

### EXPLORING NEW CULTURES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR GEN-Z RELIGIOUS LIFE: A SOCIOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE CONTEMPORARY ERA

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Article Info	Abstract
<p><b>Submitted:</b> April 02, 2023</p> <p><b>Revised:</b> May 10, 2023</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> Augustus 12, 2023</p> <p><b>Keyword:</b> Culture Religion Gen-Z Contemporary</p>	<p>Online media shapes the religious hybridity of Gen-Z, influencing attitudes towards pluralism, spirituality, and challenging conservative religious traditions. This study aims to explore the new culture and its implications for Gen-Z's religious practices in the context of contemporary society. The research uses a qualitative literature study, with data collected through content analysis of articles. The findings show that Gen-Z is influenced by technological advancements and globalization, which provide them with broad access to information through the internet and social media. They tend to be more inclusive and open to various religious traditions, often combining elements from different religions or creating personal spirituality. Technology also allows them to build digital identities and engage in social activism. Social media plays a significant role in shaping their religious views and practices, though it also presents challenges, such as dilemmas between traditional religious values and modern cultural pressures. Gen-Z requires support to navigate these conflicts and challenges. Conclusion: Gen-Z is influenced by technology and globalization, creating an inclusive and personal religious culture by combining elements of religion and spirituality, accessed through social media.</p>

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#### A. INTRODUCTION

Online media plays a significant role in shaping religious hybridity among Millennial and Gen-Z generations, as seen in the high usage of online platforms to explore religious issues and the influence of various religious preaching identities found online (Rofidah & Muhid, 2022). Generation Z accesses religious knowledge through social media as a result of the Islamization of public spaces in Indonesia, which has led to two patterns of consumption: cross-background clerics and those based on similar affiliations (Romario, 2022). Millennials and Gen Z in Australia face obstacles in participating in multifait movements due to hybrid religious

identities; however, a focus on activism and humanitarian efforts can empower them (Smith, 2022).

The thoughts of Habib Husein Ja'far al Hadar on *wasathiyyah* (moderation) are crucial in countering radicalism, racism, and fanaticism, especially for Gen-Z, by utilizing social media for Islamic preaching (Annisa, 2023). The contemporary era refers to the period from the mid-20th century to the present, marked by rapid technological advancement, information revolutions, and major shifts in values, social norms, and perspectives on issues like gender, race, and the environment. In this era, modernization and urbanization have transformed religious practices. Although traditional observance may decline, religion adapts in new ways. Social media influences the dissemination of religious messages, while also posing challenges like extremism and pluralism.

The contemporary era reveals significant changes in social and religious dynamics, particularly for Generation Z (Gen-Z), born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s. Growing up in the digital age, Gen-Z is more connected through social and digital networks, expanding their access to religious information and diverse perspectives. This enables them to explore various religions and beliefs, influencing their religious understanding and practices. Gen-Z also matures in an increasingly multicultural and multireligious society, making them more open to other faiths and inclined toward seeking a more personal and inclusive spirituality.

Changes in Gen-Z's attitudes toward religion pose challenges to traditional conservative religious frameworks, which may need to adapt in order to remain relevant. Gen-Z tends to pursue spirituality through social media, podcasts, and other online platforms, joining digital communities centered on faith. To understand these shifting dynamics, the sociological and anthropological lenses are essential. Further research is needed to examine how Gen-Z integrates their values and beliefs within their social and cultural contexts in the contemporary era.

The link between the contemporary era and Generation Z in the context of religion is highly relevant and impactful. With easy access to religious information through technology, Gen-Z can independently explore and compare various beliefs, leading to a more inclusive understanding. Raised in a multicultural and multireligious environment, they are more tolerant and inclusive toward different faiths. Gen-Z tends to blend religious elements that align with their personal views, creating a more flexible and individualistic form of spirituality, rather than strictly adhering to rigid dogma.

This research aims to understand the social and religious phenomena occurring among Generation Z within the contemporary context. The main focus is to explore the meaning and individual experiences of Gen-Z in relation to religious development, cultural shifts, and social changes that influence them. Using sociological and anthropological approaches, this study seeks to uncover the social and cultural constructs that shape their worldview. In this digital and multicultural age, Gen-Z has broad access to religious and social information, allowing them to build a more inclusive and flexible understanding. This research provides deeper insight into the dynamics of their beliefs and spirituality.

The impact of this research is significant in understanding the social and religious phenomena that shape Generation Z in the contemporary era. By focusing on Gen-Z's experiences and meanings related to religion, culture, and social change, this research offers valuable insight into how this generation navigates their identity in a rapidly evolving and

globally connected world. Utilizing sociological and anthropological approaches, the study delves into the social and cultural structures influencing their worldview. In an era marked by digital connectivity and multiculturalism, with wide access to information, Gen-Z develops a more inclusive and flexible spiritual understanding. This study offers profound insight into their beliefs, spiritual practices, and the influence of new technologies and cultural changes on their religious and social perspectives.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach based on library research, meaning the researcher did not conduct field observations or direct interviews, but rather collected data from written sources such as books, scholarly journals, articles, and other credible documents. The research uses library research as the primary method for data collection, by tracing and compiling information from various relevant written sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed journals, research articles, and reliable online resources. The focus of the search was directed toward issues related to Generation Z, popular culture, religion, and the impact of technology and globalization in contemporary society. Once the data was gathered, it underwent a processing phase through several steps, beginning with data reduction, which involves filtering and summarizing information relevant to the research focus. The data was then categorized and analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify key themes such as religious inclusivity, personal spirituality, cultural pressures, and digital identity. The analysis was conducted inductively, building understanding from emerging patterns and findings within the data. The final stage was interpretation, in which the researcher interpreted the meaning of the data using theoretical frameworks from sociology and anthropology to understand the religious experiences of Generation Z within the current social and cultural context.

## **C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. New Culture Influenced by Technology and Globalization**

The new culture emerging among Generation Z is significantly shaped by the rapid advancement of information and communication technology, as well as by the process of globalization. This study reveals that Generation Z has extensive access to information and cultural content through the internet and social media. Individuals can easily access and engage with a variety of ideas, concepts, and perspectives from around the world. In the context of religion and spirituality, this new culture reflects a tendency toward inclusivity and pluralism. Generation Z tends to adopt a more open and tolerant approach to various religious traditions. Individuals often combine elements from multiple religions or even create a personalized and unique form of spirituality. Their views on religion and spirituality are more flexible and individualistic, not strictly bound by traditional norms. Cultural and social changes in society resulting from the advancement of communication technology and information media are inevitable. The existence and capacity of society to utilize technology wisely is a prudent alternative. Using it as a means and medium for improving the quality of knowledge is a solution worth pursuing by all groups (Yoga, 2018).

Generation Z born approximately between 1997 and 2012 has grown up in an era where technology and information are an integral part of their lives. This has had a

significant impact on their values, beliefs, and life goals. Generation Z has unlimited access to a wide range of information via the internet. They can easily explore topics such as religion, politics, and culture, influencing their worldview and helping them become more informed. Generation Z often constructs their digital identities through social media and other online platforms. These platforms create spaces where they can share their values, beliefs, and life goals with a broader audience, which in turn shapes their self-perception and how others perceive them. They also frequently use the internet as a tool for social and political activism organizing campaigns, spreading awareness of critical issues, and participating in social change through online platforms. This shapes their values regarding social justice and civic engagement.

This demonstrates a shift in the religious understanding and practices of Generation Z, influenced by technological advancement and broad exposure to diverse cultures. Generation Z has access to a variety of perspectives and experiences, enabling them to explore and adopt new ideas concerning religion and spirituality. This new culture reflects the dynamism and adaptability of Generation Z in facing social and cultural changes in an increasingly interconnected world. For Generation Z, information and technology are embedded in their everyday lives, as they were born into a world where the availability of information particularly through the internet has become a global culture influencing their values, beliefs, and life goals (Maharani et al., 2023).

## **2. Religious Transformation of Gen-Z in Response to New Culture**

The new culture influenced by technological development and globalization has led to significant changes in how Generation Z understands, accesses, and practices religion. Generation Z exhibits characteristics of inclusivity and pluralism in their approach to religion and spirituality. Individuals tend to blend elements from various religious traditions, creating personalized and unique forms of spirituality. One illustrative example of this phenomenon is a Gen-Z teenager who identifies as a Christian but also shows interest in spiritual concepts from other traditions, such as meditation from Buddhism or yoga practices from Hinduism. Such individuals might regularly attend church but also participate in meditation groups or take yoga classes. In their view, these practices complement and enrich their religious understanding and experiences. In the Czech Republic, Generation Z demonstrates a tendency toward more personal and inclusive spirituality, often integrating aspects from different religious traditions where technology and globalization play a role in shaping how they access and interpret religious information (Landová, 2022).

Generation Z also frequently expresses their religiosity through social media platforms. They may share inspirational religious quotes, upload photos of themselves participating in religious activities, or engage in discussions with peers about religious topics through comments or private messages. This illustrates how Generation Z uses technology and social media as a medium to convey and actualize their religious beliefs and identity. Social media can also serve as a platform for online religious study and sermons, as well as for promoting moderate religious views through simple and engaging educational content. Such content helps avoid ambiguity and is designed to be attractive and accessible, thereby increasing public interest (Novia & Wasehudin, 2020).

Generation Z is undergoing a shift toward a more personal and individualized religious identity. Individuals integrate elements from various religious traditions based on their

personal preferences, creating spiritual practices that align with their unique needs and values. This understanding provides insight into how the new culture shaped by technology and globalization has influenced the religious perspectives and practices of Generation Z in the contemporary era. In Indonesia, Generation Z is experiencing a transitional form of religiosity, combining elements from multiple religious traditions according to personal preference. Social media plays a key role in shaping a more flexible and personalized religious identity (Epafras et al., 2021).

### **3. Perceptions, Experiences, and Understanding of Generation Z**

The diversity of Generation Z's perceptions, experiences, and understandings regarding new culture and its implications for religion is significant. Some respondents revealed that the new culture has influenced how individuals view religion, religious values, and participation in religious practices. Individuals are exploring new perspectives and adopting religious practices that are more personal and relevant to their identities. Generation Z holds religious views that differ from those of previous generations. They tend to be more inclusive and tolerant of religious differences and are inclined to integrate elements from multiple religious traditions (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Their perceptions, experiences, and understandings are shaped by the new culture influenced by technology and globalization. This culture has opened doors for Generation Z to explore and embrace inclusivity in religion. They have broader access to various religious perspectives and practices through the internet and social media. This accessibility allows them to explore and adopt religious practices that align with their values and identities. New media continues to evolve dynamically alongside the advancement of information technology, and the culture it produces also changes accordingly. In some cases, the cultural products generated by media are even perceived as forms of religion by parts of society (Zilli, 2018).

Many Gen-Z individuals grow up in religiously pluralistic environments, fostering openness to religious diversity. One might attend church regularly while also engaging in Buddhist meditation. Meditation may offer personal peace and reflection. Additionally, they might take yoga classes to incorporate physical and spiritual elements into their religious practices. For them, this is a way to harmonize religious life with mental well-being. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter are used to share inspirational religious quotes and personal religious experiences. Individuals also follow accounts that post relevant religious content. Furthermore, they often participate in online forums or group discussions with peers who share similar interests. Through social media, they connect with communities that reflect their religious values and beliefs.

Such individuals have an inclusive perception of the new culture and adopt religious practices that meet their individual needs and values. They blend elements from various religious traditions and utilize social media to express their religious beliefs and identities. These findings reflect the diversity of Generation Z's experiences and understanding in navigating their religious lives amidst a culture shaped by technology and globalization. In the modern era, religion is not a hindrance to technological advancement. Rather, religion enables humanity to think broadly and innovatively to improve life while also providing ethical boundaries and direction in utilizing human-created technologies (Andika, 2022).

#### 4. The Influence of Popular Culture and Social Media

Popular culture and social media have become significant areas of research in understanding Generation Z's lives. Popular culture including music, film, fashion, and current entertainment trends has a powerful impact on shaping Gen-Z's views and behaviors related to religion and belief. Social media, as a widely used digital platform among this generation, plays a crucial role in influencing how individuals interact with religion and faith. Through social media, Generation Z can easily access cultural and religious content, express their views, and connect with religious communities virtually. Social media affects how Gen-Z understands and practices religion. Studies have found that Generation Z uses social media as a source of information, support, and spiritual fulfillment. Individuals also use these platforms to explore various religious traditions, follow inspirational accounts, and participate in religious discussions (Gulyas & Highfield, 2018).

The influence of popular culture and social media on Generation Z's religious context includes changes in perception, increased awareness, and freedom of exploration. Generation Z shows inclusivity, adopts personalized religious practices, and utilizes social media as a platform to share their views, expand their knowledge, and connect with virtual religious communities. These implications reflect a shift in how Generation Z understands, practices, and identifies with religion. Popular culture and social media significantly shape individuals' preferences in lifestyle, fashion, and current trends. Many admit to being frequently exposed to content popularized by celebrities, influencers, and social media platforms. This exposure affects how they dress, spend leisure time, and interact with peers.

Social media has become a primary source of information. Some individuals follow accounts that post content about lifestyle, food, travel, and entertainment. It also gives them access to global popular culture, including music, movies, and television shows from various countries, making them feel connected to the latest global trends. The influence of social media is particularly strong in shaping sources of information, as reflected in dimensions such as tone of information and communication behavior (Ibrahim & Irawan, 2021). Teenagers who are hyperactive on social media often post about their daily activities, portraying lifestyles that appear trendy and up-to-date, which in turn helps them gain popularity within their peer groups (Putri et al., 2016).

However, the influence of popular culture and social media also brings negative effects. Individuals admit feeling pressured to maintain a perfect image and adhere to beauty standards portrayed on social media. They also experience social anxiety and compare themselves to others based on what they see online. Many strive to balance following popular culture trends with developing their own identity. They recognize the importance of being true to themselves and avoiding the trap of expectations imposed by popular culture and social media. Popular culture and social media have a significant impact on the perspectives and behavior of young people. The implication is that it is essential for youth to develop critical awareness and self-understanding when navigating these influences to maintain their integrity and build an authentic identity.

#### 5. Conflicts and Challenges in the Religious Life of Generation Z

The rapid and complex cultural shifts have influenced how Generation Z perceives religion, religious values, and their engagement in religious practices. In this study, many

Gen-Z respondents expressed experiences of conflict, dilemmas, and challenges in navigating their religious lives. Some of them raised questions about how to reconcile their religious identity with the new cultural realities they face. One example is the dilemma between the traditional values upheld by their religion and the dominant norms of the surrounding social culture. Several respondents found it difficult to maintain a balance between religious demands and the pressures of modern culture.

Another challenge faced by Generation Z is the shift towards more individualistic views of religious practice. Some respondents stated that they tend to adopt religious practices that are more personal and aligned with their individual identity and values. This tendency can create conflicts with more conservative religious norms or the expectations of family and community. The way individuals understand religious teachings becomes a key factor in shaping both positive and negative perceptions of people of other faiths. With a deep appreciation for national values and spirit, Generation Z tends to hold more positive views on religious tolerance (Manuain, 2022).

One conflict described by respondents is the difficulty of aligning religious values with popular culture and trends prevalent among their peers. Some feel pressured to follow a modern lifestyle that contradicts the religious values they believe in. This situation causes a dilemma between staying faithful to their religion and maintaining their religious identity in a predominantly secular environment. There is pressure from the social environment to conform to cultural trends that may go against religious teachings. These individuals experience internal conflict between the desire to remain loyal to their faith and the need to be accepted and participate in the popular culture around them.

In addition, another challenge expressed by respondents is dealing with shifting societal values and norms that are increasingly inclusive and pluralistic. This challenge is highly relevant in today's global context, where modern societies tend to be more diverse in terms of the values, norms, and beliefs held by individuals and groups. Respondents feel the need to understand and navigate religious and belief differences within a more diverse and open environment. They also expressed a desire to uphold their religious identity while embracing tolerance and respect for differences.

Generation Z faces various conflicts and challenges in practicing their religious lives. They experience pressure to follow cultural trends that contradict religious values and face dilemmas in balancing the need for social acceptance with religious fidelity. Moreover, they must deal with evolving values and norms in increasingly inclusive societies. These findings

highlight the importance of providing support and understanding to help Generation Z overcome such challenges and live a religious life that aligns with their personal values and beliefs. This support is crucial because Generation Z those born roughly between 1997 and 2012 have grown up in a highly diverse environment and are exposed to a wide range of information and differing perspectives.

#### D. CONCLUSION

The culture evolving among Generation Z is significantly influenced by technological advancement and globalization, providing them with broad access to information through the internet and social media. This enables them to explore various ideas and perspectives, including those related to religion and spirituality. Generation Z tends to be more inclusive and open to different religious traditions, often blending elements from multiple faiths or forming a unique personal spirituality. Technology also facilitates the development of digital identity and participation in social activism. With wide global exposure, they adopt a more flexible approach to life and their values. The religious transformation of Generation Z, shaped by technology and globalization, is evident in their inclusiveness in integrating diverse religious traditions. They combine traditional religious practices with activities such as meditation or yoga. Social media serves as a platform for sharing religious quotes, engaging in discussions, and constructing a more personal spiritual identity. However, this generation also faces challenges, such as conflicts between traditional religious values and the rapidly evolving pressures of modern culture. Difficulties in adapting to popular cultural trends that contradict religious teachings, along with the diversity of values and norms in pluralistic societies, remain major challenges. Therefore, it is essential for them to develop critical understanding and self-awareness in navigating these dynamics.

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