



# Enforcing Religious Moderation Among Generation Z Muslims in the Digital Era Through Critical

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## Abstract

This qualitative study explores the potential of critical reading as a tool for promoting religious moderation among Generation Z Muslims. The research focuses on a group of young Muslims aged 18-21 years enrolled in a Religious Moderation course at a State Institute of Islamic Studies in Indonesia. The study investigates how training in critical reading of religious texts can influence their interpretations of Islamic teachings and their attitudes towards diversity and pluralism. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. The findings suggest that fostering critical reading skills can encourage more moderate and inclusive understandings of Islam among Generation Z Muslims, potentially mitigating the influence of religious extremism. This research contributes valuable insights into the role of education in promoting religious tolerance and countering radicalization among young Muslims in the digital age.

**Keywords:** *religious moderation; critical reading; Generation Z Muslims*

## Introduction

Religious moderation was first introduced by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia around the late 2010s as a government effort to counter radicalism. Religious moderation fundamentally involves justice and balance. Justice implies fairness, support for truth, and non-arbitrariness. It is akin to a referee, who is unbiased and leans towards truth. Whilst, balance, signifies a mindset, attitude, and commitment to consistently uphold justice, humanity, and equality. Balance is perceived as a moderate approach to actions, neither excessive nor deficient, neither conservative nor liberal (Ministry of Religious Affairs of

Republic of Indonesia, 2021). The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia actively carries out socialization on various occasions and realms, one of which is the realm of higher education. Several State Islamic Religious Universities (PTKIN) have included religious moderation as a university or institution subject. This is done as a form of PTKIN's integration with the vision and mission of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

In a different context, research on moderation in Islam is carried out independently of university and pesantren matters. Zuhdi (2018) examines the development of Islamic education in Indonesia aimed at establishing moderate Islam. However, he notes that there are challenges aimed at shifting religious education towards conservative doctrines. Moreover, Zuhdi (2018) believes that the presentation of religion in schools affects how Indonesians perceive and practice their faith, highlighting an issue that needs addressing. However, the inclusion of a religious moderation course in the curriculum of several PTKINs does not necessarily foster a religious moderation attitude in students, who are mostly Generation Z. Instilling religious moderation in Generation Z Muslims requires a more practical effort rather than merely relying on lecture or seminar.

Practical studies are essential to balance the theoretical studies presented by lecturers in the religious moderation course. Theoretical studies can make the learning atmosphere boring. As a result, students will miss out on enjoyable and dynamic learning experiences (Fajar Hidayat, 2022; Gulo & Tafonao, 2023). Therefore, lecture methods need to be balanced with practical methods that can stimulate the development of Generation Z Muslims' thinking abilities in their process of cultivating a moderate nature in religion. Critical reading is one practice that can be considered for use in enforcing religious moderation for Generation Z Muslims. This is because critical reading tests the ability of Generation Z Muslims to reason about the issues around them.

One characteristic closely associated with Generation Z is digital literacy. This is because Generation Z was born during the expansion of the internet, making them adept at using gadgets and social media for learning, creating, and working (Pichler et al., 2021; Spitznagel, 2020). As reported by Antara News (2024), a survey conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association on internet penetration in Indonesia revealed that Generation Z contributes the most to internet usage, accounting for 34.4 percent, which is higher than the contribution of millennials at 30.62 percent. The ubiquity of the internet and gadgets in the lives of Generation Z provides them with easy access to a wide range of news. However, not all information on the internet can be trusted. The freedom of expression by users and anonymity results in the internet containing provocative fake information.

In the context of religion, provocative information that marginalizes certain religious groups/sects is often found on the internet. In response to this information, Generation Z, a generation that spends a lot of time on the internet, needs to use critical reasoning to maintain a moderate stance and not be easily influenced by provocative information.

Provocative information related to religion, ethnicity, or race will inevitably continue to emerge. This is especially true considering the diversity of religion, ethnicity, and race in Indonesia. There will always be parties taking advantage of spreading hatred towards a particular religion, ethnicity, or race (Nisa et al., 2018). The internet and social media fuel these activities. Therefore, one logical way to avoid being influenced by provocative information about religion, ethnicity, and race is to have critical thinking skills (Borst & DiYanni, 2017; Moghadam et al., 2023). In practice, this critical thinking can be applied to information input activities such as reading, listening, and watching. Generation Z spends a lot of time reading information on the internet. Hence, Generation Z needs critical thinking skills to reason the information read on the internet.

Critical reading is one of the skills currently needed by Generation Z in Indonesia, considering the amount of time they spend surfing the internet and the increasing likelihood of their exposure to provocative ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations information and radical ideologies (Baki, 2020; Van et al., 2022). Critical reading is closely related to religious moderation. It's one method that can be practiced to foster a moderate attitude in religion, especially for Generation Z Muslims.

Therefore, the teaching of religious moderation should not only be theoretical, but also requires the practice of critical reading that can be carried out by Generation Z Muslims to develop reasoning abilities in reading information. This critical reasoning ability will intertwine with the theoretical knowledge of religious moderation provided in the classroom to enforce a moderate attitude and characteristics in religion within Generation Z Muslims. Therefore, it is essential for the researcher to unfold how critical reading enforce Generation Z Muslims' religious moderation characteristics in the digital era.

## **Method**

The approach used in this research is qualitative. Denzin and Lincoln (2006) define qualitative research as an activity grounded in context that places the researcher within the world. It involves the purposeful use and gathering of various empirical materials, such as case studies, personal experiences, introspection, life stories, interviews, artefacts, cultural texts and productions, as well as observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts, to depict every day and

challenging moments and meanings in people's lives. As such, qualitative researchers employ a broad spectrum of interrelated interpretive practices with the aim of gaining a deeper comprehension of the topic in focus (Creswell, 2013). However, it is recognized that each practice enlightens the world in a distinct manner. Hence, there is often a commitment to employ more than one interpretive approach in any given study.

The participants of this study are 6 Generation Z Muslims aged 18-21 years who are taking a Religious Moderation course at one of the PTKINs (State Institutes of Islamic Studies). The selection of participants was made considering that Generation Z are digital natives who spend a lot of time surfing the internet and have a higher exposure to provocative SARA (an acronym for ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations) and radical information. For this research, the participants were required to sign a consent form, which provided a thorough and detailed description of the interview process and included a commitment to maintain the confidentiality of their personal information. The moderate characteristics in religion among Generation Z Muslims are the object of study in this research. Meanwhile, critical reading is used as a method or way in enforcing moderate characteristics in religion to Generation Z Muslims.

The primary data in this research are the results of interviews, field notes as a result of the observation process, and the result of group discussion. Furthermore, the secondary data in this research are print and digital media such as books, research articles, audio-visual sources, and related research results issued by certain institutions.

This study was carried out within 4 months. Moreover, the stages of research to be undertaken in this study include the problem identification stage, literature study stage, research planning stage, data collection stage, data analysis stage, and dissemination of results stage. The first stage is the problem identification stage where the researcher identifies the need for more practical and applicable religious moderation learning. The researcher conducts observations for collecting pre-research data about the reality of religious moderation course. Then, in the second stage, the researcher compiles previous research within the scope of related issues to determine the research gap. In the third stage, the researcher plans the research. At this stage, specific research objectives are developed.

In addition, human resources, budget, and time needed for research are also determined at this stage. The next stage is the data collection stage, which consists of three techniques: first, in-depth interviews, second, observation, and lastly, group discussion. In the fifth stage, the researcher conducts data analysis using the Miles and Huberman data analysis model. This analysis model includes three steps: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the final stage, the researcher conducts publication and presentations related to research findings so that the results can benefit a wide audience, especially in enforcing religious

moderation among Generation Z Muslims in the field of education.

The data collection process in this study will be carried out in three ways: in-depth interviews, observations, and group discussions. In the in-depth interview technique, the researcher will interview participants directly using semi-structured questions. Semi-structured questions allow the researcher to gather more information from participants. The observation technique is carried out by observing activities in the religious moderation and critical reading classes. During the observation process, the researcher makes field notes that will serve as the data basis for the data analysis process. The group discussion technique is carried out to obtain the same data between one participant and another. The implementation of the group discussion technique is intended to obtain clear and more satisfying data.

In the group discussion, the participants are exposed with some 'triggering' texts related to daily basis matter, such as, inheritance law, gender roles in Islam, the concept of jihad, and religious practices intertwining with traditional customs. Those 'triggering' texts are, then, discussed by the participants. These three data collection processes are carried out as a form of data validation through triangulation. Triangulation is the process of utilizing and merging multiple approaches, both theoretical and methodological, in the examination of a particular phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006). The practice of employing multiple methods in a study is counteract the limitations or biases of a single method. Data triangulation, which involves using multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical perspectives, is a crucial component of qualitative research.

By combining different data collection techniques, researchers can cross-validate their findings and enhance the overall validity and reliability of their study. For instance, the in-depth interviews provide rich, nuanced insights from individual participants, while the observations offer first-hand accounts of the phenomenon in its natural setting. The group discussions then allow the researcher to explore the convergence and divergence of perspectives among participants, further corroborating the data. This multifaceted approach helps researchers gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic and overcome the potential biases or limitations inherent in any single method. Ultimately, the triangulation of data strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

## **Results**

### **The Role of Critical Reading to Understand 'Triggering' Text in Digital Era**

Through Focus Group Discussion, the participant stated that one common approach is to pause and take a deep breath to avoid impulsive reactions and process emotions more calmly. Some participants prefer to limit their exposure by

scrolling past the content, using filters, or blocking accounts that consistently post triggering material. Others engage in rational analysis to understand the intent and context behind the content, focusing on facts and logic over emotional reactions. Discussing the content with trusted friends or online communities helps some participants gain different perspectives and process their feelings more effectively. Educating themselves further on the topic from reliable sources allows participants to put the content into perspective and respond thoughtfully. Lastly, practicing self-care by stepping away from devices and engaging in relaxing activities like reading, walking, or meditation helps maintain emotional balance. Together, these strategies help participants navigate and manage their reactions to challenging online content.

While some of the participants respond taking step back, pausing and taking a breath, scrolling through, and applying filters to their social media, Participant 5 argued:

“I stumbled upon an article in the social media and found it triggering. It was a writing about inheritance laws. Initially, I found the apparent gender disparity in inheritance shares troubling. To handle this, I applied critical reading by researching the historical and cultural context in which the article was post, understanding the socio-economic conditions of that time or place (Participant 5, interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2024).”

To address this emotional reaction, Participant 5 engaged in critical reading by researching the historical and cultural context surrounding the article. This involved understanding the socio-economic conditions of the time or place referenced, allowing for a more informed and nuanced perspective on the issue.

Participants also emphasized the importance of questioning the text while reading, focusing on the intended audience, main arguments, and underlying assumptions. Engaging in dialogue with peers or mentors was highlighted as a way to gain diverse perspectives that enrich understanding. Participants suggested that comparing the text with other sources helps to broaden perspectives and avoid a single narrative. This data is also supported by the interview of Participant 2 and 3:

“I usually questions everything that I read. This involves asking a series of open-ended questions about the text, such as "What does this mean?", "Why was this said?", and "What are the implications of this idea?" By engaging with the text in this way, I challenge my assumptions and dig deeper into the meanings behind the words (Participant 2, interview, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2024).”

“I tend to compare the article that I read to the other resources. This involves examining a ‘triggering’ article alongside other interpretations and related texts, both within the same religious tradition and from different religious perspectives (Participant 3, interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2024).”

Moreover, on the Focus Group Discussion, the participants shared impactful experiences where critical reading significantly altered their initial interpretations of religious texts. One participant initially viewed the concept of jihad solely as violent struggle, but through critical reading, discovered its broader meaning, including personal spiritual growth. Another participant's negative perception of a verse on women's roles changed to an appreciation of mutual respect and responsibilities after considering historical context and scholarly interpretations. A text on the punishment for theft, initially seen as harsh, was understood as a deterrent emphasizing justice and mercy upon deeper analysis. The concept of predestination, which seemed to contradict free will, was clarified through critical reading to balance divine knowledge and human agency.

Additionally, a verse on interfaith relations, initially interpreted as advocating separation, was understood to promote peaceful coexistence and mutual respect after context consideration. Lastly, a hadith on animal treatment, initially perceived as overly strict, was recognized as emphasizing compassion and ethical treatment. These experiences highlight how critical reading enabled participants to gain nuanced understandings, transforming their initial perceptions of religious texts.

### **The Involvement of Critical Reading in fostering Religious Moderation among Generation Z Muslims in the Digital Era**

In the context of critical reading contribution to a more moderate understanding of Islam, the participants emphasized, in the Focus Group discussion, that critical reading significantly contributes to a more moderate understanding of Islam. By examining the full context of Islamic teachings, including historical, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, they gain a comprehensive perspective that supports compassion and moderation. Critical reading allows them to identify and challenge biases, as it helps question selective readings and misinterpretations that often lead to extreme views.

Engaging with diverse perspectives from various scholars and schools of thought enriches their understanding and promotes inclusivity. It also helps distinguish between core principles and cultural practices, focusing on Islam's universal values rather than local traditions. The process encourages participants to question and reflect on their assumptions, leading to thoughtful interpretations aligned with Islam's core values of compassion and justice. Finally, critical reading enables them to counteract extremist narratives by examining isolated verses within the larger framework of the Quran and Hadith, which often advocate for peace, tolerance, and coexistence.

The result of the Focus Group Discussion highlights the significant role of critical reading in fostering a more moderate understanding of Islam, particularly relevant to Generation Z Muslims who are deeply embedded in the digital environment. This generation, characterized by their proficiency in navigating social media and online platforms, is exposed to a wide range of interpretations and discussions surrounding Islamic teachings (Solís & Critikián, 2023). The ability to critically engage with content allows them to examine the full context of Islamic teachings, including historical, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, which is especially important in an age where information can be easily distorted or misrepresented online. For Generation Z Muslims, critical reading serves as a tool to identify and challenge biases that may arise from selective readings prevalent on social media. This engagement with diverse perspectives from various scholars and schools of thought is crucial, as it enriches their understanding and promotes inclusivity within their faith.

By differentiating between core Islamic principles and localized cultural practices, they can focus on universal values such as compassion and justice, which are often emphasized in moderate interpretations of Islam (Sirry, 2017). Furthermore, the digital environment provides a platform for Generation Z Muslims to question their assumptions and reflect on their beliefs through constructive dialogue and access to a plethora of resources. This reflective process is essential for developing thoughtful interpretations of Islamic teachings, aligning with the values of peace and tolerance that are central to Islam (Hilmy, 2013). Lastly, critical reading empowers them to counter extremist narratives by contextualizing isolated verses within the broader framework of the Quran and Hadith, fostering a narrative of coexistence and understanding that is vital in today's polarized digital landscape. In essence, the integration of critical reading practices within the digital engagement of Generation Z Muslims can lead to a more nuanced and moderate understanding of their faith, countering the simplistic and often extreme interpretations that can proliferate online.

Moreover, critical reading is estimated to reduce religious extremism among generation Z. Through Focus Group Discussion, the participants expressed a strong belief that critical reading can help reduce religious extremism among Generation Z Muslims. They emphasized that critical reading encourages thorough analysis and understanding of context, which dismantles simplistic and extremist interpretations (Walldén, 2024). By teaching young Muslims to critically evaluate sources and question the authenticity and intent behind religious content, they become empowered to reject extremist narratives and seek balanced perspectives. Critical reading promotes intellectual curiosity and a deeper appreciation of Islam's complexities, fostering resistance to oversimplified, radical views (Rathburn et al., 2015).



Participants also noted the importance of coupling critical reading with effective educational programs that encourage questioning and discussion, creating an environment for developing a nuanced understanding of faith. While acknowledging that critical reading encourages independent thinking and skepticism, they also recognized that it should be part of a broader strategy considering social, economic, and political influences. Overall, critical reading is seen as a vital tool in countering extremist interpretations and promoting a more peaceful understanding of Islam among Generation Z Muslims. In the detailed interview, the participants mentioned some platform that can promote religious moderation for the Generation Z Muslims:

“To promote critical reading among peers I suggest to host public lectures, panel discussions, and workshops featuring scholars who emphasize critical reading and moderation (Participant 6, interview, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2024).”

“In my view, it involves using social media effectively. This includes taking advantage of platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to disseminate captivating content about critical reading strategies and promoting moderation (Participant 4, interview, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2024).”

“It is important to engage in Interfaith Dialogues. More likely participating in dialogues with individuals from different backgrounds to broaden perspectives and encourage critical examination of beliefs (Participant 2, interview, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2024).”

“I think incorporating Critical Reading into Education can advocate for the inclusion of critical reading techniques in religious education programs at schools and universities (Participant 3, interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2024).”

Participants shared on the Focus Group Discussion how critical reading has influenced their views on religious moderation. By understanding the historical context of certain texts, they realized that some cases or articles, initially perceived as advocating strict punishment, were meant for specific situations rather than universal application. Critical reading allowed them to challenge extremist interpretations, revealing that Islam promotes coexistence and respect for all religions. They also came to appreciate the diversity of thought within Islam by engaging with various scholarly perspectives, which highlighted moderate views.

Distinguishing between cultural practices and religious teachings helped them recognize that certain gender roles are cultural rather than religious mandates. Reflecting on the core values of Islam, such as compassion and justice, through critical reading, led to a more balanced understanding of their faith. Lastly, critical reading enabled them to counteract extremist narratives by understanding

the broader context of the Quran and Hadith, ultimately affirming that Islam promotes peace and tolerance. Additionally, Participant 1 and 5 argued that somehow critical reading influenced the approach used in religious discussion and debate:

“Critical reading has made me more open-minded and respectful in religious discussions. For instance, during a debate about gender roles in Islam, I used my critical reading skills to present a well-rounded argument. By citing historical context, diverse interpretations, and contemporary scholarly opinions, I was able to engage in a constructive dialogue rather than a confrontational debate. This approach not only strengthened my argument but also encouraged others to consider multiple perspectives (Participant 1, interview, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2024).”

“Critical reading has made me more nuanced and empathetic in religious discussions. For instance, during a debate about the role of women in Islam, I used my critical reading skills to present a well-rounded argument. By referencing various scholarly interpretations and considering the historical context of relevant verses, I was able to foster a more respectful and constructive dialogue. This approach not only strengthened my argument but also encouraged others to consider different perspectives and engage in a more meaningful discussion (Participant 1, interview, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2024).”

Educational institutions and digital platforms play a pivotal role in fostering critical reading skills and promoting religious moderation among Generation Z Muslims. By integrating modern pedagogical approaches and leveraging technology, these institutions can create an environment conducive to open-mindedness and balanced understanding. As portrayed in the Focus Group Discussion, the participants suggested several ways educational institutions can better support the development of critical reading skills in religious studies. They emphasized the importance of integrating critical reading into the curriculum from an early stage, along with training teachers in effective methodologies to guide students through complex texts.

Offering interdisciplinary courses that combine religious studies with history, literature, and philosophy can provide broader context and enhance critical reading skills. Additionally, creating dedicated study groups and discussion forums can encourage student engagement and facilitate open dialogue about interpretations. Participants also highlighted the potential of leveraging technology by incorporating digital tools and resources to make critical reading more accessible and engaging. Lastly, fostering a culture of inquiry within educational environments is crucial, promoting an atmosphere where questioning and critical analysis are encouraged and respected.

“My educational institution has a Critical Thinking and Religious Moderation courses. However, these courses are still separate to each other and one is never used or discussed in the other courses. In fact, I think it will be very brilliant if the lecturers collaborating and completing each other learning objectives since the two courses has a strong relation together (Participant 2, interview, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2024).”

“I got religious moderation in the second semester. The lecturer hardly ask us to read, but he ask us to visit a traditional Hindi-Javanese village. We were asked to have some interaction and interview with the people there. I think, it is one of the practical way to foster our religious moderation characteristic too (Participant 5, interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2024).”

The importance of integrating critical reading and religious moderation in educational institutions is evident in fostering religious moderation characteristics among Generation Z Muslims. The participants in the Focus Group Discussion highlighted several ways in which educational institutions can support this development. Firstly, integrating critical reading into the curriculum from an early stage and training teachers in effective methodologies can guide students through complex religious texts.

This approach encourages students to question and understand the context, which is crucial for developing a balanced and moderate view of their faith. Offering interdisciplinary courses that combine religious studies with history, literature, and philosophy can provide a broader context and enhance critical reading skills. This interdisciplinary approach can help students understand the multifaceted nature of religious texts and their interpretations, fostering tolerance and reducing the likelihood of dogmatic thinking. Creating dedicated study groups and discussion forums can encourage student engagement and facilitate open dialogue about interpretations. This promotes a culture of inquiry and respect for differing viewpoints, which are key characteristics of religious moderation. The potential of leveraging technology by incorporating digital tools and resources was also highlighted.

Making critical reading more accessible and engaging, especially for Generation Z Muslims who are adept at using digital tools, can further promote religious moderation. Participant 2's suggestion of integrating Critical Thinking and Religious Moderation courses reflects the need for a holistic approach in education. The collaboration of these two courses can reinforce each other's learning objectives, given their strong relation. Participant 5's experience of visiting a traditional Hindi-Javanese village as part of their religious moderation course illustrates the importance of practical experiences in fostering religious

moderation. Such experiences can provide students with first hand understanding of diverse cultures and faiths, promoting tolerance and respect for diversity.

Furthermore, the use of digital platform in the sense of building the religious moderation in the Generation Z Muslims cannot be separated with the educational institution's initiatives since the use of digital platform can be considered as a learning medium in the context of education (Ripley, 2007). The Focus Group Discussion captured the use of digital platform to promote the enforcement of religious moderation in Generation Z Muslims. The participants proposed several ways digital platforms can more effectively promote critical reading and religious moderation among Generation Z Muslims. They highlighted the importance of engaging multimedia content such as videos, podcasts, and interactive webinars to capture interest. Leveraging social media influencers and thought leaders who promote these concepts can reach a broader audience and influence positively.

Creating gamified learning experiences can make critical reading more fun and interactive. Encouraging online discussion forums and virtual study groups can provide safe spaces for critical discussion and diverse perspectives. Providing easy access to diverse scholarly resources helps young Muslims find trustworthy content for critical reading. Lastly, developing interactive apps with features like annotations, cross-references, and linguistic analysis can guide users through the process of critically reading religious texts, making it more accessible and informative. The participants also share some views on the platform that is usually used in the interview:

"Indeed, I have discovered numerous beneficial digital resources. For instance, Quran.com is a great platform offering an array of translations and tafsir, simplifying the process of comparing interpretations. Apps dedicated to Hadith collections provide reach to verified Hadiths accompanied by commentary. Educational platforms such as Coursera and edX provide courses focusing on Islamic studies and critical reading. Al-Islam.org is another valuable resource granting access to an extensive collection of scholarly Islamic works. Interactive applications like Islamic Library and Quran Companion come with useful features such as annotations, cross-references, and linguistic analysis (Participant 3, interview, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2024)."

"I have indeed found a wealth of valuable digital resources. For example, Al-Quran.info is an excellent platform that provides a range of translations and commentaries, facilitating the exploration of various interpretations. Apps such as "Quran Majeed" offer features like audio recitations, translations, and tafsir, which enhance comprehension. Institutions like Islamic Online University provide courses on critical reading and Islamic studies that have significantly broadened my understanding. Websites like JSTOR and Google Scholar grant access to academic articles on religious texts and their interpretations. Additionally, platforms like Reddit host communities dedicated to Islamic studies where members can pose questions and share insights (Participant 6, interview, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2024)."

## **Discussion**

### **The Role of Critical Reading to Understand ‘Triggering’ Text in Digital Era**

It can be said that handling 'triggering' religious online articles effectively requires a combination of emotional regulation and proactive strategies (Girivirya, 2023). Participants in the Focus Group Discussion highlighted several approaches, starting with pausing and taking deep breaths to prevent impulsive reactions and process emotions more calmly. Limiting exposure to triggering content through scrolling past, using filters, or blocking persistent sources of provocation is another common tactic. Rational analysis plays a key role, where understanding the intent and context behind the content helps shift focus from emotional reactions to facts and logic (Lewis, 1991).

Engaging in discussions with trusted friends or online communities provides diverse perspectives and emotional support, aiding in better processing of the content. Further educating oneself on the topic through reliable sources offers a broader context, enabling more thoughtful responses. Finally, practicing self-care by taking breaks from devices and engaging in relaxing activities like reading, walking, or meditation helps maintain emotional balance. Collectively, these strategies equip individuals to navigate and manage their reactions to challenging online content more effectively.

It is claimed that discussion also addressed complex theological concepts, such as predestination, initially viewed as conflicting with the idea of free will. Through critical reading, participants were able to reconcile these ideas by recognizing that divine knowledge and human agency can coexist harmoniously (Ilyas, 2023; Syahputra, 2024). Furthermore, interpretations of interfaith relations shifted from advocating separation to promoting peaceful coexistence and mutual respect, showcasing how context can radically alter the understanding of religious texts. Lastly, a hadith concerning animal treatment, initially seen as excessively strict, was reinterpreted through critical analysis as emphasizing compassion and ethical treatment, reinforcing the value of empathy in religious teachings.

Overall, these experiences underscore the transformative power of critical reading, enabling participants to cultivate nuanced and informed understandings of religious texts, moving beyond simplistic or extreme interpretations to embrace a more comprehensive and empathetic view.

### **The Involvement of Critical Reading in fostering Religious Moderation among Generation Z Muslims in the Digital Era**

The data shows that critical reading promotes independent thinking and skepticism. Thus, the participants recognized the need for it to be part of a broader strategy that considers social, economic, and political influences.

This holistic approach ensures that critical reading is not just an isolated practice but part of an overarching framework that supports the principles of religious moderation: nationalism, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodating local culture. Overall, critical reading is seen as a vital tool in countering extremist interpretations and promoting a more peaceful and moderate understanding of Islam among Generation Z Muslims.

To promote critical reading and enhance the characteristics of religious moderation—nationalism, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodating local culture—among Generation Z Muslims, a multifaceted approach leveraging both traditional and digital platforms is essential. Hosting public lectures, panel discussions, and workshops featuring scholars who emphasize critical reading and moderation can provide foundational knowledge and foster intellectual curiosity. Additionally, utilizing social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok to share engaging content on critical reading strategies can reach a broader audience, particularly the digitally-savvy Generation Z, and promote moderation in an accessible format.

Engaging in interfaith dialogues can broaden perspectives and encourage critical examination of beliefs, fostering tolerance and mutual respect. Incorporating critical reading techniques into educational programs at schools and universities ensures a structured and sustained approach to developing these skills (Dozier et al., 2006). Together, these strategies create a comprehensive framework that not only counters extremist narratives but also promotes a nuanced and peaceful understanding of Islam, aligned with the values of nationalism, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodating local culture.

The interview results indicate that the characteristic of tolerance is significantly developed through the practice of critical reading among Generation Z Muslims. Participants highlighted how critical reading fosters open-mindedness and respect during religious discussions, particularly when addressing complex topics such as gender roles in Islam. By employing critical reading skills, individuals are able to present well-rounded arguments that incorporate historical context and diverse interpretations, which not only strengthens their positions but also encourages others to consider multiple perspectives.

This approach promotes constructive dialogue rather than confrontational debates, thereby cultivating an environment of tolerance where differing viewpoints can be discussed respectfully (Ripley, 2007). The emphasis on empathy and nuanced understanding further reinforces the importance of tolerance in religious discourse, allowing for a more inclusive and harmonious engagement with diverse beliefs and practices within the Muslim community and beyond.

From the result, it is seen that platforms as essential for engaging Generation Z, suggesting that multimedia content, such as videos, podcasts, and interactive webinars, can effectively capture their interest. This engagement is particularly

important for Generation Z, who are accustomed to consuming information through dynamic and visually stimulating media. By leveraging social media influencers and thought leaders who embody and promote religious moderation, these platforms can broaden their reach and create a positive influence on young Muslims. Gamified learning experiences are another proposed strategy that could enhance the appeal of critical reading. This approach can make the learning process enjoyable and interactive, encouraging students to actively participate in their education. Additionally, online discussion forums and virtual study groups provide safe spaces for critical discussions, allowing participants to explore diverse perspectives and engage in dialogue that fosters moderation.

The availability of trustworthy scholarly resources through digital platforms is critical for helping young Muslims navigate the complexities of religious texts. By providing easy access to a variety of translations, commentaries, and academic articles, platforms like Quran.com, Al-Islam.org, and educational sites such as Coursera and edX empower students to engage in informed critical reading.

The interactive features of applications like "Islamic Library" and "Quran Companion" further facilitate this process by guiding users through religious texts, making them more accessible and informative. In summary, the use of digital platforms is integral to cultivating religious moderation characteristics in Generation Z Muslims. By enhancing engagement, providing diverse resources, and fostering critical discussions, these platforms not only contribute to the educational initiatives of institutions but also play a crucial role in shaping a more moderate and informed generation of Muslims.

## **Conclusion**

All and all, critical reading plays a crucial role in understanding 'triggering' religious online articles in the digital era. It involves analyzing information, evaluating sources, and discerning emotional influences to navigate challenging content. By engaging in critical reading, individuals can develop a nuanced understanding of religious texts and counter extremist narratives. Integrating critical reading into education and leveraging digital platforms can promote religious moderation among Generation Z Muslims.

While there are challenges such as complex language and biases, opportunities like interdisciplinary courses and multimedia content can support the development of critical reading skills. Educational institutions and digital platforms have a significant impact in fostering open-mindedness, balanced understanding, and promoting tolerance and respect for diverse viewpoints. Overall, critical reading is essential for cultivating a more moderate and informed generation of Muslims in the digital age.



Based on the findings from the discussions on the role of digital platforms in fostering religious moderation among Generation Z Muslims, future research should explore the effectiveness of specific multimedia content types in engaging this demographic. A comparative analysis of various formats—such as videos, podcasts, and interactive webinars—could provide insights into which methods most effectively promote critical reading and religious understanding. Additionally, examining the influence of social media influencers and thought leaders on shaping attitudes towards religious moderation could yield valuable data on outreach strategies.

Researchers should also consider longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of gamified learning experiences and online discussion forums on the critical thinking skills of young Muslims. Furthermore, a study investigating the accessibility and usability of digital resources, such as mobile applications and online platforms, could identify barriers that hinder engagement and propose solutions. Ultimately, these research avenues could inform educational institutions and content creators in developing tailored resources that effectively support the religious and intellectual growth of Generation Z Muslims.

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