



**YOUTUBE AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RELIGIOUS
UNDERSTANDING AMONG GENERATION Z FEMALE STUDENTS AT UIN
AR-RANIRY BANDA ACEH**

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Abstract

YouTube has become an increasingly accessible source of religious knowledge among Generation Z, raising questions about how digital religious content is incorporated into existing practices of Islamic learning. This study examines the role of YouTube in the social construction of religious understanding among Generation Z female students at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with nine purposively selected female students and analyzed through data reduction, thematic categorization, and interpretation using Berger and Luckmann's social construction framework. The findings reveal that YouTube serves primarily as a complementary source of religious learning alongside university education and religious study circles (*pengajian*). Three interconnected processes characterize students' engagement with religious content. Externalization is reflected in their active searching, selection, and sharing of religious videos. Objectivation is reflected in the recognition and evaluation of religious authority through scholarly credentials, religious arguments, and established Islamic learning traditions. Internalization is evident in participants' accounts of broadened religious perspectives and efforts to apply religious values in everyday life. These processes show that students do not simply adopt digital religious messages but interpret them through existing frameworks of religious knowledge and authority. This study contributes to understanding how digital religious learning interacts with established Islamic educational traditions in Aceh and highlights the significance of critical digital religious literacy in higher education.

Keywords: *YouTube; Religious Understanding; Generation Z; Social Construction of Reality; Digital Religious Authority*

A. Introduction

Digital media have expanded the ways individuals access, interpret, and exchange religious knowledge. YouTube, in particular, has become an important platform for Islamic preaching (*da'wah*), enabling religious scholars and preachers to distribute lectures, explanations, and discussions beyond conventional religious learning settings (Arifin & Nugraha, 2022; A'raaf et al., 2021). Its accessibility allows users to select religious topics according to their interests, revisit explanations, and engage with different forms of Islamic teaching. For Generation Z, these features have made digital platforms an increasingly familiar part of religious learning, alongside established sources such as universities, mosques, and religious study circles (Fajrussalam et al., 2022).

The significance of this development is reflected in Indonesia's digital media landscape. According to the Digital 2026: Indonesia report, Indonesia had approximately 180 million social media user identities in October 2025, while YouTube's potential advertising reach was estimated at 151 million users in late 2025 (Kemp, 2025). These figures indicate the extensive reach of digital platforms, although advertising reach should not be equated with monthly active users. Beyond accessibility, however, YouTube raises important questions about the credibility of online religious messages, the authority of digital preachers, and the ways audiences reconcile digital information with established Islamic traditions. These questions are particularly relevant to university students who encounter religious knowledge through both formal education and digital media.

Previous research has established YouTube as an important medium for disseminating Islamic teachings and facilitating access to religious knowledge. Suhendrik (2021) highlighted the accessibility of religious lectures through the Wamimma TV channel, while A'raaf et al. (2021) examined the use of YouTube for Islamic preaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Bari et al. (2025) and Efendi et al. (2023) similarly discussed the opportunities offered by YouTube for distributing religious messages. Beyond these communication-oriented studies, Solahudin and Fakhruroji (2020) examined Islamic learning practices on digital platforms in Indonesia, showing that online religious communication can both challenge and extend established religious authority. Chair et al. (2024) further investigated how Indonesian users seek religious knowledge through social media and the implications of these practices for religious authority.

Research involving Indonesian Muslim youth has also demonstrated that digital religious engagement involves more than receiving information. Nisa (2018), for example, examined how young Muslim women participate in the production and circulation of religious messages through Instagram. In the specific context of UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, Dermawan (2023) investigated the effectiveness of YouTube in relation to the Islamic understanding of students in the Islamic Religious Education program. These studies provide an important foundation for examining digital religious learning. Building on these studies, the present research examines how Generation Z female students at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh evaluate digital religious authority and integrate YouTube-based explanations with established sources of Islamic learning. Its distinctive contribution lies in examining these practices through the interconnected processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization within a specific Islamic higher education context in Aceh.

This question is particularly relevant in Aceh, where Islamic religious life operates within a distinctive institutional and legal environment, including the recognition of Aceh's special status under Law No. 44 of 1999 and the governance framework established by Law No. 11 of 2006 (Yusmalinda et al., 2023). Within this setting, students encounter religious knowledge through university education, religious study circles, and digital preachers on YouTube. Rather than examining the effectiveness of digital preaching alone, the present study investigates how participants position these sources within their religious learning practices, assess the credibility of online religious

explanations, and incorporate selected messages into their everyday understanding. Its distinctive contribution lies in examining these practices through the interconnected processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization within a specific Islamic higher education context in Aceh.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine how YouTube contributes to the construction of religious understanding among Generation Z female students at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh and how students use religious content on the platform in relation to other sources of Islamic learning. Specifically, the study explores their engagement with religious videos, their criteria for evaluating the credibility of digital preachers, and the ways they interpret and incorporate religious messages into their everyday understanding and practices.

This study employs Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory of the social construction of reality to understand how religious meanings are formed, recognized, and incorporated into everyday life. In this perspective, social reality is produced and reproduced through the interconnected processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Externalization refers to the expression of human meanings and activities in the social world; objectivation concerns the ways socially produced meanings acquire an apparently objective character; and internalization refers to the incorporation of socially established meanings into individual consciousness. Applied to this study, these concepts provide an analytical framework for examining how female students engage with YouTube religious content, assess its credibility in relation to recognized Islamic authorities, and incorporate selected religious messages into their understanding and reported practices.

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to examine how Generation Z female students at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh construct religious understanding through their engagement with YouTube. The case study design enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, interpretations, and practices within a specific Islamic higher education setting (Fiantika et al., 2022). UIN Ar-Raniry was selected because its students engage with formal Islamic education while also having access to digital religious content, providing a relevant context for investigating the relationship between these sources of religious knowledge.

The primary empirical data consisted of in-depth interviews with nine female students from different faculties at UIN Ar-Raniry. These interviews focused on their experiences of accessing religious content, evaluating preachers and religious messages, combining digital and conventional sources of Islamic learning, and interpreting religious teachings in everyday life. Scholarly publications and other documentary sources were used to contextualize the empirical findings, establish connections with previous research, and support the theoretical interpretation.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) female students belonging to Generation Z, defined in this study as individuals born

between 1997 and 2012; (2) active YouTube users; and (3) students who had experience watching religious content on the platform. Nine participants met these criteria and were included in the study. Their ages ranged from 18 to 24 years, and they represented different academic faculties and patterns of YouTube use. Including students from different faculties allowed the study to capture religious learning experiences across a range of academic backgrounds within the same institutional setting.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews guided by questions related to participants' religious learning experiences and their use of YouTube. The interview material was transcribed and analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, following the analytical approach described by Miles et al. (2019). Relevant interview segments were coded, compared, and organized into categories reflecting participants' access to religious content, evaluation of religious credibility, and interpretations of religious messages. These categories were subsequently examined through Berger and Luckmann's concepts of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. The analytical focus was on identifying recurring patterns and differences in participants' accounts rather than estimating their prevalence in the broader student population.

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the nine participants, including their age, faculty, reported daily YouTube use, and prior experience using the platform.

Table 1.
Characteristics of the Research Participants

No	Initials	Age	Faculty	Self-Reported Daily YouTube Use	Initial Period of YouTube Use
1	K	24	Faculty of Sharia and Law	1 – 2 hours	Since Grade 3 of Junior High School
2	B	22	Faculty of Da'wah and Communication	3 – 4 hours	Since Grade 1 of Senior High School
3	AT	19	Faculty of Tarbiah and Teacher Training	3 – 4 hours	Since Grade 3 of Junior High School
4	SN	22	Faculty of Sharia and Law	2 – 3 hours	Since Senior High School
5	I	22	Faculty of Ushuluddin and Philosophy	2- 3 hours	Since Senior High School
6	EM	19	Faculty of Adab and Humanities	2 – 3 hours	Since Junior High School
7	A	18	Faculty of Social and Political Sciences	2 – 3 hours	Since Senior High School
8	MW	20	Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training	2 – 4 hours	Since Senior High School

9	S	22	Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business	2- 3 hours	Since Entering University
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The credibility of the findings was supported through comparison of interview accounts across participants and member checking. Cross-participant comparisons were used to identify recurring patterns and differences in the reported experiences. Member checking involved reconfirming interview accounts with participants to assess the correspondence between their statements and the researcher's interpretations. These procedures supported the credibility of the analysis while retaining attention to variation in individual experiences. In presenting the findings, participants are identified using the codes listed in Table 1.

C. Results and Discussion

1. YouTube as a Complementary Source of Religious Learning

The interview findings indicate that YouTube serves as a complementary source of religious learning among the participating female students at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. Although the platform provides accessible religious explanations, participants continued to regard university education and religious study circles (*pengajian*) as important foundations for understanding Islamic teachings. They distinguished between the convenience of accessing religious videos and the opportunity to obtain direct explanations from religious teachers. This distinction was expressed by informant SN, a 22-year-old student from the Faculty of Sharia and Law, who emphasized the importance of treating YouTube as a supplementary rather than a primary source of religious knowledge:

“Today’s era has changed, and the methods of *da‘wah* have also evolved in accordance with the development of the times. Many ustaz and prominent religious scholars are now active on YouTube. However, it is important to emphasize that YouTube should be used as a complementary medium rather than the primary source. Since anyone can upload content on YouTube, we must be careful in selecting the content we consume” (SN, interview, March 1, 2026).

A similar pattern was described by informant I, a 22-year-old student from the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Philosophy. She explained that religious knowledge acquired through university education and religious study circles provides a foundation for her learning, while YouTube helps clarify topics that remain difficult to understand. Rather than relying exclusively on either source, she combines them according to her learning needs:

“At campus and in religious study circles, we learn the official and detailed foundations of religion. So, I usually combine them if there is something I do not fully understand from what I learned at campus, I look for explanations on YouTube that are easier to understand” (I, interview, March 6, 2026).

The complementary role of YouTube was further explained by informants AT and K, who emphasized its accessibility and flexibility. Informant AT, a 19-year-old student from the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, considered YouTube useful for accessing religious explanations at any time. However, she also recognized its limitations, particularly the lack of opportunities for immediate clarification when encountering difficult religious questions. Religious study circles, in contrast, allow direct interaction with teachers. Informant K, a 24-year-old student from the Faculty of Sharia and Law, similarly valued YouTube because religious lectures could be accessed repeatedly and adjusted to individual schedules. Nevertheless, she regarded it as a complementary source alongside conventional religious learning. Their experiences highlight two distinct functions of religious learning: digital media provide flexible access to explanations, while face-to-face learning offers opportunities for dialogue and clarification.

The findings demonstrate that YouTube has become integrated into the religious learning practices of the participating students without displacing their reliance on established sources of Islamic knowledge. This pattern is consistent with previous studies highlighting the accessibility and educational potential of YouTube as a medium for Islamic preaching (Ahadi & Wardan, 2024; Efendi et al., 2023). However, the present study extends this discussion by showing how students distinguish the functions of digital and conventional religious learning. While YouTube offers flexibility, repeated access, and supplementary explanations, university education and religious study circles remain important for acquiring foundational knowledge and resolving religious questions through direct interaction.

This relationship indicates that digital religious learning is not simply a shift from conventional instruction to online content. Instead, students incorporate YouTube into learning practices that already involve established religious teachers, educational institutions, and study circles. The accounts of SN and I illustrate that access to religious information does not necessarily determine the authority attributed to that information. Students may find YouTube convenient and informative while continuing to regard religious teachers and formal learning environments as important sources of guidance. The experiences of AT and K further demonstrate that the advantages of digital accessibility coexist with the continuing value of face-to-face religious instruction.

Within the Islamic higher education context of Aceh, the complementary relationship between YouTube and established religious learning can be understood in relation to the continuing significance of Islamic educational traditions. Nurdin (2020) documented the role of *dayah* institutions in Acehnese religious preaching and their gradual engagement with digital communication. Similarly, Syafieh et al. (2022) demonstrated the continuing significance of *dayah ulama* in contemporary religious practices in Aceh. More recent research by Samsuar et al. (2025) examined how *teungku dayah* adapt their preaching practices to digital platforms, while Husna et al. (2025) showed how the authority of *teungku* and the institutional identity of *Dayah MUDI Samalanga* are maintained and communicated through digital media. Together, these

studies indicate that digitalization does not necessarily eliminate established religious authority but may also provide opportunities for its continued expression and circulation.

The present findings add an audience-level perspective to this discussion. Rather than examining how dayah institutions or religious preachers adapt to digital media, this study shows how female university students position YouTube alongside sources of Islamic learning they already recognize. The accounts of SN, I, AT, and K demonstrate that digital accessibility and direct religious instruction fulfill different but complementary functions. Participants value YouTube for its flexibility and availability of explanations while continuing to rely on established learning settings for foundational knowledge and clarification. The findings therefore suggest that the relationship between digital and conventional religious learning is shaped by students' assessments of different sources and their learning needs. This pattern provides a foundation for examining the processes through which religious meanings are expressed, evaluated, and incorporated into everyday understanding.

2. The Social Construction of Religious Understanding through YouTube

1) Externalization: Religious Information-Seeking and Content Sharing

In Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory, externalization refers to the expression of human meanings and activities in the social world. Within the context of digital religious learning, this process can be examined through students' active engagement with religious information, including searching for explanations, selecting videos, responding to recommendations, and sharing religious content. These practices reflect how individual religious interests and learning needs are expressed through participation in digital environments.

The interviews reveal three main pathways through which participants encountered religious content on YouTube: recommendations from friends, videos appearing on the homepage, and independent searches. These pathways demonstrate the relationship between personal learning interests, social networks, and platform-mediated exposure. Research on digital Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia has shown how platform algorithms influence the visibility and circulation of religious content (Rhafik et al., 2026). Informant K, a 24-year-old student from the Faculty of Sharia and Law, described encountering religious content through a combination of homepage recommendations, suggestions from friends, and searches based on her interests:

“I discovered religious content on YouTube because it appeared on the YouTube homepage, but there were also recommendations from friends, and sometimes I searched for content myself according to the topic I needed” (K, interview, February 26, 2026).

K's experience shows that access to religious content involves both exposure to recommended videos and deliberate information-seeking. Although homepage suggestions and recommendations from friends introduce particular materials, she also searches for explanations according to her own interests. This interaction between digital exposure and individual initiative demonstrates that students participate actively in

shaping their religious learning experiences rather than merely consuming content presented to them.

Recommendation systems facilitate access to religious videos, while previous research has also identified the possibility of restricted exposure to diverse information through algorithmic filtering (Wulandari et al., 2021). The participants in this study encountered religious content through several pathways, including homepage recommendations, independent searches, and suggestions from friends. Their experiences highlight the role of social relationships in shaping access to religious information. Informant SN, a 22-year-old student from the Faculty of Sharia and Law, described how religious videos shared through WhatsApp encouraged her to explore YouTube content, reflecting the influence of peer networks associated with Islamic boarding schools:

“I discovered this content through recommendations from friends who often shared YouTube videos on WhatsApp, and from there I became interested in watching religious content, especially because my friends from the Islamic boarding school often attended religious study sessions, and I also liked watching religious content with them” (SN, interview, March 1, 2026).

The combination of social recommendations and independent searching was also evident in the experiences of other participants. Informant EM, a 19-year-old student from the Faculty of Adab and Humanities, described discovering religious videos through friends while also using YouTube's search function to explore topics of interest. Informant B, a 22-year-old student from the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, used YouTube to obtain additional explanations concerning Islamic jurisprudence (muamalah) and differences in scholarly opinions, particularly when opportunities to ask questions during religious study sessions were limited. These accounts indicate that students engage with religious content for different but interconnected reasons, including social recommendations and the need to clarify specific religious questions.

These practices demonstrate that religious information-seeking is shaped by both individual interests and the social environments in which students participate. Recommendations from friends may introduce particular videos, while independent searching enables students to pursue questions arising from their religious learning experiences. YouTube's accessibility supports this interaction by allowing users to locate and revisit religious explanations according to their needs (Bari et al., 2025). Within the externalization process, these activities represent forms of participation through which students express their religious interests in the digital environment.

The accessibility and format of religious videos also influenced how participants engaged with digital learning materials. Informant A, an 18-year-old student from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, described encountering short religious clips on TikTok before searching for the complete lectures on YouTube. Her experience illustrates how short-form religious clips can encourage users to seek more extensive explanations through YouTube, highlighting the complementary functions of different video formats in religious information-seeking.

The style of religious communication was another factor shaping participants' engagement with YouTube content. Previous studies have emphasized the significance of accessible language and persuasive presentation in digital da'wah (Abdusshomad, 2024; Pamungkas et al., 2026). In the present study, informant SN associated clear language and familiar examples with easier comprehension, while informant I highlighted the appeal of contemporary expressions and narratives connected to everyday experiences. Informant I explained:

“It is highly influential because most creators on YouTube use contemporary language and engaging narratives, so learning religion does not feel difficult or boring. For example, some preachers discuss religious issues using examples from films or television programs that we like, making the material easier for us to understand and remember” (I, interview, March 6, 2026).

Externalization was further reflected in the participants' reported practices of sharing religious videos through other social media platforms. Informant K described sharing YouTube content through her WhatsApp status, while informant MW reported checking religious videos before distributing them. Informant EM also described sharing religious content through WhatsApp and Instagram statuses, including by presenting videos in visually appealing formats. These practices indicate that students' engagement with religious content extends beyond individual viewing. By selecting and sharing particular messages, they participate in the circulation of religious knowledge within their social networks.

Viewed through Berger and Luckmann's (1966) framework, these findings illustrate externalization as an active process through which religious interests are expressed in digital social environments. Participants do not merely encounter religious videos but actively search for explanations, respond to social recommendations, and share messages they consider meaningful. Nisa (2018) documented how young Indonesian Muslim women participate in Instagram-based da'wah through the production and circulation of religious messages. The participants in the present study expressed their agency through selecting YouTube lectures and sharing religious content within their social networks. The present findings further show how participation is shaped by the interaction between individual learning needs, peer networks, and access to religious video content. Externalization therefore involves both personal initiative and socially mediated practices through which religious messages circulate among the participating students.

2) Objectivation: Recognition and Evaluation of Digital Religious Authority

Objectivation, within Berger and Luckmann's (1966) framework, refers to the process through which socially produced meanings acquire the character of an objective reality. In the context of digital religious learning, this concept provides a framework for examining how established standards of Islamic knowledge shape the recognition of religious authority. The interviews show that participants evaluate YouTube preachers by considering their educational backgrounds, scholarly lineage, religious arguments, and

connections to recognized traditions of Islamic scholarship. These criteria reflect the continuing influence of socially established religious knowledge in determining the credibility attributed to digital religious messages. Through this perspective, the study examines how participants recognize and evaluate religious authority within their everyday digital learning experiences.

The interviews indicate that participants evaluated the credibility of YouTube preachers by considering their religious education, scholarly background, and the arguments presented in their lectures. For informants B, SN, and MW, these considerations provided important criteria for distinguishing trustworthy religious explanations from content that required further examination. Informant B, a 22-year-old student from the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, explained her trust in Ustaz Adi Hidayat by referring to his scholarly lineage (sanad), understanding of religious sources, and ability to present clear arguments:

“I trust the ustaz or the content because his scholarly lineage is clear, and he is also able to explain religious arguments clearly. I assess it based on the clarity of the arguments, the preacher’s educational background, and his strong understanding of religion. Ustaz Adi Hidayat is well known for his strong memorization of the Qur’an, and in his content he frequently refers to classical Islamic books. In addition, his arguments are very strong” (B, interview, March 4, 2026).

Informant SN expressed a similar preference for preachers educated in pesantren, dayah, or Islamic universities, associating these institutions with recognized religious knowledge. Informant MW, a 20-year-old student from the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, further emphasized that credibility involves not only educational background but also the content and manner of religious communication. She considered the clarity of religious arguments, references to authentic Hadith, and a non-provocative preaching style when deciding whether to trust particular content. MW explained:

“I consider the preacher’s educational background. Whether he possesses clear and credible knowledge, whether his way of delivering sermons is not provocative, and whether what he conveys is supported by clear religious arguments and authentic Hadith. Through this, I can trust the channel. Educational background is important because it shows that the ustaz has a clear foundation of knowledge that can be academically and religiously accounted for” (MW, interview, March 2, 2026).

The evaluation of religious credibility reveals an important distinction between digital visibility and the recognition of religious authority. Indonesian scholarship has shown that social media can create new opportunities for religious figures to gain public influence while challenging established forms of Islamic authority. Akmaliah (2020, 2022) examined these developments in relation to Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, highlighting the ways established religious organizations respond to new forms of digital religious influence. Hidayatullah (2025) further emphasized how platform visibility, digital expertise, and audience engagement contribute to the formation of religious

authority online. These studies show that religious authority in digital environments cannot be understood solely through traditional institutional structures.

The present findings, however, reveal that platform popularity does not automatically establish religious credibility among the participating students. Informants I, SN, B, and MW emphasized scholarly qualifications, clarity of religious arguments, and references to established Islamic sources when evaluating YouTube preachers. Although informants K, B, and A acknowledged that popular preachers attract audience attention, popularity was distinguished from the credibility of their religious explanations. This pattern can be understood alongside Alatas's (2021) analysis of religious authority in Indonesia, which emphasizes the social relationships and sustained practices through which religious authority is established and maintained. In the present study, participants draw upon recognized scholarly and religious standards when evaluating digital preachers, demonstrating how established forms of Islamic authority continue to inform their judgments of religious credibility.

The relationship between digital visibility and established authority is also illustrated by A'thoina and Al-Aboosi's (2024) study of Hanan Attaki and Nahdlatul Ulama, which demonstrates how digital preaching and institutional religious authority may reinforce one another. The present research complements these studies by examining how students evaluate the credibility of digital religious preachers. Their experiences indicate that digital religious authority is selectively recognized rather than accepted through popularity alone. Interpreted through Berger and Luckmann's concept of objectivation, this pattern highlights how established standards of Islamic knowledge inform the credibility attributed to religious explanations encountered on YouTube. The study thus identifies the continuing influence of scholarly legitimacy within the evaluation of digital religious content.

The evaluation of religious authority was also evident in participants' responses to differing Islamic interpretations encountered on YouTube. Informant B regarded differences among Islamic schools of thought (*madhhab*) as part of established scholarly traditions and did not consider such differences sufficient grounds for immediately rejecting a religious explanation. Informant K described comparing unfamiliar or conflicting interpretations with other sources and seeking clarification through religious study circles. Similarly, informant EM emphasized examining supporting religious arguments before reaching a conclusion. These responses indicate that participants do not evaluate digital religious messages solely by identifying a preferred preacher. Their assessments also involve comparing interpretations and considering the religious evidence presented. Such practices illustrate how established Islamic knowledge informs the recognition of religious authority within digital learning environments.

The continuing importance of established religious learning was further illustrated by informant S, a 22-year-old student from the Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business. She distinguished between foundational knowledge acquired through university education and religious study circles and additional explanations obtained through YouTube. Her account shows that students' recognition of digital religious

sources is situated within an existing hierarchy of learning references. Rather than assigning equal authority to every available source, she identified religious study circles and university education as the foundation for evaluating and extending her understanding of Islamic teachings:

“I primarily regard religious study gatherings and university education as my main foundation. However, I use YouTube to gain additional explanations or when I want to learn something new” (S, interview, February 25, 2026).

The participants' evaluations reveal a pattern of selective recognition in which digital religious content is assessed through standards associated with established Islamic scholarship. Religious education, scholarly lineage, scriptural arguments, and opportunities for clarification provide criteria for determining whether particular explanations deserve trust. YouTube therefore becomes part of students' religious learning environment without automatically acquiring the same authority as recognized teachers or institutions. Their accounts show that access to religious content and recognition of religious credibility are related but distinct processes.

Interpreted through Berger and Luckmann's (1966) concept of objectivation, these findings illustrate how participants draw on socially established standards of Islamic knowledge when recognizing and evaluating digital religious authority. Their assessments demonstrate that the credibility of YouTube preachers is not determined solely by visibility or popularity, but also by scholarly qualifications, religious arguments, and established traditions of Islamic learning. These findings highlight the continuing relevance of recognized religious knowledge in shaping students' judgments of digital preachers. In this context, the recognition of religious authority represents an important dimension of how religious understanding is socially constructed through engagement with YouTube.

3) Internalization: Religious Meaning and Everyday Practices

Internalization, within Berger and Luckmann's (1966) framework, refers to the process through which socially established meanings are incorporated into individual consciousness and become part of everyday understanding. In the context of religious learning, this process can be examined through how individuals interpret religious messages and incorporate these meanings into their values and daily practices. In the present study, internalization is reflected in participants' accounts of how YouTube religious content broadened their understanding of Islamic teachings and informed their efforts to practice religious values in everyday life.

Informant I, a 22-year-old student from the Faculty of Ushuluddin and Philosophy, described how watching religious lectures on YouTube broadened her understanding of Islam beyond ritual worship. One example concerned her interpretation of *ṣadaqah* (charitable giving). She explained that she had previously associated charity primarily with financial contributions but later understood that it could also be expressed through kindness and helping others. She further described applying this understanding through expressions of gratitude and assistance to friends. As she explained:

“Religious content on YouTube has broadened my way of thinking. Previously, I understood Islam as focusing only on prayer. However, after watching many religious videos, I learned that Islam is not only about prayer. There is also content discussing almsgiving, which is not limited to money but can also be expressed through a smile or helping others. From there, I began to more often say thank you to others and also like to help friends when they are in difficulty.” (I, interview, March 6, 2026)

Informant I's account illustrates how religious content can acquire personal meaning when connected to everyday relationships and practices. Her interpretation of *sadaqah* reflects an understanding of Islamic values that extends beyond financial giving to include ethical conduct and assistance to others. A related experience was described by informant EM, a 19-year-old student from the Faculty of Adab and Humanities, who associated her engagement with religious videos with a broader understanding of the relationship between worship, morality, and interpersonal behavior. EM described efforts to improve her speech, maintain religious discipline, and exercise greater responsibility when using social media. These experiences are relevant to the internalization of Islamic ethical values in everyday social conduct (Aly & Anshory, 2024). EM explained:

“I gained new knowledge about religion and have tried to apply it in my daily life. I now feel that religion is not merely about worship, but also about attitudes, lifestyle, morality, and the way we interact with others, such as maintaining proper speech, becoming more disciplined in worship, and being more cautious in using social media. Although not everything changed immediately, at least I have begun trying to improve myself.” (EM, interview, March 2, 2026)

The experiences reported by I and EM illustrate two interconnected dimensions of internalization: the expansion of religious meaning and the reported application of religious values in everyday life. Both participants described learning from YouTube content in ways that extended their understanding beyond ritual obligations to include charity, morality, and interpersonal conduct. Their accounts also show that religious messages become meaningful when interpreted in relation to familiar situations and individual efforts to practice Islamic teachings. Internalization in this context therefore involves the interpretation of religious knowledge and its incorporation into participants' accounts of everyday life.

This process remained connected to established sources of Islamic learning. Informant K described placing greater trust in lecturers and religious study circles when encountering conflicting religious explanations, particularly because these settings allow direct discussion and clarification. Informant AT similarly reported consulting religious teachers when digital explanations differed from what she had previously learned. These experiences indicate that the meanings acquired through YouTube are interpreted in relation to prior religious knowledge and recognized sources of guidance. Thus, the internalization of digital religious messages is not an isolated process but develops through continuing interaction with existing Islamic learning traditions.

The findings also highlight the importance of critical engagement with digital religious information. Informants B and SN described comparing explanations from different sources when encountering religious issues discussed on social media. Their responses indicate that religious learning through YouTube can involve reflection and verification rather than the immediate acceptance of a single interpretation. This pattern is relevant to discussions of critical thinking in YouTube-based Islamic education. Rosfiani et al. (2025), for example, examined the use of YouTube in supporting critical thinking within Islamic religious education at the junior high school level. Although the educational setting differs from the present study, both contexts highlight the importance of evaluating information rather than relying exclusively on its digital accessibility.

In the present case, critical engagement is closely connected to the evaluation of religious credibility. Students assess religious messages by referring to scholarly explanations and sources they consider authoritative. Such practices illustrate the significance of digital religious literacy, particularly when different interpretations circulate across online platforms (Zuhri & Riski, 2026). The findings suggest that critical evaluation is part of how participants negotiate the relationship between digital religious content and their existing understanding of Islamic teachings.

Interpreted through Berger and Luckmann's (1966) concept of internalization, these findings illustrate how religious messages encountered through YouTube become meaningful within participants' understandings of Islamic values and everyday practices. The accounts of I and EM demonstrate that digital religious learning can involve reflection on charity, interpersonal conduct, and religious discipline. These experiences can be situated alongside Husein and Slama's (2018) research on online piety in Indonesia, which highlights the ethical dimensions of religious engagement through social media, including charitable practices. The experiences of K and AT further indicate that such interpretations remain connected to prior religious learning and recognized sources of guidance. Internalization therefore emerges as a selective and socially situated process through which digital religious messages acquire personal significance within existing frameworks of Islamic understanding.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that YouTube contributes to the construction of religious understanding among Generation Z female students at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh primarily as a complementary source of Islamic learning. Participants use the platform to obtain additional religious explanations while continuing to rely on university education and religious study circles as important foundations of religious knowledge. Through Berger and Luckmann's social construction framework, three interconnected dimensions of this process can be identified. Externalization is reflected in participants' active searching, selection, and sharing of religious content through digital platforms and social networks. Objectivation is interpreted through their recognition and evaluation of digital religious authority, particularly through scholarly qualifications, religious arguments, and established Islamic learning traditions. Internalization is reflected in participants'

accounts of broadened religious understanding and efforts to incorporate religious values into everyday practices, including charity, ethical conduct, and religious discipline.

The findings highlight the continuing relationship between digital religious learning and established Islamic sources of knowledge within the higher education context of Aceh. YouTube expands opportunities to access and explore religious explanations, but students assess and interpret these messages through religious knowledge and standards of authority they already recognize. The study contributes to understanding how digital accessibility, individual agency, and established religious authority interact in the social construction of religious understanding. It also underscores the importance of digital religious literacy that supports critical evaluation of online religious messages. While the findings are grounded in the experiences of nine female students at one Islamic university, they provide insights into how digital religious learning can develop alongside established traditions of Islamic scholarship. Further research involving other student groups and educational settings could examine how these relationships vary across different social and religious contexts.

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