Labina : Journal of Islamic Education Management
E-ISSN: 3124-9698
https://doi.org/10.66891/hn04ay64
Volume 1, Issue. 1, 2026, Page 91-107
journal.staimh.ac.id

Crisis Of Authority In Islamic Educational Institutions: Strategic Response Of Islamic Education Management To The Shift In Generation Z's Trust In The Digital Era

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Submitted: 12-12-2025	Revised : 15-01-2026	Accepted: 16-02-2026	Published: 31-03-2026

Abstract The dynamics of Islamic education in the 21st century are facing disruptions triggered by technological innovations and the demographic shift of Generation Z. This article analyzes the phenomenon of the crisis of religious authority in Islamic educational institutions, where students (Gen Z) tend to trust religious content creators on social media (*faithfluencers*) more than their formal educators or *kyai* (traditional Islamic scholars). Using a descriptive qualitative approach based on library research, this study investigates the sociological and psychological roots of this trust shift, including the impact of parasocial interactions and the dominance of algorithmic authority. The results indicate that this crisis is also exacerbated by managerial bureaucratization within *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and *madrasas*, which erodes charismatic authority. As a solution, Islamic Education Management (MPI) needs to formulate a crisis management framework based on Islamic values. The proposed tactical strategies include the hybridization of authority through the digitalization of *sanad* (chain of transmission) and *adab* (ethics), rebranding teacher competencies through creative content production training, the implementation of digital-based public relations strategies, and the integration of digital literacy into the curriculum. In conclusion, Islamic educational institutions must recalibrate themselves into digitally adaptive institutions without sacrificing the values of *khidmah* (sincere service) and *pesantren* traditions, in order to fortify the faith of Generation Z in the cyber ecosystem.

Keyword : Religious Authority | Islamic Education Management | Generation Z | Digital Disruption | Islamic Educational Institutions

Abstrak *Dinamika pendidikan Islam pada abad ke-21 sedang menghadapi disrupsi yang dipicu oleh inovasi teknologi dan pergeseran demografis Generasi Z. Artikel ini menganalisis fenomena krisis otoritas keagamaan di lembaga pendidikan Islam, di mana mahasiswa (Gen Z) cenderung lebih mempercayai konten kreator keagamaan di media sosial (faithfluencers) dibandingkan dengan pendidik formal atau kyai (ulama tradisional). Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif berbasis studi pustaka, penelitian ini mengkaji akar sosiologis dan psikologis dari pergeseran kepercayaan tersebut, termasuk dampak interaksi parasosial dan dominasi otoritas algoritmik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa krisis ini juga diperparah oleh birokratisasi manajerial dalam pesantren dan madrasah, yang mengikis otoritas karismatik. Sebagai solusi, Manajemen Pendidikan Islam (MPI) perlu merumuskan kerangka*

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manajemen krisis berbasis nilai-nilai Islam. Strategi taktis yang diusulkan meliputi hibridisasi otoritas melalui digitalisasi sanad (rantai transmisi) dan adab (etika), rebranding kompetensi guru melalui pelatihan produksi konten kreatif, implementasi strategi hubungan masyarakat berbasis digital, serta integrasi literasi digital ke dalam kurikulum. Sebagai kesimpulan, lembaga pendidikan Islam harus melakukan kalibrasi ulang menjadi institusi yang adaptif secara digital tanpa mengorbankan nilai-nilai khidmah (pelayanan yang tulus) dan tradisi pesantren, guna memperkuat keimanan Generasi Z dalam ekosistem siber.

***Kata Kunci** : Otoritas Keagamaan | Manajemen Pendidikan Islam | Generasi Z | Disrupsi Digital | Lembaga Pendidikan Islam*

1. INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of Islamic education in the 21st century are currently in the vortex of unprecedented disruption. This transformation is driven not only by the global acceleration of information technology innovation but also by a demographic shift now dominated by Generation Z. This generation, born between the late 1990s and early 2010s, grew up as digital natives who interact constantly within a digital ecosystem—an environment that fundamentally shapes their mindset, cognitive preferences, social relations, and even the articulation of their religious spirituality. This cyber ecosystem presents a paradox for Islamic educational institutions: on one hand, it offers democratization of access to sacred literature and facilitates the formation of inclusive virtual faith communities; on the other hand, it triggers a structural crisis that threatens the epistemological foundations and traditional authority of religious educational institutions.

The crisis of authority in Islamic educational institutions—which includes *pesantren*, *madrasas*, and integrated Islamic schools—is tangibly manifested through a sharp trust shift. Generation Z in Indonesia currently shows a psychological and sociological tendency to validate religious content creators on social media platforms (*faithfluencers* or celebrity *ustadz*) as their primary spiritual references, often sidelining or degrading the authority of the *ustadz*, *kyai*, or formal Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers who educate them in the classroom. This process is driven by algorithmic platforms that decentralize the production of religious discourse, detaching it from the institutional hierarchies that for centuries have served as the gatekeepers of theological truth.

In responding to this multidimensional crisis, the discipline of Islamic Education Management (MPI) faces a strategic imperative to do more than merely implement administrative digitalization or the peripheral adoption of technology. MPI is required to reformulate the architecture of institutional leadership, modernize public communication

strategies, and re-engineer pedagogical approaches capable of reconciling the clash between the demands of modern bureaucratization, spiritual traditions, and digital disruption. This analytical research report presents a comprehensive investigation into the sociological and psychological roots of the religious authority crisis among Generation Z, its impact on the bureaucratic culture of Islamic educational institutions, and offers a framework of tactical and strategic solutions based on value management and digital literacy to reclaim the lost space of authority.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a library research method with a descriptive qualitative approach. Data collection was carried out through the search, review, and critical analysis of various academic literature, reputable scientific journal articles, empirical research reports, and relevant case study documents within the realms of Islamic Education Management (MPI), sociology of religion, and the digital behavior of Generation Z.

The focus of the study is directed at how modernization, individualization, and the development of information technology algorithms reshape the structure and patterns of religious authority in contemporary Muslim societies. Data analysis was conducted using data reduction techniques, thematic conceptual synthesis, and conclusion drawing to formulate tactical and strategic solution designs that are technologically adaptive yet remain deeply rooted in the fundamental values of *Maqashid al-Shari'ah* (objectives of Islamic law) and *pesantren* traditions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Sociological and Psychological Anatomy of Generation Z in the Digital Religion Ecosystem

The shift of religious authority from classroom institutions to gadget screens does not occur in a sociological vacuum. This phenomenon is a direct implication of the interaction between the psychosocial characteristics of Generation Z, the affordances of digital platform mechanics, and the emergence of new religious actors who master digital capital.

Manifestation of Digital Spirituality and Its Vulnerabilities For Generation Z, the boundary between the sacred physical space and the profane digital space has blurred. They practice what sociologists of religion call "digital religion," a concept where religious

practices are not merely transferred to the internet but are reshaped by the logic of the media itself. Social media for this generation functions not only as a communication channel but as an echo-chamber that validates and reinforces religious understandings that resonate emotionally with their personal experiences. This phenomenon is not limited to Indonesia; manifestations of digital piety are also seen among youth in China who share videos of burning virtual incense to pray for academic success or use animated GIFs to express their spiritual aspirations. This confirms that the digitalization of piety is a global phenomenon that crosses theological boundaries.

Nevertheless, absolute reliance on cyberspace brings massive vulnerabilities. Generation Z faces the challenges of severe digital distraction, spiritual identity crises, and the onslaught of secularization. The speed of information consumption on short-video platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels is often not balanced with substantive literacy. This gap is empirically proven in the realm of Islamic financial literacy; research shows that low Islamic financial literacy significantly correlates positively with the vulnerability of Generation Z to fall into fraudulent investments disguised as Sharia-compliant. When basic literacy is weak, religious narratives manipulated by malicious actors on social media easily deceive them due to convincing symbolic packaging. This reality underscores the urgency of the presence of schools, MPI institutions, and families as moral compasses and cognitive verifiers to prevent radicalization and theological simplification.

Parasocial Interaction as a Mechanism for Trust Transfer The key to understanding why Generation Z shifts their authority loyalty to *faithfluencers* lies in the communication psychology concept called Parasocial Interaction (PSI). PSI refers to the illusion of a reciprocal relationship, emotional intimacy, and feelings of friendship felt by a follower towards a media public figure, regardless of the fact that the interaction is asymmetrical. To measure this phenomenon, researchers have even developed and validated the *Parasocial Relationships with Religious Figures* (PSR-R) scale in Indonesia, confirming that dimensions of interest, knowledge seeking, and emotional dedication strongly moderate followers' bonds with their idolized religious figures.

Contemporary digital platforms, particularly those featuring live streaming and portrait-format short videos, are specifically designed to accelerate the formation of PSI. Qualitative research on Generation Z active on TikTok Live Streaming reveals that 75% of participants felt significantly closer emotionally to their religious idols during live broadcasts compared

to when consuming pre-recorded video content. Mechanisms such as reading audience comments in real-time (*real-time shoutouts*), responding to teenagers' existential questions through Q&A sessions, and facilitating virtual gifts create a psychological affirmation that the audience is "seen" and "acknowledged" by that authoritative figure.

Conversely, the relationship between students and *ustadz* or religious teachers in formal educational settings is often perceived as having a rigid hierarchical distance, bounded by class hours, and trapped in one-way instructional communication. When a *faithfluencer* presents a relatable story (*relatability*), shares personal vulnerabilities, and utilizes empathy that resonates with youth anxieties (*emotional resonance*), PSI acts as a strong mediating variable that transforms visual attraction into absolute sociological trust.

3.2. Deconstruction of Authority: From Classical Sanad to Algorithmic Metrics

This shift in trust subsequently disrupts the theological and sociological conceptions of what defines an "ulama" (scholar) or authoritative figure in Islam. Max Weber's classical theory of authority states that for power to endure, it requires clear and stable legitimacy, whether sourced from tradition, legal-rational frameworks, or charisma. In the digital era, this legitimacy is being re-engineered.

Characteristics of Traditional Authority vs. Digital Authority Historically, religious authority in the Indonesian archipelago—represented by figures like *kyai*, *ulama*, or *tengku*—was built upon the foundation of classical textual mastery (*tafaqquh fi al-din*), an unbroken chain of knowledge transmission (*sanad*), cultural recognition from local communities, and the genealogical lineage of *pesantren*. For instance, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organization consistently relies on figures with globally recognized epistemological depth, such as Prof. Dr. Quraish Shihab, to provide theological legitimacy during times of crisis.

However, the presence of *faithfluencers* and celebrity preachers, such as the Hanan Attaki phenomenon and similar figures, presents a "stylish *da'wah*" style that offers an alternative route to authority. They democratize the production of religious discourse, allowing individuals who may not have an orthodox *pesantren* scholarly background to claim the preacher's space. The following table presents a comparative analysis regarding the transformation of these authority parameters:

AUTHORITY PARAMETER	TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY (MADRASA/PESANTREN)	ALGORITHMIC DIGITAL AUTHORITY (FAITHFLUENCERS)
SCIENTIFIC EPISTEMOLOGY	Centered on mastery of classical texts (*kitab kuning*), Arabic grammar, *ushul fiqh*, and strict scholarly chains (*sanad*).	Centered on social credibility, contemporary hermeneutic adaptation, and the translation of teachings into psychological self-help solutions.
VALIDATION MECHANISM	Long-term institutional recognition, validation from a council of scholars, and tangible dedication to the local community.	Algorithmic metric performance: follower growth rate, likes, engagement rate, and virality status.
COMMUNICATION APPROACH	Tends to be monological, hierarchical, formal, and emphasizes the ethical obedience (*adab*) of the student to the teacher.	Tends to be dialogical, egalitarian, uses Generation Z pop culture slang, performative, and visually aesthetic.
NATURE OF SPATIAL LANDSCAPE	Bound to physical geographical borders, community locality, and institutional school/pesantren schedules.	Transcends geographical boundaries (cyber Islamic environments), accessible 24/7, global and fluid in nature.

Algorithmic Dominance and the Cyber Islamic Environment Within the framework of digital sociology, this phenomenon can be analyzed through the concept of *cyber Islamic environments* introduced by Garry Bunt. Cyberspace is a highly competitive arena where various ideologies, from ultra-conservative to progressive, battle to seize hegemony. In this battlefield, social media algorithms act as invisible gatekeepers.

Formal religious teachers or local *kyai* often lose prestige to social media figures simply because they do not understand Search Engine Optimization (SEO), the For You Page (FYP) algorithms on TikTok, or the rhythm of content uploading. However, there is an epistemological danger inherent in authority that relies on algorithms. Algorithms are programmed to prioritize attention-grabbing content (attention economy) and quick emotional reactions, rather than content that encourages deep theological contemplation. This triggers the simplification of religious doctrines and increases the risk of sectarian polarization, a challenge where algorithmic authority can fade as quickly as social media trends change if not supported by stable traditional knowledge legitimacy.

3.3. The Paradox of Modernization: Cultural Crisis and Internal Bureaucratization in MPI

Amidst external pressures from digital disruption, Islamic educational institutions are ironically experiencing an erosion of authority from within due to how they respond to modernization. Efforts to transform institutions to be competitive—such as administrative improvements, filling digital databases, and accreditation—often create cultural crises, especially in *pesantren* and integrated *madrasa* environments.

Bureaucratization and the Erosion of the Kyai's Charismatic Authority According to structural analysis of modern *pesantren* management, the most crucial cultural crisis is the shift in the center of authority and decision-making. Historically, a *kyai* is the central figure possessing absolute charismatic and moral authority. However, with the influx of modern corporate management trends into the Islamic education system, this authority is deconstructed. Strategic policies, staff recruitment, curriculum determination, and teacher evaluations are now dictated more by the hierarchical structure of the foundation, managerial directors, and technocratic Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) rather than by the spiritual considerations of the *kyai*.

The impact is the mechanization of human relations. The relationship between the *kyai*, *ustadz*, and *santri* (students) previously woven through emotional bonds and the value of *khidmah* (sincere service) is now reduced to a professional contractual relationship measured through honorarium systems and metric-based Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). This paradigm shift from *spiritual service* to *economic activity* erodes the aura of sacredness previously attached to the figure of a religious educator, inadvertently making Generation Z feel their school institutions are rigid and transactional.

Administrative Fatigue of Educators vs. Adaptation Demands The implementation of contemporary curricula, such as the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Emancipated Curriculum) in *madrasas*, forces religious teachers to continuously adapt to new administrative burdens. *Ustadz* and *ustadzah* from elementary to secondary levels are required to attend various additional technology trainings to master filling out digital modules, e-report card reporting, and project planning. This time-consuming, application-based administrative workload creates a paradox: educators are increasingly busy with their computer screens reporting

student development performance, but simultaneously lose qualitative time to truly provide spiritual mentoring, listen to student grievances, and build Parasocial Interactions in the real world. This void of affective space in the real world is perfectly taken over by *faithfluencer* figures in cyberspace.

Furthermore, psychological resistance from some senior educators who view technology integration as marginalizing traditional Islamic identity values exacerbates institutional backwardness. When educators' digital competencies are uneven and school infrastructure is unequal, institutions fail to provide an engaging learning experience for digital natives.

3.4. Theoretical Framework of Solutions: Crisis Management and Value-Based Leadership

Islamic educational institutions cannot respond to this shift by being reactive or repressively blocking digital access, as isolationist approaches have proven counterproductive in the contemporary era. MPI must holistically adopt crisis management theory that addresses not only physical crises but also social and reputational crises.

Implementation of Crisis Management in Islamic Educational Institutions
Developing a crisis management model in Islamic education requires the assimilation of standard emergency response practices with fundamental principles of Islamic theology. This structural crisis management framework includes:

- **Prediction-Based Preparation Phase (Pre-Crisis):** Educational institutions must proactively map the cultural and psychosocial vulnerabilities of their students. This involves designing flexible digital regulatory tools and SOPs, as well as improving the digital literacy of the internal ecosystem long before scandals of deviant religious understanding occur among students.
- **Dynamic Response Phase (Crisis Response):** When trust in school authority drops sharply, institutions must immediately activate a competent crisis communication team to provide a balancing narrative. Communication styles must shift from dogmatic-authoritarian to rational-persuasive.
- **Holistic Recovery Phase (Post-Crisis):** Restoring the balance of academic culture by conducting intensive guidance programs and evaluating existing systems to strengthen the resilience of educational quality against future technological

disruptions. An institution's ability to transform is reflected in its academic scholarly achievements; for example, this adaptation acceleration is indirectly validated by the success of scientific journals in Islamic education studies at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung breaking into prestigious indexing (Q1 and Q2), demonstrating the maturity of global MPI scientific discourse.

Restoration Through Islamic Value-Based Pesantren Management To cure the alienation caused by structural bureaucratization, MPI must recalibrate its governance through the "Islamic Value-Based Solution Design" approach. This solution proposes that the rational efficiency of modern management be filtered through the lens of *Maqashid al-Shari'ah* (objectives of Islamic law).

Work should not only be viewed as a transactional contract but revitalized in its meaning as *amal jariyah* (continuous charity) and *amanah* (trust/responsibility). Institutional leadership practices must restore the role of the *kyai* or school principal as a moral compass and primary spiritual figure who is openly accessible, not merely a ceremonial symbol. Strategic decision-making must shift from purely technocratic hierarchical logic by adopting the mechanism of *musyawarah* (consultation), so that every stakeholder—from young tech-savvy teachers to senior traditional scholars—has a complementary voice in formulating the institution's direction. This protects the institution from the trap of commodification, where success indicators are returned to the essence of Islamic education: the molding of *insan kamil* (perfect human beings) who are civilized, rather than merely optimizing enrollment numbers.

3.5. Tactical Strategies for Authority Reclamation: Hybridization, Literacy, and Rebranding

The macro framework above must be translated into tactical and operational interventions. Islamic Education Management must carry out proactive penetration by synergizing teaching method innovations with an understanding of public communication algorithms.

Hybridization of Authority: Integration of Classical Sanad and Digital Space (Blended Authority) Sociological research shows that the most resilient model of religious authority in the Society 5.0 era is not one that rejects technology, but one that creates "hybrid authority". Digital authority operates optimally through the selective continuation of tradition; long-lasting *faithinfluencers* are those who eventually begin referencing classical Islamic texts or respected scholars to strengthen their scientific foundations.

For *pesantren* institutions, this is implemented through the digitalization of *kitab kuning* (*turats*/heritage) in a manner that does not uproot its scholarly spirit. Case studies of prototype application development such as *TuratsKu* prove that digitalization can preserve historical value and *adab* through careful functional design. Traditional methods like *Bandongan* and *Sorogan* are revitalized into blended learning systems with essential features:

- **Authentic Audio Integration:** Applications are designed with embedded voice recordings of direct readings from the *kyai/ustadz*. This guarantees the preservation of the auditory face-to-face mechanism (*talaqqi*), maintaining the purity of the knowledge *sanad* that distinguishes *pesantren* authority from mere digital text readers.
- **Interactive Contextual Intelligence:** Incorporating original classical texts equipped with digital syntactic marginal notes (*nahwu/sharaf*), as well as automatic translations that greatly assist Generation Z in overcoming linguistic barriers.
- **Connectivity and Offline Ecosystems:** Recognizing internet access limitations, the system design is optimized to run without a network (offline-friendly), while providing moderated discussion forums where the teacher remains the central verifier of interpretation.

Rebranding Teacher Competence Through Content Creation Training Recognizing that authority metrics are now supported by visual performativity, MPI must aggressively allocate budget and time to train its religious teachers to master content production. Religious teachers must undergo rebranding from figures perceived as conservative to inclusive and humanistic digital communicators.

This has been tested through systematic training programs for religious extension workers and preachers, which provide a practical roadmap for MPI. The training curriculum for educators no longer merely discusses PAI theory but includes technical execution of media production:

- **Acceleration of Digital Tool Mastery:** Intensive training using popular and free media editing applications such as CapCut, Canva, and InShot.
- **Metamorphosis of Communication Paradigm:** Shifting the monological textual lecture method towards a storytelling approach that prioritizes empathy, visual aesthetics, and thematic relevance to align with youth audience psychology.

- **Learning Management Platform Integration:** Encouraging teachers to optimize cloud-based Learning Management Systems (LMS) to provide direct feedback to student work, thus allowing teachers to successfully duplicate Parasocial Interaction mechanisms in real academic relationships.

Digital-Based Public Relations Management Strategy Generation Z's trust does not only depend on the individual capacity of their teachers but also on institutional reputation. Therefore, MPI must execute "Digital-Based Public Relations Management" by applying corporate mass communication theory. Educational institutions must position themselves not merely as passive institutions but as active producers of cultural discourse.

Examining Harold D. Lasswell's theory, institutions like Daarut Tauhiid successfully maintain their authority by conducting sharp audience segmentation and assigning young preachers ("santri karya") to reach urban groups. Digital campaign strategies can be built through:

1. **Orchestration of Symbolic Capital (Bourdieu):** Educational institutions must explicitly highlight symbolic capital (religious titles, academic degrees, *pesantren* lineage certification) on their teachers' profiles in school content to counter the hegemony of *faithfluencers* who lack formal legitimacy.
2. **Choice of Persuasive Style:** Adopting infographics of theological arguments based on structured rationality, science, and practical applications of *fatwas* (rulings) which are highly valued by analytical generations.
3. **Cross-Institutional Coalitions:** Uploading endorsements or references from larger parent organizations (e.g., the Indonesian Ulema Council) to legitimize internal *madrasa* policies.

Curriculum Transformation: Digital Literacy as a Theological Fortress External efforts will be powerless without internal immunity. Overhauling the *madrasa* and PAI curriculum becomes an absolute necessity to include critical digital media literacy curricula. The ultimate goal of education is not to distance students from technology, but to prepare them as *khalifah fil ard* (leaders on earth) subjects in the digital realm.

Digital literacy components that need to be integrated into PAI include:

- **Information & Media Literacy:** Teachers present viral *da'wah* content and guide students to test it with simple *takhrij* (verification) methodology of hadith, training the differentiation between hoaxes and authentic fatwas.
- **Learning Skills:** The use of gadgets in the classroom as mandatory equipment to access reliable Islamic repositories, fostering a culture of independent theological research among students.
- **Collaboration & Communication:** Implementing the Project Based Learning (PjBL) model where students produce digital piety campaigns as a graduation requirement for the subject.
- **Digital Ethics:** Educating on the theology of identity protection, the etiquette of commenting (*tabayyun*), and time management so that students avoid enslavement by social media algorithms.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion The shock of the crisis of authority in Islamic educational institutions caused by the exodus of Generation Z's trust toward *faithfluencers* and religious content creators is a permanent sociological reality that cannot be canceled through ideological denialism or technology access bans. In this era of digital disruption, the form of religious authority has transformed; legitimacy is no longer solely monopolized by orthodox textual chains hidden behind hierarchical classroom walls, but has hybridized with performative competence, emotional resonance, and the capability to navigate cyber media algorithmic architectures.

Islamic Education Management must respond to this inevitability through a forward-looking crisis management framework. The roots of alienation caused by institutional technocratic bureaucratization must be healed through the reintroduction of "value-based pesantren management," where spirituality, sincerity of service (*khidmah*), and collective involvement (*musyawarah*) are restored as the driving operational soul of the institution. In the pedagogical realm, the digital integration of classical methods and content creation training for educators have proven essential so that educators can weave Parasocial Interaction closeness with Gen Z in a relevant and meaningful way.

Suggestions Based on the conclusions of the findings above, it is suggested for policymakers, foundation administrators, and *madrasa* principals to begin allocating budgets and specific

programs for improving digital literacy, as well as organizing technical guidance on creative content creation for all PAI educators. Curricularly, the Ministry of Religious Affairs needs to evaluate the integration of digital literacy in national PAI textbooks. For future academic researchers, more comprehensive quantitative field studies are needed to empirically measure the effectiveness level of the *hybrid authority* strategy in preventing radicalization crises or theological deviations among students in various urban and rural areas.

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