

The Transformation of Generation Z's Religiosity in the Context of Modernity: The Role of Formal Spirituality and Spiritual Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

With modernity and digital acceleration shaping how young people see religion, being religious isn't just about following rituals anymore, but also about having a reflective and personal spiritual experience. You can see this with Gen Z, who still practice formal spirituality while also building spiritual well-being through contemplative experiences and searching for meaning in their context. Research aims to analyze how Generation Z's religious transformation takes place in the context of modernity and how formal spirituality contributes to the formation of spiritual well-being. This research finds that the transformation of Generation Z's religiosity does not lead to a weakening of formal religion, but rather to a shift in orientation toward a more internal and existential meaning. Formal spirituality continues to function as the foundation of religiosity, enriched by reflective and personal experiences in building spiritual well-being. Formal spirituality still holds an important role in shaping the spiritual well-being of Generation Z amid modernity and digital culture. Formal religious practices are not only understood as ritual obligations, but also as a source of meaning in life and a coping mechanism in facing the pressures of modern life. These findings confirm that formal spirituality remains relevant as the foundation of spiritual well-being for the younger generation in the modern era.

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Introduction

Religion is essentially an existential human need that does not simply disappear amid the rapidly advancing and rational tide of modernity. Modernization is often perceived as a process that diminishes the role of religion in human life. However, a number of studies indicate that religion does not actually disappear, but rather undergoes a process of adaptation to an ever-changing social context (Astuti et al., 2025). As has been stated, "Modernization does not eliminate the role of religion, but rather encourages the revitalization and reinterpretation of its teachings so that they remain relevant to contemporary realities." (Shofi & Aulia, 2025).

Therefore, modernity is not necessarily at odds with religiosity; rather, it can serve as a new space for transforming the way people understand and practice religion (Fitria, 2024). Meanwhile, modernity has also brought about significant social changes, particularly through advancements in technology and digital communication. Modernization has led to significant changes in communication systems, digital technology, and patterns of social interaction among urban communities (Herman, 2024). Developments in information technology have enabled people to access information quickly and widely, without the limitations of time and space (Yulianti et al., 2025). This condition also influences how individuals acquire knowledge, build social relationships, and express their identity, including in matters of religiosity. Although modern life is becoming increasingly rational and technology-driven, people still have a fundamental need for meaning in life, a sense of transcendental connection, and inner peace (Saumantri, 2023). In book *Search for Meaning*, Frank states: “The will to meaning is the primary motivational force in man.” Frankl explained that the main driving force behind human behavior is not merely pleasure or power, but the search for meaning, which shows that the spiritual dimension continues to hold an important place in modern human life (Frankl, 1984).

From this perspective, Generation Z is an interesting group to study because they were born and raised in a digital environment that is vastly different from that of previous generations. This generation doesn't just interact with technology as a tool, but integrates it into their daily lives (Yulyani & Rifiananda, 2025). Therefore, the dynamics of Generation Z's religiosity also unfold in a context that differs from that of previous generations (Miftahul Jannah & Nurmila, 2025). Evidence from the real world shows that there has been a transformation in how Generation Z expresses and interprets religion. They prefer to access religious content from social media (Nafisah & Jannah, 2024), following digital religious figures, and building a more personal and reflective spiritual identity. This transformation shows that the digital space has become not only a means of communication but also a vital medium in shaping the religious experiences of the younger generation. A variety of studies in the fields of the psychology of religion and Islamic psychology have demonstrated a link between religiosity and an individual's psychological well-being. Research has shown a link between psychological well-being and religiosity. Besides that, there is a growing recognition of the importance of the spiritual dimension in the lives of modern individuals amid the crisis of meaning plaguing contemporary society (Kosasih et al., 2022). Psychological developments in modern humans indicate strong significance of the spiritual dimension for the balance of modern society (Gumiandari, 2012). Previous research generally indicates that participation in formal religious practices can contribute to emotional stability, the formation of life

meaning, and increased inner satisfaction (Praditya et al., 2025). In the context of university life, religious practices also serve as a psychological mechanism that helps individuals manage the academic and social stress and pressures they experience (Giono & Surawan, 2025). These findings are consistent with other studies showing that participation in formal religious practices can serve as a positive form of religious coping that enhances emotional regulation and improves an individual's psychological well-being (Asih et al., 2025).

Even so, most of these studies still focus on conventional patterns of religiosity, which are assumed to be relatively stable and strongly institutionalized. This approach has not fully taken into account the dynamics of religiosity in the context of modernity, which is characterized by digitalization, value pluralism, and increasing individualization of identity. In many studies, formal spirituality is often understood as adherence to rituals and institutional norms. This is supported by Ujang Nurholis's research, which shows that formal religiosity is often manifested through symbolic adherence to rituals and institutional norms, while the dimensions of inner experience and spiritual meaning are often less significant. Research on how formal spirituality is being reinterpreted by Generation Z, who live in a flexible and fast-paced digital culture, remains relatively limited. There is a research gap that warrants further attention. Previous studies have extensively examined the relationship between religiosity and psychological well-being, but have not yet thoroughly explored how religiosity is transforming among Generation Z in the context of digital modernity, how formal spirituality is being reinterpreted as part of a subjective experience that contributes to spiritual well-being. This limitation suggests that existing theoretical frameworks are not yet fully capable of explaining the dynamics of religiosity among young people living in a digital ecosystem and an increasingly individualistic culture.

Based on these realities and gaps in the literature, this study aims to analyze how Generation Z experiences and interprets the transformation of religiosity in the context of modernity, as well as how formal spirituality is interpreted in the formation of their spiritual well-being. Specifically, this study aims to examine how Generation Z perceives religiosity within a digital and individualistic culture, how they engage with formal spiritual practices in their daily lives, and how these religious experiences shape their understanding of inner well-being. This objective is not merely focused on describing phenomena, but also on deeply understanding the psychological dynamics that are involved. This study is based on the argument that the transformation of Generation Z's religiosity is not merely a shift in the forms of religious practice, but rather a process of psychospiritual adaptation that has direct implications for their spiritual well-being.

In the current trend of modernity, which tends to emphasize rationality and individual autonomy, formal spirituality may undergo a redefinition of its meaning, both as a source of peace and as a symbol of social identity. If this transformation is not comprehensively understood, there is a risk that religiosity will be reduced to mere symbolic expression devoid of deeper meaning. Conversely, if these spiritual experiences are systematically examined, it will become clear how formal spirituality remains relevant in fostering inner balance, a sense of life's meaning, and self-integration.

This study is therefore important to test the assumption that formal spirituality, even within the context of digital modernity, continues to play a significant role in fostering the spiritual well-being of Generation Z through a dynamic and reflective process of meaning-making. This article is hopefully able to enrich the body of knowledge in Islamic psychology and Islamic studies, making them more adaptable to the changing times. Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for academics, educators, and religious practitioners in formulating spiritual guidance approaches that are more relevant to the younger generation. Thus, this study not only holds academic importance but also practical significance in addressing the challenges of religious practice in an ever-evolving modern era.

Method

This study used qualitative methods, which are research methods used to examine the natural conditions of the subject, with the researcher serving as the key instrument (Sugiyono, 2013). This method was chosen because the study focuses on exploring meaning, narratives, and personal experiences expressed through words, stories, and individual reflections. The resulting data consists of in-depth descriptions of religious experiences, interpretations of formal spirituality, and constructions of spiritual well-being that emerge through interactions with digital and social environments. The phenomenological approach was employed because the research focuses on lived experience, the experiences that participants are aware of and give meaning to. Through this approach, the researcher seeks to uncover the essence of Generation Z's religious experiences as they are subjectively lived, rather than merely as perceived from an external perspective. This phenomenological approach enables us to explore the deepest meanings of the dynamics of religiosity undergoing transformation in the context of modernity, while also capturing the complexity of spiritual experiences that emerge amid social and digital change.

The design of phenomenology in this study is based on the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, is a qualitative analysis approach that focuses on how individuals make sense of their life experiences and how researchers reflectively and

interpretively understand that process of meaning-making. IPA does not merely describe experiences, but emphasizes the process of double interpretation (double hermeneutic), "IPA dictates the requirement for a double hermeneutic: 'the participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world'" (Smith, 2004, p. 40) (John Noon, 2018). This statement explains that in the social sciences, there is a double hermeneutic process, consisting of two layers of interpretation. First, participants interpret and assign meaning to their own life experiences. Second, researchers reinterpret the meanings constructed by those participants. On the article titled "Evaluating the Contribution of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis," (Smith, 2011) explains that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research methodology used to understand the subjective reality of informants through their personal interpretations of life experiences and the meanings they derive from those experiences. This statement affirms that IPA aims to understand the subjective reality of informants through their personal interpretations of life experiences and the meanings they construct. Thus, the primary focus of IPA is not the generalization of findings, but rather the contextual, idiographic, and reflective exploration of the meaning of individual experiences.

For the application of IPA, the analysis involves repeated readings of interview transcripts to gain a deep understanding, followed by initial noting, the development of emerging themes, and the grouping of themes into a more organized and comprehensive framework of meaning. This analytical process enables researchers to identify the dynamics of consciousness, emotions, spiritual reflection, and the construction of religious identity experienced by participants. The IPA approach aligns with the framework of Islamic psychology because it acknowledges inner experiences as meaningful realities that are integrated with the spiritual dimension of human beings. That is why the use of the IPA model in this study is intended to provide an in-depth and reflective analysis of how formal spirituality and spiritual well-being are understood, experienced, and internalized by Generation Z in the context of their lives.

Participant

The study sample consisted of 10 participants selected using purposive sampling, a method of selecting participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2013). The participants came from various social backgrounds to represent the dynamics of Generation Z's religious experiences within the context of their diverse lives. This diversity of backgrounds was intended to provide a more varied picture of religious experiences in the daily lives of Generation Z.

General participant criteria include individuals aged 18–25, a transitional phase toward early adulthood typically characterized by self-identity exploration, whether as students, workers, or in other social roles. Participants were born between approximately 1997 and 2005 to clarify generational boundaries as required for academic purposes. All participants are Muslim because the theoretical framework of this study is based on the perspective of Islamic psychology and the discussion of formal spirituality within the context of Islamic religiosity. Additionally, the participants are individuals who are active in the digital environment, use social media regularly, and access online religious content such as virtual religious studies, religious quotes, or sermons by digital religious figures. The establishment of these criteria aims to ensure that the religious experiences examined truly represent the dynamics of Generation Z's religiosity within the context of modernity and digital culture.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection in this study was conducted using semi-structured in-depth interviews. Interviews were chosen as the primary method because they allow the researcher to explore participants' religious experiences in a more open, reflective, and contextual manner. The interview questions were formulated based on the research problem, covering aspects of the meaning of religiosity in the context of modernity, experiences of practicing formal spirituality, and their perceptions of inner well-being. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit authentic narratives from participants regarding the spiritual dynamics they experience, to understand the process of internalizing religious values in daily life, and to identify the relationship between formal religious practices and experiences of spiritual well-being. During the interviews, the researcher provided space for participants to elaborate on their experiences in depth, thereby obtaining rich and meaningful data.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study followed the six main stages of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as developed by (Smith et al., 2021) , (1) reading and rereading interview transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' narratives; (2) conducting initial noting, which includes descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments; (3) developing emergent themes that represent the essence of the experience; (4) identifying connections between themes within a single case to form an organized structure of meaning; (5) continuing the analysis in the next case while maintaining the idiographic principle; and (6) identifying cross-case patterns to uncover both the similarities and uniqueness of participants' experiences. To ensure the credibility of the findings, this study employed validity techniques such as member checking—reconfirming the results of interpretation with the participants—and the use of a reflexivity journal as the researcher's reflective notes

throughout the research process. Reflexivity is a crucial aspect because, in qualitative research, the researcher is not in a completely neutral position but is actively involved in the process of interpreting meaning. Therefore, the researcher consciously reflects on their assumptions, background, and personal values to ensure they do not dominate the analytical process, thereby ensuring that the resulting interpretations remain grounded in the participants' authentic experiences.

Result And Discussion

1. Formal Spirituality as the Foundation of Inner Peace

The interview results indicate that most participants view formal spirituality as a crucial foundation for cultivating inner peace amid the dynamics of modern life. Religious practices such as prayer (sholat), fasting, attending religious study sessions, and participation in institutional religious activities are still viewed as relevant by Generation Z. Even though they live in a fast-paced, distraction-filled digital environment, formal worship actually serves as a means to restore inner balance and provide a more meaningful direction in life.

One participant shared:

"Amid the busyness of college and daily activities, prayer helps me feel more at peace. It feels like having a moment to take a break from the hustle and bustle."

Another participant also shared a similar experience:

"After working all day, I find peace when it's time to pray. At that moment, my mind and heart feel calmer."

Other participants added:

"Even though life today is fast-paced and full of distractions from social media, prayer remains my anchor. It helps me feel more grounded and less prone to stress."

This finding suggests that formal spirituality continues to serve as a source of inner peace for Generation Z as they navigate the challenges of modern life.

2. Formal Spirituality as a Medium for Coping with Life's Stresses

Findings also show that formal spirituality serves as a coping mechanism for dealing with the pressures of modern life. Participants acknowledged that academic demands, social expectations, and heavy use of digital media often cause stress and anxiety. In such situations, religious practices are seen as a space for reflection that helps them calm down and regain emotional balance.

One participant explained:

“When I feel overwhelmed by work or personal problems, I usually try to draw closer to God through prayer. Afterward, my mind feels calmer and I can see the problems more clearly.”

Another participant added:

“For me, prayer is like a place to return to when I’m mentally exhausted. From there, I feel stronger to face my problems.”

A different participant shared:

“When I pray, I feel like I’m pouring out all the problems I’ve been holding inside—from my family and others. Afterward, the burden I’ve been feeling seems to lift.”

Findings show that formal spirituality serves as a source of psychological strength that helps Generation Z cope with life’s pressures.

3. A Personal and Reflective Approach to Religious Practice

Interview results show that formal spiritual practices are not performed merely as ritual obligations, but also as personal and reflective religious experiences. Participants view worship as a means of drawing closer to God while gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of life.

Participant:

“I practice my faith not only out of a sense of duty, but also out of a personal need. Through this, I feel closer to God and have a deeper understanding of the meaning of my life.”

Another participant added:

“When I practice my faith, the urge often comes from within. I do so not because of pressure from others, but because of my own desire.”

That means the participants’ religious experiences were more reflective and personal.

4. Informal Spiritual Experiences in Finding Meaning in Life

In additions to formal spiritual practices, participants also reported having informal spiritual experiences that brought them inner peace. These experiences included self-reflection, spending time alone in contemplation, and feeling a sense of closeness to God while in nature or in contemplative settings.

One participant shared:

“In addition to worship, I sometimes spend time alone and reflect to gather my thoughts when I’m feeling emotionally low.”

Another participant also explained:

“Sometimes I feel a sense of peace when visiting natural attractions and witnessing the beauty of God’s creation. At those moments, I feel a sense of calm within myself.”

Findings show that informal spiritual experiences are not separate from formal religious

practices, but are viewed as complementary experiences in building meaning in life and inner peace.

5. The Role of Digital Media in Promoting Religious Understanding

The study's findings also show that digital media plays a role in shaping Generation Z's religious experiences. Participants reported frequently accessing religious content through social media, such as sermons, religious quotes, and online discussions.

One participant explained:

"I often watch lectures or religious study sessions on social media because they're more accessible. Still, I feel that attending a session in person provides a deeper understanding."

Another participant added:

"Social media helps me gain religious insights easily, but learning directly from a teacher makes my understanding clearer."

This finding suggests that digital media is viewed as a supplementary tool for deepening religious understanding, rather than as a substitute for formal religious practices.

DISCUSSION

Research results show that the transformation of Generation Z's religiosity in the context of modernity does not lead to a weakening of formal religion, but rather to a shift toward a more reflective, personal, and adaptive way of experiencing faith in response to the dynamics of digital life.

1. Formal Spirituality as an Adaptive Mechanism in Modernity

Research findings indicate that formal spirituality continues to serve as the primary foundation for fostering inner peace among Generation Z. In the context of modernity—characterized by the rapid flow of information, social competition, and academic pressure—formal religious practices such as prayer, fasting, and religious study are not abandoned but rather serve as a means of maintaining psychological stability and life direction.

This shows that the transformation of Generation Z's religiosity does not signify a move away from formal religion, but rather indicates a process of adaptation in how individuals interpret and experience religious practices. Formal spiritual practices serve as a psychological anchor that helps individuals maintain emotional balance amid the dynamics of modernity. This finding is also compatible with Kenneth I. Pargament's theory of Religious Coping, "Religious coping involves the use of religious beliefs or behaviors to facilitate problem-solving to prevent or alleviate the negative emotional consequences of stressful life circumstances." (Pargament,

1997) which explains that religion serves as a coping mechanism for dealing with life's stresses.

From this perspective, the participants' formal spiritual practices can be understood as a form of positive religious coping—that is, the use of religious beliefs and practices to find meaning, spiritual control, and closeness to God in the face of life's pressures. No indications of negative religious coping, such as spiritual conflict or feelings of being abandoned by God, were found. On the opposite, religious practices actually strengthen the transcendental relationship as a psychological resource. Thus, formal spirituality in this study functions not only as a ritual obligation but also as an adaptive mechanism that helps Generation Z cope with the complexities of modern life.

2. Formal Spirituality as a Means of Emotional Regulation and Psychological Resilience

The research results also show that formal spirituality plays a crucial role in helping Generation Z cope with the pressures of modern life. Academic demands, social expectations, and intense exposure to digital media create various forms of psychological stress. In such situations, religious practices serve as a space for reflection, allowing individuals to calm themselves and reorganize their emotions. This analysis indicates that formal spirituality functions as a means of emotional regulation and the development of psychological resilience. Religious practices allow individuals to place life's problems within a broader and more transcendental perspective.

From Pargament's perspective on religious coping, religious practices serve as psychological resources that help individuals make more meaningful sense of their life experiences. Therefore, formal spirituality not only serves a normative function in religious life but also plays a psychological and existential role in maintaining an individual's life balance. These findings indicate that the transformation of Generation Z's religiosity does not diminish religion's function as a source of inner peace, but rather strengthens its role as an adaptation strategy against the pressures of modernity.

3. The Transformation of Religiosity Toward an Intrinsic Orientation

The research results also indicate that the participants' religiosity is more personal and reflective in nature. Religious practices are not carried out merely as social symbols or normative obligations, but are experienced as a spiritual need that gives meaning to life.

This Phenomena can be analyzed using Gordon Allport's theory of religious orientation, which distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. "Perhaps the briefest way to characterize the two poles of subjective religion is to say that the extrinsically motivated

person uses his religion, whereas the intrinsically motivated lives his religion.” (Allport & Ross, 1967).

Intrinsic religiosity view religion as the purpose of life itself, whereas extrinsic religiosity treats religion as a means to achieve specific social or psychological goals. Based on the participants' accounts, the religiosity that emerged aligns more closely with an intrinsic orientation, as religion is seen as a source of existential meaning and inner peace. The transformation of Generation Z's religiosity cannot be understood as a process of secularization, but rather as a shift toward a more internalized form of religiosity. An individual's religious maturity plays a crucial role in the process of internalizing spiritual values, so that religious practices are not merely performed as ritual obligations, but also serve as a source of meaning and life orientation. Therefore, Generation Z in this study does not abandon formal spiritual practices, but rather experiences them in a more personal and reflective capacity.

4. The Integration of Formal Spirituality and Informal Spiritual Experiences

The research results also show that Generation Z's spiritual experiences are not limited to formal ritual practices but also include reflective experiences such as contemplation, self-reflection, and spiritual experiences in nature. This phenomenon can be analyzed using Ellison's concept of Spiritual Well-Being, which states that spiritual well-being consists of two main dimensions: In the theory of Spiritual Well-Being proposed by (Ellison, 1983), Spiritual well-being consists of two dimensions: religious well-being (an individual's relationship with their God) and existential well-being (the meaning of life and existential satisfaction).

This study, formal spiritual practices contribute to the dimension of religious well-being by strengthening the relationship with God. Meanwhile, non-formal spiritual experiences contribute to the dimension of existential well-being through reflection on the meaning of life and self-awareness. Interestingly, participants do not perceive these two dimensions as separate. Instead, they are viewed as complementary spiritual experiences. This indicates that the transformation of Generation Z's religiosity is integrative, where formal practices remain the primary foundation, while non-formal experiences enrich the depth of spiritual meaning.

5. Digitalization as a Medium for the Transformation of Religiosity

In this study, digitalization does not emerge as a threat to religiosity, but rather as a medium that broadens access to religious knowledge. Generation Z uses social media to obtain religious information, yet continues to regard formal religious studies as the primary source of reference. This phenomenon indicates that Generation Z's transformation of religiosity occurs through a process of negotiation between tradition and technology. Digital media serves as an

additional tool for broadening religious horizons, but it does not replace formal spiritual practices.

From Pargament's perspective on religious coping, digital access to religious resources can be understood as an expansion of religious coping resources. Meanwhile, within Allport's framework of religious orientation, a selective attitude toward digital religious content indicates a more mature internalization of religious values. Thus, digitalization serves as an adaptive instrument in the process of transforming Generation Z's religiosity. Formal spirituality remains the primary foundation in shaping spiritual well-being, while digital media functions as a facilitator of a more flexible and contextual understanding of religion.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the transformation of Generation Z's religiosity does not lead to a weakening of formal religion, but rather to a shift toward a more reflective, personal, and integrative way of experiencing faith. Formal spirituality remains the primary foundation for building spiritual well-being, while non-formal spiritual experiences and digital media serve as supporting elements in enriching the religious experiences of the younger generation. Thus, the transformation of Generation Z's religiosity can be understood as a process of religious adaptation in the face of digital modernity, in which formal religious practices are maintained but interpreted in a more personal and contextual manner.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that formal spirituality continues to play a significant role in shaping the spiritual well-being of Generation Z amidst the dynamics of modernity and digital culture. Formal religious practices such as prayer, fasting, and participation in religious study sessions are still understood as sources of inner peace, life direction, and psychological stability. The religiosity developing among Generation Z in this study tends to be intrinsic, where religious practices are experienced reflectively and personally as a source of life's meaning. Non-formal spiritual experiences, like self-reflection and meditation, also enrich religious experiences by integrating the dimensions of a relationship with God and the search for life's meaning. In the context of this study, digital media serves as a supportive tool in broadening religious understanding without replacing the role of formal spirituality.

This study suggests that the next study should involve a broader range of participants with diverse social and cultural backgrounds to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics of religiosity among Generation Z. In addition, future research could employ different methodological approaches, such as quantitative or mixed-methods approaches, to strengthen

the findings regarding the relationship between formal spirituality and spiritual well-being among young people in the digital age.

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