



Identity Negotiation and Hybrid 'Part-Time *Mahasantri*' of Gen Z Students at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah

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Abstract

This study investigates the identity negotiation and hybrid religiosity emerging from the clash between conservative Islamic boarding house rules (Ma'had Al-Jami'ah) and the expressive, digitally-native culture of Generation Z students. Employing a qualitative, case study approach at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah UIN Ar-Raniry, data were collected via in-depth interviews with 26 Gen Z students, lecturers, and supervisors, supported by rigorous observation and document analysis. Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's qualitative data analysis technique in three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion/verification. Findings demonstrate this hybridization is manifested across three domains: (1) Digitalization and profanation, where religious practice is subjected to virtual spectacle; (2) Negotiated modesty, where Shari'ah-compliant fashion is compromised by social trend-following; and (3) Desensitization and conformity, evidenced by the normalization of profane language due to the bandwagon effect. These findings converge to establish a dual identity: the Part-Time *Mahasantri*, who effectively inhabit a "Third Space" where conservative religious norms are temporarily suspended in favor of social conformity. This paper argues that students' hybrid behavior is less a theological rebellion than an identity negotiation driven by peer influence and liquid religiosity, offering a critical insight for Islamic educational institutions aiming to achieve sustainable character development (SDG 4, Quality Education).

Keywords: Identity Negotiation, Hybrid Religiosity, Generation Z (Gen Z), Part-Time *Mahasantri*, Ma'had Al-Jami'ah

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji negosiasi identitas dan keagamaan hibrida yang muncul dari benturan antara aturan asrama Islam konservatif (Ma'had Al-Jami'ah) dan budaya ekspresif serta digital-native mahasiswa Generasi Z. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kasus di Ma'had Al-Jami'ah UIN Ar-Raniry, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan dua puluh enam mahasiswa Gen Z, dosen, dan pengasub, didukung oleh observasi yang ketat dan analisis dokumen. Analisis data dilakukan dengan teknik analisis data kualitatif Miles dan Huberman melalui tiga tahapan yaitu reduksi data, penyajian data dan kesimpulan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa hibridisasi ini tercermin dalam tiga domain: (1) Digitalisasi dan profanasi, di mana praktik keagamaan diubah menjadi pertunjukan virtual; (2) Kesopanan yang dinegosiasikan, di mana busana yang sesuai syariah dikompromikan oleh tren sosial; dan (3) Desensitisasi dan konformitas, yang ditandai dengan normalisasi bahasa profan akibat efek bandwagon. Temuan ini bersatu untuk menetapkan identitas ganda: Part-Time *Mahasantri*, yang secara efektif menghuni "Ruang Ketiga" di mana norma-norma

agama konservatif sementara ditanggubkan demi kesesuaian sosial. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa perilaku hibrid mahasiswa lebih merupakan negosiasi identitas yang dipengaruhi oleh pengaruh teman sebaya dan keagamaan yang cair, daripada pemberontakan teologis, memberikan wawasan kritis bagi lembaga pendidikan Islam yang bertujuan mencapai pengembangan karakter berkelanjutan (SDG 4, Pendidikan Berkualitas).

Kata kunci: *Negosiasi Identitas, Keagamaan Hibrida, Generasi Z (Gen Z), Mahasantri Paruh Waktu, Ma'had Al-Jami'ah*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a shift in the characteristics of college students from Millennials to Generation Z (Gen Z). This phenomenon has resulted in a change in student identity from academic and conservative to digital and socialite. Gen Z has become a digital native, born and raised in the digital era (Kaur & Chavan, 2025). The existence of digital media has had a significant impact on the formation of identity among Gen Z communities. This has led to rapid changes in social identity, fashion trends, and the use of slang in the Gen Z community. Facts show that digital media use is dominated by Gen Z. According to APJII data, in 2024, internet users in Indonesia will reach 221,563,479 out of a total population of 278,969,200, with Gen Z as the dominant user group (34.40%) (APJII, 2024). As a result, digital media addiction has led to increased fatigue and anxiety and changed the social behavior of Gen Z (Chang & Chang, 2023; Sharma et al., 2023). Furthermore, for Gen Z, fashion has become an expression of individual identity and self-expression (Adindo & Sutoyo, 2026; Delgado et al., 2023; Humaida et al., 2026; Pradana et al., 2023). Uniqueness and diversity in clothing have become a necessity for Gen Z students, leading them to adopt fast-fashion and other styles (Ahmad & Syihabuddin, 2025; Aulia et al., 2026; Choiriyah et al., 2025; Wojdyla & Chi, 2024). In addition, digital media also has an impact on the use of slang within the Gen Z community (Liew et al., 2025; Sundaram et al., 2023; Tufail et al., 2024). This phenomenon occurs on a massive scale throughout the Gen Z community, including Gen Z students at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah at the State Islamic University. Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, a *pesantren*-based higher education institution at the State Islamic University, plays an important role in fostering Islamic character and noble morals among students. Therefore, the digital lifestyle, fashion styles, and slang in the Gen Z student community have become major challenges in fostering a sense of community in the dormitory at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah.

Many studies in various fields of science have been conducted on Gen Z (Malik et al., 2024). In reality, studies linking the transformation of Gen Z's digital lifestyle, fashion, and slang to the religious context of students at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah remain very limited. In fact, according to the Religious-Social Shaping of Technology (RSST) theory, technology does not merely shape religion, but religious practices and values also actively shape how technology is adopted and used by religious communities. Campbell emphasizes the existence of hybrid spaces where traditional religious practices and the digital world interact (H. Campbell, 2010; H. A. Campbell, 2013).

So far, studies on the relationship between religious identity, hybridity, Gen Z students, and Ma'had Al-Jami'ah can be divided into three trends. First, studies on Gen Z religious identity hybridity find that it arises from factors such as religious identity, ethnic or cultural origin, language use, and social status (Boland, 2020). The religious hybridity of Gen Z occurs in the

Hijrah Pop phenomenon among Gen Z teenagers (Sunaryanto & Syamsuri, 2022), urban Muslim youth (E. Saputra, 2022), the interfaith community (Waliyuddin & Noor, 2022), and the digital media space (Rofidah & Muhid, 2022). In Islamic boarding schools, Gen Z *santri* hybridity occurs in the negotiation of *santri* identity between Islamic boarding school tradition and digital narrative populism, thereby encouraging the construction of a "digital santri" identity (D. Saputra, 2025). Second, a study on the characteristics of Gen Z's identity found that Gen Z has the characteristics of digital natives (Hammad, 2025), practical, independent, and career-based learning style (Chalim et al., 2024; Weber & Keim, 2021), independent, visual, and kinesthetic (Shorey et al., 2021) and following fashion styles for reasons of uniqueness, self-concept and brand image (Singh et al., 2025). When it comes to clothing, Gen Z chooses fast fashion and follows fashion trends to suit their lifestyle (Wojdyla & Chi, 2024). Gen Z tends to use slang to create a sense of familiarity in everyday conversations (Y. Q. Yusuf et al., 2023). Third, a study of Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, an institution that integrates Islamic boarding school education and Islamic higher education, fosters a religious culture and character among students and encourages the integration of Islamic values and academic skills (Al Muiz et al., 2023). Ma'had Al-Jami'ah builds students' religious character and improves the moral character of post-program students (M. Yusuf et al., 2024). In addition, Ma'had Al-Jami'ah has become an institution for improving students' ability to read and write the Qur'an (Herlambang et al., 2024) and for preventing the spread of religious radicalism, especially in Islamic religious universities (Asa'ari et al., 2022).

However, the above study did not directly examine the hybridity of religious identity among Gen Z students at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah. The research on Gen Z hybridity in Islamic boarding schools above only touches on digital interactions among traditional students and does not examine clothing identity or slang communication. The research was also conducted in traditional Islamic boarding schools, not at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, which is the focus of this study. Thus, there is still a gap in research examining the dynamics of religious identity hybridity among Gen Z students that emerge through clothing expressions, digital communication, and slang in the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah environment. Such studies are urgently needed to understand how campus Islamic boarding schools adapt to a generation that brings with it a strong digital culture and individual expression.

This article aims to fill the gap found in the above literature study. This article departs from a fundamental problem, namely, how religious identity is formed among Gen Z students at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, State Islamic University. On the one hand, Gen Z students have psychological characteristics that require freedom of expression. On the other hand, Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, or campus Islamic boarding schools, are conventional Islamic educational institutions with several static, binding rules (Yaakob et al., 2025). Based on these issues, three questions can be formulated to analyze the problem: a) How does religious identity hybridity occur among Gen Z students at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, State Islamic University? b) What are the forms of religious identity hybridity that occur? c) Why does religious identity hybridity occur among Gen Z students at the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah Islamic State University? These three questions will be the primary focus guiding the entire discussion in this article. The urgency of this research lies in the need to deeply understand the dynamics of identity negotiation between the religious values taught at Ma'had and the digital lifestyle of Gen Z. This understanding is essential so that

campus Islamic boarding schools can formulate educational strategies that are contextual, relevant, and responsive to generational changes.

This article argues that there has been a shift in religious identity among Gen Z students, as evidenced in their daily behavior. This shift in identity is evident in their digital interactions, fashion styles, and verbal communication in their daily interactions. On the one hand, they are required to fulfill their roles as students who obey the rules of the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah dormitory; on the other hand, Gen Z is characterized as a digital native, independent, creative, and fashionable. What is even more interesting is the fact that Gen Z, with their independent behavior and fashion trends, are forced to follow several *pesantren* programs at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah. Of course, this phenomenon will create identity friction and encourage the emergence of new identity constructions among Gen Z students at State Islamic Universities. Therefore, this study is crucial for empirically revealing the forms of religious identity hybridity arising from the clash between traditional boarding school values and Gen Z digital culture. The findings of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the study of contemporary religious identity and provide practical implications for the management of Ma'had Al-Jami'ah in the era of digital transformation.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative case study approach, collecting data through interviews, observations, and document reviews. Observations were made of the daily activities of Gen Z students to see how worship and religious practices, clothing behavior, and daily communication have been digitized. Interviews were conducted with 26 Gen Z students, 3 lecturers, and 2 dormitory supervisors to examine how worship and religious practices have been digitized, as well as fashion trends and the use of slang in daily communication. Documentation reviews were conducted to examine the regulations of Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah Implementation Guidelines from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, and documentation of the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah program reports. Interviews and observations were conducted in several sessions to ensure data availability. Some interviews were conducted by making special appointments and were formal, while others were conducted informally and spontaneously.

This research is conducted at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, Ar-Raniry State Islamic University, Banda Aceh. The selection of this location was based on several considerations. First, Ar-Raniry State Islamic University, Banda Aceh, is located in Aceh Province, the only province with Islamic Sharia law, which certainly gives a distinct color to the religious identity of Gen Z students. Second, Ar-Raniry State Islamic University Banda Aceh is the first UIN in Aceh to offer the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah program. Third, Ma'had Al-Jami'ah UIN Ar-Raniry is located in Aceh Province, which is the westernmost province of Indonesia. Aceh's geographical location, far from the capital city, certainly has an impact on the identity of Gen Z, which is different from that of Gen Z at Islamic universities in the capital city. This fact was taken into consideration in selecting Ma'had Al-Jami'ah UIN Ar-Raniry as the locus of this study.

Interviews and observations were conducted over 2 months, involving 26 Gen Z students, 3 lecturers, and 2 dormitory supervisors as informants. This study focuses on the hybridity of Gen Z students' religious identity, particularly in terms of the digitization of worship

and religious practices, clothing behavior, and the use of slang in daily communication. The students were selected based on their direct involvement in the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah program, the lecturers were selected based on their participation in the teaching process on campus, and the dormitory supervisors were individuals directly involved in the care and guidance of the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah dormitory. The students, lecturers, and supervisors who served as informants were selected through purposive sampling, i.e., individuals directly involved in the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah program and campus lectures. Each informant was a direct participant and observer of the hybridity of Gen Z students' religious identities. The number of participants was not determined at the outset but was guided by data saturation. Data collection was stopped when it no longer produced significant new information, as indicated by repetition of narrative patterns and consistency of categories. The validity of the data in this study was ensured through triangulation of data sources, data collection methods, and time, to ensure that the data obtained was objective and not manipulative. Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's qualitative data analysis technique in three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion/verification. Coding was carried out as part of data reduction to identify units of meaning and develop categories representing the dynamics of the cases. Codes with similar meanings were grouped into categories and developed into main themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Digitalization of Worship and Religious Practices

The digitalization of worship and religious practices among Gen Z students is evident in the use of digital media and social media to facilitate them. Students appear to exhibit Gen Z characteristics of being digital natives and independent in performing digital and virtual worship and religious practices. This digitization of worship and religious practices is not observed among Gen Z students in the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah dormitory environment. While in the dormitory, Gen Z students follow a conservative program of worship and religious practices. As acknowledged by the following caregiver:

"At the dormitory, the students study as usual. They learn *tajwid* and *tahsin* Al-Qur'an using the *mushaf* and study *Fiqh*, *Taubid*, and *Tsaqafah* Islam directly with the *ustadz* and *ustadzah*. During the learning process, the students are divided into several *halaqah* groups and are guided directly by the *ustadz* and *ustadzah*."

However, digitizing worship was observed among Gen Z students outside the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah dormitory. The digitization of worship was found in the form of using prayer apps, digital Al-Qur'an and Tafsir, social media, and websites. As acknowledged by the following students:

"On campus, we usually use apps to remind us of prayer times, such as Muslim Pro, Athan Pro, or others. To look up the interpretation of verses, we usually use Tafsir Digital or search via websites. It's easier and faster that way. We also search online when looking for answers to religious questions, especially when working on college assignments on campus. For communication, we also have a WhatsApp group to remind each other about classes and dormitory programs."

More details on the digitalization of worship among Gen Z students can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Digitization of Worship and Religious Practices

Digital Behavior	Media Digital	Objective
Using daily worship apps	Muslim Pro, Athan Pro, Umma, Prayer Times	Making it easier to perform prayers on time
Using social media as a means of <i>dakwah</i> and <i>tadabbur</i>	YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp	Increasing knowledge through digital <i>da'wah</i> tools
Attending online lectures and virtual study groups	YouTube Live, Zoom, Google Meet, podcast	Participating in virtual studies without having to be physically present
Using the Digital Qur'an and Tafsir Application	Quran for Android, Muslim Pro, Al-Quran Indonesia, Qur'an Kemenag, quran.com, tafsirweb.com, quran.nu.or.id.	Easy to interact with the Qur'an and its interpretations without having to carry a hard copy
Using WhatsApp Groups for collective worship	Subuh Youth Movement Group (GPS), Grup Markaz Tahfizh Al-Qur'an (MATAQU) Ar-Raniry, Grup One Day One Juz (ODOJ)	Building religious solidarity and increasing motivation to worship
Searching for religious answers via the internet	NU Online (nu.or.id), konsultasisyariah.com, rumaysho.com, muslim.or.id	Find religious answers easily and quickly
Expressing religious identity through social media	WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok	Demonstrating religious identity and personal branding as a Muslim/Muslimah via digital media

Source: Compiled by researcher, 2025

Based on the data above, there are two patterns of digitization in worship and religious practices among Gen Z students. First, digitization occurs when Gen Z students are outside the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah dormitory, especially during lectures on campus. Students use digital applications, prayer apps, social media, and websites to assist in the implementation of worship and religious practices. Second, when they are in the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah dormitory, students practice worship and religious observances in a conservative, conventional manner. Students participate in the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah program directly, without going through intermediaries such as virtual or digital media. *Mahasantri* attends *tajwid* and *tahsin* Al-Qur'an recitation classes in person, using the *mushaf*, and studies *Fiqh*, *Tauhid*, and *Tsaqafah Islamiyah* material directly from *ustadz* and *ustadzah*.

Non-Islamic Dressing Behavior and Following Fashion Trends

Gen Z students' behavior regarding the dress code shows a tendency to follow fashion trends that sometimes conflict with Islamic dress code requirements. Non-Islamic dress code violations among students can be observed outside the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah dormitory, especially

during lectures on campus, routine sports activities outside the dormitory, and in other public spaces. As acknowledged by the following lecturer:

"I see that sometimes there are students who wear non-Islamic clothing when attending lectures on campus. In certain faculties, there are even male students who still wear bracelets and ripped jeans. Some female students still wear thin, transparent hijabs, sleeveless tops, and short socks that reveal their legs."

This fact was also conveyed by one of the female students as follows:

"When I'm outside the dormitory, I sometimes wear a Pashmina headscarf and a slightly slit skirt. After all, I don't need to be too formal when going for an afternoon walk or hanging out at a coffee shop."

One of the caregivers expressed a different opinion:

"I see that both male and female students always wear modest and Islamic clothing in the dormitory. They follow the dress code. From the moment they enter the dormitory, we socialize them so that they understand the consequences of not following the rules."

This un-Islamic dress code was found not only among female students but also among male students. Outside the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah dormitory, male students were found wearing un-Islamic clothing, especially at the gym, soccer field, tourist attractions, and coffee shops. For more details, see the following table:

Table 2. Non-Islamic Dress Behavior

No.	Dress Code	
	Male <i>Mahasantri</i>	Female <i>Mahasantri</i>
1	Wearing bracelets and necklaces	Wearing a thin or transparent <i>hijab</i>
2	Wearing shorts during exercise	Wearing clothes that show the arms (T-shirt or blouse without cuffs)
3	Wearing T-shirts with vulgar/un-Islamic motifs, such as images of living creatures or inappropriate writing	Wearing a slit skirt that shows the calves
4	Wearing ripped jeans on the thighs or knees that expose the <i>aurat</i>	Wearing a short hijab, a neck-wrapped <i>hijab</i> , or a short pashmina style that does not cover the chest
5	Wearing patterned T-shirts with eye-catching images or writing during congregational prayers at the mosque	Wearing short socks that reveal the <i>aurat</i>

Source: Compiled by researcher, 2025

The data above shows a deviation in the dress code of Gen Z students, which is contrary to the rules of Ma'had Al-Jami'ah. Ma'had Al-Jami'ah regulations state that every student is required to dress in Muslim attire and cover their *aurat*. Male students are not permitted to wear clothing that exposes the *aurat*, such as shorts or ripped trousers. Female students are required to wear loose, non-tight skirts, long, loose tops, headscarves that cover the chest, clothing that does not reveal the shape of the body, and non-transparent clothing. These Muslim/Muslimah dress code regulations apply to all students at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah without exception.

Based on the above data, it can be concluded that the clothing behavior of Gen Z students can be divided into two patterns. First, students wear Islamic and sharia-compliant clothing in the dormitory environment. They follow dormitory rules requiring all students to dress modestly and in accordance with Islamic dress standards. Gen Z students are well aware of the consequences of violating dormitory rules. Second, things are different when students are outside the dormitory. Some students wear non-Islamic clothing. This is found in activities outside the dormitory environment, such as on campus, at sports venues, tourist attractions, and coffee shops.

The Use of Slang in Everyday Communication

The communication behavior of students found that Gen Z students use slang in their daily communication. The use of slang is not limited in direct verbal communication but also extends in digital communication on social media platforms. Gen Z students use slang in the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah dormitory and beyond. However, when in the dormitory, students use positive slang. As acknowledged by the following female student:

"We also often use slang in our daily activities, both in the dormitory and on campus. For example, we call our close friends "bestie." Other words we often use are "gas," "mager," "cringe," and "santuy." Sometimes we also use abbreviations like LOL, FOMO, SKSD, and OMG. We usually use these abbreviations more often on our smartphones. When we use these slang words, it makes us feel closer and more familiar with our friends."

Meanwhile, outside the dormitory, some male students sometimes use negative slang, as admitted by the following male student:

"It's true that sometimes we use words like *anjir*, *tai*, or *bangke* among friends. But we don't mean to use foul language. Our friends don't get angry. It's just that we're used to it, usually, when we're at the coffee shop or playing sports. So not when we're in the dorm."

Here is the confession of one of the lecturers:

I have heard *mahasantri* students using slang words such as *anjir* or *anjay* when they gather at coffee shops. Perhaps they do so to appear polite, but everyone knows what those words mean (dog). It may not be a problem for them because they are used to it. However, this behavior still demeans their status (as *mahasantri* students).

The following dormitory supervisor expressed a different opinion:

All students are required to follow the rules of polite speech and are prohibited from using profanity in the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah dormitory. So far, I have not heard any students using profanity in the dormitory. Slang words such as *bestie*, *cringe*, *santuy*, *flexing*, *KEPO*, and *bucin* are often heard, but I have never heard the words *anjir* or *taik*.

The use of slang among Gen Z students can be categorized into two types: positive and negative. For more details, see the following table:

Table 3. Use of Slang in Daily Communication

Positive Words			Negative Words		
No	Slang Word	Meaning	No	Slang Words	Meaning
1	Bestie	Close friend	1	<i>Anjir/ Anjay</i>	A play on the word "dog," an expression of surprise or admiration
2	<i>Gas/ Gaskeun</i>	Let's continue/begin	2	<i>Tai/Taik</i>	Excrement, expressions of disappointment
3	<i>Mager</i>	Lazy to Move	3	<i>Bangke</i>	Corpse, angry expression
4	<i>Gabut</i>	No activities	4	Flexing	Show off
5	Cringe	Tacky, embarrassing	5	<i>Julid</i>	Envy, containing backbiting and malice
6	<i>Santuy</i>	Santai	6	KEPO	Want to know other people's business
7	LOL	Laugh Out Loud (laughing loudly)	7	<i>Bucin</i>	Simp
8	OMG	Oh My God (surprised)			
9	FOMO	Fear of Missing Out (afraid of missing out)			
10	OOTD	Outfit of the Day (fashion style on a specific day)			
11	SKSD	Acting like you know me well			
12	Sus	Suspicious			

Source: Compiled by researcher, 2025

The use of slang among Gen Z students can be categorized into two types: positive and negative. Some commonly used positive slang words are: *bestie*, *gas/gaskeun*, *mager*, *gabut*, *cringe*, *santuy*, LOL, OMG, FOMO, OOTD, Sus, and GOAT. Meanwhile, commonly used negative slang words are: *anjir*, *anjay*, *tai*, *taik*, *bangke*, flexing, *julid*, *bucin*, and KEPO.

Based on the above data, it can be concluded that slang use among Gen Z students falls into two patterns. First, the use of slang in the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah dormitory environment, where students use positive or negative slang words that are not sensitive and do not violate the dormitory's language rules, such as *julid*, *bucin*, or flexing. Second, the use of slang outside the dormitory environment, such as on campus, at coffee shops, sports fields, and other Gen Z community gathering places. Students tend to easily use negative slang words such as *anjir*, *anjay*, *tai*, or *taik*. These words have become part of their daily vocabulary without the intention of cursing or speaking foul language. However, everyone who hears them understands that their meaning is still foul and rude.

This study shows that the hybridity of the religious identity of Gen Z students at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah results from the encounter between conservative Islamic values and the digital culture and modern lifestyle of this generation. On the one hand, they maintain traditional

religious culture in a dormitory environment that emphasizes discipline in worship and religious ethics. Still, on the other hand, they use digital technology to expand their religious experiences in the virtual realm. The expression of identity through clothing and language also shows a process of negotiation between piety and modernity, in which students try to adapt to trends and pop culture without completely abandoning Islamic values. This hybridity describes the flexible, adaptive, and context-specific dynamics of Gen Z religiosity in the digital era.

Discussion

Desacralization of worship and profanation of religion

The digital behavior of Gen Z students shows that the characteristics of digital natives in Gen Z have been implemented in every aspect of life, including worship. For Gen Z, convenience in activities is an important consideration, so even in worship, digitalization is possible. On the other hand, this behavior of religious digitalization can weaken the sanctity of worship. The use of social media as a community medium in worship can eliminate the meaning of congregation in worship. Digital interpretation makes it easier for students to understand verses from the Qur'an, but on the other hand, studying interpretation independently is prone to misunderstanding the meaning if one does not learn directly from a teacher. On the other hand, social media has become a tool for Gen Z students to express their religious identity, with philanthropy and religious sensitivity serving as personal branding (Nasrullah, 2020). The impact is that Gen Z students place more importance on uploading their worship activities than on the essence and benefits of those activities. This behavior illustrates the desacralization of worship in Gen Z students' digital behavior.

The profanation of religion can also be found in the digitalization of worship by Gen Z students. For example, daily recitation of the Qur'an using a digital Qur'an such as Quran for Android on a smartphone. Sometimes smartphones are used for recitation, but they are also used to watch movies and listen to music that violate Islamic values. This behavior is a clear example of the profanity of religion, where the same device (smartphone) is used for two opposing worlds (H. A. Campbell, 2012). The two worlds referred to are the Islamic recitation of the Qur'an and the viewing of non-Islamic films and music. Ultimately, this behavior has placed the Qur'an in an unholy position and changed its status from sacred to profane. In addition, WhatsApp groups for worship communities often become platforms for showcasing worship, contrary to their original purpose. The original purpose of the group, which was to motivate worship, has instead become a medium for virtual flexing and even digital *riya*. Similarly, when attending live and online recitations via the YouTube platform, non-Islamic commercial advertisements are sometimes unintentionally displayed (Dalimunthe et al., 2025; Harahap et al., 2026; Ib et al., 2026). Even though it is only for a moment, it can still diminish the sacred meaning of the recitation.

The profanation of religion in the digital context does not mean the loss of religious practices but a shift in meaning, authority, and ways of practising religion as a result of digital platforms. As digital natives, Gen Z students are easily exposed to social media, so the sanctity of religion is renegotiated in the digital public sphere. Gen Z students find it easier to find answers to religious questions by *searching* Google and *scrolling* through social media than by asking their *ustadz* or *kyai* directly. Websites such as konsultasisyariah.com or rumaysho.com

have become quick and easy alternative media. This behaviour shows a shift from religious authority grounded in scientific *sanad* to one grounded in digital media and popularity. On the other hand, the existence of social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram has created a religious marketplace where religious interpretations are presented openly, and Gen Z consumes them directly without filters (Ahmad Kusaini et al., 2024; Habil et al., 2025; Japheth et al., 2025; Mafarja et al., 2026; Musslifah et al., 2025). This condition blurs the boundaries between the sacred and the profane in religion, where religious knowledge has become part of digital content and social media.

The desacralization of worship and the profanation of religion have become the religious identity of Gen Z students when they are outside the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah dormitory environment. Meanwhile, when in the dormitory, they show an identity of students who are obedient and compliant in following conservative and conventional dormitory programs. In the dormitory, Gen Z students are bound by static, restrictive rules. Compliance with these rules will greatly affect their graduation grades. Meanwhile, outside the dormitory, Gen Z students are free and independent in showing their digital student identity. The desacralization of worship and profanation of religion indicate the existence of a dual religious identity among Gen Z students at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah UIN Ar-Raniry.

De-Islamization of Muslim Fashion and the Trend of Following Fashion Styles

The fashion behavior of Gen Z students shows a trend of following current fashion styles. Gen Z students tend to wear trendy outfits popular among teenagers. This fashionable clothing behavior is uniquely observed among Gen Z students outside the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah dormitory. This is especially true in public spaces where the Gen Z community gathers, such as coffee shops, cafes, sports venues, and recreational areas. For example, female students wear Pashmina headscarves wrapped simply around the neck, T-shirts or blouses without sleeves, and split skirts that reveal the calves. Male students wear T-shirts with vulgar patterns, ripped jeans or pants torn at the knees or thighs, and sports outfits that reveal *aurat*, such as shorts.

The un-Islamic dress code of Gen Z female students indicates a de-Islamization of Muslim clothing. Outside the dormitory environment, Gen Z female students often wear clothing that is not sharia-compliant. Or they wear clothing that covers the *aurat*, but certain parts remain uncovered. For example, female students wear thin, transparent headscarves, pashmina headscarves that reveal their hair, blouses without cuffs, and long skirts without socks. Meanwhile, male students wear bracelets and necklaces, long pants with ripped knees, patterned shirts during congregational prayers, and shorts during sports. This behavior in dressing can diminish the meaning of Muslim clothing or even eliminate Islamic values in student clothing. Students should wear sharia-compliant clothing that completely covers the *aurat*, but in fact, they wear clothing that exposes the *aurat* and is not sharia-compliant. This un-Islamic dress code among Gen Z *mahasantri* occurs outside the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah dormitory environment. This fact is evidence of the de-Islamization of Muslim clothing among Gen Z *mahasantri*.

The de-Islamization of Muslim clothing has become a second identity for Gen Z students outside the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah dormitory environment. Gen Z students wear different clothes than they do in the dormitory. This trend shows a dual identity in the clothing patterns of Gen Z students. Strict and binding regulations have an impact on the use of sharia-compliant

and Islamic Muslim clothing by Gen Z students in the dormitory environment. Fear of failure in the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah program forces them to follow the rules even if they are unwilling. On the other hand, the independent environment outside the dormitory, which is free from dress code regulations, has an impact on the daily outfits they wear. This freedom without coercion has led to a de-Islamization of their daily dress style, even though this is unintentional. Most Gen Z students wear non-Islamic clothing not because they intend to go against Islamic values, but rather because of their social circle and habits.

The de-Islamization of Muslim fashion is the result of Gen Z's efforts to minimize self-discomfort and reduce feelings of alienation from the community (Syahrivar, 2021). In addition, the commercialization of fashion among Gen Z has contributed to the de-Islamization of Muslim fashion. Digital media, which Gen Z consumes daily, has become a virtual marketplace with influencers as its distribution agents (Shin et al., 2025). This is further reinforced by Gen Z's consumer behavior, which tends to follow global fashion trends. Consumerism creates a pattern of adoption in Muslim clothing that is reinterpreted according to community cultural trends. This pattern of adoption is then manifested in the hybrid dressing practices of Gen Z students (Ajala, 2017). It can be concluded that the de-Islamization of Muslim clothing among Gen Z female students is greatly influenced by the disruption of digital media information and the tendency of Gen Z to follow similar clothing patterns that are in line with the cultural trends of their community.

Desensitization to Slang and the Bandwagon Effect Phenomenon

The use of slang in the daily communication of Gen Z students shows that they tend to use negative slang words such as *anjir*, *anjay*, *tai*, or *taik* more easily outside the dormitory environment, at coffee shops, sports fields, and other Gen Z community gathering places. This behavior is caused by the bandwagon effect phenomenon within the Gen Z community. The bandwagon effect is a psychological phenomenon in which individuals tend to follow the habits, lifestyles, or language practices that are predominantly practiced within a community, even when they sometimes conflict with ethical and cultural norms (Furinto et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2022; Oan-Oon & Choibamroong, 2025). In the bandwagon effect, decision-making and truth determination are based on the majority rather than on moral values. This bandwagon effect is further reinforced by Gen Z's conformity, in which teenagers are easily manipulated and change their behavior, attitudes, and even their identity to fit in and conform to their community's identity (Iklimah et al., 2023; Minich et al., 2023). This causes Gen Z individuals to use negative slang more easily in their daily communication. The foul language they use is often not intended to be abusive or violate Islamic values, but has become a daily habit due to the influence of dominant digital media.

On the other hand, the continuous and persistent use of negative slang causes language desensitization in the Gen Z student community. Language desensitization is a phenomenon of decreased emotional sensitivity to negative stimuli in language. Desensitization occurs through repeated exposure to negative words or sentences (Miles-Novelo & Anderson, 2020; Mrug et al., 2016). For example, a Gen Z student who has just heard the words *anjir*, *anjay*, or *taik* in everyday communication will initially feel uncomfortable and disturbed. However, when these words are heard continuously and repeatedly, a sense of comfort will emerge. Furthermore,

these students may become users of these words in the future. The negative slang words used by Gen Z students have become a habit in the Gen Z community, especially outside the dormitory environment. Although often done unintentionally, these words still tarnish Islamic values and lower the self-esteem and status of Islamic students.

Language desensitization and the bandwagon effect have become the religious identity of Gen Z students outside the dormitory environment, as well as their dual identity. As before, fear of failure in the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah program has made Gen Z students submissive and obedient to the rules of communication in the dormitory. However, something different happens outside the dormitory when they are not bound by the rules—students who are supposed to speak politely and in an Islamic manner instead use foul and harsh language. Students will easily use negative words or subtle insults, even when using distorted words. Language desensitization and the bandwagon effect are also evidence of the enormous influence of the environment and community in shaping Gen Z's identity (Sukarjono et al., 2026; Triyono et al., 2025). Religious norms and cultural ethics can be violated if a behavior is widely accepted and practiced within the Gen Z community. This phenomenon can occur in all Gen Z communities, including Gen Z students.

Based on the above analysis, it can be seen that the hybridity of Gen Z students' religious identity reflects a complex shift in religious patterns between traditional religious values and modern virtual culture. Gen Z students live in two worlds, namely the sacred world (dormitories, Islamic traditions) and the profane world (social media, popular culture). In the context of postmodernism theory of religion (Bauman, 2010). The religious diversity of Gen Z students can be categorized as liquid religion—a fluid, flexible, and easily adaptable form of religion (Groot, 2009; Ward, 2017). The models of digitalization of worship, desensitization of language, and de-Islamization of clothing are manifestations of the identity negotiations of *mabasantri* who seek to elaborate normative piety with contemporary self-expression. In the context of social construction theory of identity, religious identity is no longer fixed and singular, but is dynamically constructed through social interaction and digital space (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Social media and virtual communities in this context serve as a "new social space" that produces a new form of religiosity, where religiosity is not merely a form of spiritual obedience, but a lifestyle. This means that the hybridity of Gen Z students' identities illustrates the process of "religious glocalization," namely the blending of normative local Islamic values with the expressive and personal influences of global digital culture (Featherstone et al., 1995). The result is the emergence of an ambivalent student identity: religious yet digital, obedient to dormitory norms yet fluid in public spaces, and polite yet expressive. This phenomenon confirms that the religiosity of the digital generation cannot be understood in binary terms of sacred and profane, but must be viewed as a spectrum of identities constantly negotiated in the context of social and technological change.

A study of the behavioural dynamics of Gen Z Islamic boarding school students is of critical importance in the development of contemporary Islamic education studies. This study not only captures the behaviour of Gen Z Islamic boarding school students but also presents evidence of a paradigm shift in religious practice in the digital age (Arif et al., 2024; Badawi, 2025; Baihaqi et al., 2023; Hamdi et al., 2024; Hasan, 2015). The phenomenon of hybrid identity among Gen Z students, who tend to be obedient in the dormitory but fluid in public spaces,

poses a challenge for developing Islamic education strategies from a formal legal approach to a persuasive approach grounded in digital awareness. The theoretical contribution of these research findings presents three strategies for developing Islamic education studies at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah. First, curriculum reconstruction with sanad-based digital literacy. The digitisation of media and learning materials at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah will serve as a filter for students in understanding religious interpretations from digital platforms. Second, the transformation of dormitory culture from coercion to awareness. The main problem with dual identity is obedience driven by fear of programme failure rather than by willingness. The transformation of dormitory culture can be achieved by habituating programmes in public spaces, such as cafes or recreational areas, with the assistance of supervisors. This activity aims to minimise the impact of the bandwagon effect, in which Gen Z students can get caught up in negative behaviour within their community. Third, mitigating language desensitisation through community role models and evaluating language ethics on social media. There is a need to create a social environment with a high intensity of positive words so that the bandwagon effect works in a positive direction. These three strategies can be implemented through a digital code of ethics for Gen Z students, taking into account aspects of digital worship integrity, scientific authority based on sanad, Islamic dress code ethics, and polite language. The achievement of this digital code of ethics can be measured using evaluation instruments such as weekly reflection journals and behaviour-monitoring tools.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that digital media interactions and group community identity strongly influence identity construction among Gen Z students. Educational interactions with Gen Z students should use learning methods and media that are appropriate to their characteristics as digital natives, independent, and creative. The use of conservative and conventional methods and media will have an impact on the construction of dual identities among Gen Z students. On the one hand, when they are in the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah dormitory environment, they will act as religious, Islamic, and academic students. On the other hand, when outside the dormitory, they will act like Gen Z teenagers: independent, digital natives, and fashionable. This dualism in Gen Z students' identities will construct a third-space identity as a zone of transition and a space for identity transformation (Bhabha, 1994; Bhandari, 2022). The powerlessness of Gen Z students to resist the dominance of dormitory rules (superordinate) that differ from their characteristics (subordinate) leads to the construction of a dual identity: part-time students. Part-time *mahasantri* is a new identity for Gen Z *mahasantri* who participate in the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah program at one time but are also Gen Z students on campus and Gen Z teenagers in their communities at other times. Environmental conditions and community behavior have a very significant influence in constructing their identity. Even religious norms and cultural ethics can be violated if a behavior has been agreed upon and practiced massively within the community. This is often found in the emergence of the bandwagon effect phenomenon and conformity behavior in shaping the psychological and sociological conditions of Gen Z.

This article recommends that Ma'had Al-Jami'ah respond dynamically and progressively to this shift in student identity. In recent years, there has been a shift in student identity from the millennial generation to Generation Z. Therefore, Ma'had Al-Jami'ah should use a learning

approach that is in line with the characteristics of Gen Z rather than remaining static and stagnant using a conservative and conventional learning approach. Ma'had Al-Jami'ah must consider using digital methods and media to attract Gen Z students' interest and motivation to learn. A group-based learning approach can be an alternative to strengthen Gen Z's religious identity. This group is not limited to the dormitory environment; it should also function effectively when students are outside the dormitory. Strengthening positive values within groups can help prevent the emergence of negative behavior in both dress and communication. Coercive methods are ineffective in shaping commendable character in Gen Z. However, methods of habituation and continuous, repeated exposure to values of goodness can change the character of Gen Z students for the better, day by day. The bandwagon effect and conformity behavior among Gen Z should be taken into consideration in determining a practical and progressive learning approach at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah.

The shift from Millennial to Gen Z characteristics demands that Ma'had Al-Jami'ah's management realign its pedagogy to meet the standards of SDG 4 (Quality Education), specifically target 4.7. An educational model that is static and conventional fails to cultivate the critical digital citizenship required today. Thus, the recommendation to integrate digital media and group-based approaches is a necessity for achieving modern, contextual religious education.

Finally, this study is limited to the research location at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. Therefore, further research at other Ma'had Al-Jami'ah is also necessary, especially at Islamic universities located in areas without Islamic sharia specialization, such as Aceh, and close to the national capital. Of course, the characteristics of Gen Z students may differ due to the many social factors that shape them.

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