

THE USE OF RELIGIOUS CONTENT ON TIKTOK AS AN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEARNING RESOURCE FOR GENERATION Z STUDENTS AT THE MUS-YQ LIL BANIN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL KUDUS

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ABSTRACT

The development of social media has expanded Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning resources for Generation Z. However, the openness of religious content on TikTok also raises concerns regarding source credibility, depth of explanation, and shifting religious authority. Previous studies have primarily examined TikTok as a medium for da'wah, instructional delivery, and Islamic communication, while santri's experiences in selecting digital content and connecting it with pesantren learning traditions remain underexplored. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design at PP. MUS-YQ Lil Banin Kudus. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving ten purposively selected informants and were analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that TikTok serves as a complementary learning resource for developing initial understanding, clarifying IRE materials, and encouraging further exploration of religious knowledge. Its use is supported by accessibility and audiovisual presentation but constrained by short content duration, algorithmic distractions, conflicting religious views, and variable creator credibility. These findings highlight the need for digital religious literacy guidance that enables santri to verify information and use TikTok critically without diminishing the authority of teachers, ustaz, classical Islamic texts, and pesantren scholarly traditions.

Keywords: TikTok; religious content; learning resources; Islamic Religious Education; Generation Z

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital media has changed how Generation Z acquires religious knowledge. Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning no longer takes place only through formal classroom interaction, religious study sessions, and the

reading of Islamic texts, but also through digital content that can be accessed independently. TikTok is widely used because it presents information in short, visual, interactive, and easily shareable videos. This condition corresponds to the characteristics of Generation Z, who have grown up in a digital environment and are accustomed to obtaining information rapidly through mobile devices. Data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association show that Indonesia had 221.56 million internet users in 2024, representing a penetration rate of 79.5%, while Generation Z was the largest user group, contributing 34.40% (APJII, 2024). This high level of connectivity enables religious content on TikTok to function not only as a medium of da'wah but also as an informal learning resource that can broaden students' religious understanding. Nevertheless, religious material that is brief, fragmented, and shaped by algorithmic recommendation systems raises questions about source credibility, depth of content, and alignment with IRE learning objectives.

A number of studies have examined the use of TikTok in learning and the dissemination of religious knowledge. Putri and Astutik (2021) found that TikTok's text, sound, and role-play features can support the delivery of fiqh, creed and morality, Qur'an and Hadith, and Islamic cultural history materials to Generation Z. Their study placed greater emphasis on TikTok's features and the development of methods for delivering IRE content during the COVID-19 pandemic. Susanti, Syamsul, and Burhani (2025), meanwhile, showed that TikTok is widely used by Generation Z to obtain religious information and may support the understanding and application of Islamic messages in everyday life. Other research has explained that social media, including TikTok and Instagram, contributes to disseminating Islamic values and shaping the religious identity of Muslim youth (Soedjiwo et al., 2025). These studies demonstrate TikTok's potential as a channel for religious information, although its use still requires an ability to assess content, sources, and the authority of content creators.

Despite providing an important foundation, previous research has several limitations. First, many studies focus on platform features, content characteristics, the effectiveness of da'wah messages, religious understanding, or Muslim identity formation. They do not explain in depth how users select, interpret, examine, and employ TikTok religious content as an IRE learning resource. Second, earlier studies generally position Generation Z as social media users in a broad sense and rarely examine their experiences within pesantren settings. Santri inhabit two learning spaces simultaneously: an open, algorithm-driven digital environment and a pesantren environment with its own scholarly traditions, curriculum, and structure of religious authority. This issue is important because digital religious authority may be constructed through visibility, digital expertise, content appeal,

and algorithmic ranking rather than solely through chains of scholarly transmission and recognition of knowledge, as is customary in pesantren traditions (Hidayatullah, 2024). A knowledge gap therefore remains concerning how Generation Z santri at PP. MUS-YQ Lil Banin Kudus interpret TikTok religious content as a learning resource, how they experience its use, and what factors support or inhibit that use.

In response to this gap, the study focuses on the use of religious content on TikTok as an IRE learning resource for Generation Z at PP. MUS-YQ Lil Banin Kudus. It aims to analyze the forms and processes through which TikTok religious content is used as an IRE learning resource; explore Generation Z students' responses and experiences in selecting, understanding, and using such content; and identify the factors that support and inhibit its use. TikTok is therefore examined not merely as a medium for transmitting religious messages but as an informal learning space associated with learning needs, digital religious literacy, creator credibility, content characteristics, pesantren support, and students' ability to connect digital information with IRE materials. The study also considers the relationship between digital and conventional learning resources in pesantren so that TikTok use is not understood separately from the participants' broader religious education.

This study is expected to make theoretical and practical contributions to the development of IRE and digital learning. Theoretically, it broadens research on IRE learning resources by explaining experiences of algorithmically mediated religious content in a pesantren setting. It also clarifies how digital religious authority and pesantren scholarly authority are negotiated in Generation Z learning experiences. Practically, the findings may inform IRE teachers, pesantren caregivers, and educational administrators in developing digital religious literacy guidance, particularly to help students assess creator credibility, verify the suitability of content, and use social media critically. The study may also support the development of contextual IRE learning that reflects Generation Z's digital practices while maintaining intellectual depth and the validity of religious sources.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to develop an in-depth understanding of how Generation Z santri at PP. MUS-YQ Lil Banin Kudus use religious content on TikTok as an Islamic Religious Education learning resource. The case study design was selected because the research focused on a clearly bounded context: santri's experiences of searching for, selecting, understanding, and using religious TikTok content within a pesantren environment. The study was conducted from March to May 2026. Ten informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their experience, involvement,

and knowledge of the phenomenon. They comprised six Generation Z santri as primary informants, two IRE teachers, one ustaz or pesantren caregiver, and one pesantren administrator as supporting informants.

To protect confidentiality, the santri were coded SZ-01 to SZ-06, the IRE teachers GP-01 and GP-02, the ustaz or caregiver US-01, and the pesantren administrator PP-01. The santri selection criteria were enrollment at PP. MUS-YQ Lil Banin Kudus, membership of Generation Z, active use of TikTok, previous access to religious content, and experience using such content to expand IRE knowledge. The teachers, caregiver, and administrator were selected because they were familiar with IRE learning, santri's digital practices, and policies governing social media use in the pesantren.

Tabel 1. Kode Informan

No.	Kode	Status informan	Peran dalam penelitian
1	SZ-01	Santri Generasi Z	Primary informant
2	SZ-02	Santri Generasi Z	Primary informant
3	SZ-03	Santri Generasi Z	Primary informant
4	SZ-04	Santri Generasi Z	Primary informant
5	SZ-05	Santri Generasi Z	Primary informant
6	SZ-06	Santri Generasi Z	Primary informant
7	GP-01	Guru PAI	Supporting informant
8	GP-02	Guru PAI	Supporting informant
9	US-01	Ustaz/pengasuh pesantren	Supporting informant
10	PP-01	Pengurus pesantren	Supporting informant

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews with the santri explored the types of religious content accessed, reasons for selecting particular content and accounts, ways of judging creator credibility, experiences of understanding and using religious information, connections between TikTok content and IRE materials, and supporting and inhibiting factors. Interviews with teachers, caregivers, and administrators gathered information about social media guidance, assessments of the credibility of digital religious content, and TikTok's position as a complementary learning resource.

Observations focused on santri activities when searching for, watching, saving, sharing, and discussing religious content. Documentation included screenshots, TikTok links or accounts, learning notes, and pesantren policy documents concerning digital-device use. The researcher served as the principal

instrument, supported by interview guides, observation sheets, and documentation protocols developed around three research foci: forms of TikTok religious-content use as an IRE learning resource, santri responses and experiences, and factors supporting or inhibiting its use.

Data were analyzed thematically by familiarizing the researcher with the complete dataset, assigning initial codes, grouping codes into categories, developing and reviewing themes, and interpreting the resulting themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation across informants, method triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentation, and member checking by confirming preliminary findings with informants. Ethical principles were observed by explaining the research aims and procedures, obtaining informed consent, anonymizing identities, and securely restricting access to recordings, transcripts, and documentation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were drawn from ten informants: six Generation Z santri as primary informants, two IRE teachers, one ustaz or caregiver, and one pesantren administrator. Their identities were anonymized using SZ-01 to SZ-06 for santri, GP-01 and GP-02 for IRE teachers, US-01 for the ustaz or caregiver, and PP-01 for the pesantren administrator. Thematic analysis of interviews, observations, and documentation generated three central themes: patterns of using TikTok religious content as an IRE learning resource; santri responses and experiences; and supporting and inhibiting factors.

1. The Use of Religious Content on TikTok as an IRE Learning Resource

The findings show that Generation Z santri at PP. MUS-YQ Lil Banin Kudus use religious content on TikTok as an additional learning resource rather than as a substitute for formal classroom learning or pesantren study of Islamic texts. TikTok use commonly begins spontaneously when religious content appears on the For You Page (FYP). After encountering appealing content, santri tend to save the video, follow its creator, search for other videos on similar themes, or share it with friends. The most frequently accessed topics include the fiqh of worship, creed and morality, Qur'anic recitation, hadith, Islamic history, daily prayers, and religious motivation.

SZ-01 explained that TikTok was used to find brief explanations of religious questions encountered in everyday life:

"I usually watch content about how to perform prayer and ablution, rulings on impurities, and everyday matters of worship. If the explanation is easy

to understand, I save the video. Sometimes I return to it when I encounter the same issue.” (SZ-01)

This statement indicates that TikTok content is used as a practical source of information that can be revisited when needed. SZ-02 described a similar pattern, using TikTok primarily to clarify material previously studied in class or at the pesantren:

“Sometimes I do not immediately understand material explained by the teacher or ustaz. Afterwards, I search TikTok using the same keywords. Usually, there is a video with a simple example that helps me understand it more quickly.” (SZ-02)

In addition to supplying explanations, TikTok provides santri with an initial encounter with religious topics they have not studied in detail. SZ-03 stated that content appearing on the FYP sometimes encouraged further investigation through other sources:

“I once saw a video about different views on reciting the qunut. Because the video was short, I did not fully understand it. I then asked an ustaz and looked for a more complete explanation. TikTok usually makes me aware first that an issue like that exists.” (SZ-03)

TikTok’s capacity to stimulate curiosity was also reflected in SZ-04’s experience. Islamic historical content was considered more attractive because it was presented through images, sound, text, and concise storytelling:

“I am more interested in content about the history of the Prophet and his Companions because it is presented like a story. The pictures, text, and sound make the material feel less difficult. After watching, I usually want to know the full story.” (SZ-04)

SZ-05 used the save and share features to organize materials considered important. Videos concerning fiqh and morality were saved for later study, while motivational religious content was more often shared with friends:

“If a video contains an important ruling or explanation, I add it to my favorites. If it is motivational or a reminder, I usually send it to a friend.

Sometimes we discuss whether its explanation is consistent with what is taught in the pesantren.” (SZ-05)

The same level of caution was not evident among all santri. SZ-06 admitted that they had initially judged the truth of content by its delivery and follower count. After receiving guidance, however, they began examining creators’ backgrounds and comparing their explanations with other sources:

“Previously, if the delivery was convincing and the creator had many followers, I believed it immediately. Now I first check who is giving the explanation. If it concerns a religious ruling, I usually ask a teacher or ustaz so that I do not make a mistake.” (SZ-06)

An IRE teacher confirmed that TikTok had become a religious information source frequently used by santri. GP-01 reported that some brought questions originating from TikTok into learning activities:

“Some santri ask about rulings on worship or differences of opinion because they previously saw a TikTok video. This shows that TikTok can stimulate curiosity, but the explanations they receive still need clarification.” (GP-01)

These findings indicate three principal forms of TikTok use: a source of practical explanation, a supplement to IRE material, and a stimulus for deeper religious inquiry. Its use is informal and independent, yet remains connected to learning in the classroom and pesantren.

2. Generation Z Santri’s Responses and Experiences in Using Religious Content

Santri generally responded positively to religious content on TikTok because it was brief, engaging, and communicated in language close to their lives. They considered the short-video format helpful for developing an initial overview of a topic. The combination of text, sound, images, illustrations, and concrete examples also assisted them in understanding concepts previously perceived as difficult. At the same time, they recognized that short duration often produced incomplete explanations and potential misunderstanding.

SZ-01 experienced TikTok as facilitating flexible learning beyond fixed schedules:

"Learning through TikTok is more flexible. During a break or after pesantren activities, I can watch several videos. The material is short, so it does not feel as if I have been studying for a long time." (SZ-01)

SZ-02 emphasized the benefits of familiar language and examples relevant to young people's lives:

"The language is usually simpler, and the examples are close to young people's lives. That helps me grasp the point more quickly. However, if the topic concerns a complicated ruling, I would not rely on a single video." (SZ-02)

Religious content also generated reflective experiences. SZ-03 explained that videos about morality, relationships with parents, and discipline in worship often prompted an evaluation of everyday behavior:

"When I see content about devotion to parents or maintaining prayer, I feel reminded. Sometimes the video is only one minute long, but its message makes me reconsider my habits." (SZ-03)

SZ-04 noted that TikTok learning did not always occur individually. Interesting or controversial content was frequently shared and discussed among friends:

"If there is a video that seems strange or differs from what we learn in the pesantren, we usually discuss it together. Some agree and others do not. If we cannot find an answer, we ask an ustaz." (SZ-04)

This experience points to social learning through information exchange, discussion, and collective verification. TikTok's openness, however, also exposed santri to diverse religious perspectives. SZ-05 reported that conflicting claims sometimes created confusion, particularly when each creator asserted that their position was correct:

"Sometimes one account says that a practice is permissible, while another says it is not. If both present their arguments convincingly, I become confused. I usually return to the explanation of a teacher or ustaz who understands the legal basis." (SZ-05)

SZ-o6 highlighted content that simplified religious questions and used provocative titles to attract attention:

“Some videos have titles that seem to condemn the practices of other groups. After watching, the explanation turns out to be incomplete. This kind of content attracts attention quickly, but it can make people draw conclusions without understanding the issue.” (SZ-o6)

GP-o2 assessed two tendencies in santri responses. Some used TikTok critically as an additional resource, whereas others readily accepted information because they were attracted by creators’ appearance and communication style:

“Santri with a foundation in religious knowledge can usually compare a video’s content with what they have learned. Those with a more limited foundation tend to believe content because the creator is famous, looks attractive, or speaks assertively.” (GP-o2)

Santri experiences therefore included easy access, increased interest, initial understanding, religious reflection, peer discussion, and verification with teachers or ustaz. They simultaneously experienced confusion arising from competing viewpoints, incomplete explanations, and difficulties in assessing creator credibility.

3. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Use of Religious Content on TikTok

TikTok religious content was supported as an IRE learning resource by easy access, audiovisual form, simple language, diverse materials, and a recommendation system that displays content corresponding to users’ previous interests. Smartphones and internet access enabled santri to obtain material beyond the space and time of formal learning. Search, save, share, and comment features also allowed them to locate content, archive videos, discuss ideas, and find additional explanations.

GP-o1 regarded the audiovisual format as TikTok’s principal strength as a supplementary resource:

“Material accompanied by images, text, sound, and examples attracts santri’s attention more easily. For simple topics, such as worship

procedures or moral reinforcement, short videos can provide an initial overview.” (GP-01)

Peer support also influenced TikTok use. Santri frequently received account or video recommendations from friends and then discussed the content informally. Teachers’ and ustaz’s openness to questions arising from social media further helped santri clarify information they did not understand. US-01 explained that pesantren could not completely separate santri from developments in digital media:

“Santri live at a time when religious information is available everywhere. A complete ban does not solve the problem. It is more important to teach them how to choose teachers, examine the basis of an explanation, and ask questions when they encounter doubtful content.” (US-01)

This statement demonstrates that guidance from caregivers and teachers is important if TikTok use is to develop from information consumption into critical learning. In this context, the pesantren supplies foundational knowledge and standards for evaluating digital religious content.

Several barriers were also identified. First, short video duration often produced brief and decontextualized religious explanations. Questions of fiqh, creed, hadith, and scholarly disagreement that require extensive explanation were frequently reduced to short conclusions. Second, not all creators possessed accountable religious expertise. Account popularity, follower counts, and communication skills did not necessarily correspond to mastery of religious material. Distraction was another barrier. Santri might open TikTok to search for religious material but subsequently move to entertainment content recommended by the algorithm. SZ-06 explained:

“At first, I intend to find a religious explanation, but after one video ends, an entertainment video appears. Sometimes I eventually spend more time on entertainment than on the material I was looking for.” (SZ-06)

Smartphone use within the pesantren was also restricted by rules concerning time and place. PP-01 explained that the restrictions were intended to maintain discipline and prevent excessive social media use:

“Santri are not permitted to use mobile phones at all times. Their use is regulated so that it does not interfere with Qur’anic study, lessons,

congregational prayer, and rest. Digital content can be used for learning, but it must remain under pesantren supervision and rules.” (PP-01)

These restrictions functioned both as an access barrier and a control mechanism. Santri did not have unrestricted freedom to use TikTok, but pesantren rules helped prevent excessive use and ensured that digital technology did not disrupt core activities. Other barriers included unstable internet quality, limited data allowances, uneven digital literacy, and a tendency to accept information on the basis of creator popularity.

Overall, religious content on TikTok functioned as an additional resource that complemented IRE and pesantren religious education. TikTok offered accessibility, varied materials, and engaging presentation, but could not serve as the principal resource because of short duration, uneven creator credibility, competing religious perspectives, and substantial distraction. Teachers, ustaz, and the pesantren environment played a central role in helping santri verify information and connect digital content with more authoritative religious sources.

DISCUSSION

1. TikTok as a Complementary IRE Learning Resource

The findings indicate that Generation Z santri use TikTok as an additional learning resource to obtain practical explanations, clarify IRE material, and recognize religious issues they have not previously studied. They do not replace classroom learning and pesantren study with TikTok, but use it as an entry point for initial understanding. From the perspective of learning-resource theory, learning resources are not limited to teachers and books; they also include messages, people, materials, devices, techniques, and environments that facilitate learning. TikTok religious content may therefore be positioned as a digital learning resource because it contains religious messages, is delivered audiovisually, and is deliberately used by santri to meet IRE learning needs.

The use of TikTok as a supplementary resource shows that santri learning extends beyond classroom boundaries and formal schedules. They may search for explanations of fiqh, creed, morality, Qur'an and Hadith, and Islamic history in response to perceived needs. This pattern can be explained through connectivism, which views digital-era learning as the construction of relationships among information sources distributed across networks. Knowledge is not stored entirely within the individual; it also exists in information networks, digital devices, communities, and resources that can be accessed when needed (Siemens, 2005). Learning capacity is therefore

determined not only by the amount of information acquired but also by the ability to find, connect, select, and update information.

Santri practices of searching keywords, saving videos, following religious accounts, and sharing content with friends demonstrate the formation of a digital learning network. TikTok helps them encounter initial information, while teachers, ustaz, Islamic texts, and peers constitute other nodes used for clarification. Religious learning thus occurs through connections between digital and conventional resources. Connectivism nevertheless emphasizes that distinguishing important from unimportant information is a central component of digital learning. TikTok's effectiveness as a learning resource must therefore be assessed not only by ease of access but also by santri's ability to evaluate information accuracy and relevance.

These findings are consistent with Putri and Astutik (2021), who showed that TikTok can deliver materials on fiqh, creed and morality, Qur'an and Hadith, and Islamic cultural history to Generation Z. Text, sound, and role-play features offer learning experiences that differ from conventional delivery. The present study extends their findings by positioning TikTok not only as a medium through which creators deliver material but also as a learning resource independently selected and managed by santri. Attention consequently shifts from platform characteristics toward user learning behavior, particularly how santri find, save, compare, and connect TikTok content with pesantren IRE learning.

The use of short videos can also be interpreted through multimedia learning theory. Mayer (2021) argues that people may learn more effectively from a combination of words and images than from words alone, provided that multimedia elements are relevant and do not overload cognitive capacity. TikTok content combining sound, text, illustration, movement, and concrete examples may help santri form an initial representation of a topic. Audiovisual presentation can also make certain material less abstract, particularly worship procedures, Qur'anic recitation, Islamic history, and moral habituation.

Multimedia effectiveness, however, does not automatically ensure depth of learning. Short duration may compel creators to reduce context, argumentation, scriptural evidence, and scholarly disagreement. In IRE, excessive simplification risks presenting complex issues as though they have a single answer. TikTok is therefore more appropriately positioned as a resource for initial orientation and reinforcement, not as the sole reference for forming religious understanding or decisions. Formal learning and pesantren study remain necessary to supply the conceptual foundations, context, reasoning, and scholarly tradition that short videos cannot adequately convey.

2. Learning Experience, Engagement, and Digital Religious Literacy

Santri's positive responses were associated with easy access, simple language, appealing audiovisual presentation, and relevance to adolescent life. These characteristics promoted engagement because santri did not merely receive teacher-selected material but chose content according to their curiosity and learning needs. From a constructivist perspective, learners do not receive knowledge passively; they construct understanding through experience, new information, prior knowledge, and interaction with their social environment. When santri connect TikTok videos with classroom material, the study of Islamic texts, worship experience, and everyday questions, they construct meaning through interpretation.

Santri who bring TikTok-derived questions to teachers or ustaz demonstrate how digital content can initiate dialogic learning. Information first obtained individually develops into discussion with peers, teachers, and caregivers. This process corresponds to Vygotskian social constructivism, which emphasizes that understanding develops through social interaction and assistance from more competent others. Teachers and ustaz function as providers of academic and religious scaffolding, helping santri move from initial to more complete understanding. Peers also act as discussion partners when santri compare interpretations of the content they encounter.

TikTok learning is therefore not always individual or isolated. Saving, sharing, discussing, and verifying content create a social learning ecosystem. Santri do not merely consume information; under certain conditions, they reflect, ask questions, and compare sources. The findings are consistent with Susanti, Syamsul, and Burhani (2025), who found that Generation Z widely uses TikTok to obtain religious information and understand Islamic messages. The present study adds that understanding is not produced by content alone but is shaped by prior knowledge, peer discussion, and guidance from pesantren religious authorities.

Content about morality, relationships with parents, disciplined worship, and religious motivation also generated reflective responses. TikTok can therefore potentially address the affective as well as the cognitive domain. Brief, emotional messages close to adolescents' experiences may prompt them to evaluate their behavior. A momentary emotional response, however, cannot be equated with lasting attitudinal change. Religious behavior requires reinforcement, exemplification, habituation, supervision, and a supportive social environment. TikTok may stimulate awareness, while pesantren education transforms that awareness into more consistent religious practice.

Confusion arising from competing views demonstrates the importance of digital religious literacy. Such literacy is not merely the ability to operate devices and locate information; it includes identifying creators, examining the basis of arguments, understanding context, comparing sources, and distinguishing religious explanation from personal opinion. Santri who judge truth from follower counts, speaking style, or production quality possess technical skills that are not necessarily accompanied by evaluative competence.

The shift from immediately trusting a video to checking a creator's identity and consulting an ustaz indicates developing self-regulation. Self-regulated learning theory holds that learners actively set goals, choose strategies, monitor understanding, and evaluate learning outcomes (Zimmerman, 2002). Searching for videos, saving material, comparing information, and requesting clarification are learning-management strategies. Self-regulation, however, was uneven. Santri with stronger religious foundations were more capable of evaluating content, whereas those with limited prior knowledge were more readily influenced by creator popularity.

3. Supporting Factors, Barriers, and the Negotiation of Religious Authority

Accessibility, audiovisual format, popular language, content diversity, and recommendation features supported TikTok's use as an IRE learning resource. These features may be understood as technological affordances: possibilities for action made available by a technology. TikTok enables users to search, watch, save, respond to, and disseminate information rapidly. For Generation Z santri, these functions blur the boundary between social-media activity and learning. Learning can occur in brief, repeated micro-sessions guided by user needs.

TikTok's recommendation system, however, is not specifically designed around pedagogical quality or religious validity. Its algorithm tends to display content likely to retain attention on the basis of previous interactions. Popular, emotional, controversial, and visually compelling content may consequently become highly visible without necessarily possessing a strong scholarly foundation. Broad access to information is therefore not synonymous with access to accurate and profound knowledge.

This issue relates to changes in religious authority in digital spaces. Hidayatullah (2024) explains that digital religious authority is constructed not only through mastery of knowledge and a relationship with scholarly tradition but also through digital expertise, visibility, content excellence, persuasive aesthetics, and algorithmic ranking. This interpretation corresponds with the finding that some santri initially judged content credibility by follower count,

speaking style, and visual appeal. In digital spaces, popularity may be perceived as competence, even though the two do not necessarily coincide.

Within the pesantren, this situation brings two forms of authority into contact. Pesantren authority is built through mastery of Islamic texts, chains of scholarly transmission, community recognition, exemplary conduct, and direct teacher-santri relationships. TikTok authority, by contrast, tends to be built through visibility, communication skill, audience interaction, and digital popularity. The findings do not indicate that digital authority completely replaces pesantren authority. Santri instead consult teachers and ustaz to verify doubtful content. An authority negotiation therefore occurs: santri obtain initial information from digital spaces but continue to refer to pesantren authorities for legitimacy and deeper explanation.

These findings align with Soedjiwo, Ramdhani, and Suroyo (2025), who show that social media disseminates Islamic values and contributes to the religious identity of Muslim youth. In a pesantren context, however, religious understanding and identity are not shaped by social media alone. Learning traditions, relationships with ustaz, pesantren culture, and knowledge obtained through Islamic texts continue to provide the framework by which santri accept or reject digital messages. Santri are therefore not necessarily passive recipients; they can negotiate digital information through their knowledge and religious environment.

Distraction represents an additional barrier because TikTok functions simultaneously as a learning resource and an entertainment medium. Users may open the application to find religious explanations but be directed by algorithmic recommendations toward unrelated material. From a self-regulation perspective, this condition requires control of attention, time, and the purpose of use. Without such control, time spent on the platform may increase while learning goals remain unmet. Managing time and attention is thus an important dimension of digital religious literacy.

Pesantren rules governing smartphone use can be understood both as restrictions and as guidance. Limiting access reduces flexibility but also prevents distraction, excessive use, and disruption to core pesantren activities. An approach based exclusively on prohibition risks denying santri the opportunity to develop digital-evaluation skills. Conversely, unrestricted freedom increases exposure to unreliable content. A more proportionate approach combines limited use with literacy education, content clarification, and guidance toward appropriate sources.

Overall, TikTok occupies a complementary position within the pesantren IRE learning ecosystem. It offers rapid access, attracts attention, stimulates

curiosity, and provides initial understanding. Its limitations include shallow explanation, uncertain source credibility, distraction, and the presentation of competing viewpoints. TikTok's pedagogical value is therefore not inherent in the technology itself but is determined by content quality, santri's prior knowledge, digital religious literacy, self-regulation, and guidance from teachers and caregivers. The principal contribution of these findings is to affirm that integrating social media into IRE requires a critical and verified model of use that remains connected to pesantren scholarly traditions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that TikTok has expanded the IRE learning space for Generation Z santri through open, personalized, and networked digital resources. Within the pesantren context, TikTok functions as a complementary learning resource rather than a replacement for teachers, ustaz, Islamic texts, and formal learning. The study contributes the argument that the pedagogical value of TikTok religious content is determined by digital religious literacy, self-regulation, source credibility, educator guidance, and santri's capacity to connect digital information with pesantren scholarly traditions.

The study is limited to one pesantren and ten informants and relies on subjective experiences; its findings therefore cannot be generalized and do not objectively measure changes in religious understanding or behavior. Future research should involve multiple pesantren, employ mixed methods, and analyze the quality of the religious content and accounts accessed by santri. Pesantren should also develop digital religious literacy guidance so that santri can evaluate source credibility, compare information, and use TikTok critically and responsibly.

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