

**MODERN YOUTH COMMUNITY: BETWEEN TRADITIONS, AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY
IN DOLOK MASANGO VILLAGE, BINTANG BAYU DISTRICT, SERDANG BEDAGAI
REGENCY**

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ABSTRACT

In the digital age, marked by advances in information technology and the expansion of social media, the religious identity of young people has undergone significant transformation. This study examines how the younger generation, particularly Indonesian Muslim youth, form and express their religious identity through digital spaces. Using a qualitative approach based on recent studies (2019–2025), it was found that digital media serves a dual role as both a platform for spiritual learning and a space for negotiating values. Adolescents are no longer passive recipients of religious teachings but active agents in constructing religious narratives that align with their context. The concepts of hybrid identity, online hijrah communities, and communicative religious practices have become new patterns in the religiosity of Generation Z. However, these dynamics also present challenges such as value fragmentation and superficial religious symbolism. This study recommends a more reflective, participatory, and adaptive approach to religious education that is responsive to digital culture as a strategy to strengthen the spirituality of teenagers in a holistic manner.

Keywords: religious identity; youth; digital age; social media; Generation Z.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a crucial period in the human life cycle, characterized by significant physical, psychological, and social changes. At this stage, the individual is in the process of searching for self-identity, which includes personal, social, and religious identity (Erikson, 1968). In the modern era marked by massive global information flows, the development of digital technologies, and increased exposure to various ideologies and lifestyles, adolescents are faced with unprecedented complexities. Not only do they grapple with the challenges of transitioning from childhood to adulthood, but they also have to navigate the tug-of-war between traditional values inherited from family and community environments, with values and lifestyles often associated with modernity (Bauman, 2000).

Modernity brings with it the advancement of information technology, cultural openness, and broad access to diverse thoughts, including in terms of religion. As a result, values that were once considered established and unshakable are now being questioned or even abandoned. Adolescents often experience identity confusion as they have to choose between maintaining local traditions inherited from families and communities, or following new trends and values that are more individualistic and modern. This process creates a tension between the continuity of tradition and the demands of modernization, especially in the religious aspects that greatly determine the direction of adolescents' lives going forward.

In the context of Indonesian society, where religion plays a central role in daily life, the formation of adolescents' religious identity is very important. Muslim youth, in particular, are often at a crossroads between maintaining religious traditions that have been held for generations by their families and communities, and a tendency to adopt more personal religious understandings or practices, in accordance with their interpretation of modernity. This can manifest in various forms, ranging from how to dress, lifestyle choices, to interpretation of religious texts (Charles, 2007). This dynamic is becoming increasingly interesting to study in rural areas, which have traditionally been known to hold on to tradition more strongly, but are not entirely immune to the penetration of modern values from urban or global media.

In general, the phenomenon of adolescent identity search occurs in various parts of the world and is a universal challenge. In the modern era marked by massive global information flows, the development of digital technology, and increased exposure to various ideologies and lifestyles, adolescents are faced with unprecedented complexity. Not only do they grapple with the transition from childhood to adulthood, but they also have to navigate the tug-of-war between traditional values inherited from family and community, with values and lifestyles often associated with modernity. This phenomenon gives rise to complex social dynamics in the process of forming adolescent identities, including their religious identity.

In particular, in the context of Indonesian society that makes religion an important pillar in social life, the formation of adolescent religious identity is an interesting topic to study. Muslim youth, for example, are often at the crossroads between maintaining hereditary religious traditions and adopting more individualistic and modern religious practices. This can be reflected in the style of dress, the choice of social community, to the way they interpret religious teachings.

In the context of a plural and religious Indonesian society, religion plays a central role in shaping individual character and social structure. However, it is undeniable that the interpretation and expression of religious diversity of teenagers is currently undergoing a shift. Muslim adolescents, for example, often exhibit non-uniform forms of religiosity: some still hold firmly to traditions inherited by their families and communities, while others begin to adopt more personalized, open, and contextual religious lifestyles and ways.

Dolok Masanggo Village, located in Bintang Bayu District, Serdang Bedagai Regency, is one example of a rural community that has undergone this shift. Although geographically located in rural areas that tend to maintain traditional values, it is undeniable that the trend of modernization, especially through access to technology and information, has permeated the lives of its adolescents. This phenomenon creates a unique arena in which local traditions interact with the religious identity of the adolescents in process, which may be influenced by modern values (Koentjaraningrat, 2002). How the youth in Dolok Masanggo Village balance or reconcile the demands of tradition, the desire to be "modern", and the search for their religious identity is a fundamental question. This research seeks to fill this understanding gap by analyzing in depth how the modern youth community in Dolok Masanggo Village forms their religious identity in the midst of the tension between tradition and modernity.

How the youth in Dolok Masango Village balance or reconcile between the demands of tradition, the desire to be "modern," and the search for their religious identity is a key question. This research aims to fill this understanding gap through an in-depth analysis of the dynamics of the modern youth community in Dolok Masango Village in shaping religious identity in the midst of the tension between tradition and modernity.

The emergence of the modern youth community in this village shows a process of shifting values and lifestyles that have implications for their religious patterns. Some adolescents maintain religious practices that are collective and based on local traditions, while others tend to make religion a flexible and more individualized personal expression. This tension between tradition and modernity then raises an important question: How do the teenagers in Dolok Masango Village shape their religious identity? To what extent are they able to reconcile local values with the challenges of the times?

Therefore, this study aims to examine more deeply the dynamics of the modern youth community in Dolok Masango Village, focusing on how they negotiate traditional values and modernity in the process of forming religious identity. This understanding is important to know the direction of development of the young generation in maintaining local spiritual and cultural values in the midst of ongoing social changes.

RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, the author conducted research with a qualitative approach, namely describing and interpreting the modern adolescent community. This type of research is intended to look for facts, the state of the phenomenon phenomenon which is then described. The use of a qualitative approach is carried out to build knowledge through understanding and discovering something that happens in the field.

According to Moleong in (Nasution, Fattah, 2023) Qualitative research is research that intends to understand the phenomena of what the research subject experiences e.g. behavior, perception, motivation, actions, etc. holistically, and by way of description in the form of words and language, in a special natural context and by utilizing various natural methods.

Bogdan and Taylor define "qualitative methodology" as a research procedure that generates descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behaviors. Kirk and Miller define qualitative research as a particular tradition in the social sciences that fundamentally relies on observation of human beings in their own area and relates to those people in their discourse and in their terminology (Fadli, 2021). Sarmana said an important goal in qualitative research is to make reality or events easy to understand (*understandable*) and allows the model to produce new hypotheses (Malahati et al., 2023).

Data Collection Techniques

Qualitative data collection techniques consist of three main characteristics that must be carried out by a researcher, namely through observation, interviews and documents. As viewed, Mulyana, Moleong, Creswell, Emzir, Daymon & Holloway and Fontana & Frey, as follows: (Kaharuddin, 2021)

- 1) Observation: Observation data collection in descriptive qualitative research in the form of observations made by researchers directly in the field. Observation is observing various events or symptoms that occur related to what the purpose of the research is.
- 2) Interview: data collection through interviews is carried out by asking questions referring to questionnaire instruments that have been created by the researcher and validated by relevant experts. There are several types of interview models, such as direct and indirect interview models. The direct interview in question is *face to face*. Indirect interviews are interviews via *video call* or phone. From the interview, information related to the modern youth community and religious traditions can be known.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

Local Traditions Still Considered Relevant by Teenagers

Local traditions are an important part of a community's identity. In the midst of the ever-growing trend of globalization and modernization, tradition is often considered an element of the past that is no longer relevant to people's lives, especially the younger generation. However, this assumption does

not fully apply in Dolok Masanggo Village, Bintang Bayu District, Serdang Bedagai Regency. Based on the results of in-depth interviews with several teenagers in the village, it was found that traditions are still considered to have an important meaning in their lives as modern teenagers:

"I think it is still relevant, and the way to respond to it is by understanding the meaning behind tradition and preserving and adapting according to the times." (RN, Wawancara By the Author, 2025).

Further explanation from the speaker:

"Yes, I think it is still relevant to our lives as teenagers today, indeed sometimes there are teenagers who cannot accept the traditions of our ancestors who have been doing this for a long time, but the longer we live and the longer the tradition is continued, then over time there is an encouragement that makes the tradition more adapted to modern life today, therefore, these traditions can be accepted by our youth" (TM, Wawancara By the Author, 2025).

For some teenagers, tradition is a kind of "soul connector" between the past and the present. In the midst of the rapid influence of outside culture through social media, teenagers still feel that their identity is tethered to the roots of village culture. They do not reject modernity, but neither do they want to lose their traditional roots. Then the resource person also explained:

"Yes, I personally think that the traditions in Dolok Masango village are still relevant, nothing has changed. But maybe in my opinion there must be a little that must be changed, namely the tradition where parents in an institution or group must teach young people in the village so that the traditions in the village still have their successors and provide more stage for the youth in the village" (RN, Wawancara By the Author, 2025).

Teenagers in Dolok Masango Village generally do not reject local traditions, but strive to understand, adapt, and preserve them according to the context of modern life. They realize that tradition still has value, but it needs an approach that is appropriate to the times to keep it alive among the younger generation. For teenagers in Dolok Masango, tradition is not just a formality. Traditions are considered to have an important function as a life-balancer, especially when they are faced with conflict, social pressure, or moral choices. In this context, the values taught through tradition become a guideline in attitude.

For example, the value of mutual cooperation instilled from childhood in village activities is the basis for adolescents to understand the importance of solidarity. The value of politeness in traditional traditions helps them maintain ethics when talking to parents, teachers, or community leaders. The value of respect for ancestors also makes them have a sense of responsibility for their family history.

Religious Identity Plays an Important Role in Adolescents' Personal Lives

Religion is not only a belief system or ritual, but it is also an important part of a person's identity, especially in the context of a religious society like Indonesia. In Dolok Masanggo Village, the role of religion is felt strongly in daily life, not only in the older generation, but also in teenagers. Even though they live in the midst of a wave of modernization and digitalization, teenagers in this village still make religion the main guideline in shaping themselves, determining attitudes, and building social relationships. As explained by the speaker:

"To be a guide in behaving, speaking, and interacting as well as religious activities that affect the way of interaction, one of which is RM activities and mutual cooperation to clean places of worship" (RN, Wawancara By the Author, 2025).

Furthermore, the resource person also said:

"Yes, of course it is very good, because religion is the foundation of life for a human being in the world, it is clear that the important role of religion gives many values in my life, such as a sense of responsibility, good manners and others. To communicate with friends may be more of a joke that is a little exaggerated, but I am aware of the risks that are obtained so that the nature of always apologising first. To make decisions in life, I believe and believe that all of them are destined to be the only way we can achieve them even though sometimes there is a little doubt about the decisions I make. And one religious value that became a foundation in my life "Morals are higher than knowledge" (IM, Wawancara By the Author, 2025).

Of course, we always realize that religion is the foundation and has also become a source of life for every ummah, especially Muslims, through religion everyone definitely upholds ethics and also morality values in social life, therefore the teachings and values of tradition in a religion are very

necessary and must be strengthened in this era. In this era of technology, we are expected to be able to compete with technology or we must be able to adapt to technology so that our religious values do not escape. Then further the resource person also explained:

"If we just carry out the tradition like in the past, not necessarily all young people can now participate. But if it is packaged in an interesting way, more people will want to participate and finally understand the contents." "If we just carry out the tradition like in the past, not necessarily all young people today can participate. But if it is packaged in an interesting way, more people will want to participate and finally understand the contents." (Scott, S.S., 2025).

All of the speakers showed that religious values influenced the way they behaved, interacted, and made decisions. Religious activities such as youth wirid, mutual cooperation to clean mosques, and recitation are important spaces to form morals and social responsibility. The findings of interviews with several interviewees show that religious identity is not only culturally inherited, but also internalized personally. That is, religion has not only become a "social status" (such as the label 'Muslim' or 'religious'), but has become a framework of thinking and attitudes that is lived in real life.

Religious values are present in the way they speak, think, choose friends, resolve conflicts, and judge information from the outside. Religion became a moral fortress, an emotional support, and a source of direction in their lives. Furthermore, through communities such as youth wirid, they find space to share, grow, and strengthen solidarity as a generation that is religious but still adaptive to the times.

Religious activities in the village such as youth wirid, mutual cooperation in mosques, and joint recitation are important spaces for adolescents to grow and take care of their religious identity. They not only attended as passive participants, but also began to be involved in organizing events, becoming activity committees, and even as young speakers. This makes them feel that they have a moral and social responsibility to their community. Their religious identity is no longer personal, but collective. They become part of a vibrant and active religious community.

Modern Adolescents Are Critical and Selective Towards Traditional Values

Each generation lives in a different social reality. If the generation of parents and grandparents lives in a society that tends to be homogeneous and culturally stable, then today's generation of teenagers lives in a more complex environment characterized by information openness, a variety of life choices, and the intensity of changes in values. It is in this context that a new attitude is shown by adolescents towards traditional and religious values: they do not immediately reject, but do not accept it for granted. They are critical and selective, choosing based on understanding, logic, and compatibility with their personal and social conditions.

Unlike previous generations, teenagers are now more selective and critical. They carry out the teachings of tradition or religion after first understanding their reasons and meanings. They want to make these values part of an understood identity, not just followed. As explained by the speaker:

"Previous generations (parents, grandparents) tended to follow traditions and religion fully and absolutely, without asking many questions or criticizing. These values are lived as an inseparable part of life. Meanwhile, teenagers now tend to be more critical and selective. They want to know the reason behind every customary rule or religious teaching, and will only carry it out if they feel it is in accordance with their intellect and heart". (IM, Interview by the Author, 2025).

The most striking difference between today's youth and previous generations lies in the way they live the traditions. The older generation lived the values and customary rules in full, absolutely, and rarely questioned them. Instead, today's teenagers are beginning to explore the meaning behind existing cultural symbols and social practices.

For example, in traditional ceremonies or community activities, teenagers are more interested if the meaning behind each activity is explained. They are not satisfied with the answer "it has always been so," but want to understand its historical, functional, or philosophical reasoning. If that meaning is found, they will tend to keep the tradition; but if not, they are more likely to choose to stay away or find a new form that is more meaningful to them. Then the resource person also explained that:

"Of course, there are us and the people who have been different, how many years have they been there, of course they run it, it's more of a way that is still thick traditionally, because it is still in their era, while in the era of modern teenagers, this must have changed a lot, so

when introducing it, it is necessary to adapt or the way of delivering it must be in harmony with the times, Because if teenagers are teenagers now, they will be interested if there is something new, so even though there are new religious traditions, even though they are told directly, they will definitely get bored if it's just a story, but if we collaborate with today, such as creating content and explaining their religious traditions, maybe teenagers will be easier to follow" (TM, Author's Review, 2025).

Critical attitudes and also selective attitudes are very rare to be found in this era at the age of adolescence, because today's adolescents are indeed very, very active and selective in selecting and sorting out existing information. Therefore, teenagers, of course, in seeing and also following a tradition, are very, very careful about it, such as for example there is a tradition that does not make sense in their opinion and they will certainly leave it.

Maintaining a Balance between Modernity and Local Values

Adolescents do not reject the development of the times, but try to balance modern trends with family and religious values. They filter trends, choose educational ones and build self-image, and utilize technology to reinforce local values.

Modernity has opened up many new spaces for teenagers to form identities, pursue their dreams, and access various sources of information and entertainment. Social media, lifestyle trends, and popular culture have formed a new landscape that can no longer be avoided. In the midst of this current, there are concerns about the fading of local values such as religion and tradition, especially among the younger generation.

"Yes, if we want to balance between following the present times and also without having to abandon the teachings of religious teachings taught by the community, so yes we can harmonize this with technology, for example there are activities to pack the values by promoting it by creating educational content as an introduction to oh this is the typical religious culture of dolok masango so from there we can also promote religious teachings without having to leave the teachings of the teachings religious religion, yes, with us collaborating like that" (TM, Wawwancara By the Author, 2025).

Maintaining this balance is not an easy thing, especially in today's era. They are in a state of attraction: on the one hand they want to appear modern and accepted by the outside environment, on the other hand want to remain an integral part of their local community. Furthermore, the resource person also explained:

"Maintaining this balance is not an easy thing. They are in a state of attraction: on the one hand they want to appear modern and accepted by the outside environment, on the other hand want to remain an integral part of their local community" (IM, Wawwancara By the Author, 2025).

Of course, in harmonizing or balancing between the attitude of modernity and also to maintain the values of religious traditions to maintain these two, of course, teenagers must be able to balance more so that they are not said to be outdated without having to leave religious traditions that have existed for a long time. In addition, the resource person also explained:

"The trick is to choose a trend that is collective and educates and maintains the dignity of the family and also makes tradition and religion as self-identity" (RN, Wawwancara By the Author, 2025).

In terms of choosing and also sorting out the content that we will follow, it is also the most important thing in terms of maintaining the values of religious traditions that we will maintain in this era, we find that the values of religious traditions that have been introduced through educational content or da'wah content that are packaged creatively and then also introduced to the wider community so that our people can know religious traditions that they did not know before.

Discussion

In the midst of the rapid flow of information that hits the younger generation, religious identity is no longer formed linearly through families and formal institutions such as schools or Islamic boarding schools. Now, social media, da'wah videos on YouTube, and Islamic content on TikTok have become important actors in the process of internalizing religious values among teenagers. This phenomenon shows a shift in the way of religion of generation Z which is more visual, dialogical, and personal.

Research by (Susanto & Rokobah, 2022) notes that Generation Z is not only passively accepting religious doctrines, but also actively shaping their religious narratives through digital spaces. Religious moderation is a concept that they internalize not only through text, but through virtual interactions and experiences. Some of them even develop religious personalities that are not fixated on formal symbols, but manifest in everyday ethical behavior.

In the case of the digital migration movement, for example, many teenagers have rediscovered the meaning of religion through online communities. (Zahara, Wildan, & Komariah, 2020) observing that digital media is not only a means of spreading values, but also a space for the formation of a religious social identity full of symbolism. It creates what is called a flexible "hijrah identity" but remains rooted in the spirit of spirituality.

However, this reality also brings new challenges. Religious identities formed in virtual spaces are often fragmentary and prone to polarization. (Rofidah & Muhid, 2022) said that the emergence of identity hybridity, which is a combination of religious norms and global lifestyles, is a characteristic of today's urban Muslim youth. They can at the same time practice worship consistently, while still keeping up with popular lifestyle trends that are not always in harmony with conservative religious norms.

Similar conditions were observed by (Fajrie et al, 2023), explaining that adolescents in urban and rural areas exhibit different religious expressions depending on their access and involvement in the digital world. In big cities, religious identity is more performative and open, while in villages it is still more tied to social structures and local authorities.

However, digital transformation also presents a great opportunity to strengthen religion based on critical awareness. In research by (Syafi, 2024) , social media is actually a space that opens up cross-perspective discussions and provides a forum for adolescents to build a more reflective understanding of religion. Religion is no longer only explained through one-way lectures, but through discussions, creative content, and narratives of experiences that touch more on their affective and cognitive dimensions.

Overall, the religious identity of Indonesian teenagers in the digital era cannot be separated from the flow of value globalization. But instead of dissolving, many of them have instead used this complexity as fuel for the search for a more authentic religious identity. These identities grow in a broad spectrum, from the textual and conservative, to the symbolic and spiritual. In other words, they are forming a new face of religion that is more adaptive to the ever-changing world, without having to lose the deepest meaning of faith itself (Dwi, et all, 2025).

In the midst of the rapid flow of modernization and information technology advancement, the youth community in Dolok Masango Village is at a crossroads of identity that is not easy. They live in a global cultural vortex but remain in a social space that upholds tradition and religion. This phenomenon gives birth to interesting dynamics in the formation of adolescent religious identity which is no longer passive, but the result of an active process of selection, interpretation, and negotiation.

For most teenagers, tradition is not seen as a static inheritance to be taken for granted. They try to understand the meaning behind each cultural practice, and then decide whether or not it is still relevant in their modern lives. Instead of rejecting it outright, many of them want new forms of preserving traditions that are more interactive and contextual, such as packaging local values into more widely accessible digital content.

In matters of religion, the teenagers also showed a strong religious spirit. However, their expressions are often different from previous generations. They made religion not just a social symbol, but a personal ethical framework and spiritual guidance that they understood rationally and emotionally. Activities such as youth wirid, mutual cooperation to clean places of worship, and religious studies are important spaces for them to combine spiritual values with the social dynamics of the current context.

Teenagers also cannot be separated from digital challenges. Exposure to information through social media presents new values that sometimes contradict local teachings. However, instead of getting caught up in the current, many teenagers are trying to find a middle ground: they don't reject modernity, but try to stay grounded in their cultural and religious roots. This balance is reflected in the way they use technology not only for entertainment, but also to strengthen their religious identity and community (Mujahid, 2024).

The critical consciousness of today's youth is also evident in the way they choose which values to internalize. They do not hesitate to question teachings or traditions that do not conform to their

conscience and rationality. However, when these values are felt to be meaningful, they will preserve them and even pioneer their preservation in a more contextual and communicative version. This attitude is a form of actualization of a reflective and dynamic religious identity (Harahap, 2024).

Thus, the youth community in Dolok Masango is a mirror of the young generation of Muslims living in a tension between continuity and change. They do not solely live in the traditional vs modern dichotomy, but are constantly looking for ways to bring the two together in their social and spiritual practices. Their religious identity grew out of a space of dialogue between the past and the present, between community values and personal choice. In this process, they became not only the successors of values, but also innovators in redesigning spiritual expressions that are relevant today.

CONCLUSIONS

The transformation of Indonesian youth's religious identity in the digital era is not a static process, but a dynamic search that continues to take place in the space of cultural, technological, and spiritual interaction. Social media is not only a means of entertainment, but also serves as a forum for religious discussion, a medium for the expression of faith, and even a forum for contemporary da'wah. Phenomena such as online hijrah communities, visual da'wah content, and shifts in the way of understanding Islamic values show that the younger generation does not reject religion, but interprets and adapts it to their rapidly changing world. Today's youth practice a more personal, reflective, and sometimes symbolic religiousness, but still exhibit strong spiritual aspirations. Although this presents challenges in the form of the possibility of polarization and loss of deep meaning, that is precisely where the opportunity for religious education and mentoring to become more relevant and contextual lies. With a dialogical and digital-native-friendly approach, adolescents can be directed to build a religious identity that is not only appropriate for their time, but also morally and socially meaningful.

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