



Critical Religious Literacy Skills Education for Mosque Youth to Counter Cyber Extremist Doctrine

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Abstract: The development of digital space has changed the way young people obtain and understand religious information, while simultaneously opening up opportunities for the emergence of extremist doctrines through rapidly and widely disseminated religious narratives. This study aims to analyze the digital religious information consumption patterns of young mosque residents, their vulnerability to cyber-extremist doctrines, the critical religious literacy skills needed, and strategies to strengthen youth capacity as part of digital community resilience. The study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, observations, documentation, and, where available, group discussions, and were then analyzed using coding, categorization, and thematic analysis. The results show that young mosque residents access religious information through a fast, diverse, and interactive digital environment, and do not rely entirely on formal religious authorities. Vulnerability to cyber extremism is related to limited information verification, fragmented religious understanding, peer group influence, information polarization, digital platform mechanisms, and exclusive identity narratives. The required critical religious literacy includes the ability to identify narratives, verify sources and authorities, understand context, compare perspectives, evaluate arguments, reflect, and respond responsibly to information. The research formulated a strengthening model through the stages of information access, narrative identification, verification, contextualization, evaluation, reflection, responsible response, and youth resilience. This model positions mosque youth not merely as objects of protection but as agents of digital community resilience. The research findings confirm that preventing cyber-extremism requires strengthening critical capacity, not simply increasing religious knowledge or restricting access to digital content.

Keywords: community resilience; critical religious literacy; cyber extremism; digital literacy; mosque youth.

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has transformed the way society acquires, studies, and discusses religious knowledge (Kholili et al., 2024). Religion is no longer learned solely through mosques, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), madrasas, religious study groups (*majlis ta'lim*), books, or face-to-face meetings with religious teachers, but also through various digital platforms that enable religious information to circulate quickly, concisely, and visually, across geographic boundaries (Rahman & Anwar, 2020). These changes indicate that religious spaces are undergoing digitalization that not only shifts lectures from physical to virtual settings but also changes how religious authority, identity, community, and practice are formed. Campbell (2013) explains that the relationship between religion and digital media is best understood as a reciprocal process, in which religious practices influence media use, while media also shape how religion is practiced and understood (H. A. Campbell, n.d.). In the Islamic context, Bunt (2009) shows that the internet has created various cyber-Islamic environments that enable the exchange of knowledge, the formation of communities, and the negotiation of religious authority to take place outside of conventional religious institutions (Bunt, 2009).

The Indonesian context demonstrates that these changes are occurring within a vast digital environment. A survey by the Indonesian Association of Indonesian Internet Users (APJII) indicates that the number of Indonesian internet users will reach approximately 221.56 million by 2024, with a penetration rate of 79.5 percent, with Gen Z representing the largest proportion of users. This data is important not only because it demonstrates the large number of internet users, but also because it demonstrates that the younger generation occupies a strategic position in the changing information ecology. By early 2025, Indonesia also had approximately 212 million internet users and 143 million social media user identities, making social media a key infrastructure for public interaction and information consumption. In this environment, young people are not only consumers of religious information but also participants in the processes of producing, distributing, commenting on, re-disseminating and constructing meaning from religious messages (Admin, 2024).

These changes present both opportunities and vulnerabilities. On the one hand, digital media expands access to religious studies, bringing young people into contact with diverse religious scholars and intellectual traditions, and enabling flexible religious learning. On the other hand, the abundance of information is not always accompanied by an increased ability to assess its quality. Religious content circulating through social media often comes in short clips that prioritize visual appeal, speed of consumption, and user engagement. As a result, the complexity of religious issues can be reduced to brief statements lacking historical, methodological, and argumentative context. Studies on religious digital literacy among students also indicate that access to digital religious content can outpace students' ability to verify and critically evaluate it (Rosyad et al., 2021).

The problem lies not in the use of digital media itself, but rather in the imbalance between the ability to access information and the ability to understand and evaluate it. Young people with extensive access to religious content may not be able to distinguish well-founded religious arguments from simplistic, manipulative, exclusive, or provocative narratives. Therefore, the transformation of digital religious spaces needs to be accompanied by strengthening critical capacity. Without such capacity, information disclosure can transform into exposure to diverse narratives without adequate epistemic tools to assess their validity (Huriani & Rahman, 2026).

One of the challenges emerging from the changing digital religious space is the proliferation of extremist narratives through online communication networks. In this study, the term cyber-extremism refers to the spread and amplification of extreme ideas through digital infrastructure, including social media, video-sharing platforms, online forums, and digital communication networks. The focus is not on the assumption that all violent religious content constitutes extremism, but rather on the process by which religious messages are used to construct exclusivism, delegitimize other groups, justify intolerance, or, in some form, justify violence (Rahman, 2023).

The digital space has characteristics that make the spread of such narratives more complex. Messages can be produced cheaply, disseminated quickly, packaged in attractive formats, and reproduced by users without having to go through filtering mechanisms such as those found in religious educational institutions. Conway (2017) emphasizes that the relationship between the internet and violent extremism cannot be understood simply as a causal relationship. The internet can function as a space for communication, facilitation, mobilization, propaganda dissemination, and network formation, while the process of radicalization itself involves various social and individual factors (Conway, 2017). Thus, the presence of extreme content in the digital space does not automatically result in extremism, but rather creates a communication environment that can be exploited to strengthen this process.

The characteristics of narratives are important because extremist doctrines do not always manifest in propaganda that openly calls for violence. Narratives can emerge through claims of a single truth, the formation of opposition between "us" and "them" groups, the delegitimization of different authorities, the removal of context in the use of religious texts, and the simplification of complex issues into black-and-white moral issues. Kadivar (2017), in his study of Daesh, demonstrated that social media plays a crucial role in the dissemination of propaganda and the communication process related to radicalization, although the internet's role still needs to be positioned as part of a broader process

(Kadivar, 2017). Recent studies also indicate that extremist actors can exploit platform characteristics, including algorithmic recommendations, meme culture, symbols, and message obfuscation techniques, to expand the reach of propaganda.

The issue is further complicated by the fact that platform algorithms operate not primarily based on the depth of religious knowledge, but rather on patterns of user interaction and engagement. Content that garners high attention is more likely to be recommended again, leading users to repeatedly encounter similar narratives. Research on young people in Islamic schools in Jakarta suggests a link between algorithmic social media exposure and religious polarization, with platform recommendations potentially strengthening echo chambers and shifting some religious authority from teachers to digital figures. Thus, the issue of cyberextremism is not only related to the content of messages, but also to the digital architecture that determines how messages are discovered, prioritized, and consumed.

Therefore, strategies to counter cyber extremism cannot simply involve removing content or prohibiting access to certain information. Lakomy (2022) points out that countering violent extremism strategies based on moderation and content control face various limitations because extremist propaganda can continuously adapt to changes in technology and platform mechanisms (Lakomy, 2023). These challenges highlight the need for strategies that strengthen user capacity. Young people need to be able to recognize narrative patterns, verify sources, understand context, and evaluate arguments before accepting or sharing religious content.

In this context, religious literacy is not simply understood as the ability to know terms, doctrines, or basic information about religion. Religious literacy requires the ability to understand how religion is produced, interpreted, debated, and practiced in specific social contexts. Dinham and Shaw (2017) point out that religious literacy relates to the ability to understand religion and beliefs in a more complex way, including how this knowledge is used in social life (Dinham & Shaw, 2017). Aldridge (2020) even emphasizes that literacy should not only enable someone to enter and understand a domain of knowledge, but also enable them to ask critical questions about how that domain is defined and shaped (Hannam et al., 2020).

Based on this, this study uses the concept of critical religious literacy to refer to the ability of young people to read religious information reflectively, contextually, and evaluatively. This literacy includes at least the ability to identify sources, understand the context of texts and messages, examine the authority and credibility of the transmitter, compare perspectives, recognize narrative manipulation, evaluate arguments, and consider the social consequences of a religious understanding. With this framework, literacy does not stop at the question "what is the content of the religious message," but moves on to questions "who conveys it, where does it come from, in what context does the message appear, how arguments are constructed, what perspectives are omitted, and what are the consequences if the message is accepted without examination."

This critical dimension is crucial in the digital space because religious authority is no longer solely determined by the depth of knowledge but can also be shaped by popularity, number of followers, content production capabilities, and level of user engagement. Bunt (2009) has shown that the digital Islamic environment expands access to various sources and religious authorities beyond traditional structures. This development enriches learning spaces, but also demands that users have the ability to distinguish popularity from scholarly authority (Bunt, 2009). In the Indonesian context, recent research on digital religious literacy also demonstrates the importance of credible sources and contextualized religious understanding in helping the younger generation evaluate and reject radical narratives (Prasetia, 2025).

Thus, critical religious literacy is not intended to make young people skeptical of religion, but rather to foster a more responsible relationship between faith, knowledge, and reason. A critical attitude is not synonymous with a rejection of religious authority. Rather, it enables young people to understand why an opinion has a certain basis, how differing interpretations are formed, and when a message has been simplified or manipulated. In the context of preventing cyberextremism, this ability represents a form of epistemic resilience, namely the ability to resist easily accepting religious claims simply because they are presented in religious language, symbols of piety, or digital popularity.

The role of mosque youth is crucial because they stand at the intersection of religious spaces, social life, and digital culture. Mosque youth are not only recipients of religious education but also have the capacity to act as bridges between the religious knowledge developing within the mosque community and the information dynamics occurring in the digital space. Therefore, mosque youth need to be positioned not simply as a group to be protected from exposure to extremism, but as actors with the capacity to build community resilience.

The concept of resilience in this context does not imply the ability to avoid all forms of extreme content, as this is difficult to achieve in an open digital ecosystem. Resilience is better understood as the ability to recognize risks, maintain a reflective religious orientation, verify information before believing it, discuss doubts with credible sources, and generate responses that do not reinforce polarization. This approach shifts the strategy from passive protection to active capacity building.

Mosque youth possess the social capital to support this process. Interactions between youth, relationships with mosque administrators, religious teachers, educational institutions, and local communities can provide a space for open discussion of digital religious issues. Furthermore, youth can also produce alternative content that presents contextual, inclusive, and credible religious messages. Studies of Indonesian youth communities show that social media can be used not only as a platform for disseminating information but also as a medium for counter-radicalization initiatives and the production of alternative narratives.

Thus, mosques can be understood as a social foundation for building digital resilience. This function does not mean that mosques should become centers for monitoring youth's digital activities. Instead, mosques can provide learning spaces that allow youth to bring issues they encounter on social media into forums for dialogue, clarification, and religious learning. This position is crucial because preventing extremism will be more sustainable if youth have a social space to ask questions and discuss, rather than simply accept prohibitions.

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between digital media, religious literacy, radicalism, and religious moderation. Studies on digital religion have shown that media have transformed the structures of religious authority and communities (Bunt, 2009; H. Campbell, 2013). Research on digital extremism suggests that social media can be a vehicle for propaganda, mobilization, and network formation, although its influence on radicalization is not unique (Conway, 2017; Kadivar, 2017). Meanwhile, research on digital religious literacy in Indonesia has begun to demonstrate the importance of critical thinking, source verification, and contextual understanding in addressing religious narratives on social media.

However, there is still room for development at the intersection of these three fields. Some studies define digital literacy as the technical ability to access and verify information, while religious literacy studies emphasize religious knowledge and understanding. On the other hand, studies of cyberextremism tend to position users as targets of exposure or radicalization. The relationship between critical religious literacy, digital skills, and the resilience of mosque youth has not been widely formulated within an integrative educational framework. Yet, youth need more than just knowledge about the dangers of extremism. They need skills to understand how narratives are constructed, how sources work, how algorithms influence information exposure, and how to respond to problematic content without amplifying its spread.

This gap becomes increasingly important as digital developments demonstrate that extremism can adapt to new forms of communication. Recent research on extremist propaganda on TikTok, for example, shows that messages can be disguised through popular culture, symbols, memes, and communication techniques designed to evade platform moderation (Karo et al., 2026). This situation suggests that youth resilience cannot be built simply by recognizing specific words or symbols. What is needed are analytical skills that can be applied to various forms and changing narratives.

Based on these issues, this study aims to analyze the need for critical religious literacy for mosque youth in addressing the development of extremist doctrines in cyberspace. Specifically, the research aims to understand the patterns and challenges of digital religious information consumption, identify

forms of vulnerability to cyber extremist narratives, formulate necessary critical religious literacy skills, and analyze the role of mosque youth as actors in building digital community resilience.

This research further focuses on formulating an educational framework that connects the ability to understand religious sources with digital skills, information verification, contextualization, narrative evaluation, and responsible response. Thus, the ultimate goal is not simply to produce youth who are more knowledgeable about religious information, but rather to produce youth who are able to read, examine, assess, and respond to religious information critically and ethically. This focus positions critical religious literacy as an instrument for capacity building, while mosque youth are positioned as key actors in building community resilience against cyber extremist doctrines. Based on this framework, this research seeks to develop an educational model that integrates religious literacy, digital literacy, critical reasoning, and community resilience in the face of changing religious ecologies in cyberspace.

2. Research Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to understand the experiences of mosque youth in accessing, understanding, evaluating, and responding to religious information in the digital space. A qualitative approach allows the research to explore the experiences and meanings of the subjects within their social context, while case studies are used to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon in a real-life context (Cheryl N. Poth, n.d.; Yin, 2018). Where there is direct involvement of the researcher in educational activities or discussions with youth, participatory elements are used to support understanding the learning process and participant responses.

The research focuses on the youth community environment of the mosque as a social space where religious activities and digital interactions take place. The primary subjects are youth in the mosque who are active in community activities and use digital media as a source of religious information. Informants were selected purposively based on the relevance of their experiences to the research focus. To broaden perspectives, the research could also involve mosque administrators, youth mentors, religious teachers (ustaz or ustazah), and other parties involved in religious education and digital literacy. Selecting informants based on relevance to the phenomenon being studied is an important characteristic of qualitative research (Cheryl N. Poth, n.d.).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, documentation, and focus group discussions (FGDs) where available. Interviews were used to explore youth experiences in accessing religious information, selecting sources, verifying information, understanding context, and responding to provocative or extreme content. Observations were conducted on youth activities at mosques, particularly religious activities, discussions, and educational processes related to the use of digital information. Documentation included educational materials and religious content relevant to the research focus. FGDs, when conducted, were used to observe the process of exchanging views and forming collective understandings. The use of multiple data sources enabled the case study to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon (Yin, 2018).

The research focused on six main aspects, namely: (1) patterns of digital religious information consumption, including sources, platforms, and types of content accessed; (2) the ability to verify information, especially checking sources, credibility, and comparing information; (3) understanding the religious context so that texts and messages are not understood in a fragmented manner; (4) the ability to recognize the characteristics of extreme narratives, such as exclusivism, delegitimization of other groups, intolerance, text manipulation, and justification of violence; (5) responses to provocative content, including accepting, sharing, clarifying, ignoring, or reporting it; and (6) the need for critical religious literacy skills that young people need to deal with digital information reflectively and responsibly.

Data were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, coding, categorization, thematic analysis, and interpretation. Data relevant to the research focus were first sorted and coded based on themes such as information consumption, source verification, religious context, extreme narratives, digital responses, and critical literacy needs. These codes were then grouped into categories and themes

to identify patterns and relationships between findings. Thematic analysis was used because it allows researchers to systematically and flexibly identify and interpret patterns of meaning in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interpretations were then linked to the frameworks of critical religious literacy, digital literacy, and resilience against cyber extremism. Data validity was strengthened through triangulation of sources and techniques by comparing information from youth, supporting informants, interviews, observations, documentation, and focus group discussions (FGDs) where available (Yin, 2018).

3. Research Results

Digital Religious Consumption Patterns of Mosque Youth

Changes in the digital religious space have made social media a crucial platform for young mosque attendees to acquire religious knowledge. These consumption patterns demonstrate that religious learning no longer occurs linearly through the teacher-student relationship in the study room, but rather through a rapid, repetitive, visual, and highly personalized flow of information. Young people can access lectures, study excerpts, interpretations, religious advice, discussions of Islamic jurisprudence, and Islamic motivational content across various platforms without first attending a specific religious educational institution. Chair et al. (2024) demonstrate that social media has become a new platform for Indonesian youth to learn about religion through Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram (Chair et al., 2024). This situation demonstrates the expansion of access to religious knowledge as well as changes in how religious authority is perceived and negotiated by the younger generation.

In the context of young mosque goers, consuming digital religious information cannot be understood simply as an activity of seeking religious knowledge. This activity is also part of the formation of identity, religious preferences, and social orientation. Young people tend not only to seek answers to normative questions but also to seek out figures, communities, and communication styles that are perceived as close to their experiences. Therefore, the appeal of content is often determined not only by the depth of religious argumentation but also by the way the message is packaged, the language used, the communicator's appearance, emotional closeness, and the content's ability to build a sense of connection with the audience. Saputra's (2021) study shows that the development of social media has contributed to the fragmentation of religious authority among young Indonesian Muslims because *da'wah* can be accessed through figures and communities that previously existed outside the channels of conventional religious authority (Saputra, 2021).

This pattern demonstrates a significant shift from institution-based authority to one shaped in part by digital visibility. A religious messenger can garner significant attention not solely because of their scholarly background, but also because of their ability to construct engaging, consistent, and relevant communication within digital culture. In such situations, the number of followers, views, comments, and frequency of appearance on timelines can indirectly serve as indicators of popularity, which is then perceived as legitimacy. This shift requires a clear distinction between popularity and scholarly authority. Popularity indicates an account's ability to garner attention, while religious authority relates to scholarly capacity, argumentation, integrity, and the context in which knowledge is transmitted. Research on urban Muslim youth suggests that this fragmentation of authority allows young people to quickly acquire religious insights without always having to interact directly with religious scholars or educational institutions.

The form of content consumed also influences how religious knowledge is understood. Digital content tends to prioritize messages that can be understood quickly, have a straightforward narrative structure, and are able to maintain users' attention. In the context of digital *da'wah*, these characteristics encourage the compression of religious messages. Issues that traditionally require lengthy explanations can be packaged in video clips or short statements. Recent developments in Indonesia's digital *da'wah* culture demonstrate that the shift from physical stages to feeds represents not only a change in media, but also a shift in the performative conditions for conveying piety and religious knowledge.

Thus, the digital religious consumption patterns of mosque youth demonstrate two concurrent trends. First, there is a democratization of access to religious knowledge, as youth can quickly obtain references from various sources. Second, there is a fragmentation of knowledge, as information is received through fragmented messages that do not always fit within a coherent scientific framework. This fragmentation does not automatically result in erroneous religious understanding, but rather increases the need for the ability to connect various pieces of information to broader sources, contexts, and arguments.

The next issue relates to the basis for young people's choice of trustworthy information. In the digital ecosystem, content choices can be influenced by emotional closeness to the communicator, the message's compatibility with prior beliefs, friend recommendations, the number of interactions, or the frequency with which the content appears on the timeline. At this point, the information consumption process can shift from active search to consumption increasingly guided by recommendation systems. Research by Fitriyanti and Nur (2026) on young people at Islamic schools in Jakarta showed that algorithmic exposure to social media is associated with the formation of echo chambers and religious polarization, while recommendation mechanisms can enhance exposure to content that aligns with users' behavioral patterns (Fitriyanti & Nur, 2026).

This situation demonstrates that young people do not always consciously choose all the information they consume. Some information is selected by the system based on their previous interaction, search, viewing, and engagement history. As a result, the digital religious experience becomes increasingly personalized and selective. Young people who frequently interact with certain types of content are likely to encounter more content with similar characteristics. This is where critical literacy skills become crucial. The key issue is not whether young people use social media to learn about religion, but rather whether they recognize that the information presented to them is the result of an interaction between personal choices and platform mechanisms.

These consumption patterns ultimately demonstrate that mosque youth exist within a knowledge ecosystem far more complex than conventional models of religious learning. They can interact with multiple sources simultaneously, compare various figures, join different communities, and construct understanding through a combination of offline and online experiences. Therefore, mosque youth are not appropriately positioned as mere recipients of doctrine. They are active users who select, interpret, share, and, in many cases, reproduce religious messages. The question is whether this process occurs with adequate evaluative capacity or instead follows the logic of popularity, emotional connection, and algorithmic recommendations.

Youth Vulnerability to Cyber Extremism Doctrine

Youth vulnerability to cyber extremism doctrine cannot be explained solely by the intensity of social media use. High media use does not automatically result in extremism. Vulnerability is better understood as the result of the intersection of individual characteristics, the quality of religious knowledge, the social environment, media consumption patterns, platform mechanisms, and the appeal of a narrative. Therefore, cyber extremism needs to be understood as an ecological issue, not simply a matter of content. Youth can encounter extremist narratives through very ordinary processes, such as searching for religious information, following certain figures, receiving video recommendations, joining chat groups, or interacting with content that shares similar themes.

One significant vulnerability is the low ability to verify information. When religious information is accepted based on who delivers it or its popularity, the process of verifying sources and arguments becomes less important. This situation becomes problematic when the content uses religious symbols, quotations from verses or hadiths, Arabic, and a communication style that conveys an authoritative impression. Religious appearances can create symbolic legitimacy, leading users to assume a message is true before examining its source and context. In such circumstances, the literacy issue is not simply the ability to find information, but the ability to question how information attains its status as trusted knowledge.

The second vulnerability is fragmented religious understanding. Short content allows young people to quickly acquire chunks of information, but it doesn't always provide adequate context. A verse, hadith, scholarly opinion, or historical event can be separated from its background and scholarly debate. When these fragments are then used to explain complex social issues, there's a risk of oversimplified understanding. Fragmented understanding becomes even more problematic when users only acquire one perspective and don't develop the habit of comparing it with other interpretations or sources.

The third vulnerability relates to the formation of echo chambers. Echo chambers occur when users interact more with information that reinforces their existing views and are less exposed to divergent perspectives (Zhang, 2025). In a religious context, this mechanism can reinforce the belief that only one interpretation is correct and that other perspectives are not worthy of consideration. Research on young Indonesian Muslims suggests that behavior-based recommendation systems can contribute to the formation of a homogenous information space and narrow the diversity of perspectives users receive (Malintang et al., 2026). However, algorithms should not be viewed as the sole cause. Recommendation systems operate through the relationship between platform design and user behavior. When users consistently like, watch, share, or follow certain content, the system receives signals that similar content is more likely to be retained in the user experience. Thus, a reciprocal relationship forms between user preferences and platform personalization. Jamil and Khusairi's (2025) study of TikTok in Indonesia showed that content related to religious conflict received high engagement rates, while expressions of negative emotions were also associated with increased content dissemination (Jamil & Khusairi, 2025). This suggests that user attention itself is part of the mechanism that makes certain narratives more visible.

Another vulnerability arises from peer group influence. For young people, social acceptance is a crucial part of identity formation. Information shared by friends, communities, or figures considered close can be more credible than sources with whom the user has no social connection. In the digital space, these relationships can be formed through comments, chat groups, live streaming, online religious study communities, and regular interactions with religious figures. Research on WhatsApp use within Muslim youth networks shows that trust and authority can be built through horizontal interactions, consistent communication, and emotional participation in the community, not just through formal credentials (2025).

Another equally important aspect is the appeal of identity narratives. Extremist doctrines don't always offer complex religious arguments. In many cases, their appeal lies in their ability to offer a clear sense of identity, a sense of belonging, moral certainty, and a clear division of the world into easily understood categories. The "us" and "them" narrative, for example, can provide a clear identity boundary for someone seeking social and religious standing. Research on youth radicalization shows that the search for identity, social alienation, and grievances about social conditions can be factors exploited by extremist actors to build relationships with potential sympathizers (Saeed, 2021). Therefore, vulnerability to cyberextremism cannot be reduced to a lack of religious knowledge. Even young people with religious knowledge can still be vulnerable if that knowledge is consumed in a fragmented, unverified manner, and placed in a digital environment that reinforces information homogeneity. Conversely, the ability to question sources, compare perspectives, understand context, recognize manipulation techniques, and understand how algorithms work can strengthen young people's position as more reflective users.

These findings point to the important understanding that cyberextremism operates not only through what content says, but also through how it is discovered, believed, repeated, shared, and linked to user identities. Therefore, the vulnerability of mosque youth needs to be understood across three interrelated layers. The first layer is epistemic, namely the ability to distinguish credible knowledge from manipulative claims. The second layer is sociotechnical, namely the ability to understand the influence of algorithms, personalization, echo chambers, and platform engagement mechanisms. The third layer is socio-identity, namely the ability to understand how the need for acceptance, identity, solidarity, and belonging can be exploited to shape extremist narratives.

Within this framework, mosque youth should not be viewed as inherently vulnerable to extremism. Vulnerability is a condition that can vary with the information environment, educational quality, social relationships, reflective skills, and the community's capacity to provide a space for clarification. This understanding is crucial because it shifts the direction of interventions from simply limiting access to content to strengthening youth's ability to critically read the information ecosystem. It is at this point that the need for critical religious literacy becomes increasingly clear, as the problem facing youth is not simply the abundance of religious information, but also the ability to determine which information is trustworthy, to understand its context and to respond responsibly.

Characteristics of Religious Narratives that Lead to Extremism

The discussion on the consumption of digital religious information indicates that young people's ability to confront cyber extremism is not solely built through knowledge of the terms "radical" or "extreme." A more fundamental issue is the ability to recognize how a narrative is constructed to gain legitimacy, shape identity, create group boundaries, and influence audiences' views of religious and social issues. Extremist narratives can appear in forms that are not always explicit. They can use seemingly normative religious language, excerpts from verses or hadiths, symbols of piety, humor, memes, or statements that at first glance appear to be social criticism. Therefore, recognizing extremism requires the ability to read the structure of a message, not simply matching specific words or symbols.

The first characteristic is the claim of absolute truth. This type of narrative tends to present one understanding as the only valid truth and closes off the possibility of differing interpretations. Differences of opinion, traditionally part of the dynamics of religious thought, can be constructed as deviations, weaknesses in faith, or forms of betrayal of religion. This pattern of absolutism is important because it eliminates the space for dialogue and makes the process of correcting an understanding increasingly difficult. Research into digital manifestations of extremism shows that absolutist thinking can be intertwined with the division of the world into opposing moral categories, where one's own group is positioned as representing the truth while others are positioned as threats.

The second characteristic is the delegitimization of other groups. Extreme narratives don't simply say "my opinion is right," but can go further, asserting that dissenting parties lack legitimacy to speak, and are even untrustworthy as members of a religious community. Delegitimization can be directed at other religious groups, groups within the same religion, institutions, religious scholars, or specific social groups. In the digital space, this pattern can develop through the repetition of labels, generalizations, stereotypes, and simplifications of identities. Research on dehumanization in digital communication shows that the process of denigrating outgroups doesn't always manifest through explicitly abusive terms. Dehumanization can form cumulatively through a series of narratives, depictions of other groups as threats, and the formation of repeated negative associations (Obaid, 1999).

The third characteristic is the simplification of religious issues. Extremist narratives tend to turn issues with historical, social, political, and theological dimensions into black-and-white questions. Questions that are actually open to multiple interpretations are then presented as if they have only two possibilities: right or wrong, faith or infidelity, defending religion or opposing it. This simplification is effective because it provides certainty and reduces complexity, but it also removes the context necessary for a proper understanding of the issue. Research on extreme online messages shows that extremist rhetoric tends to employ oppositional structures and strong moral themes, so that the world is understood through opposing categories (Helland, 2005).

The fourth characteristic is the formation of an "us" and "them" dichotomy. Collective identity is constructed by asserting that one group is considered true, pure, or authentic and another group is considered deviant, threatening, or uncommitted to religion. This structure is persuasive because it offers a sense of belonging and a clear sense of identity. For young people developing their social and religious identities, this narrative can convey the impression that belonging to a particular group represents courage, loyalty, or a defense of religion. Research on extremist discourse among young people suggests that youth identity can be deliberately constructed through notions of loyalty, "true believers," and role models glorified in extremist narratives (Bingham & Conner, 2010).

The fifth characteristic is the glorification of conflict and violence. In extremist narratives, conflict can be presented not as a problem to be resolved through dialogue, but as an arena for proving loyalty and courage. Violence can be given moral or religious meaning, making aggressive actions appear legitimate. In some extremist propaganda, concepts of sacrifice, heroism, martyrdom, or group defense are used to transform violent acts into symbols of honor. Analysis of ISIS propaganda shows that enemy narratives, religious narratives, and emotional narratives work together to construct images of threat, group identity, and the legitimacy of the struggle.

The sixth characteristic is the manipulation of religious texts and authority. Quranic verses, hadith, scholarly opinions, or religious concepts can be quoted without context to support predetermined conclusions. The problem is not the use of religious texts, but rather the way they are truncated, removed from their context, and used to justify an agenda. In such situations, the ability of young people to question the original source, the context in which the verses were revealed, the quality of the hadith, methods of interpretation, and differences of scholarly opinion becomes crucial. Therefore, critical religious literacy needs to move beyond simply memorizing texts to understanding how they are interpreted and used in argumentation. Therefore, indicators of extreme narratives cannot be determined solely from a single word, symbol, or statement. Identification requires examining the overall pattern of argumentation, including how a group is portrayed, how authority is constructed, how conflicts are framed, how religious texts are used, and how audiences are guided to take a position. This approach is better suited to the nature of digital communication, which allows extreme messages to be disguised, truncated, repackaged, or conveyed through popular channels.

Critical Religious Literacy Skills Needed by Youth

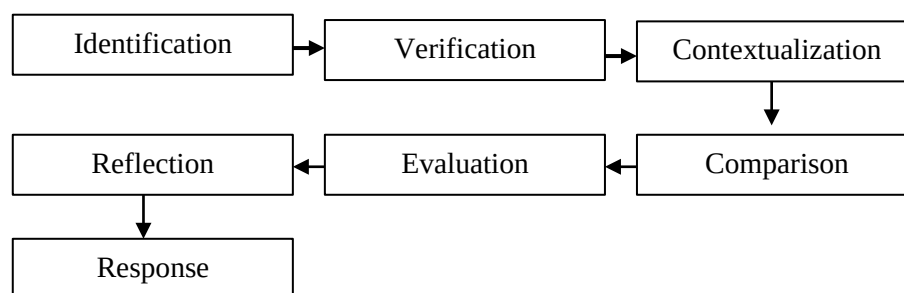
Based on these characteristics, the primary need for mosque youth is not simply additional religious knowledge, but rather the epistemic skills to understand why information is credible, questionable, or withheld. Critical religious literacy in this study is therefore formulated as a series of interconnected skills: Identification, Verification, Contextualization, Comparison, Evaluation, Reflection, and Response. This series demonstrates that critical literacy is a process, not a single skill. The first stage is identification. Youth need to be able to recognize the type of information they are encountering, who is delivering it, what the communication goal is, who the message is directed at, and how it is packaged. Identification does not mean immediately determining whether it is true or false, but rather mapping the object under examination. Youth need to learn to distinguish between personal opinions, religious interpretations, factual information, text quotations, news, propaganda, and persuasive content. This ability is important because users often receive messages before realizing they were designed to elicit a particular response.

The second stage is verification. Once the source is identified, the information needs to be checked by tracing the original source, assessing the credibility of the transmitter, assessing the references used, and comparing them with credible sources. Research on digital religious literacy shows that verification skills are crucial in dealing with religious information on social media. A study of madrasah students revealed a gap between the ability to access and understand content and the ability to critically evaluate and verify it (Ansori et al., 2026). The third stage is contextualization. Religious information cannot be adequately understood if the text is separated from its context. Young people need to question the historical, social, scientific, and purposeful context of a statement. At this stage, the crucial question is not simply "what the text says" but "in what context is the text used and how scholars understand it." Contextualization skills can prevent the indiscriminate use of excerpts from verses or hadith to explain complex contemporary issues.

The fourth stage is comparison. Young people need to develop the habit of comparing information with other sources, scholars, perspectives, or interpretations. Comparison is not intended to equate all opinions, but rather to identify the areas of difference and the basis for each argument. A study of Islamic learning through the internet and social media among high school students in Indonesia showed that the use of digital sources can foster more open and critical learning when students use them to seek information and discuss it with other groups (Asror et al., 2024). The fifth stage is

evaluation. After examining the sources and context, young people need to assess the quality of the argument. Evaluation includes questions about the evidence used, logical consistency, the possibility of manipulation, overgeneralization, the use of emotion, and the social consequences of the message. Thus, evaluation asks not only whether the information is popular but also whether it is adequately grounded. Research on critical social media literacy in preventing extremism indicates that the ability to critically read media structures and persuasion strategies is a crucial skill for countering the misuse of social media by extremist actors (Akram-Lodhi, 2022).

The sixth stage is reflection. Young people need to evaluate not only the content of the information, but also their own response to it. Why does a piece of content feel so convincing? Is it because it's well-argued, because it aligns with existing beliefs, or because it evokes anger and fear? Reflection helps young people recognize personal biases and emotional influences in the information-receiving process. At this stage, critical religious literacy intersects with digital literacy, as users need to understand that their decisions are also influenced by the media environment and algorithmic mechanisms. The final stage is response. Literacy isn't complete when someone recognizes that information is problematic. Young people need to know what to do after encountering such content. Responses can include not sharing, seeking clarification, discussing it with credible sources, reporting the content, or producing more responsible alternative information. Thus, literacy results in ethical action, not just individual knowledge. This framework makes young people active users capable of managing information while considering the social impact of their digital activities. This sequence can be formulated as a process:



The strength of this framework lies in the shift in orientation from "determining whether content is true or false" to "understanding the processes that make a claim credible or questionable." Youth are not educated to accept decisions already made by educators, but are trained to construct justifiable reasons for making decisions.

Critical Religious Literacy Education Strategy for Mosque Youth

Strengthening these skills requires educational strategies that are practical and based on youth's digital experiences. Lectures on the dangers of radicalism are insufficient, as this method tends to position youth as recipients of information. A more appropriate strategy is case-based learning, where youth are directly exposed to examples of content and trained to decipher how the message works. This model allows critical religious literacy to develop through practice, not just through definition. The first strategy is religious content analysis. Youth can be presented with various forms of content, such as video clips of lectures, social media posts, memes, verse quotations, or religious statements. Participants are then asked to identify the source, purpose, target audience, main claims, emotional language, and the "us" versus "them" structure. This activity trains the identification stage and introduces the concept that religious content is a communication product with context and purpose.

The second strategy is source checking. Participants are trained to trace original sources, check references, compare information, and identify the credibility of the presenter. This exercise can be conducted through simple simulations, for example, where participants receive a religious claim from social media and are then asked to find relevant primary sources or academic references. This strategy is important because research on digital religious literacy shows that verification skills are still an aspect that needs strengthening (Asror et al., 2024). The third strategy is cross-perspective discussions and religious dialogue. Young people need to become accustomed to dealing with differing interpretations

without immediately categorizing them as threats. Discussion forums can present various religious perspectives while emphasizing the basis for each argument. The goal is not to force participants to accept all opinions, but rather to develop the ability to understand why differences arise and how these differences can be discussed ethically.

The fourth strategy is case studies and information verification simulations. Young people can be presented with cases that resemble real-life situations on social media and then asked to determine the steps they will take. Participants can be asked to explain their reasons for choosing to believe, reject, share, clarify, or report content. This process simultaneously utilizes the skills of identification, verification, contextualization, comparison, and evaluation. The fifth strategy is algorithm literacy. Young people need to understand that timelines are not completely neutral and that content recommendations are influenced by user interaction patterns. Algorithmic literacy education can be conducted through simple experiments comparing search results or recommendations based on different interaction patterns. Research on algorithmic awareness in young people demonstrates the importance of understanding how recommendation systems work so that users have awareness and agency over the information environment they encounter (Pinchevski & Peters, 2022).

The final strategy is the production of alternative content. Youth should not only be taught how to avoid problematic content but also be given the opportunity to produce informative, contextual, inclusive, and source-based religious content. Content production can take the form of short videos, infographics, podcasts, articles, or educational materials on social media. This strategy is crucial because the digital space is not only a place for consumption but also an arena for the production of meaning. The experience of counter-narrative programs among Indonesian youth shows that strategies for addressing extreme narratives require attention to how alternative narratives are developed and conveyed to young audiences (Thobani, 2017). Therefore, a critical religious literacy education strategy for youth in mosques should not be developed as a new indoctrination program that simply replaces one narrative with another. The orientation should be to build the capacity for thinking and acting. Youth are trained to read information critically, understand the religious context, examine sources, compare perspectives, recognize patterns of manipulation, understand the influence of algorithms, and produce responsible responses. This type of education makes mosques not only a place for transmitting religious knowledge, but also a learning space that helps youth develop epistemic skills and digital ethics to navigate the complexities of the contemporary religious space.

Mosque Youth as Agents of Resilience against Cyber Extremism

Discussions on cyber extremism often position youth primarily as a group that must be protected. This position is justified, as youth interact intensively with the digital environment and may encounter a variety of information, including intolerant and extreme narratives. However, if youth continue to be positioned solely as objects of protection, prevention strategies will tend to be defensive. Youth are viewed as those who must be kept away from harmful content, their behavior monitored, or educated about the dangers of extremism. Such an approach fails to fully capture the potential of youth as social actors capable of building a healthier digital environment. Therefore, this study proposes a shift in perspective from youth as targets of protection to youth as actors of community resilience.

In this context, the concept of resilience is not understood as an individual's ability to resist all external influences alone. Resilience is the capacity to cope with stress, process information, maintain value orientations, build supportive social relationships, and generate constructive responses when faced with situations that have the potential to disrupt shared life. Studies on resilience to extremism indicate that this capacity is related to various forms of social capital, including identity connectivity, cross-group relationships, and the ability to build networks that enable young people to gain support and alternative perspectives (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). Thus, resilience resides not only within the individual but is also shaped by the quality of the social relationships that surround them.

This perspective is crucial when applied to youth in mosques. Mosques are not simply venues for religious rituals, but also social spaces where young people build friendships, gain knowledge, engage in shared activities, and forge community identities. Research on youth in mosques in urban Bandung

shows that social media has become an integral part of youth identity and moral formation, while mosque-based activities can provide a space for developing moral literacy, self-control, and a network of values that support positive behavior (Kodir & Syafei, 2026). These findings demonstrate that the relationship between mosques and digital spaces need not be understood as contradictory. Instead, mosques can serve as a social foundation for building youth skills in navigating digital dynamics.

Within this framework, mosque youth can play a primary role as verifiers of religious information. This role does not mean every youth must become a religious expert, but rather, they must cultivate the habit of not automatically accepting and disseminating information. Youth can serve as the first layer of verification within the community by asking simple questions about the source of the information, the authority of the transmitter, the basis of the argument, the context in which the text is used, and the possibility of manipulation. When this habit becomes part of the community culture, the verification process no longer relies solely on a single religious figure. A collective mechanism is formed that treats religious information as something that needs to be understood before being disseminated.

The second role is as producers of alternative religious content. Young people are no longer simply consumers of information produced by others. They can use their digital skills to produce content that provides contextual, argumentative, and easy-to-understand religious explanations. This production can take the form of short videos, infographics, podcasts, popular articles, online discussions, or documentation of mosque activities. The orientation is not to create counter-propaganda, but rather to provide alternative information that can expand the space for dialogue and reduce the dominance of simplistic narratives. Research on youth involvement in the use of social media to counter violent extremism shows that media can also be used as a space for dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, and the development of narratives that support peace (Ati, 2025).

The third role is that of facilitator of dialogue and peer learning. Youth with critical religious literacy skills can help create spaces for discussion among their peers. This position is crucial because the process of receiving information often occurs through social relationships. Information shared by close friends or trusted communities can gain social legitimacy before being epistemically verified. Therefore, strengthening resilience cannot be achieved solely through vertical relationships between religious teachers and congregations. Horizontal relationships between youth are also needed, allowing for clarification, correction, and an open exchange of perspectives.

The fourth role is as a liaison between the mosque and the digital space. Youth can translate the values, knowledge, and activities of the mosque community into digital communication language that is appropriate for the young audience. Conversely, youth can also bring emerging issues in the digital space into learning forums at the mosque. This position makes youth a bridge between two often-separated spaces: the offline religious space and the digital space. Thus, issues arising on social media should not be allowed to fester without discussion within the community, while religious activities at the mosque are not limited to the physical space.

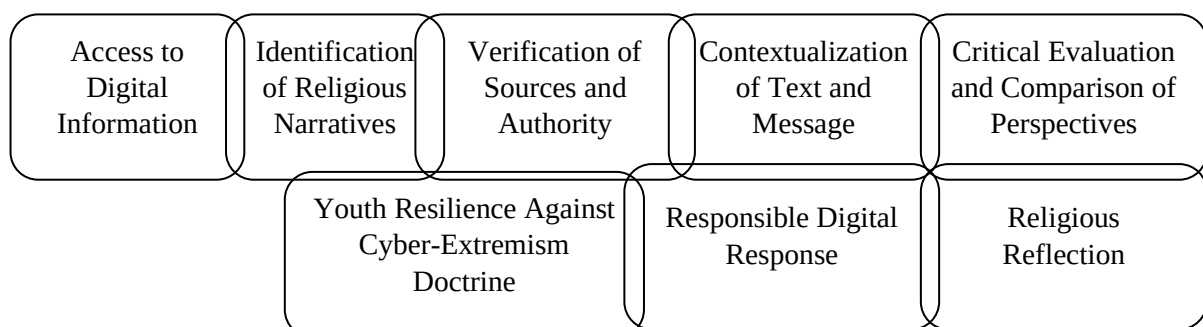
This shift in position has important consequences for educational design. If youth are considered actors of resilience, then education cannot be solely oriented toward prohibitions. Youth need to be given trust, space for participation, responsibility, and the opportunity to make decisions. Educational programs that simply say "don't believe this content" do not build skills that can be used when young people encounter new content that has not been discussed before. In contrast, programs that train young people to understand the process of vetting information produce skills that are more transferable to a variety of situations.

The community-based resilience model also demonstrates that primary strength lies not in individual control, but in the community's ability to build social connections and support mechanisms. Research on community-based youth organizations in post-conflict areas shows that educational activities, awareness campaigns, and inter-youth engagement can contribute to building community resilience against violent extremism (Janahi, 2022). In the context of mosque youth, these principles can be translated into activities that connect religious literacy, digital literacy, dialogue, and social participation.

Therefore, resilience against cyberextremism should not be understood as a state where young people never encounter extreme narratives. In an open digital ecosystem, such a state is difficult to achieve. Resilience is more realistically understood as the ability to recognize, examine, question, discuss, and respond to encountered narratives without losing ethical orientation and social connectedness. At this point, young people are no longer simply objects protected from extremism, but become part of the social mechanisms that prevent extreme narratives from gaining unchecked acceptance. Thus, youth in mosques hold a strategic position in building digital community resilience because they exist at the intersection of religious identity, peer networks, community activities, and digital experiences. Strengthening this position can enable mosques to function as learning spaces that not only transmit religious knowledge but also build community capacity to navigate complex information flows. Resilience, then, does not arise from a single sermon or policy, but from collective habits of examining information, engaging in dialogue, building networks, and generating responsible responses.

Model for Strengthening Critical Religious Literacy of Mosque Youth

Based on the previous discussion, this study formulates a model for strengthening critical religious literacy among mosque youth, positioning literacy as an epistemic and ethical process that moves from receiving information to responsible action. This model stems from the fact that the primary issue in the digital religious space is not simply the abundance of available information, but rather the user's ability to process that information. While youth may have extensive access to religious sermons, interpretations, hadith, opinions, news, and discussions, this broad access does not automatically translate into the ability to discern the quality of information. The formulated model consists of eight interconnected stages:

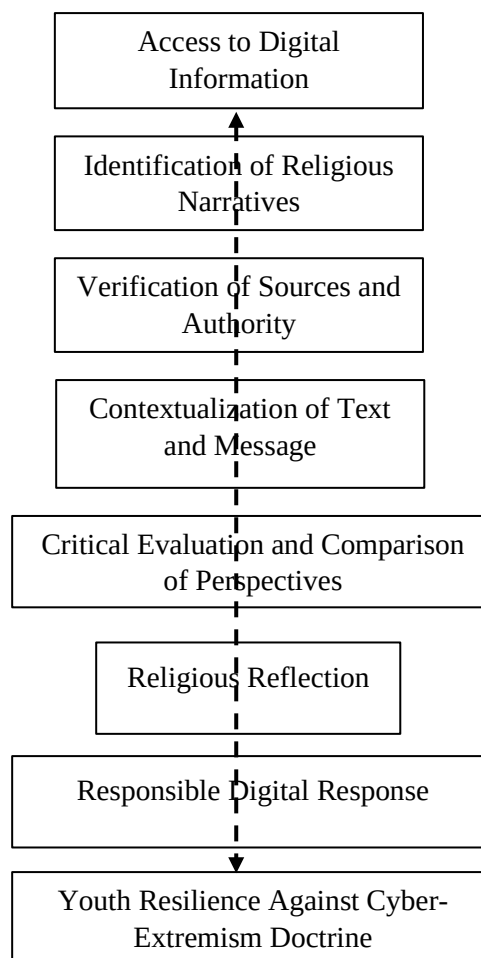


This series of stages should not be understood as a linear and rigid procedure. In practice, young people can return to previous stages if they obtain additional information or discover weaknesses in the sources or contexts they have examined. Therefore, this model is better understood as a critical literacy cycle that enables a repeated process of examination, reflection, and evaluation. The first stage involves access to digital information. Young people interact with various sources through social media, search engines, video platforms, chat groups, and religious channels. Access is the starting point, but not the ultimate goal, of literacy. The ability to obtain information requires an understanding of its origin, who produces it, and the factors that make some information more visible than others.

The second stage is identifying the religious narrative by mapping the message content, arguments, communicator, target audience, and purpose of the message. The main question is "what is actually being conveyed?" rather than simply "do I agree with it?". The third stage is verifying the source and authority by examining the narrator's identity, competence, references, the correspondence of quotations to the original source, and comparing them with other credible sources. The fourth stage involves contextualizing the text and message. A valid source can still lead to misunderstandings when used out of context. Therefore, verses, hadith, and opinions of scholars need to be understood based on their historical, scientific, social, and methodological context. The fifth stage involves critical evaluation

and comparison of perspectives by assessing evidence, generalizations, emotional manipulation, the existence of alternative perspectives, and the relationship between premises and conclusions.

The sixth stage is religious reflection, which is the ability of young people to identify the influence of identity, experience, emotions, and initial beliefs on the reception of information. The seventh stage produces responsible digital responses, such as not spreading questionable information, providing clarification, engaging in dialogue, or directing others to credible sources. The final stage is developing resilience against cyber extremist doctrine. This resilience does not mean immunity to all digital influences, but rather an ability that is cumulatively developed through epistemic skills, self-reflection, social networks, and responsible communication habits. A study of Islamic boarding school students' resilience to extremism in Indonesia shows that resilience is formed through the interaction of critical religious understanding, emotional development, character formation, mentoring, and reflection on digital religious content (Muttaqin et al., 2023).



The strength of this model lies in the shift in understanding literacy. Literacy is not positioned as a technical ability to access information, nor is it reduced to the ability to determine what content educators deem "correct." Literacy is understood as the ability to construct knowledge through a process of accountable inquiry, then translate that knowledge into ethical digital actions. With this perspective, youth gain space to think and make decisions, while educators act as facilitators, providing resources, context, methods, and a space for dialogue. This model also integrates individual and community dimensions. On the one hand, every youth needs the skills to independently verify information. On the other hand, resilience will not develop optimally if youth operate in a social environment that closes off dialogue and does not provide a space for clarification. Research on community resilience against extremism shows that youth organizations can build resilience through

education, awareness-raising, and social connectedness. Therefore, the implementation of the model needs to be supported by a mosque culture that encourages discussion, openness to questions, mentoring, and youth participation.

The conceptual contribution of this model lies in its attempt to connect religious literacy, digital literacy, reflection, and community resilience within a single analytical framework. Information access is treated as a starting point, not an indicator of success. Verification and contextualization ensure that information is not taken at face value. Evaluation and comparison build epistemic capacity. Reflection provides a dimension of self-awareness. Response transforms knowledge into action. Meanwhile, resilience is a social and sustainable outcome, shaped through the interaction between individual capacity and the community environment. Therefore, the model for strengthening critical religious literacy among mosque youth is not aimed at producing youth who are simply able to avoid extreme content. The more fundamental goal is to shape youth who can navigate the complexity of religious information without losing critical thinking skills, ethical orientation, or social connectedness. Within this framework, educational success is measured not by how little extreme content young people have ever seen, but by their ability to identify narratives, examine sources, understand context, compare perspectives, reflect on their own position, and choose responsible responses. At this point, critical religious literacy transforms from a protection strategy into a digital community resilience infrastructure.

4. Conclusion

This research shows that young mosque residents' consumption of religious information occurs primarily through a fast-paced, diverse, and interactive digital environment, no longer entirely dependent on formal religious authority. This situation broadens access to religious knowledge, but also presents the risk of information fragmentation, shifts in authority, and the acceptance of messages based on popularity, social proximity, or conformity to prior beliefs. Vulnerability to cyberextremist doctrine is not solely caused by high social media use, but is shaped by the interaction between limited information verification, fragmented religious understanding, peer group influence, a polarized information environment, digital platform mechanisms, and identity narratives that construct divisions between "us" and "them." Therefore, young mosque residents cannot be viewed as an inherently vulnerable group, but rather as a group whose critical capacity can be strengthened. Required skills include the ability to identify narratives, verify sources and authority, understand the context of texts and messages, compare perspectives, evaluate arguments, reflect on one's own position, and determine responsible digital responses. Education needs to use a contextual, dialogical, and case-based approach so that young people are not only aware of the dangers of extremism but are able to apply critical skills when encountering new information. In a community context, mosque youth can act as information checkers, facilitators of peer dialogue, producers of alternative religious content, and liaisons between religious and digital spaces. This position makes youth not merely objects of protection but actors in digital community resilience.

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