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Between Scrolling and Prostration: A Phenomenological Study of Cognitive Dissonance among MTs Miftahul Ulum Students Engaging with Religious Content on Social Media

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Abstract. *Social media has transformed how madrasah students encounter religious knowledge and can expose them to messages that differ from classroom instruction. This study examines students' experiences of accessing religious content, the forms of cognitive dissonance that emerge, and the role of teachers and the madrasah environment in mediating conflicting understandings. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed at MTs Miftahul Ulum Tunggak Cerme. Informants included the madrasah principal, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, a Guidance and Counseling (BK) teacher, and six purposively selected students representing variation in social-media exposure and experience with religious content. Data were generated through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation and analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model in combination with phenomenological meaning units and experiential themes. The findings show that students encounter confusion, doubt, authority conflict, adjustment of understanding, and efforts to seek certainty when digital religious messages differ from madrasah-based learning. In this article, "prostration" is used as an analytical symbol for the orientation toward reflective appreciation and practice of religious values; it is not treated as a directly observed measure of internalization. Teacher and madrasah mediation was reported through clarification, source evaluation, religious learning, counseling-oriented guidance, and habituation, while students described comparing sources and seeking clarification when uncertainty arose. These findings underscore the importance of digital religious literacy and critical thinking in quality, values-based education and are relevant to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4).*

Keywords: *Cognitive Dissonance; Religious Content; Social Media; Digital Religious Literacy; Madrasah Education*

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology over the past two decades has brought fundamental transformations to the educational and spiritual landscape of learners (Gulo & Tapilaha, 2024). Social media no longer functions merely as a space for social interaction but has evolved into an arena for the massive, rapid, and borderless production and dissemination of religious knowledge (Sholehah, 2025). Within the digital religious landscape, a significant epistemic paradox has emerged. On the one hand, students gain easy access to various forms of Islamic content that are diverse and instantly available (Choiri, 2024). On the other hand, such accessibility has contributed to the fragmentation of religious understanding due to the absence of methodological and authoritative filters in receiving information. Consequently, the process of internalizing religious values may experience distortions of

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meaning that influence students' perspectives and the depth of their spirituality in everyday life (Yulianti, 2024).

Social media scrolling activities have transformed the ways students acquire, receive, and interpret religious information in their daily lives. Through digital devices, students can access various religious contents quickly, briefly, and repeatedly without directly seeking primary sources (Zain & Mustain, 2024). These contents include religious lectures, Qur'anic verses, hadiths, moral advice, and religious perspectives from various scholars and social media users. The ease of access provides opportunities for students to broaden their Islamic knowledge; however, it simultaneously presents challenges in the form of diverse interpretations and varying levels of information quality (Afif, 2024). Differences in communication styles, interpretations, and source authority may expose students to religious messages that do not always align with the knowledge obtained through madrasah education, teachers, and family environments. This experience becomes increasingly complex when religious information obtained through scrolling activities encounters religious values that have already been internalized by students through learning processes and religious practices within the madrasah environment.

In contrast to scrolling activities, "prostration" in this study is employed primarily as a symbolic and analytical concept rather than as a direct observational indicator of students' internal states. The term refers to the educational orientation from religious knowledge toward reflective appreciation and observable religious practice. Within madrasah education, this orientation may be supported through Islamic Religious Education, teacher role modeling, habitual worship practices, and family and social environments (Shodiq, 2024). Accordingly, the study does not infer internalization solely from visible ritual behavior. Instead, students' reported meanings, observed practices, and contextual evidence are distinguished analytically. When religious messages encountered on social media differ from classroom explanations or established religious practices, students may experience tension between prior knowledge, emerging interpretations, and new information. The contrast between scrolling and prostration is therefore used to examine how students negotiate digital religious information within a values-based educational context.

According to Utami, (2022), cognitive dissonance refers to a psychological condition that emerges when individuals experience inconsistency between their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Such inconsistency is not only cognitive in nature but also generates psychological pressure that encourages individuals to restore balance through various strategies, such as changing perspectives, adjusting behaviors, or justifying one of the conflicting sources of information (Domenico, 2021). In the context of madrasah students, cognitive dissonance appears when religious authority obtained from digital media conflicts with religious authority derived from formal educational institutions (Artiga, 2024). The encounter between these two sources of authority creates an internal negotiation process, placing students in a state of epistemic uncertainty that influences how they understand and continuously practice religious values in everyday life (Valéry, 2022).

Amid this epistemic tension, an increasingly visible gap emerges between "scrolling culture," characterized by speed, dominant visuality, and instant information consumption, and "prostration culture," which requires slowness, deep contemplation, ethical conduct, and spiritual reflection without haste. These two cultures operate through different logics and often confront each other within students' consciousness. The irony of contemporary education becomes apparent when increased access to digital technology does not necessarily

correspond with improved religious maturity (Nata, 2024). Instead, the abundance of information may create an illusion of superficial knowledge, where religious understanding becomes fragmented and loses its depth of meaning. This condition highlights a serious challenge in establishing a balance between digital literacy and reflective spirituality.

At MTs Miftahul Ulum Tunggak Cerme, the phenomenon of digital transformation within the religious sphere is evident among students who are at the stage of formal operational cognitive development. At this stage, students begin to develop abstract thinking abilities but remain vulnerable to strong external influences, particularly from social media. Their activities in accessing religious preaching content through platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube occur intensively and repeatedly in their daily lives. However, initial observations indicate the emergence of inner tension or cognitive dissonance when the religious content they consume does not correspond with their understanding of classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning), teachers' guidance, and religious traditions developed within the madrasah and pesantren environment. This situation creates a negotiation space between digital authority and classical scholarly authority.

Several previous studies have examined social media usage as a source of religious information and its impact on students' religious understanding (Nursintia & Layyinah, 2025). However, studies specifically exploring the subjective experiences of madrasah students when encountering conflicts between religious content on social media and religious values acquired through formal educational authority remain limited. Furthermore, these experiences have rarely been examined through a phenomenological perspective using the concept of cognitive dissonance as an analytical framework.

This phenomenon is important because it concerns the formation of students' religious understanding within a digital environment shaped by social-media algorithms (Hidayatullah, 2024). The study therefore addresses three questions: (1) how students experience and interpret religious content encountered through social media; (2) what forms of cognitive dissonance arise when digital messages differ from madrasah learning; and (3) how teachers and the madrasah environment mediate these differences. By focusing on students' lived experiences, this study contributes to the development of digital religious literacy, source evaluation, and critical thinking within Islamic education. These educational implications are also relevant to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), particularly the promotion of inclusive, equitable, quality education and the competencies needed for responsible participation in contemporary information environments.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using a phenomenological research design to deeply understand the subjective experiences of MTs Miftahul Ulum students in engaging with religious content on social media (Nasir, 2023). The selection of phenomenology is based on the research focus, which does not merely identify social media usage behaviors but also explores how students experience, interpret, and respond to discrepancies between religious information obtained from digital spaces and the values acquired through madrasah education. Phenomenology positions lived experience as the primary source for understanding the essence of a phenomenon. In this study, the experiences of scrolling and prostration are understood as two experiential spaces that bring together digital culture and students' religious appreciation, thereby allowing the emergence of cognitive dissonance dynamics in the process of religious meaning-making.

The research was conducted at MTs Miftahul Ulum Tunggak Cerme because the institution combines a strong religious educational orientation with students' increasing engagement with social media. Informants were selected purposively on the basis of their involvement, knowledge, and experience relevant to the research focus. They consisted of the madrasah principal, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, a Guidance and Counseling (BK) teacher, and six students. Variation among the six student informants was sought in the extent of their exposure to social media and in their experiences of encountering religious content, so that the phenomenological accounts would not represent only one pattern of digital engagement. Primary data were obtained through interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation, while secondary data were drawn from madrasah documents, academic books, and journal articles related to social media, Islamic education, and cognitive dissonance. The diversity of informants was intended to provide complementary perspectives on the same phenomenon.

Data collection combined non-participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation focused on directly observable student behavior during learning activities, social interactions, religious practices, and patterns of gadget use; it was not used to infer internal states such as religious internalization. Semi-structured interviews explored students' lived experiences, including sources of religious information, encounters with differing messages, confusion or doubt, source comparison, and ways of seeking clarification. Interviews with the principal, PAI teachers, and BK teacher examined forms of mediation that they reported or implemented in educational practice. Documentation included madrasah archives, teacher records, photographs of learning and religious activities, and relevant digital materials. In the reporting of results, practices directly observed by the researcher are distinguished from interventions described by teachers and from recommendations developed in the discussion.

Data analysis employed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, while preserving the phenomenological emphasis on lived experience. During condensation, interview passages relevant to students' encounters with religious content were treated as meaning units, coded, and grouped into experiential categories such as confusion, doubt, authority conflict, comparison of sources, adjustment of understanding, and the search for certainty. These categories were compared across participants and organized into broader experiential themes. Interpretations were repeatedly checked against the original interview material to avoid detaching themes from participants' accounts. Data displays combined narrative descriptions and thematic classification, while conclusions were verified through source and method triangulation by comparing student accounts with teacher/principal accounts, observation, and documentation. This analytic sequence was used to reduce interpretive bias and strengthen the credibility of the findings.



Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

3.1.1. The Experiences of MTs Miftahul Ulum Students in Interpreting Scrolling as an Activity of Accessing Religious Content on Social Media and Prostration as the Appreciation and Practice of Religious Values in Daily Life

The experiences of MTs Miftahul Ulum students indicate that the activity of scrolling religious content on social media has become part of their encounter with Islamic information from a relatively early age. The interview results with six students (Khoirul, Sandiono, Musthofa, Wildan, Zahro, and Sinta) reveal that exposure to religious content through social media has occurred since elementary school, with various initial experiences ranging from the second, fourth, and sixth grades to approximately 2018–2019. Personal ownership of mobile phones has further expanded the intensity of access to digital media. YouTube and TikTok have become the most frequently used platforms because they provide religious content in short, visual, and easily accessible formats. The findings demonstrate that scrolling is not merely a form of digital entertainment activity but has also become an entry point for students to obtain religious knowledge through informal channels.

The types of religious content consumed by students demonstrate diverse themes, ranging from general Islamic lectures, explanations of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), to Ramadan religious speeches (kultum) that provide practical information regarding Islamic teachings and practices. Students' interest in such content is reflected in their positive feelings when following or watching religious materials through social media. This condition indicates that digital spaces have shaped new forms of religious experiences that are flexible, personal, and not entirely dependent on formal learning environments. From the perspective of subjective experience, scrolling becomes an activity that enables students to select, receive, and interpret religious information based on their interests and needs. The perspectives of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers and Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers further strengthen the understanding of students' experiences, particularly regarding the relationship between religious content consumption on social media and the formation of religious understanding and behavior.

In this study, the meaning of prostration is analytical and symbolic: it denotes an orientation from receiving religious information toward reflection and religious practice. The field data show that students' digital experiences occur alongside PAI learning, religious habituation, teacher guidance, and the madrasah environment. Religious information obtained through YouTube and TikTok therefore enters an educational context in which students compare, question, and relate digital messages to existing religious knowledge and observable practices. Interviews with Mrs. Asmawiyah, Mrs. Mahmudah, and Mrs. Aisah emphasized the need for students to respond critically, selectively, and reflectively. The study does not claim that internalization was directly observed; rather, it analyzes how students and teachers describe the movement from information toward understanding and practice.

3.1.2. Forms of Cognitive Dissonance Experienced by Students in Encountering Differences between Religious Content on Social Media and Religious Learning in Madrasah

The forms of cognitive dissonance experienced by MTs Miftahul Ulum students emerge when religious information obtained through social media does not fully correspond with the religious knowledge provided through madrasah learning. Based on interview findings, the six students, namely Khoirul, Sandiono, Musthofa, Wildan, Zahro, and Sinta, revealed that access to religious content through YouTube and TikTok expanded their exposure to various forms of Islamic teachings, including religious lectures, fiqh, and Ramadan speeches. Such diversity potentially creates differences in interpretation because digital content originates from various creators and is delivered through different communication styles. Students encounter situations in which religious information considered valid on social media needs to be confirmed and compared with explanations provided by teachers at the madrasah. This situation reflects cognitive tension characterized by confusion, uncertainty, and students' need to determine which religious information can be considered trustworthy.

Students' cognitive dissonance is also reflected through the process of comparing digital religious authority with pedagogical authority established within the madrasah environment. Interviews with Mrs. Asmawiyah and Mrs. Mahmudah indicate the necessity of developing students' critical attitudes in evaluating the sources and validity of religious information on social media. Content presented in attractive, concise, and persuasive formats may capture students' attention more quickly compared to systematically delivered classroom explanations. This condition creates a space for negotiating meaning when students

encounter information that differs from Islamic Religious Education materials. According to Mrs. Aisah, students' responses include asking questions, expressing doubts, and attempting to seek clarification from individuals with greater understanding of religious matters.

The research findings demonstrate that cognitive dissonance does not necessarily develop into rejection of madrasah religious values but may become a reflective experience that encourages students to clarify the information they receive. Differences between social media content and madrasah learning place students within a psychological process of maintaining consistency between knowledge, beliefs, and religious practices. Islamic Religious Education teachers emphasize the importance of providing argumentative explanations so that students do not passively accept digital information, while the Guidance and Counseling teacher highlights the need for assistance when students experience confusion in determining appropriate responses. From this perspective, students' dissonance can be understood through three main tendencies: the emergence of confusion regarding differences in information, the process of comparing religious sources, and efforts to obtain certainty through teachers and the madrasah environment. This phenomenon emphasizes the importance of digital religious literacy as an integral component of contemporary madrasah education.

3.1.3. The Role of Teachers and Madrasah Environment in Mediating Students' Cognitive Dissonance in Encountering Religious Content on Social Media

Teachers and the madrasah environment were identified as important mediating resources when students encountered diverse religious content on social media. The principal, Mr. Musthofa, reported institutional efforts to encourage selectivity in choosing content, warn students about inaccurate religious information, and strengthen coordination with teachers. These statements are reported as institutional practices described by the principal; they are not presented as experimentally tested interventions. Their relevance is supported by student accounts indicating that teachers and the madrasah are used as reference points when students need clarification.

PAI teachers, Mrs. Asmawiyah and Mrs. Mahmudah, described mediation through conceptual clarification, reinforcement of religious knowledge, source evaluation, and encouragement to question short or viral religious content before accepting it. Mrs. Aisah, as the BK teacher, described counseling-oriented assistance when students experience confusion or uncertainty. The documented effect that can be supported by the present data is limited to students' reported tendency to ask questions, compare sources, and seek clarification; the study does not claim a measured causal effect on long-term behavior.

Taken together, the findings indicate a mediation process involving clarification, comparison, source checking, and adjustment of understanding. This process occurs alongside formal religious learning and habituation within the madrasah. Figure 2 synthesizes the empirical sequence from students' digital encounters to cognitive dissonance and the mediating role of educational actors. The figure should therefore be read as a conceptual summary of the findings rather than as evidence that every student follows an identical linear pathway.

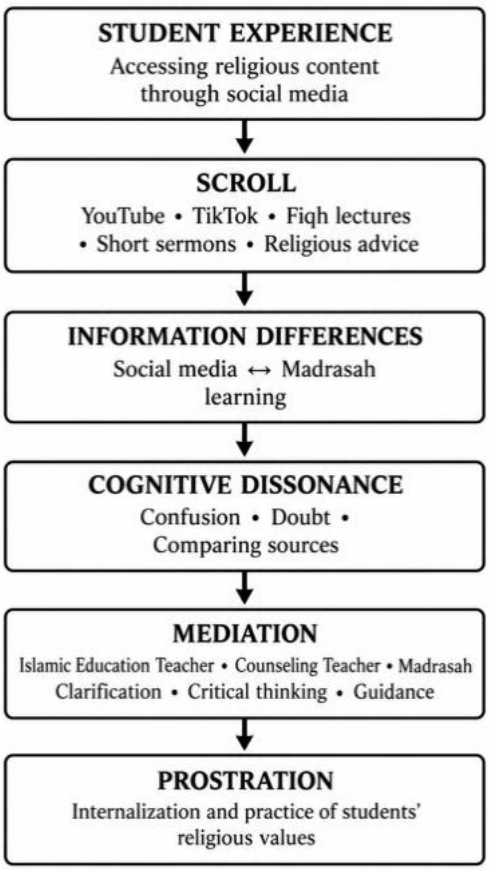


Figure 2. Conceptual Map of Students' Experiences, Cognitive Dissonance, and Religious Mediation

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. The Experiences of MTs Miftahul Ulum Students in Interpreting Scrolling as an Activity of Accessing Religious Content on Social Media and Prostration as the Appreciation and Practice of Religious Values in Daily Life

The experiences of MTs Miftahul Ulum students in accessing religious content demonstrate a transformation in the characteristics of religious learning spaces from conventional environments toward more open digital spaces. In this study, scrolling is interpreted as the activity of browsing, selecting, watching, and absorbing religious information through social media, particularly YouTube and TikTok (Haq, 2024). The findings regarding students' early exposure to religious content since elementary school indicate the role of digital media in shaping religious experiences from a relatively young age. Religious lectures, Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), and Ramadan religious speeches (kultum) have become informal sources of knowledge that are easily accessible and can be consumed according to students' personal interests. This phenomenon demonstrates that scrolling is not merely a technological behavior but has developed into a mechanism for seeking religious knowledge beyond the structure of madrasah learning, thereby shaping students' personal religious experiences.

The characteristics of digital content, which are brief, visual, and easily accessible, also influence how students interact with religious knowledge (Lailatul & Ridwan, 2024). The interview results reveal that students experience enjoyment when engaging with religious content through social media. This response indicates that digital media has pedagogical appeal because it is able to present religious materials in formats that are closely connected to

students' daily lives. However, this experience also contains an epistemological dimension that requires attention because religious information on social media originates from diverse sources with varying levels of scholarly credibility. Students may consider popularity, presentation style, or visual attractiveness when accepting information. This situation illustrates that scrolling creates an initial encounter with religious knowledge, while deeper understanding still requires processes of verification, interpretation, and guidance from credible religious authorities.

The concept of prostration in this study should be read as a symbolic analytical construct, not as a direct measure of students' inner religious internalization. It refers to the orientation from information acquisition toward reflection, submission to religious values, and observable practice (Ridhani et al., 2023). If scrolling represents students' horizontal movement across multiple digital sources, prostration represents the normative educational direction toward deeper understanding and practice. Because internalization is an internal process, the present study treats it as an interpretation grounded in participants' accounts and contextual evidence rather than as an outcome directly observed by the researcher.

The interpretation of scrolling and prostration aligns with Imam Al-Ghazali's perspective regarding the transformation of knowledge into inner appreciation and behavior (Irawan & Rohman, 2025). Religious knowledge does not end with the ability to understand information but must contribute to the formation of awareness, morality, and real actions in life (Ariani & Ritonga, 2024). Scrolling represents the process of acquiring religious knowledge through digital spaces that expand students' access to various forms of information, while prostration represents the process of deepening meaning, submission, and actualizing religious values. The relationship between the two demonstrates that digital information gains religious significance when it is critically understood, deeply reflected upon, and embodied through behavior. This perspective emphasizes the importance of balancing knowledge acquisition, the formation of inner awareness, and the practice of religious values.

The relationship between scrolling and prostration also highlights the important position of madrasah as a mediating space between digital knowledge and students' religious development. Social media provides broad access to information, while madrasah provides a framework of knowledge, values, and normative orientations for understanding such information. Statements from Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers and Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers strengthen the understanding that students' digital experiences need to be placed within a continuous guidance process. Teachers do not only act as transmitters of knowledge but also as guides who help students examine, clarify, and contextualize religious information obtained from digital platforms (Jannah, 2025). This role becomes essential when students encounter various religious perspectives on social media. Madrasah functions as a reflective space that helps students connect what they encounter through scrolling with the values they are expected to internalize through prostration (Ilah, 2025).

Taken together, scrolling and prostration function as two analytical dimensions of students' religious experience in the digital era. Scrolling denotes access, exploration, and consumption of religious information, whereas prostration denotes the educational orientation toward reflection and practice. The proposed sequence—information → understanding → reflection → practice—is therefore interpretive rather than a claim that internalization was directly observed in every participant. This distinction helps preserve the

phenomenological focus on students' accounts while avoiding overstatement of unobservable psychological outcomes.

3.2.2. Forms of Cognitive Dissonance Experienced by Students in Encountering Differences between Religious Content on Social Media and Religious Learning in Madrasah

Cognitive dissonance refers to a psychological condition in which individuals experience inconsistency between two or more cognitive elements, such as knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, or received information, resulting in internal tension that encourages individuals to seek consistency (Kurnia, 2024). In the context of MTs Miftahul Ulum students, cognitive dissonance emerges when religious content obtained through YouTube and TikTok encounters the understanding developed through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in the madrasah. The encounter between these two sources of knowledge generates psychological processes involving comparison, questioning, selection, and clarification of information before students determine the understanding they consider most acceptable. This process demonstrates students' efforts to manage differences in information through critical consideration, dialogue with teachers, and adjustment of understanding based on sources perceived as credible (Rafi, 2025).

The first form of cognitive dissonance experienced by students is confusion regarding differences in religious information encountered within digital spaces (Adhar, 2025). Based on the experiences of Khoirul, Sandiono, Musthofa, Wildan, Zahro, and Sinta, access to religious content provides opportunities for students to obtain diverse materials, such as general Islamic lectures, fiqh, and Ramadan religious speeches (kultum). Such diversity broadens students' knowledge, while simultaneously allowing the emergence of information containing explanations and perspectives that are not always identical to the materials taught in madrasah. Confusion arises when students do not yet possess sufficient knowledge frameworks to independently explain these differences. This condition demonstrates that the more open the sources of information accessed by students, the greater the need for the ability to select and understand religious contexts. At this stage, dissonance does not indicate rejection of madrasah values but rather represents the initial process in which students attempt to reconcile different forms of information (Segara & Aulia, 2022).

The second form involves doubts regarding the truth and credibility of religious content consumed through social media (Sari, 2026). The characteristics of social media allow religious information to be presented in concise, attractive, persuasive, and easily viral formats, while the depth of scholarly arguments is not always visible to students (Gkikas, 2022). The interview findings with Mrs. Asmawiyah and Mrs. Mahmudah indicate that students need to be equipped with religious knowledge methodologies so that they do not accept digital information without critical evaluation. This statement reveals an epistemological issue within students' religious experiences, namely how to distinguish information that has a scholarly foundation from information that merely gains public attention. The doubts that emerge may encourage students to seek additional information or request explanations from teachers. This process demonstrates that dissonance can become a trigger for developing reflective attitudes, as long as students receive guidance that directs uncertainty toward verification processes rather than merely accepting or rejecting information (Fechner & Isbanner, 2025).

The third form is the conflict of religious authority between digital sources and teachers within the madrasah environment (Baqir & Mashlahah, 2026). Social media presents

religious figures with varying levels of popularity, communication styles, and numbers of followers, whereas Islamic Religious Education teachers obtain authority through systematic educational processes and direct interaction with students (Aziz, 2026). When both sources provide different explanations regarding a particular issue, students may experience difficulty in determining which reference should be trusted. Mrs. Asmawiyah and Mrs. Mahmudah emphasize strengthening religious scholarly methodologies as a strategy to equip students in critically evaluating information based on its foundations and contexts, rather than merely relying on the popularity of the speaker. This perspective demonstrates that resolving dissonance requires evaluative abilities. Students are guided to understand the reasoning behind an opinion, trace its sources, and connect it with previously acquired knowledge. Authority conflict becomes one of the most relevant forms of dissonance in students' religious experiences within digital environments (Parhan & Jais, 2026).

The fourth form appears as tension between previously held knowledge or beliefs and new information obtained through social media (Hidayah & Husnul, 2025). Students already possess religious understanding frameworks shaped by family, Islamic Religious Education learning, religious practices, and madrasah culture before intensively interacting with digital religious content. Different forms of new information may disrupt the consistency of such understanding and encourage students to make cognitive adjustments. Students' experiences demonstrate this tendency through the process of comparing digital information with teachers' explanations. This condition confirms that dissonance does not always produce negative consequences (Seran, 2024). When managed through academic dialogue and guidance, cognitive tension can develop into an opportunity for students to deepen their religious understanding in a more critical, conscious, and argumentative manner.

The fifth form involves seeking certainty through clarification and guidance from teachers and the madrasah environment. When encountering different information, students require figures who can assist them in interpreting issues in a more directed manner. Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers have an important position in assisting students when confusion, doubt, or difficulty in determining attitudes emerges. Islamic Religious Education teachers provide reinforcement from the perspective of religious scholarship, while BK teachers assist students in managing issues related to personal development and decision-making (Indraswati & Fithriyana, 2025). This guidance pattern demonstrates that the resolution of dissonance occurs through social interaction rather than merely through individual cognitive processes. Madrasah becomes a clarification space that connects students' digital experiences with more systematic religious knowledge. Cognitive dissonance can become a pedagogical opportunity to develop digital religious literacy, critical thinking abilities, and students' independence in evaluating information encountered on social media (Ridho & Neviyarni, 2026).

3.3.3. The Role of Teachers and the Madrasah Environment in Mediating Students' Cognitive Dissonance in Encountering Religious Content on Social Media

The mediation of cognitive dissonance refers to the guidance process carried out by teachers and the madrasah environment to assist students in managing inconsistencies between knowledge, beliefs, and religious information obtained from various sources (Anwar & Romli, 2025). Mediation does not mean eliminating the questions or differences experienced by students, but rather directing cognitive tension toward processes of clarification, evaluation, and the formation of more consistent understanding. In the context of MTs

Miftahul Ulum, this process becomes important because students live within two spaces of religious knowledge, namely social media as an informal space and madrasah as a formal educational space. Both spaces can strengthen each other but may also present different perspectives. The role of teachers becomes a bridge that prevents students from passively accepting digital information or rejecting it prematurely. Mediation is directed toward developing critical thinking abilities, religious literacy, and responsible decision-making (Astoro, 2024).

At the institutional level, the madrasah principal described policies and educational messages intended to support responsible social-media use (Sofya, 2025). In the present data, these are treated as reported institutional practices. They include reminders about content selectivity, warnings about misleading information, and coordination with teachers. The study did not employ an intervention design; therefore, no causal claim is made that these practices independently changed students' behavior. Their significance lies in providing a reference structure that students can use when digital religious information becomes uncertain or conflicting.

PAI teachers described practices of conceptual explanation, source evaluation, contextualization, and dialogue when students encounter questionable religious information. These practices are consistent with the teacher's role as an epistemic facilitator (Ihsan et al., 2025). The empirical evidence in this study supports the presence of such guidance through teacher accounts and students' reported use of teachers as clarification sources; it does not establish an experimentally measured effect.

The BK teacher described counseling-oriented support through interpersonal communication, opportunities to articulate doubt, and direction toward relevant sources when students experience confusion. This form of support complements PAI teachers' scholarly clarification. Again, the present study documents the reported role and students' responses rather than testing the effectiveness of a formal counseling intervention. The strongest supported outcome is students' reported movement from uncertainty toward questioning, comparison, and clarification.

The madrasah environment functions as a social space that connects students' digital experiences with religious values, norms, and practices that occur in real life (Rizqi, 2026). Interviews with Khoirul, Sandiono, Musthofa, Wildan, Zahro, and Sinta demonstrate that students' experiences in accessing religious content through social media occur alongside PAI learning and religious habituation within the madrasah. This situation indicates that mediation does not only occur through teachers' verbal advice but also through the institutional culture experienced by students on a daily basis. Religious practices, interactions with teachers, religious learning, and role modeling become social mechanisms that assist students in connecting information with practice. When students encounter differences in information, the madrasah provides a space for comparing and clarifying meanings. The educational environment allows dissonance to develop into a reflective experience. Students gain opportunities to examine digital knowledge through direct experiences, dialogue, and the practice of religious values within the madrasah community.

The synergy between the madrasah principal, PAI teachers, BK teachers, and students forms a mediation mechanism that enables cognitive dissonance to be managed constructively. The madrasah principal provides institutional direction, PAI teachers provide scholarly authority, BK teachers support students' psychological dynamics, while students become active subjects who clarify and compare information. This pattern demonstrates that

dissonance mediation is not a one-way process aimed at forcing uniformity of understanding, but rather a pedagogical process that develops students' abilities to face the complexity of religious knowledge in the digital era. Social media information cannot be filtered solely based on popularity or presentation appeal but must be evaluated through its sources, substance, context, and compatibility with religious principles (Agusta & Laugu, 2020). Effective mediation ultimately transforms students from passive information consumers into critical, reflective, and responsible learners. Madrasah becomes a connecting space that maintains continuity between digital knowledge, religious understanding, and the practice of Islamic values in students' lives (Januaripin, 2025).

Conclusions

This study shows that MTs Miftahul Ulum students use social media as an informal source of religious knowledge while continuing to interpret that information within the formal and social environment of the madrasah. "Scrolling" captures students' encounters with digital religious messages, whereas "prostration" is used as a symbolic analytical orientation toward reflection and religious practice rather than as a directly observed measure of internalization.

Cognitive dissonance emerges when digital religious messages differ from prior knowledge or madrasah instruction, taking the form of confusion, doubt, authority conflict, adjustment of understanding, and the search for certainty. Students respond by comparing sources, asking questions, and seeking clarification. These experiences indicate that dissonance can function as a pedagogical opportunity for digital religious literacy and critical thinking when appropriate educational support is available.

Teachers and the madrasah environment mediate these experiences through reported practices of clarification, source evaluation, religious learning, counseling-oriented guidance, and habituation. The findings do not establish causal effects of specific interventions but show that students regard teachers and the madrasah as important reference points when resolving uncertainty. This supports the development of values-based digital literacy consistent with the educational aims of SDG 4. The study is limited by its single-madrasah setting and small group of six student informants; consequently, the findings are context-bound and intended for analytical transfer rather than statistical generalization. Future studies should include multiple madrasahs, more diverse student profiles, and longitudinal or intervention designs to examine how mediation practices influence students' religious reasoning over time.

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Conflicts of Interest

The The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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