

## CRISIS OF THE DIGITAL GENERATION: Analysis of the Impact of Social Media and Strengthening Strategies through a Contextual Approach to Islamic Religious Education

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dampak media sosial terhadap krisis generasi digital dan merumuskan strategi untuk memperkuat iman melalui pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam kontekstual. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis studi literatur. Data dikumpulkan melalui studi dokumentasi buku, artikel jurnal, dan literatur ilmiah yang relevan dengan media sosial, keyakinan, generasi digital, dan pembelajaran PAI kontekstual. Data dianalisis secara deskriptif-interpretatif melalui proses identifikasi, klasifikasi, sintesis, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media sosial berkontribusi terhadap krisis iman melalui pluralitas informasi agama tanpa validasi, pergeseran otoritas agama ke ruang digital, budaya instan, panutan yang lemah, dan paparan konten yang mempengaruhi perspektif agama siswa. Penelitian ini menawarkan kontribusi berupa strategi untuk memperkuat iman melalui pembelajaran PAI kontekstual yang menghubungkan materi iman dengan fenomena digital seperti flexing, digital footprints, dakwah instan, cancel culture, dan ketidakamanan, sehingga iman dapat diinternalisasi sebagai landasan moral-spiritual dalam kehidupan digital.

**Kata kunci:** Iman, Generasi Digital, Media Sosial, PAI Kontekstual.

### Abstract

This research aims to analyze the impact of social media on the crisis of the digital generation and formulate strategies to strengthen the faith through contextual Islamic Religious Education learning. This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study type. Data were collected through documentation studies of books, journal articles, and scientific literature relevant to social media, faith, digital generation, and contextual PAI learning. Data are analyzed descriptive-interpretatively through the process of identification, classification, synthesis, and drawing conclusions. The findings of the study show that social media contributes to the crisis of faith through a plurality of religious information without validation, a shift of religious authority to a digital space, instant culture, weak role models, and exposure to content that affects students' religious perspectives. This research offers a contribution in the form of a strategy to strengthen faith through contextual PAI learning that relates faith material to digital phenomena such as flexing, digital footprints, instant da'wah, cancel culture, and insecurity, so that faith can be internalized as a moral-spiritual foundation in digital life.

**Keywords:** Faith, Digital Generation, Social Media, Contextual PAI.

## Introduction

The development of digital technology has fundamentally changed the way humans interact, learn, build identities, and understand the values of life (an Herliani & Wahyudin, 2018). Social media as an important part of the digital ecosystem no longer only functions as a means of communication, but has developed into a new social space that influences the way of thinking, acting, and shaping the outlook on life of modern society. In the context of the digital generation, especially generation Z, the digital space has become a very dominant daily environment. They not only use social media for entertainment and communication, but also to seek information, build social relationships, follow public figures, access religious content, and form self-identity (Andi Tejawati & Adab, 2025). This condition shows that social media has a great influence on the moral, spiritual, and religious development of the younger generation (Lazwardi & Prince, 2025). On the one hand, social media opens up wide opportunities for the rapid and creative dissemination of religious knowledge. However, on the other hand, the digital space also presents serious risks in the form of the dissemination of unvalidated religious information, the emergence of new religious authorities that are not necessarily credible, an instant culture in understanding religion, and the exposure to content that can weaken the values of faith.

Various literature shows that the use of social media has become a global phenomenon that has a direct impact on the religious life of the younger generation (All et al., 2025). The We Are Social 2024 report shows that the internet usage rate in Indonesia has reached 79% of the total population with an average usage time of more than eight hours per day, which confirms the strong dominance of digital space in people's social lives. Agustinus Golo's research shows that social media plays a role in shaping self-value and identity. Meanwhile, Saifuddin Zuhri and colleagues explained that Generation Z makes extensive use of digital platforms to seek religious knowledge, but often faces difficulties in distinguishing between valid and invalid religious information. Another study shows that social media can be a means of spreading Islamic Religious Education values and improving the quality of faith of generation Z, as explained by Erlin Sarwila and Rina Dwi Ayunda. However, Akilah Mahmud also emphasized that the intensity of the use of digital media can contribute to the identity crisis of generation Z (Parina et al., 2021). The literature shows the existence of two sides of social media: as a potential educational-religious space, as well as a problematic space that can cause confusion of values, religious doubts, and weakening the foundation of faith if it is not accompanied by digital literacy and adequate religious guidance.

The unique context of this research lies in the effort to read the phenomenon of social media not only as a matter of technology, communication, or digital culture, but as a serious challenge for

strengthening the faith of the digital generation in learning Islamic Religious Education (Affan et al., 2026). The digital generation lives in an ecosystem filled with visual content, instant da'wah, short lecture pieces, social media algorithms, virtual communities, online games, flexing culture, cancel culture, exemplary crises, to the phenomenon of insecurity that is very close to their psychological and social experiences. In this context, faiths are not enough to be taught normatively, textually, and doctrinally, but need to be connected to the digital reality they experience every day (Ahmadi et al., 2025). Contextual PAI learning is important because it is able to bridge the values of faith with actual problems in the digital space. With this approach, the material of faith is not only understood as a theological concept, but also as a moral and spiritual foundation in responding to information, choosing content, building self-identity, maintaining digital ethics, and facing various social pressures on social media.

Although many studies on social media, generation Z, and religious education have been conducted, there are still some research gaps that need to be considered (Adawiyah & Supandi, 2024). First, some studies still see social media, especially as a means of spreading da'wah or learning media, so there are not many who have specifically studied its impact on the digital generation faith crisis. Second, some studies on the identity crisis of generation Z have not explicitly linked it to the dimension of faith as the foundation of faith in Islam. Third, studies on PAI learning still often focus on learning strategies in general, but not many have formulated the strengthening of faith through a contextual approach based on digital phenomena. Fourth, there is still a gap between normative faith learning in the classroom and the complexity of students' digital experiences that are full of unvalidated content, instant culture, and shifts in religious authority. This gap is the important basis for this research to connect the impact of social media, the crisis of faith, and contextual PAI learning strategies in one systematic analytical framework.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze the impact of social media on the crisis of the digital generation of faith and formulate a strategy to strengthen the faith through a contextual Islamic Religious Education learning approach. In particular, this research is directed to explain how social media affects the way the digital generation acquires and understands religious teachings, the forms of faith crises that arise due to exposure to digital content, and how PAI learning can be designed to be more relevant to the lives of students in the digital era. This research also seeks to identify digital phenomena that can be used as contextual materials in faith learning, such as instant da'wah, digital footprint, flexing, exemplary crises, cancel culture, insecurity, and viral culture. Thus, faith learning is expected not only to stop at cognitive understanding, but also to be able to form critical awareness, steadfastness of faith, and moral responsibility of students in the digital space.

The significance of this research can be seen from theoretical and practical aspects. Theoretically, this research contributes to enriching the study of Islamic Religious Education, especially in the development of faith learning that is responsive to digital dynamics. This research also offers a perspective that the crisis of the digital generation needs to be understood as a pedagogical problem, not solely a moral or technological problem. Practically, the results of this research can be a reference for PAI teachers, curriculum developers, Islamic educational institutions, and parents in designing a faith strengthening strategy that is more contextual, communicative, and close to the reality of students' lives. Through the contextual PAI approach, students are expected to be able to make faith a spiritual foundation for critical thinking, choosing information wisely, avoiding content that damages faith values, and building responsible digital behavior. Thus, faith education can play a strategic role in forming a digital generation that is faithful, media-savvy, moral, and resilient to face the challenges of the times.

## Discussion

### Characteristics of Social Media and Digital Generation

Social media is an online-based application that makes it easier for users to interact and share various forms of information quickly and widely (Amin, 2025). Today, social media is not only a means of communication, but has also become part of the lifestyle and space for the formation of social identity. This phenomenon is closely related to the emergence of the digital generation which has a high level of proximity to information and communication technology.

The digital generation in this study refers to the millennial generation and Generation Z who grew up in the digital technology environment (Ahmadi et al., 2025). The millennial generation born around 1980–2000 is experiencing a transition process to the digital era, while Generation Z who was born after it is known as *Digital Natives* Because since the beginning of his life he has interacted with the internet and social media. These two generations have characteristics that are relatively adaptive to technological developments and have high mobility in accessing various sources of information.

As an active user of digital technology, this generation tends to obtain information through various digital information sources. Social media not only serves as a means of communication, but also as a primary source of information that influences the way individuals understand various issues, including in the religious field. Although social media has various advantages, such as speed in disseminating information and ease of access for users, in perspective *Media Dependency Theory* A high level of dependence on the media can increase the influence of the media on individuals and groups (Arifin & Efendi, 2025). The greater a person's dependence on the media, the greater the role of the media in shaping the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of its users. Thus, the dominance of

social media in the lives of the digital generation not only affects communication patterns, but also has the potential to shape value systems and individual perspectives on social and religious realities.

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur explain that dependence on media occurs in a social system, especially when individuals do not have sufficient access to alternative sources of information, such as direct communication or personal experiences. In these conditions, individuals tend to rely more on mass media as the main source of information. This level of dependence usually increases in situations of crisis, social change, or uncertain conditions, when people's need for information becomes even higher (Latifah et al., 2023).

### **The Impact of Social Media on the Faith Crisis**

The digital era presents new challenges in strengthening the faith, because of the very fast and wide flow of information, including various content on social media that is not always in line with Islamic values. This condition has the potential to affect the steadfastness of faith and the stability of a Muslim's character, especially in the digital generation that makes social media the main source of information.

A number of studies show that the young generation faces the risk of a crisis of faith due to the ease of access to various misleading digital content and the low level of digital literacy based on Islamic values. In Generation Z, the crisis of faith is often influenced by exposure to digital content that is contrary to Islamic teachings, lack of spiritual assistance, and an undirected process of searching for identity in the digital space. In addition, the pressure of the social environment, digital trends, and the very fast flow of information can also affect the stability of the faith of the younger generation (Ulya et al., 2025).

The impact of social media on the crisis of faith can be seen from several aspects. First, social media provides an open space for various parties to produce and disseminate religious information freely. This condition has led to the emergence of a plurality of religious interpretations that circulate without an adequate scientific validation process. On the one hand, this condition enriches religious discourse, but on the other hand it can cause epistemological confusion for individuals who do not have a strong basis in religious knowledge.

Second, the development of religious content that is textual and less contextual also has the potential to give rise to a partial understanding of Islamic teachings. This incomplete understanding can lead to the emergence of rigid religious attitudes and a lack of consideration of the social and humanitarian dimensions in Islamic teachings. If one accepts such an understanding without the guidance of a competent teacher, there can be a misunderstanding of the teachings of Islam as a whole.

Third, the development of social media has also given birth to the phenomenon of digital preachers or religious microcelebrities who have a great influence in the virtual space. (Muthohirin, 2025). Their popularity in the digital space raises questions about religious authority, as many of them lack the qualifications of scholars in the traditional sense, such as formal Islamic education, scientific sanad, or involvement in religious institutions such as Islamic boarding schools and Islamic organizations. Some digital preachers actually come from general intellectuals who actively convey religious teachings through digital platforms. This phenomenon shows a shift in religious authority from institutional to popularity-based authority in the digital space (Abdul, 2010).

In addition, the flow of digital information also gives birth to popular culture that emphasizes the speed, visuality, and virality of content. As a result, religious discussions are often simplified in the form of short content that prioritizes visual appeal over depth of scientific analysis. This condition has the potential to weaken the quality of people's religious understanding and trigger the emergence of various forms of deviations from the faith. Thus, the crisis of faith in the digital generation is not only caused by exposure to negative content on social media, but also by changes in information consumption patterns, shifts in religious authority, and weak integration between religious understanding and life experiences in the digital era

### **Faith Strengthening Strategy through Contextual PAI**

In Islamic perspective, the faith has a fundamental position as the main foundation in the life of a Muslim (Dalimunthe & Daulay, 2023). Etymologically, the creed comes from the Arabic language *Al-'Aqd* which means a bond or something that is firmly bound. This term is also related to the meaning of solid belief, affirmation, and strong attachment to a belief. Meanwhile, terminologically faith is understood as a strong and steady belief in the heart, which is not accompanied by doubts for the person who believes it (Apriani & Komalasari, 2024).

Faith is not only related to aspects of theological beliefs, but also serves as a moral foundation that guides individual behavior in daily life. Therefore, strengthening faith is very important in dealing with the dynamics of modern life influenced by the development of digital technology. In this study, faith is understood as a basic belief in faith that is the foundation of a Muslim's life. The term faith used in this discussion is focused on the aspect of faith, so that the discussion remains within the framework of strengthening faith.

Based on this understanding, strengthening faith is not enough to be done normatively, but needs to be connected to the reality of students' lives. One of the approaches that can be used is a contextual approach by relating the material of faith (faith) to the real phenomena experienced by students in the digital era.

One of the strengthening of faith can be done through a contextual approach by relating faith material to real phenomena experienced by students in the digital era. The contextual approach or *Contextual Teaching and Learning* (CTL) is a learning strategy that emphasizes the relationship between the subject matter and the real life of students. Through this approach, learning not only focuses on imparting knowledge, but also helps students understand and internalize the values learned in daily life. Learning becomes more meaningful when students are able to relate the material they learn to their experiences, needs, and social and digital environment. Therefore, CTL encourages students to think critically, reflectively, and be able to solve real problems, not just memorize concepts in the abstract.

The contextualization of faith learning can be done through several digital phenomena that are close to the lives of students:

1. Faith in Allah through the phenomenon of *flexing* on social media

One of the phenomena that can be used as contextual learning in strengthening faith is the practice of *flexing* on social media. This phenomenon refers to the tendency of some individuals to show off their wealth or luxurious lifestyle on digital platforms in order to gain social recognition. In Indonesia, the practice of *flexing* has been a public concern through several cases that went viral on social media, resulting in widespread criticism from the public.

This phenomenon can be analyzed from the perspective of faith through the concept of faith in Allah as *Ar-Razzaq* (the Giver of sustenance). In Islamic teachings, sustenance is understood as a gift from Allah that should be addressed with gratitude and responsibility, not as a means to seek praise or recognition from humans. The practice of *flexing* is also related to *riya'* behavior, which is displaying charity or ownership with the aim of gaining judgment from others. As affirmed in QS. Ibrahim verse 7: "Indeed, if you are grateful, I will surely add (favours) to you, but if you deny (My favor), indeed My punishment is verily severe." This verse shows that sustenance should be managed with gratitude and responsibility, not for arrogance in the digital space.

By making the case of *flexing* as a discussion material in learning, students can understand that activities on social media not only have a social impact, but also have moral and spiritual dimensions. Through this reflection, faith can function as a foundation in directing individual attitudes and behaviors in the digital era.

2. Faith in angels through *the concept of digital footprint*

The material of faith in angels, especially related to the duties of the angels Raqib and Atid who record all human deeds, can be contextualized through the concept *Digital Footprint* or

digital footprints. Digital footprints are data or information that a person leaves behind when using the internet, either intentionally or unintentionally. In addition, digital footprints can also be understood as information that a person uploads into a digital space which is then stored and can be traced back (Mumtazah et al., 2025). In many cases, old posts on social media often reappear and have an impact on a person's reputation. This shows that digital activities have long-term consequences. Through this analogy, the teacher can explain that just as digital activities can be recorded and traced, so all human deeds are recorded by angels. The difference is that the recording of charity by angels is perfect and impossible to erase. This is in accordance with the words of Allah in QS. Qaf verse 18:

He said not a word but a guardian angel at his side who was always ready (to record)" (Ali et al., 2015).

Thus, students can understand that every activity, including on social media, has moral and spiritual consequences.

### 3. Faith in the book of Allah through the phenomenon of instant ustadz on social media

The development of social media has also given rise to the phenomenon of digital da'wah which is delivered in the form of short content on various platforms such as TikTok and YouTube. The da'wah content is usually packaged in an attractive and easy-to-understand manner so that it can reach a wide audience. However, the pattern of short and instant delivery has the potential to reduce the depth of understanding of religious teachings. Audiences are often more interested in practical information delivered quickly, so they are less motivated to study Islamic teachings more comprehensively. This condition can cause religious understanding to become partial and less deep.

In PAI learning, teachers can take advantage of this phenomenon by inviting students to compare viral da'wah content with the main references in Islam, namely the Qur'an and mu'tabar tafsir. Through this approach, students are expected to have digital religious literacy skills and understand that the Qur'an remains the main source of truth in the midst of the rapid flow of digital information. This is in accordance with Allah's affirmation in QS. Al-Baqarah verse 2:

"There is no doubt about this book (the Qur'an); Guidance for those who are pious (Ali et al., 2015)."

### 4. Faith in the Prophet through the phenomenon of exemplary crisis in the digital era

Today's teenagers grow up in an intense digital ecosystem, where social media is the main space in the formation of self-image. The pressure to appear perfect and competitive encourages *self-branding practices* that emphasize appearance, achievements, and material aspects. As a

result, traditional moral examples, including the Prophet Muhammad as *uswah hasanah*, began to be displaced by digital figures that were commercial and selective. Commercial means that the content displayed is often profit-oriented such as promotion and popularity, while selective means that it only shows the ideal side of life so that it does not represent reality in its entirety. This difference between digital imagery and reality can create identity dissonance that undermines long-term moral commitments.

Strengthening faith in the apostle can be contextualized through the phenomenon of exemplary crisis in the digital era, where many public figures or influencers are used as role models, even though they do not always reflect good moral values. Students often imitate the lifestyle of celebrities or *content creators* rather than imitating the morals of the Prophet. As explained in the Qur'an surah QS. Al-Ahzab verse 21:

"Indeed, the Messenger of Allah (himself) has a good example for you..." (Ali et al., 2015)

In PAI learning, teachers can invite students to compare the character of the Prophet as the main example with the behavior of public figures who go viral on social media. Through this reflection, students are directed to understand that the main role model in the life of a Muslim is the Prophet, not just a popular figure in the digital space.

#### 5. Faith in the Last Day through the *Cancel Culture Phenomenon*

"Cancel *culture*" is a digital phenomenon in the form of collective rejection or exclusion of individuals, especially public figures, due to alleged mistakes or controversial statements. This phenomenon is growing rapidly on social media, where a person can be "*canceled*" by the public as a form of response to behavior that is considered inappropriate. In the digital age, individuals are increasingly vulnerable to the consequences of activities in cyberspace. The impact is not only limited to the virtual space, but it can also affect real life, such as job opportunities, public perception, and personal reputation.

The material of faith in the last day can be contextualized through the phenomenon of *cancel culture*, which is the practice of punishing someone socially for mistakes that go viral on social media. In some cases, public figures have experienced mass blasphemy and even lost their jobs due to pressure from netizens, even though the information circulating is not necessarily completely true or fair. This phenomenon can be used as a reflection material in learning to explain the concept *of hisab* on the last day. The teacher can emphasize that man's judgment in the world is often subjective and limited, whereas God has perfect knowledge of all human actions. Allah says in the Qur'an Surah QS. Az-Zalzalah verses 7–8:

"Whoever does good deeds as heavy as zarah, he will surely see (the reward). And whoever commits a crime as heavy as zarah, he will surely see (the reward). (Ali et al., 2015)"

This verse reinforces the understanding that true judgment is in the hands of God, not in public opinion on social media.

#### 6. Faith in qada and qadar through the phenomenon of *insecurity* on social media

The phenomenon of *insecurity* is also experienced by many teenagers in the digital era. Social media often displays ideal living standards, such as academic achievement, physical appearance, or social success. Exposure to these standards can encourage individuals to compare themselves to others constantly, resulting in feelings of inadequacy or lack of confidence. Factors that cause *insecurity* include:

- a. *Insecurity* due to failure or rejection, *Insecurity* can arise from painful experiences such as failure or rejection. This experience forms a negative mindset towards yourself. Success and failure in achieving life goals will affect the way an individual perceives themselves.
- b. Lack of confidence due to social anxiety, *Insecurity* can also be caused by low self-confidence in social situations, especially due to fear of being judged negatively by others. This condition is related to social anxiety, which can make individuals withdraw from the social environment and decrease the quality of life.
- c. *Insecurity* due to perfectionism, The desire to achieve standards that are too high or perfect can trigger feelings of disappointment, self-blame, and even psychological disorders. Constant striving to be "perfect" actually reinforces feelings of insecurity because individuals find it difficult to accept their own shortcomings.

In PAI learning, *insecurity* can be related to the material of faith to qada and qadar. Teachers can explain that each individual has different rules and ways of life according to the wisdom of Allah. Understanding destiny does not mean giving up, but accepting the results with open arms after making maximum efforts. Allah affirms in the Qur'an the letter QS. Al-Hadid verses 22–23:

"There is no calamity that befalls the earth and yourselves unless it is written in the Book (Lauh Mahfuz)... so that you may not grieve for what has escaped you... (Ali et al., 2015)"

This verse teaches that each individual has their own rules, so there is no need to get caught up in self-destructive social comparisons. Through this contextual approach, faith learning not only functions as a process of knowledge transfer, but also as a process of internalizing faith values that are relevant to the lives of the digital generation. Thus, students

are expected to be able to make faith as a foundation in responding to various life dynamics in the digital era.

To strengthen the understanding of these phenomena, further analysis is needed through the perspective of social theory. In this case, *Media Dependency Theory* presented by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur explain that the level of individual dependence on the media will determine the extent to which the media influences the way of thinking, attitudes, and behaviors (Nurlina et al., 2024). In the context of the digital generation, the high intensity of social media use makes digital platforms the main source of obtaining information, including religious knowledge. When this dependence is not balanced with adequate religious literacy, then social media not only functions as a means of information, but also as an agent that shapes religious perspectives subjectively. This then contributes to the emergence of value confusion and the weakening of faith in the digital generation.

In addition, this phenomenon can also be understood through the perspective of *Social Construction of Reality* presented by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. This theory explains that social reality is formed through the process of externalization, objectification, and internalization (Anriani & Nasution, 2024). In the context of social media, various religious content that is consumed continuously will shape individual perceptions, which are then internalized into beliefs. Thus, the religious understanding of the digital generation is not entirely formed from authoritative sources, but also from the construction of reality shaped by the digital media itself. Therefore, strengthening the faith through contextual PAI learning is important as an effort to direct the internalization process to remain in harmony with authentic Islamic values.

## Conclusion

The development of social media has created a new social space that influences the way the digital generation obtains information, forms self-identity, and understands religious values. Although social media opens up wide opportunities in the dissemination of religious knowledge, the flow of information that is not always verified and the low level of digital religious literacy can cause confusion of values and potential creed crises in the younger generation.

This condition shows that strengthening faith is not enough to be done through a normative learning approach, but needs to be adjusted to the reality of students' lives in the digital era. The contextual approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is a relevant strategy because it is able to relate faith material to phenomena that are close to students' experiences.

Through the contextualization of various digital phenomena in faith learning, students not only understand the concept of faith cognitively, but are also able to reflect these values in daily life. Thus,

faith can function as a moral and spiritual foundation in responding to the dynamics of digital life in a more critical and responsible manner.

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