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Strengthening Harmony in The Midst of The Rapid Advancement of Information Technology

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ABSTRACT. Indonesia is a pluralistic country in many aspects, including race, ethnicity, regional languages, customs, and religion. To manage this diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA), the government frames it within the format of religious harmony, which is defined as "... the state of relationships among religious communities based on tolerance, mutual understanding, mutual respect, appreciation of equality in practicing their religious teachings, and cooperation in social, national, and state life within the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia." Since religious harmony is a state of being, it is dynamic and influenced by its ability to adapt to social changes in society, including shifts in social structures that encompass patterns of social relationships, social norms, and social roles. Social changes vary not only in terms of degree but also in scale and scope. The development of technology, particularly information technology, has brought significant changes to social behavior. The rapid growth of information technology has altered old social patterns and structures. This change is marked by shifts in interaction patterns, lifestyles, behaviors, perspectives, ways of living, and social orientations. It is worth exploring how we (especially religious leaders) can strive to maintain religious harmony amidst the rapid advancement of information technology. The research method used in this study will be literature research. This literature research will focus on textbook analysis. The research will involve a comprehensive analysis of works discussing the relationship between information technology and religion. The rapid advancement of information and communication technology has accelerated social changes in various fields. An important phenomenon to observe is the fading of values, including religious, cultural, and national values. Society tends to neglect moral values when engaging in social media, focusing instead on what can go viral and generate profit. It is imperative for religious leaders to enter the digital technology realm to carry out their sacred role of delivering messages of morality and goodness, ensuring that religious harmony remains strong. In this context, it is important to involve and provide space for the younger generation to play a role.

Keywords: *Strengthening, Harmony, Rapid Advancement, Information Technology.*

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a pluralistic country in many aspects such as race, ethnicity, regional languages, customs, and religion. This diversity is a valuable asset, like a beautiful and precious mosaic when managed well, but it can also pose a threat if not handled wisely. A critical factor in this diversity is ethnicity, inter-group, race, and religion (SARA) (Hoon, 2017). Therefore, the nation's survival depends on how we manage SARA diversity into a synergistic force to achieve national unity and cohesion (Renger et al., 2020; Reynolds, 2018). Diversity should stimulate entities to complement each other, cooperate, and realize national integration for the common good. However, if not managed properly, SARA diversity can become a boomerang, serving as ammunition for disintegration.

To manage SARA diversity, the government frames it within the format of religious harmony, defined as "a state of relations among religious communities based on tolerance, mutual understanding, respect, equality in practicing their religious teachings, and cooperation in societal, national, and state life in the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution" (Joint Regulation of the Minister of Religion and the Minister of Home Affairs No. 9 of 2006, No. 8 of 2006, Chapter I, Article 1). This religious harmony can be realized if there is tolerance, mutual understanding, respect for equality in practicing religious teachings, and positive, productive cooperation (Abidin & Gwynne, 2017; Maki et al., 2017).

Religious harmony is a dynamic state influenced by its ability to keep up with societal changes, particularly social structure changes, which include patterns of social relationships, norms, and social roles. Social change occurs at various levels and scope, from individual behavior shifts (e.g., lower birth rates or abortion rates) to changes in group norms, inter-individual or group relations, and transformations in customs or societal values (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Burga & Damopolii, 2022). The level of change varies between societies depending on factors like technological advancement, natural environment, organizational development stages, political awareness, cultural diversity, and the degree or character of interaction with other societies. Among these variables, the most influential today is technological advancement, especially in information technology, which shapes human thoughts and behavior.

The development of technology, particularly information technology, has significantly altered societal behavior. This rapid technological progress impacts not only regions confined by borders but also extends beyond regional boundaries globally (Campbell, 2024). New discoveries in information technology have had a massive impact, as the utilization of information technology has altered social patterns and disrupted the old social order. These changes are characterized by shifts in interaction patterns, lifestyle, behavior, worldviews, and social orientation. It is interesting to explore how efforts, particularly by religious leaders, can maintain religious harmony amidst the rapid advancement of information technology (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020).

The advancement of information technology has introduced significant transformations in religious practices and interactions (Aguilar et al., 2017). Digital platforms have become new spaces for religious communication, knowledge dissemination, and the formation of religious identities. Through social media, online forums, and digital religious content, individuals can access, interpret, and share religious information beyond traditional institutional boundaries. This phenomenon has created new opportunities for religious engagement but also generated challenges related to religious authority, misinformation, polarization, and the spread of exclusive narratives (Cheong, 2017). Consequently, information technology has become an important factor influencing the dynamics of contemporary religious life and social relations.

In the Indonesian context, the relationship between information technology and religion presents complex dynamics. On the one hand, digital technology provides opportunities to

strengthen religious harmony by facilitating interfaith communication, promoting tolerance narratives, and expanding access to inclusive religious knowledge (Yuliawati & Asri, 2024). On the other hand, digital spaces may also become channels for the dissemination of intolerance, identity-based conflicts, and religious contestation (Lim, 2017). The increasing involvement of religious actors and communities in digital spaces demonstrates that maintaining religious harmony requires new strategies that consider technological changes and evolving patterns of social interaction.

Previous studies have extensively examined the role of technology in shaping social behavior and religious expression (Cinelli et al., 2021). However, limited attention has been given to how information technology influences the efforts to maintain religious harmony within a pluralistic society such as Indonesia. Existing discussions often focus on digital religious practices, online religious authority, or the spread of religious discourse, while the relationship between technological transformation and the sustainability of religious harmony remains insufficiently explored (Evolvi, 2022). Therefore, a deeper examination is needed to understand how technological development reshapes religious norms, social relations, and strategies for managing religious diversity.

Based on this background, this study aims to critically examine the relationship between information technology and the sustainability of religious harmony in Indonesia. Specifically, it explores how technological developments reshape religious practices, patterns of social interaction, and the negotiation of religious values within a pluralistic society (Subchi et al., 2022). Using a literature-based approach, the study synthesizes existing scholarship on digital religion, online religious communication, tolerance, and religious contestation to identify key opportunities, challenges, and gaps in current knowledge. Its contribution lies in developing an integrated understanding of how digital environments may both support and complicate efforts to sustain religious harmony (Andok, 2024). The study further highlights the importance of digital literacy, inclusive religious communication, and context-sensitive engagement strategies in promoting tolerance, social cohesion, and peaceful coexistence amid religious diversity (Yusuf et al., 2019).

METHOD

This study employs a literature research method to examine the relationship between information technology and religion. Literature research can be categorized into four main types: (1) studies of revelatory texts, (2) analysis of the ideas of prominent thinkers, (3) textbook analysis, and (4) historical studies. This research adopts the textbook analysis approach by critically examining scholarly works that discuss the intersection between technological development, social transformation, and religious values (Snyder, 2019; Tsuria et al., 2017). The data were obtained through a systematic review of relevant literature, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, research reports, and other authoritative publications related to information technology and religious change. The collected sources were analyzed qualitatively to identify major themes, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings regarding the influence of technological advancement on religious practices, social structures, and normative frameworks. Through this approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how information technology contributes to the transformation of religious norms and social relations in contemporary society (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020).

In addition, the literature selection process was guided by predefined inclusion criteria to ensure the relevance and academic credibility of the selected sources. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly publications examining the relationship between information technology, religious practices, and social change. Studies offering theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence on the social shaping of technology, digital religious

communication, and the transformation of religious authority were particularly considered (Humeira et al., 2019). Research exploring the mediatization of religion and the integration of online and offline religious practices was also included to capture the changing nature of contemporary religious experiences (Gao et al., 2024). The analytical process involved comparing findings across the selected studies, identifying conceptual similarities and differences, and synthesizing recurring themes and emerging patterns. This approach enabled the development of a multidimensional interpretation of how technological developments influence religious practices, social interactions, and the negotiation of religious values in contemporary society.

Furthermore, this study applies a thematic analysis technique to interpret the collected literature by organizing findings into several key themes, including digital transformation of religious practices, changes in religious authority, the emergence of online religious communities, and the negotiation between technological innovation and religious values (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analytical approach enables the researcher to examine not only the opportunities provided by information technology but also the challenges and ethical considerations arising from its integration into religious life (Campbell, 2010). By synthesizing diverse academic perspectives, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper theoretical understanding of the dynamic relationship between technological progress and religious transformation in the digital era.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The Impact Of Information Technology On Social Change

Ernst Cassirer states that the superiority of humans lies in their ability to communicate through the creation of agreed-upon symbols, which he describes as animal symbolicum. Innovation and creativity in creating and communicating symbols significantly influence human communication and interaction. The rapid development of information technology is transforming communication patterns and societal relations, from direct communication to digital communication, with the use of social media increasing. This transformation changes how individuals interact, both in personal and professional lives. Before digital technology, most communication occurred face-to-face. Conversations happened in real-time, enriched by body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Social and cultural contexts also influenced communication, taking place in a shared physical space.

The advent of digital technology, such as the internet and mobile devices, has removed these physical barriers. Email, instant messaging, and social media allow individuals to interact without being in the same location, offering great flexibility to communicate anytime and from anywhere. This technological advancement reduces social and familial dynamics, with relationships becoming more streamlined and mediated by technology.

Unlike direct communication that requires physical meetings, information technology enables fast and efficient communication. Messages can be sent and received in seconds, facilitating quicker decision-making. Digital platforms like email and instant messaging allow for the efficient exchange of information without the need for face-to-face interaction. While direct communication often involves limited and localized dissemination of information, digital communication can spread information quickly and broadly. A single click can deliver a message to thousands or even millions via social media, blogs, or websites, altering the dynamics of information dissemination.

In direct communication, physical presence is essential, with eye contact, body movements, and facial expressions enriching communication and deepening interpersonal relationships. In digital communication, physical presence is replaced by virtual presence. Though technology like video calls, emojis, and GIFs attempt to replicate some non-verbal aspects, they often fall short of capturing the depth of face-to-face interaction. With its convenience, digital communication

risks reducing the quality of relationships. Interactions become shorter and more superficial, and there's a greater potential for miscommunication due to the absence of non-verbal cues.

The transformation of communication patterns driven by technological advancement has significantly influenced people's lifestyles, social interactions, and everyday needs. The rapid development of information and communication technology (ICT) has shifted human communication from conventional face-to-face interactions toward digital-based communication systems that emphasize speed, accessibility, and efficiency. One of the most significant manifestations of this transformation is the increasing dominance of instant messaging applications as the primary medium for personal, professional, and social conversations. According to a survey conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII, *Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia*), approximately 89.35% of Indonesia's 143.26 million internet users utilize messaging services as part of their daily digital activities. This phenomenon demonstrates that communication technology has become an integral component of modern social life, influencing how individuals build relationships, exchange information, and participate in digital communities. Furthermore, the widespread adoption of instant messaging has created new communication cultures characterized by immediacy, continuous connectivity, and the expectation of rapid responses.

The social implications of communication technology extend beyond the technical aspects of connectivity and involve broader changes in individual behavior, social structures, and cultural practices. These impacts include various dimensions, such as the speed at which technological innovations are adopted, the accessibility and usability of digital platforms, and their consequences for interpersonal relationships and collective behavior. The influence of communication technology can be understood through the distinction between "impact" and "effect," where impact refers to broader social transformations resulting from technological development, while effect is more specifically associated with changes in individual knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, and actions caused by the transmission and reception of information. Through digital communication platforms, individuals gain greater opportunities to access knowledge, participate in public discussions, and establish connections across geographical boundaries. However, these developments also introduce challenges, including information overload, changes in communication ethics, reduced quality of direct interpersonal interactions, and the spread of misinformation. Therefore, understanding the social consequences of communication technology requires a comprehensive analysis of both its beneficial contributions and potential risks within contemporary society.

In the educational sector, information technology has evolved beyond its traditional perception as merely a supporting tool and has become a transformative force that reshapes teaching and learning processes. The integration of multimedia, hypermedia, digital learning platforms, and artificial intelligence provides new opportunities for educators and students to create more flexible, interactive, and personalized learning experiences. Technology-supported learning environments enable students to access educational resources without limitations of time and location, while also encouraging independent learning, collaboration, and critical thinking skills. E-learning platforms, for example, have been shown to increase student motivation, provide more engaging learning experiences, and contribute to improved academic achievement by accommodating diverse learning styles and individual needs. Furthermore, advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI) offer significant potential for understanding human cognition, including how individuals learn, reason, solve problems, and make decisions. AI systems, which are designed to simulate aspects of human intelligence through computational processes, can perform various functions such as language understanding, data analysis, prediction, evaluation, problem-solving, and adaptive learning. Consequently, the application of AI in education represents not only a technological innovation but also a new approach to understanding and enhancing human learning processes in the digital era.

In the economic sector, information technology has the potential to contribute significantly to economic growth by improving productivity and operational efficiency, generating new employment opportunities, encouraging innovation in production and service delivery, strengthening the competitiveness of products and services, and facilitating faster distribution processes. However, the rapid development of information technology also presents several challenges that may negatively affect economic structures and social conditions. These challenges include the emergence of consumer-oriented lifestyles, increasing market dominance over economic activities, widening economic disparities, dependence on foreign economic actors, intensified exploitation of natural resources, displacement of certain types of employment, difficulties faced by local products in competing with global brands, and the growth of technology-related economic crimes.

In the political sphere, the advancement of information technology has significantly transformed the way political communication, participation, and democratic processes are conducted. Digital platforms have created new opportunities for political actors, institutions, and citizens to access, distribute, and exchange political information more efficiently. Information technology enables political organizations to analyze voter characteristics, identify specific demographic segments, design targeted communication strategies, and optimize campaign approaches based on digital data. Furthermore, social media and online platforms have increased public awareness of political issues by providing easier access to political discussions, policy information, and civic education materials. The use of digital technologies has also expanded opportunities for political fundraising by enabling organizations and candidates to reach broader communities through online donation systems. Consequently, information technology has contributed to the development of more interactive forms of political engagement, allowing citizens to participate in political conversations beyond traditional institutional boundaries.

Despite these advantages, the integration of information technology into political processes has also generated complex challenges that influence democratic interactions and social stability. One of the most significant concerns is political polarization, which can emerge from the personalized nature of digital platforms. Algorithms used by information technology systems often prioritize content based on users' previous interactions, interests, and preferences. While this mechanism improves user experience, it may unintentionally create digital environments known as "echo chambers," where individuals are repeatedly exposed to information that reinforces their existing beliefs while having limited exposure to alternative perspectives. This condition can reduce opportunities for constructive dialogue, increase social divisions, and make it more difficult for communities with different viewpoints to engage in meaningful discussions. Therefore, the algorithmic structure of digital platforms has become an important factor in understanding contemporary political communication and social interaction.

Another major challenge associated with technological development in politics is the increasing spread of misinformation, disinformation, and fabricated content, particularly within the context of the post-truth era. The rapid circulation of information through digital networks allows inaccurate or misleading content to reach large audiences within a short period. Such phenomena may influence public perceptions, shape political attitudes, and affect decision-making processes when individuals do not critically evaluate the reliability of information sources. In addition, information technology has created possibilities for the manipulation of public opinion through coordinated digital campaigns, selective information distribution, and strategic framing of political narratives. These practices demonstrate that technology itself is not inherently positive or negative; rather, its social consequences depend on how individuals, institutions, and societies utilize and regulate technological systems. Moreover, increasing dependence on digital infrastructure has introduced additional risks, including cyberattacks, unauthorized access to personal data, and security vulnerabilities that may threaten both individual privacy and institutional resilience.

Overall, the development of information technology represents a transformative force that produces both opportunities and challenges across various dimensions of social life. On the positive side, technological advancement contributes to greater efficiency, faster communication, wider access to information, improved educational opportunities, and the expansion of economic activities through the creation of new digital-based employment sectors. Technology has also supported the democratization of knowledge by reducing barriers to accessing educational and informational resources. However, these benefits must be balanced with critical awareness of potential negative consequences, including information inequality, technological dependency, erosion of certain social values, cultural transformation, political polarization, and social fragmentation. Therefore, the relationship between information technology and society requires continuous evaluation through ethical, social, and regulatory perspectives to ensure that technological progress contributes to sustainable human development rather than creating new forms of inequality or social disruption.

Impact Of Information Technology On Religious Behavior In Society

The number of internet users in Indonesia continues to increase every year. According to data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), internet users have reached 215.63 million people, equivalent to 78.19% of Indonesia's total population.

The segment of society most engaged with information technology is Generation Z, born between 1996 and 2012. One of their standout characteristics is their openness to various kinds of information and cultures.

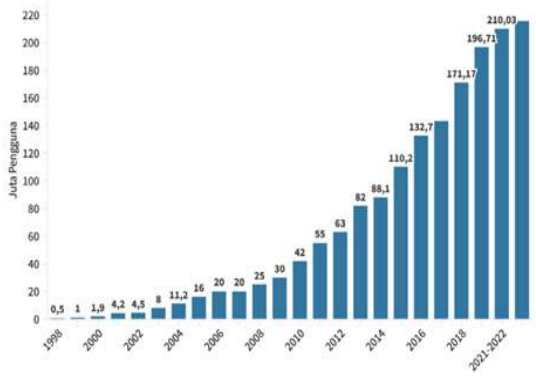


Figure 1 Number of internet users in Indonesia

They can easily access information from diverse sources, including social media and the internet, which gives them broader and more varied perspectives on the world.

According to the survey titled "Religion Among Youth: Ritual No, Conservative Yes" (2021), data show that young people, especially those categorized as Generation Z, frequently engage in religious issues online.

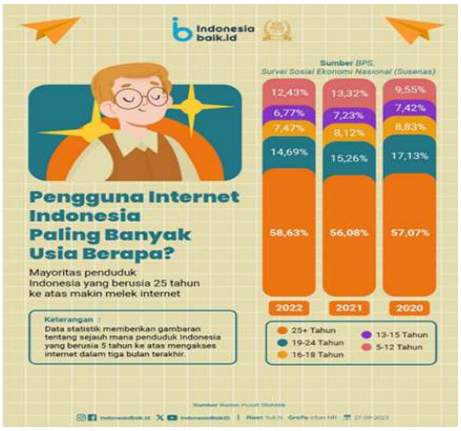


Figure 2 Internet users in Indonesia

They are the generation that most frequently "like" or "dislike," share, comment on, and consume religious content on social media. The survey also found that individuals who rely on social media as a source of religious knowledge tend to interact more frequently on these platforms. Their interactions include giving feedback (like/dislike), sharing information (share), commenting (comment), and, of course, watching religious programs. Moreover, the higher an individual's religiosity level, the more frequently they engage in these interactions on social media. The same pattern applies to individuals who view themselves as religious opinion leaders, people whose religious opinions are often sought and heard.

Interestingly, although Generation Z is often characterized as having lower levels of religious observance compared to previous generations, evidence from a survey conducted by the Varkey Foundation across 20 countries indicates a different pattern in Indonesia. The survey shows that 93% of Indonesian Generation Z respondents consider religion an important factor contributing to their happiness, a proportion considerably higher than the global average. These findings suggest that religious values remain significant among Indonesian youth despite changes in patterns of religious engagement. The survey also highlights several important trends in the religious lives of Generation Z, including a decline in participation in some traditional religious practices, the growing importance of personal spirituality, the increasing influence of social media and digital technology on religious understanding, a more critical perspective toward religious institutions, and shifts in personal values and priorities. These developments indicate that technological advancement does not necessarily diminish religious commitment but may contribute to the transformation of how younger generations interpret, practice, and express their religious identities.

Additionally, a report entitled *"The Dynamics of Digital Activism Among Indonesian Youth in the Discourse of Freedom of Religion and Belief (KKB)"*, published by the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) in collaboration with the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS) in 2023, highlights the evolving relationship between Generation Z and religion. The report indicates that Indonesian Generation Z tends to demonstrate a flexible approach to religious engagement, perceiving religion not only as a source of moral guidance but also as an important component of personal and collective identity. This finding reflects the changing patterns of religious expression among young people, in which digital spaces provide new platforms for negotiating, communicating, and constructing religious identities.

A survey by the Pew Research Center in the United States about the reference sources used by the public for making major life decisions revealed that most Americans rely more on their own research than on guidance from experts. Eight out of ten Americans said they "strongly rely" on their own research when making major decisions. By comparison, 25% said they strongly rely on advice from professional experts, and only 15% strongly rely on guidance from religious leaders. To play a strategic role in the digital information and communication world, it is

imperative for religious leaders to enhance their competencies and capabilities. Whether they like it or not, religious leaders must be adept at navigating various social media platforms and be aware of viral issues that capture the public's attention. They need to actively spread positive values sourced from religious, cultural, and national principles to offer an alternative voice amidst the flood of information.

Equally important is cooperation with policymakers and law enforcement to curb the spread of false information, pornography, and extremist provocations. Strategic collaboration with Generation Z is also crucial in building a network of young religious leaders. The role of Generation Z is important because they are more familiar and technologically literate, and from a psychological standpoint, moral messages are more effective when delivered by peers (Mulyana, 2010).

Discussion

Applying Ernst Cassirer's concept of *symbolic forms*, the findings demonstrate that humans have successfully extended their capacity for "symbolic creation" into the digital realm, where information technology functions as a new medium for communication, identity formation, and the construction of social meaning. As *animal symbolicum*, humans continuously develop symbolic systems to interpret and organize their experiences, and digital platforms represent a contemporary transformation of these systems. However, this adaptation also involves qualitative changes in human relationships. Although digital communication provides unprecedented speed, accessibility, and global connectivity, the increasing reliance on technology may contribute to the simplification of social interactions, as highlighted by Fukuyama's notion of social streamlining. The efficiency and convenience offered by digital communication can gradually reduce opportunities for deeper emotional engagement, meaningful conversations, and strong social bonds. Thus, the paradox of the digital age emerges: humans are more connected than ever through technological networks, yet many interactions risk becoming increasingly superficial, requiring a balance between technological advancement and the preservation of authentic human relationships.

The results regarding political polarization and "echo chambers" are particularly concerning. When algorithms prioritize content that aligns with existing preferences, they inadvertently stifle cross-view dialogue. This suggests that the same technology intended to democratize information is being used to fragment society, making the role of media literacy and critical thinking more vital than ever in the education sector. A striking point of discussion is the contrast between Gen Z's declining engagement in traditional religious rituals and their overwhelming belief in religion as a source of happiness (93%). This suggests a shift toward personal spirituality over institutional adherence. For Indonesian youth, religion serves as a source of identity and guidance rather than just a set of external rules. This "flexibility" indicates that religious expression is not disappearing but is being reconfigured to fit a digital, globalized context.

The fact that only 15% of people rely on religious leaders for major decisions signifies a crisis of authority. In a "post-truth" era where "own research" is king, religious leaders can no longer rely on traditional status alone. To remain relevant, they must bridge the digital competency gap. As the findings suggest, messages are most effective when delivered by peers; therefore, the strategic collaboration between traditional leaders and Gen Z "opinion leaders" is essential to combat extremism and misinformation. While information technology brings "imperialism" and dependency, it also offers the democratization of knowledge. The future of social and religious life in Indonesia will depend on whether leaders can offer a "humanized" digital presence that captures the depth of face-to-face interaction while leveraging the efficiency of modern tools.

CONCLUSION

The rapid advancement of information and communication technology has become a significant driver of social transformation, affecting various dimensions of human life, including religion, culture, education, and the economy. One important issue arising from this transformation is the potential erosion of religious, cultural, and national values in digital spaces. In many cases, interactions on social media are increasingly shaped by the pursuit of popularity, virality, and economic benefits rather than ethical considerations and moral responsibility. In the educational sector, educators who experience technological gaps may encounter difficulties in adapting to digital learning environments and guiding students who are increasingly exposed to diverse sources of online information. Meanwhile, in the economic sphere, the expansion of digital financial services has also created new social challenges, as some individuals become vulnerable to harmful practices such as illegal online lending (*pinjaman online/pinjol*) and online gambling due to limited digital literacy and financial awareness. Furthermore, changes in information access patterns have influenced the relationship between religious communities and religious authorities, particularly among Generation Z, who increasingly seek religious knowledge and references through digital platforms. This shift may create challenges for traditional religious authority and potentially affect efforts to maintain religious understanding and social harmony.

To address these challenges, religious leaders need to actively engage with the digital world as part of their responsibility to deliver moral guidance, religious knowledge, and messages of social harmony in contemporary society. Digital platforms should not only be viewed as sources of disruption but also as strategic spaces for spreading positive values, strengthening religious literacy, and building constructive communities. Through effective use of information technology, religious leaders can reach wider audiences, especially younger generations who are highly connected to digital environments. In this process, it is essential to provide opportunities for young people to participate as partners in promoting ethical digital practices, creating meaningful content, and supporting the dissemination of values that encourage tolerance and mutual respect. Collaboration between religious leaders and younger generations can help ensure that technological development contributes to strengthening religious harmony and social cohesion rather than becoming a factor that weakens fundamental values in society.

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