Shifting Authority of Religious Learning Resources among Adolescents in the Era of Social Media Algorithms: Challenges for Islamic Religious Education

Aulia Ramadhani Lubis, Hadi Saputra Panggabean, Muhammad Yunan Harahap

Abstract

The development of social media has transformed how adolescents obtain, select, and assess religious information. Content repeatedly displayed through algorithmic mechanisms can become a learning resource; however, content visibility and popularity do not necessarily indicate scholarly authority. This study aims to analyze shifts in the authority of religious learning resources among adolescents, the algorithmic factors influencing these shifts, problems in religious understanding, and their implications for Islamic Religious Education (IRE). This study employs a qualitative approach using a literature review of relevant literature published from 2023 to 2026. The data were analyzed thematically through identification, categorization, comparison, and synthesis. The review shows that the authority of religious learning resources is shifting from a relatively centralized pattern toward a more pluralistic ecosystem, while algorithms reinforce the visibility of particular content based on user interactions. This condition may lead to information fragmentation, weak source verification, confusion regarding differences of opinion, the dominance of emotional content, and echo chambers. The novelty of this article lies in distinguishing authority and visibility as two dimensions that do not necessarily move in the same direction. IRE needs to respond to these changes by strengthening digital religious literacy, tabayyun (careful verification), source-comparison skills, critical thinking, religious moderation, and teachers' digital role modeling.

Keywords: *religious authority; adolescents; social media algorithms; digital religious literacy; Islamic Religious Education.*

Aulia Ramadhani Lubis[1]
[1]Master of Management, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia
e-mail: ekogunarsotamba75@gmail.com[1]

Hadi Saputra Panggabean[2], Muhammad Yunan Harahap [3]
[2,3] Master of Management, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia
e-mail: hadi@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id, yunan@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id
3rd International Cofference on the Epicentrum of Economic Global Framework (ICEEGLOF)
Theme: Navigating The Future: Business and Social Paradigms in a Transformative Era.
https://proceeding.pancabudi.ac.id/index.php/ICEEGLOF

Introduction

Digital transformation has brought about fundamental changes in the ways young people communicate, learn, build relationships, and obtain information. Social media no longer functions merely as a space for entertainment but has developed into an information environment that also influences the formation of social and religious understanding. During adolescence, these changes are particularly significant because identity, values, and socio-religious orientations are still in the process of development. Therefore, various forms of religious information consumed through digital media may become part of the process through which adolescents construct their religious perspectives.

Social media provides significant opportunities for religious learning. Adolescents can access studies of the Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, Islamic history, religious lectures, and various religious discussions quickly and easily. The availability of digital sources enables learning to take place beyond the classroom and formal educational institutions. Assya Syahnaz (2023) highlights the importance of strengthening adolescents' religious character in facing the digital environment. This indicates that religious education cannot ignore the changes in the learning environment experienced by students.

However, ease of access is not always accompanied by the ability to assess information quality. Religious content on social media may be presented in the form of excerpts from religious lectures, quotations from Qur'anic verses or Hadith without context, provocative titles, or statements that prioritize attractiveness over depth of argumentation. Under such conditions, adolescents need not only the ability to find information but also the ability to assess source credibility, verify references, understand context, and compare different religious perspectives.

This issue becomes increasingly complex because the information received by users does not appear entirely at random. Social media algorithms use various interaction signals, such as searches, viewing behavior, comments, likes, and patterns of user engagement, to influence the content recommended to users. Consequently, users who frequently interact with particular religious themes may repeatedly receive similar content. Such an environment can influence what becomes visible to users, but it does not automatically determine what is most accurate or most authoritative.

These changes are also related to the structure of religious authority. In formal educational environments, religious learning sources are generally associated with teachers, books, educational institutions, scholars, and Islamic sources grounded in established knowledge. Social media expands the range of actors who can disseminate religious information, including influencers, content creators, da'wah channels, digital communities, and personal accounts. Consequently, adolescents encounter a more diverse and competitive ecosystem of sources. This shift does not mean that the authority of teachers or religious scholars has disappeared; rather, it indicates that students have more choices in determining which sources they consider trustworthy.

This context highlights a fundamental distinction between authority and visibility. Authority is associated with competence, credibility, scholarly foundations, and the capacity to take responsibility for the information provided. Visibility, on the other hand, refers to how frequently particular content appears and is seen by users. Content with high visibility does not necessarily possess high scholarly authority. Likewise, credible

sources do not necessarily receive the same level of visibility within social media recommendation systems. This distinction is important because adolescents may unconsciously use popularity, follower counts, or frequency of appearance as indicators of truth.

Studies on religious education and religious moderation demonstrate the importance of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in developing balanced religious understanding. Khasanah et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of religious moderation within the Islamic education system in Indonesia. Riyawi and Febriansyah (2023) also demonstrate the urgency of religious moderation from the perspective of Islamic education. Furthermore, Ichsan et al. (2024) position the *wasathiyah* paradigm as an important foundation for realizing moderate Islamic education.

The strengthening of religious moderation needs to be translated into concrete learning practices. Ratnah et al. (2024) demonstrate that the values of religious moderation can be integrated into the strategies and practices of Islamic Religious Education. Yudin et al. (2025) highlight the importance of interactive learning, dialogue, and teacher role modeling in developing religious moderation. Through a systematic review, Muis (2025) demonstrates that religious moderation is increasingly integrated into the objectives, learning experiences, methods, and assessment of Islamic Religious Education at the secondary education level. Fathurrozi et al. (2025) also demonstrate the relevance of the wasathiyah approach in deradicalization strategies for Generation Z.
In addition to curriculum and learning strategies, teacher competence is an important factor. Qoyyumillah and Aziz (2026) emphasize the need for teachers' pedagogical competence to develop awareness of religious moderation in the digital era. Meanwhile, Nugroho et al. (2026) demonstrate that social media communication, digital activism, and symbolic power need to be considered when understanding the dynamics of tolerance and extremism among young people.

Although research on religious character, religious moderation, Islamic education, and teacher competence in the digital era has continued to develop, there remains room for further study that connects algorithmic visibility mechanisms with shifts in the authority of religious learning sources among adolescents. Some studies have focused more heavily on social media as a space for communication or on religious education as a means of promoting religious moderation. This article integrates these two perspectives by positioning algorithms as mechanisms that can influence information visibility, while digital religious literacy is positioned as the capacity required to evaluate such information.

Based on this research gap, this study aims to analyze: (1) the forms of shifts in the authority of religious learning sources among adolescents; (2) digital and algorithmic factors that influence source selection; (3) the problems of religious understanding that emerge; and (4) their implications for Islamic Religious Education.

The novelty of this study lies in its analytical framework distinguishing authority from visibility. The article examines not only who becomes a source of religious information for adolescents but also how algorithmic mechanisms can determine which sources or content are more frequently visible. Thus, the article offers the perspective that the challenge for Islamic Religious Education in the digital era is not merely to return students to conventional learning sources, but rather to equip them with the ability to

distinguish between content that is frequently visible and sources that can be academically and intellectually accountable.

Literature Review

2.1 Adolescents and Changes in the Religious Learning Environment

Adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by identity seeking, value exploration, and the need for social recognition. In the digital era, these processes take place simultaneously within the family, school, community, and social media environments. Therefore, the development of religious character does not occur solely through formal learning but also through adolescents' interactions with various messages that they routinely consume.

Assya Syahnaz (2023) identifies religious character as an important need for adolescents in the digital era. Kholiyah (2025) also demonstrates the importance of internalizing religious character through educational activities that adapt to the digital environment. Thus, the digital environment needs to be understood as an educational space that requires guidance and supervision.

2.2 Authority of Religious Learning Sources

In this article, the authority of religious learning sources is understood as the degree of trust and recognition that students place in particular individuals, media, or sources when seeking and evaluating religious knowledge. Authority is not merely associated with popularity but also with competence, credibility, scholarly foundations, and the ability to take responsibility for the information provided.

Social media has made the structure of learning sources more pluralistic. Teachers, religious scholars, religious institutions, influencers, content creators, and digital communities can simultaneously serve as references. This condition provides adolescents with opportunities to compare different perspectives, but it also creates challenges in determining which sources are credible.

2.3 Algorithms and Information Visibility

Social media algorithms play a role in determining which content is displayed more frequently to users based on various interaction signals. In the context of religious information, such mechanisms may cause particular themes to become increasingly dominant within users' digital experiences.

Visibility needs to be distinguished from authority. Visibility addresses the question, “How often is particular content seen?”, whereas authority addresses the question, “To what extent can the source be held academically and intellectually accountable?” This distinction constitutes an important foundation for digital religious literacy education.

2.4 Digital Religious Literacy

Digital religious literacy refers to the ability to use, understand, evaluate, and disseminate religious information responsibly. This ability includes examining the identity and competence of content creators, the sources of religious evidence, the context of information, differences of religious opinion, and the social consequences of disseminating information.

Such literacy is closely related to the Islamic principle of *tabayyun*, namely the practice of verifying information before accepting or disseminating it. Students need to be accustomed to not accepting or sharing religious information merely because it has gone viral. Islamic Religious Education can develop these abilities through activities such as

comparing two pieces of content, verifying the sources of Hadith or Qur'anic verses, identifying contexts, and discussing differences of opinion in an academic and respectful manner.

2.5 Islamic Religious Education and Religious Moderation in the Digital Era

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a strategic position in developing a strong, moderate, and open-minded understanding of religion. Khasanah et al. (2023), Ichsan et al. (2024), and Ratnah et al. (2024) demonstrate the importance of religious moderation in Islamic education.

In the digital era, religious moderation should not merely be taught as a concept but also applied when students encounter different forms of religious content. Yudin et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of interactive learning, dialogue, and teacher role modeling. Muis (2025) demonstrates that religious moderation needs to be incorporated into learning objectives, learning experiences, teaching methods, and assessment. Therefore, religious moderation needs to be integrated with digital religious literacy.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using the library research method. This method was selected because the study focuses on mapping, comparing, and synthesizing ideas and research findings concerning changes in the authority of religious learning sources among adolescents, the influence of algorithmic environments, digital religious literacy, and their implications for Islamic Religious Education.

The data sources consist of scholarly articles relevant to the focus of the study and published between 2023 and 2026. This publication period was selected to ensure that the discussion draws upon relatively up-to-date literature. The literature was considered based on several criteria, namely: (1) addressing adolescents, religious character, or the digital generation; (2) relating to social media or digital communication; (3) discussing religious moderation or Islamic education; (4) relating to teacher competence or digital pedagogy; and/or (5) contributing to an understanding of the religious learning environment.

The data were analyzed thematically through four stages. First, identification, which involved identifying concepts and findings related to religious learning sources, social media, algorithms, religious moderation, and Islamic Religious Education. Second, categorization, which involved grouping the findings into themes including source authority, algorithmic visibility, information consumption behavior, problems of religious understanding, and educational responses. Third, comparison, which involved comparing similarities and differences in the emphasis of the studies reviewed. Fourth, synthesis, which involved connecting various findings to develop a conceptual framework concerning shifts in the authority of religious learning sources.

The validity of the arguments was strengthened through comparison across multiple sources addressing closely related areas of focus. This study distinguishes between findings directly reported by previous studies and the author's interpretive synthesis. Therefore, the findings are positioned as a literature-based conceptual synthesis and are not intended to provide statistical generalizations regarding adolesc

Results

4.1 From a Single Authority to a Pluralistic Authority Ecosystem

The synthesis indicates that the change does not merely represent a loss of authority among teachers or religious scholars, but rather the emergence of a more pluralistic ecosystem of learning resources. Adolescents can obtain religious information from Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, books, religious lectures, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, digital communities, as well as conversations with peers.

Each source possesses a different form of legitimacy. Teachers derive legitimacy from their educational position and pedagogical competence; religious scholars derive it from knowledge and scholarly reputation; while digital creators may gain informal legitimacy through popularity, linguistic familiarity, content consistency, and the number of followers.

These findings indicate that authority has become increasingly competitive. Adolescents may select sources based on ease of access and their proximity to personal experiences. Therefore, PAI needs to teach students that ease of access to information does not necessarily indicate information quality.

Fathurrozi et al. (2025) demonstrate the importance of a *wasathiyah* approach in addressing the challenges faced by Generation Z. This finding can be related to the need to develop students' ability to select religious sources so that they do not merely obtain information but are also capable of evaluating the orientation and characteristics of the information they consume.

4.2 Algorithms Increase Visibility, Not Authority

The literature synthesis indicates that algorithms play a role in determining which information becomes more visible to users. When individuals repeatedly watch or interact with particular topics, similar content may appear more frequently in their feeds.

In the religious context, this condition may create the perception that a particular view is the most common or the most correct simply because it is encountered repeatedly. However, frequency of appearance is a matter of visibility, not evidence of authority.

Nugroho et al. (2026) highlight the importance of considering social-mediated communication, symbolic power, emotional content, and echo chambers in understanding the dynamics of tolerance and extremism. These findings reinforce the argument that digital information experiences can influence how young people construct social meaning.

Therefore, algorithms should not be regarded as the sole cause of problems in religious understanding. User responses, literacy skills, family and school environments, content characteristics, and the quality of education also play important roles. PAI needs to develop students' ability to understand this information environment critically.

4.3 Problems in Adolescents' Religious Understanding

Based on the literature synthesis, five major problems were identified.

First, information fragmentation. Short-form content may remove the context of religious evidence or argumentation, causing complex religious issues to appear overly simple.

Second, source credibility. Teachers, academics, *ustaz*, influencers, and ordinary users may appear in relatively similar visual formats, requiring adolescents to develop the ability to distinguish between their respective levels of competence.

Third, confusion regarding differences of opinion. Differences in religious views presented without adequate foundations and context may lead students to perceive disagreement as an absolute contradiction.

Fourth, the dominance of emotional content. Content that evokes anger, fear, or feelings of superiority may more easily attract attention.
Fifth, echo chambers. Repeated exposure to similar content may narrow encounters with alternative perspectives.
These problems demonstrate that the challenge of religious education concerns not only what is learned, but also who provides the information, through which media it is delivered, how the information is selected, and how its validity is assessed.

4.4 Changes in the Role of PAI Teachers

The shift in authority does not mean that PAI teachers have become irrelevant; rather, this transformation expands the teacher's role from merely delivering instructional material to serving as a facilitator, mentor, and validator of students' religious reasoning processes.
Yudin et al. (2025) demonstrate the importance of interactive learning, dialogue, and teacher role modeling in developing religious moderation. Qoyyumillah and Aziz (2026) emphasize the need for teachers' pedagogical competence to foster awareness of religious moderation in the digital era.
Accordingly, PAI teachers need to be able to respond to questions arising from social media. When students encounter information that differs from what they have learned in class, teachers should not immediately respond through prohibition or judgment. Instead, such differences can be used as learning opportunities to examine sources, religious evidence, context, methods of argumentation, and ethical conduct in expressing disagreement.

4.5 PAI Strategies for Addressing the Shift in Authority

First, digital religious literacy should be integrated into PAI instruction. Such literacy can be incorporated into Qur'an and Hadith, aqidah-akhlak, fiqh, Islamic history, as well as religious moderation topics.
Second, the practice of tabayyun should be developed. Students can be trained to use simple questions: Who created the content? What is its source? Does it provide religious evidence? What is the context? Are there comparative sources? What might be the consequences if the information is disseminated?
Third, source comparison should be strengthened. Teachers can present a particular religious topic through several types of sources, such as textbooks, websites of religious institutions, lecture videos, and social media content. Students can then compare the sources, arguments, contexts, and methods of presentation.
Fourth, religious moderation should be strengthened. Khasanah et al. (2023), Ichsan et al. (2024), Ratnah et al. (2024), and Muis (2025) demonstrate the importance of moderation within Islamic education. In the digital environment, moderation needs to be manifested through the ability to encounter differences without easily insulting, labeling, or judging others.
Fifth, teachers should provide digital role modeling. PAI teachers need to demonstrate responsible digital practices by using respectful language, citing sources, verifying information before sharing it, and acknowledging the existence of differences of opinion that have scholarly foundations.

4.6 Conceptual Model: Authority and Visibility as Distinct Dimensions

Based on the literature synthesis, this article proposes the following model:

Social Media Exposure → Content Selection and Consumption → Increased Content Visibility → Competition among Source Authorities → Construction of Religious Understanding → Problems in Religious Understanding → Digital Religious Literacy → Critical, Moderate, and Contextual Islamic Understanding.

The model consists of two dimensions that need to be distinguished.

The first dimension is visibility, referring to the degree to which particular content becomes noticeable within users' digital experiences. Visibility may be influenced by user interactions, popularity, content format, and recommendation mechanisms.

The second dimension is authority, referring to the extent to which a source deserves to be trusted based on competence, credibility, scholarly foundations, references, and its capacity to take responsibility for the information it provides.

The novelty of this article lies in the proposition that visibility cannot substitute for authority. Content that appears frequently is not necessarily the most accurate, while credible sources may not necessarily appear frequently. Therefore, an important competency in PAI in the digital era is students' ability to assess authority, namely by examining who is speaking, what foundations are used, how the argument is constructed, and whether the information can be verified.

This framework shifts the orientation of PAI from merely transmitting knowledge toward developing students' ability to evaluate knowledge. Students are not only directed to understand religious teachings but are also expected to determine which sources are worthy of trust, understand context, verify information, appreciate differences, and act responsibly in digital spaces.

Conclusion

Social media has transformed adolescents' religious learning environment by expanding the number and diversity of accessible sources. This transformation does not automatically diminish the authority of teachers, religious scholars, or educational institutions; rather, it has created a more pluralistic and competitive ecosystem of learning resources.

Social media algorithms reinforce this transformation through mechanisms that influence content visibility. Problems arise when visibility, popularity, follower counts, or frequency of appearance are perceived as indicators of religious truth and authority. Such conditions may increase the risks of information fragmentation, inadequate source verification, confusion regarding differences of opinion, the dominance of emotional content, and the formation of echo chambers.

The implication for Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is the need to shift the orientation of learning toward guidance and critical evaluation. Teachers should not be positioned merely as the sole source of information but should serve as guides who assist students in understanding, comparing, verifying, and contextualizing religious information.

The novelty of this article lies in the conceptual distinction between authority and visibility. This distinction is important because frequently viewed content does not necessarily possess a high level of scholarly authority. Therefore, digital religious literacy needs to be integrated with tabayyun (careful verification), critical thinking, religious moderation, respectful conduct when dealing with differences, and teachers' digital role modeling.

Future research could test this conceptual model through field studies involving junior or senior high school students, particularly through interviews, observations, surveys, and social media content analysis, to examine how adolescents select, trust, and validate sources of religious information.

References

[1] Assya Syahnaz. (2023). Karakter religius: Suatu kebutuhan bagi remaja di era digital. Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan, 5(3), 1325–1334.

[2] Fathurrozi, M., Anam, N., & Alfabanni, T. A. (2025). Deradicalization strategy: A wasathiyah curriculum for Gen Z in Islamic boarding schools. Fenomena, 24(2), 225–240. https://doi.org/10.35719/fenomena.v24i2.609

[3] Ichsan, Y., Syamsudin, S., Nuryana, Z., & Sukiman. (2024). Realizing Islamic education based on religious moderation with the wasathiyah Islamic paradigm from the perspective of the Qur'an. Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam, 21(1), 247–263. https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v21i1.9944

[4] Khasanah, N., Irwan Hamzani, A., & Aravik, H. (2023). Religious moderation in the Islamic education system in Indonesia. Qalamuna: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, dan Agama, 15(1), 629–642. https://doi.org/10.37680/qalamuna.v15i1.4115

[5] Kholiyah. (2025). Internalisasi karakter religius melalui Program Raih Pahala di era digital. Jurnal Intelektualita: Keislaman, Sosial, dan Sains, 14(2), 462–472.

[6] Muis, A. (2025). Incorporating religious moderation values into the Islamic religious education curriculum in secondary education: A systematic review of goals, experiences, methods, and evaluation. British Journal of Religious Education, 48(2). https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2025.2598619

[7] Nugroho, C., Balakrishnan, K., Wulandari, A., Nastain, M., Malau, R. M. U., & Bintara, C. S. (2026). Mediating extremism and tolerance: Social-mediated communication, digital activism, and symbolic power among Indonesian university students. Social Sciences, 15(7), 459. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci15070459

[8] Qoyyumillah, N. I., & Aziz, I. N. (2026). Teachers' pedagogical competence for fostering religious moderation awareness in the digital era: A phenomenological study of madrasahs in East Java. International Journal of Islamic Thought and Humanities.

[9] Ratnah, Ali Shah, S. A., & Alam, M. (2024). Integrating religious moderation into Islamic Religious Education: Strategies and impacts. At-Tadzkir: Islamic Education Journal, 3(2), 120–133. https://doi.org/10.59373/attadzkir.v3i2.67

[10] Riyawi, M. R., & Febriansyah, D. (2023). The urgency of religious moderation in the perspective of Islamic education. Journal of Social Research, 2(8), 2578–2591. https://doi.org/10.55324/josr.v2i8.1309

[11] Yudin, F., Nugraha, E., Syarifudin, E., & Wasehudin, W. (2025). Building religious moderation through Islamic Religious Education: A study of high school teachers in Banten, Indonesia. Jurnal EDUCATIO: Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia, 11(1), 66–73. https://doi.org/10.29210/1202525523