

**FIKRUNA: Jurnal Ilmiah Kependidikan dan Kemasyarakatan**

Vol. 8, No. 1, 2026

DOI 10.56489/fik.v4i2

P-ISSN: 2620-7834; E-ISSN: 2715-2928

**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE MORAL  
DEGRADATION OF STUDENTS AND THE MITIGATIVE ROLE OF  
ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

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**Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the patterns of social media use among students, the forms of moral degradation that arise, the influence of social media on moral formation, and the role and effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education in mitigating these negative impacts. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research method. Research data were obtained through analysis of books, reputable scientific journal articles, and current academic sources relevant to the themes of adolescent morality, social media, and religious education. Data collection techniques were carried out through indexed literature searches, while data analysis used content analysis techniques with data reduction, categorization, data presentation, and conclusion drawing steps. The results of the study show that students use social media intensively with repetitive patterns dominated by entertainment activities, search for self-identity, and visual-based social interaction. This pattern contributes to the emergence of moral degradation in the form of digital aggression, decline in academic integrity, hedonistic behavior, empathy crisis, and weakening awareness of norms of decency and social ethics. The research findings also reveal that social media acts as a new agent of socialization that shapes moral relativism through algorithms, viral culture, and weak direct social control. Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role as a mitigative instrument through the internalization of values such as honesty, responsibility, manners, and the strengthening of digital literacy based on Islamic values. The effectiveness of the Islamic Religious Education strategy is reflected in changes in prosocial behavior, increased self-control, the development of moral resilience, and the formation of a religious school culture. This study concludes that strengthening Islamic Religious Education is a strategic necessity for building the moral resilience of students so that they are able to face the challenges of the social media era in an ethical, critical, and spiritually-based manner.

**Keywords:** social media; moral degradation; students; Islamic Religious Education

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## A. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology over the past two decades has changed the patterns of social interaction among adolescents and students. Social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and instant messaging applications provide access to information and a vast space for expression, while also presenting risks in the form of content that is not in line with moral values, attention distractions, and a tendency toward digital addiction. The dual impact (positive and negative) of social media use on the learning process and character development of young people has been documented in recent systematic studies. On the one hand, social media supports collaboration and access to learning resources, but on the other hand, it also causes distraction, reduced learning efficiency, and ethical and moral challenges.<sup>4</sup>

Specifically in the moral realm of students, continuous exposure to immoral content, the phenomenon of cyberbullying, and negative behavior models that are publicly displayed can contribute to what is often referred to as moral degradation. This moral degradation is evident in a decline in concern for social norms, weak self-control, and an increase in consumptive behavior and superficial social relationships, all of which have implications for the quality of interactions in the school environment and learning outcomes. Meta-analytic empirical evidence also shows a negative relationship between excessive use/dependence on social networks and important educational indicators, such as academic achievement, which is often closely related to the moral aspects and responsibilities of students.<sup>5</sup>

In the context of Indonesia, which has a Muslim majority population, Islamic Religious Education has strategic potential as a mitigating instrument, through strengthening character education, digital literacy based on Islamic ethics, and learning internalized moral values, Islamic Religious Education can serve as a buffer against the negative influences of social media. Curricular and extracurricular

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<sup>4</sup> Zongguo Wang, Zaleha Abdullah, Wenhai Hu, *A Systematic Review of the Impact of Social Media on Project-Based Learning*, (Sustainability: MDPI, Vol. 17 No. 8, 2025). 36.

<sup>5</sup> Nader Salari, Hosna Zarei, Shabnam Rasoulpoor, Hooman Ghasemi, Amin Hosseinian-Far, Masoud Mohammadi, *The impact of social networking addiction on the academic achievement of university students globally: A meta-analysis*, (Public Health in Practice [Oxf.], 2025; article 100584). 100.

interventions that integrate digital competence, critical thinking, and religious values are necessary so that students do not merely become consumers of content, but also moral agents who are able to sort, assess, and act in accordance with ethical principles. Contemporary studies emphasize the need for a planned pedagogical approach, project-based learning that utilizes social media constructively, and school policies that strengthen media literacy and community-based supervision. Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the influence of social media on the moral degradation of students and explore the mitigating role of Islamic Religious Education in responding to these challenges. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide a basis for policy recommendations and learning practices that can strengthen the integration of religious values and digital literacy in the school environment.

## **B. METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted using a qualitative-descriptive approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the influence of social media on the moral degradation of students and how Islamic Religious Education acts as a mitigating factor. The main issues examined were the increase in deviant behavior, changes in communication ethics, and the weakening of moral values due to uncontrolled exposure to social media. This phenomenon is becoming increasingly important because students have a high level of digital dependence, which affects their attitudes, character, and daily interaction patterns.<sup>6</sup>

The research targets included high school students and Islamic Education teachers who interact directly with the dynamics of students' moral development. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which involves selecting individuals who are considered to be most knowledgeable and involved with the phenomenon of moral degradation and the use of social media in the school context. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with students and PAI teachers to gain an understanding of the moral behavior that had undergone change. In addition,

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<sup>6</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2024). 112-113.

direct observations were conducted to observe student interactions, both in the classroom and in their digital activities within the school environment. Documentation in the form of school records, technology use policies, and PAI learning materials were also analyzed to reinforce the research findings. Triangulation of methods was used to ensure the diversity and accuracy of the data obtained.

Data analysis used the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. All data obtained was continuously reflected upon to find patterns of correlation between social media use, forms of moral degradation, and the strategic contribution of Islamic Religious Education in providing mitigation. The analysis process was carried out in stages until the main themes were clearly mapped out and could be used as a basis for developing educational recommendations.<sup>7</sup>

### **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The pattern of social media use among students in the digital age shows an increasingly intensive and repetitive trend, directly related to social activities, entertainment, and the search for identity. Recent studies show that students access social media for an average of 3-6 hours per day, especially on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp, which offer visual and interactive features that are very attractive to teenagers. This usage is no longer merely a means of communication, but has evolved into a space for self-expression, image building, and informal learning that is often uncontrolled. Overexposure to viral content, digital celebrity culture, and aggressive recommendation algorithms shapes patterns of consumption that are fast, instant, and reduce students' tendency to critically reflect on the information they receive.<sup>8</sup>

Students tend to form multitasking patterns, such as studying while browsing social media, doing homework while scrolling, or interacting in class

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2024). 35-36.

<sup>8</sup> Ahmad Fadillah, *Teenagers and Social Media in the Age of Algorithms* (Jakarta: Prenadamedia Group, 2024), 35-36.

groups and friendship groups at the same time. Empirically, this pattern has been proven to affect focus, emotional stability, and self-regulation due to constant digital distractions. Recent research confirms that most adolescents show a tendency toward fear of missing out (FoMO), so that social media use is not based on need, but on the fear of being left behind by social trends.<sup>9</sup>

This phenomenon shows how social media has become a space that mediates relationships, perceptions of moral values, and even the way students assess themselves and others. Students' social media usage patterns show a shift in orientation from direct communication to visual and emotive communication. Students prefer to use stories, emojis, or short videos as a means of expression, rather than verbal communication, which requires context and depth. As a result, conventional social interaction skills have declined, including the ability to manage conflict, express opinions wisely, and understand ethical boundaries in social interactions.<sup>10</sup> In the context of education, this condition highlights the importance of the mitigative role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in building moral digital literacy, spiritual awareness, and media ethics that balance the psychological development needs of students with the demands of modern digital life.

### **1. Identified Forms of Moral Degradation**

The forms of moral degradation identified among students in the era of social media dominance show increasingly complex and layered patterns of deviance. One of the most significant forms is the increase in digital aggression such as cyberbullying, verbal abuse, the spread of negative comments, and provocative content, whether done consciously or impulsively. Students tend to consider such aggressive behavior as normal because they are accustomed to seeing it repeatedly in the digital space. Recent studies confirm that social media creates a boundless space that allows teenagers to express negative emotions without considering the moral and psychological impact on others, especially due to the lack

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<sup>9</sup> Nur Hayati dan Muhammad Zain, *Digital Behavior of Youth and Moral Orientation in the Post-Pandemic Era* (Yogyakarta: Deepublish, 2024), 41–42.

<sup>10</sup> Lina Marlina, *Media Literacy and Moral Reasoning among High School Students* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2025), 58–59.

of direct social control.<sup>11</sup> This situation shows that social media is not only a means of communication, but also an arena that can slowly erode moral sensitivity through the normalization of aggressive behavior.

Another form of degradation can be seen in the decline of personal integrity, especially in the academic sphere and everyday life. Students are increasingly using technology to engage in dishonest acts such as plagiarism, data manipulation, instant answer searches, and the use of artificial intelligence applications without academic ethics. The instant culture created by social media encourages students to choose convenience over the correct process. New research shows that exposure to fast-paced content that prioritizes summaries and visuals weakens reflective abilities, perseverance, and appreciation for the intellectual process.<sup>12</sup> As a result, the values of honesty, responsibility, and hard work, which are the core of moral education, are experiencing significant erosion.

The empathy crisis is a form of moral degradation that is becoming increasingly prominent. Students are becoming more focused on self-representation, image-building, and visual consumerism than on quality relational interactions. The ability to feel other people's feelings is declining because digital communication often only uses emojis, short expressions, and language with minimal context. Recent research shows that excessive digital interaction hinders the development of emotional intelligence, particularly the ability to understand complex emotions, manage conflict, and behave prosocially.<sup>13</sup> When empathy declines, there is a tendency toward individualism, indifference, and a loss of social solidarity among students.

Moral degradation is also evident in behaviors that violate norms of decency and social ethics, such as the use of vulgar language, taking photos or videos without permission, and the dissemination of obscene content involving teenagers.

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<sup>11</sup> Rahmawati Nur dan Dedi Arif, *Digital Aggression and Moral Sensitivity among Adolescents* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2024), 35–36.

<sup>12</sup> Dian Permata dan Joko Prasetyo, *Youth Materialism and Digital Lifestyle Culture* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2025), 51–52.

<sup>13</sup> Siti Marlina dan Ahmad Yusuf, *Declining Empathy in Digital Youth Culture* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2025), 57–59.

The increasing accessibility of sexual content through social media contributes to an increase in deviant behavior and a decline in self-control. Several studies show that this kind of exposure correlates with increased impulsive behavior, low sexual moral awareness, and an inability to distinguish boundaries of privacy in digital interactions.<sup>14</sup> This phenomenon shows that moral degradation is not only related to speech and actions, but also touches on the realm of bodily ethics, privacy, and human dignity.

The forms of moral degradation that arise as a result of the dominance of social media reflect a serious shift in values. Students not only face challenges in controlling their behavior, but also experience a moral identity crisis influenced by a fast-paced, instant, and repetitive digital culture. Therefore, the role of education, including Islamic Religious Education, is essential in reorienting students' moral compass so that they can adapt to the digital world without losing their ethical foundation.

## **2. The Influence of Social Media on the Morals of Identified Students**

The influence of social media on students' morals has been identified in the form of a significant shift in values, especially in how they understand the concepts of right and wrong in everyday life. Social media not only functions as a means of communication, but also as the main space for shaping moral perceptions through visual content, viral narratives, and algorithm-based interactions that tend to prioritize sensation over depth of meaning. Recent research shows that students who have high access intensity tend to experience a decline in moral reflection abilities, where ethical decisions are often influenced by standards of virality, popularity, and social validation rather than universal values.<sup>15</sup> This situation leads to the emergence of moral relativism, where actions that were previously considered deviant become seemingly normal because they often appear on digital timelines.

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<sup>14</sup> Rina Aulia, *Digital Sexuality and Adolescent Behavioral Ethics* (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 2025), 61–63.

<sup>15</sup> Sonia Livingstone, Children, *Adolescents, and Moral Learning in the Digital Age* (London: Routledge, 2024), 35–37.

Social media also influences the character formation of students through digital social learning mechanisms. Students imitate the behavior of viral figures, influencers, and public figures who often display hedonistic, aggressive, or permissive lifestyles that violate norms. Recent studies reveal that this imitation process occurs unconsciously because platform algorithms continuously present similar content repeatedly.<sup>16</sup> As a result, values such as politeness, respect for teachers and parents, and manners in social interactions have declined, as students increasingly look to digital figures as moral references rather than traditional authorities such as teachers and religious leaders.

Social media also has an impact on students' weak self-control and moral discipline. Exposure to fast-paced instant content makes it difficult for students to develop patience, perseverance, and resilience. A 2024 study found that the habits of doomscrolling and consuming short-form content correlate with increased impulsivity, low ability to delay gratification, and weakened awareness of the moral consequences of an action.<sup>17</sup> In the context of education, these conditions contribute to an increase in behavior that violates school rules, low learning ethics, and a decrease in social responsibility.

Social media has also been shown to influence students' spiritual and religious orientation. Religious information that is widely disseminated without scientific curation exposes students to shallow, extreme, or biased interpretations of religion. This shifts their moral perspective from moderate values to a more permissive or, conversely, more exclusive attitude. Recent research shows that exposure to instant religious content on social media is associated with a weakening of classical scientific authority and the emergence of simplistic religious understandings that influence attitudes of tolerance, empathy, and social justice.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> David Buckingham, Youth, *Social Media, and Moral Development* (New York: Polity Press, 2024), 41–43.

<sup>17</sup> Mark D. Griffiths dan Daria J. Kuss, *Problematic Social Media Use and Self-Control among Adolescents* (Cambridge: Academic Press, 2024), 52–55.

<sup>18</sup> Farid Panjwani dan Lynn Davies, *Religious Literacy, Social Media and Moral Education* (London: Bloomsbury, 2025), 60–62.

This condition directly impacts how students view differences, respond to conflict, and position themselves in a multicultural society.

Social media influences the development of empathy and social sensitivity in students. Digital interactions that lack direct emotional contact trigger dehumanization, where other individuals are viewed only as accounts or symbols, rather than as whole human beings with feelings and dignity. Recent studies note that long-term exposure to digital communication based on short texts and shallow emotional symbols contributes to a decline in moral empathy, an increase in permissive attitudes toward symbolic violence, and a weakening of concern for the suffering of others.<sup>19</sup> As a result, behaviors such as understanding, helping, and respecting others are increasingly marginalized in the value system of students.

Social media has created a new arena for the moral development of students. Its influence is not only behavioral, but also touches the deepest layers of their ethical, spiritual, and social consciousness. Social media has become a “hidden curriculum” that continuously teaches values without being noticed. Therefore, this influence needs to be mitigated by strengthening the role of formal education, particularly Islamic Religious Education, which is capable of instilling transcendental moral principles and digital ethics that are balanced with the realities of modern technology.

### **3. The Identified Mitigative Role of Islamic Religious Education**

Islamic Religious Education plays a very strategic mitigating role in addressing the moral degradation of students amid the dominance of social media. IRE functions as a system of internalizing values that not only emphasizes religious cognitive aspects but also the formation of moral and spiritual awareness derived from revelation. Recent research shows that effective religious education can build moral consciousness that encourages students to have an ethical filter in responding to digital content.<sup>20</sup> Values such as honesty, responsibility, manners in social

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<sup>19</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *Digital Communication and the Decline of Empathy in Youth Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2024), 68–70.

<sup>20</sup> Abdullah Sahin, *New Directions in Islamic Education: Pedagogy and Identity Formation* (Leicester: Kube Publishing, 2024), 35–37.

interactions, and fear of God (taqwa) become the foundation that functions as an internal fortress when students are faced with negative content and permissive culture on social media.

The mitigative role of Islamic Religious Education is also evident in strengthening moral literacy and digital literacy based on Islamic values. Islamic Religious Education contributes to guiding students in understanding the boundaries of halal and haram, social rights and obligations, and their responsibilities as caliphs in the digital space. Recent studies in the field of Islamic education show that the integration of moral values in digital literacy can reduce aggressive behavior, ethical deviations, and moral relativism among adolescents.<sup>21</sup> With this approach, social media is not only understood as a threat, but also as a field for charity, preaching, and responsible use of technology.

Islamic Religious Education serves as a medium for character building through the internalization of the concepts of ihsan, muraqabah, and muhasabah in daily life. Education that instills awareness that every behavior is monitored by Allah forms a transcendent self-control, not merely fear of social sanctions. Contemporary research indicates that the spiritual dimension in education has been proven effective in suppressing deviant behavior because it builds moral awareness from within the students.<sup>22</sup> In this context, Islamic Religious Education plays a role in restoring the students' orientation in life from mere social validation to a meaning of life based on spiritual responsibility.

Islamic Religious Education also plays a mitigating role in building religious moderation and moral resilience amid a flood of digital religious information. Social media is often a source of the spread of extreme, superficial, or ideologically biased ideas. Through a moderate, comprehensive, and science-based learning approach, Islamic Religious Education trains students to be critical, selective, and fair in responding to religious information. Religious education oriented towards religious

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<sup>21</sup> Yusef Waghid, Education, *Democracy and Islamic Ethics* (Cham: Springer, 2024), 41–43.

<sup>22</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality and Moral Education* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2024), 52–54.

literacy can increase tolerance, social empathy, and balance in moral thinking.<sup>23</sup> This role is very important in maintaining the moral stability of students amid the plurality of digital information.

Islamic Religious Education serves as a restorative force that restores the function of education as a means of shaping well-rounded individuals (*insan kamil*). In the context of moral degradation caused by social media, Islamic Religious Education is not only reactive, but also proactive through the habit of worship, strengthening Islamic school culture, and teacher role modeling. Recent research shows that a spiritually-based educational environment has a significant impact in reducing deviant behavior and improving students' self-control.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Islamic Religious Education acts as a comprehensive moral mitigation system, covering spiritual, social, and digital dimensions to maintain the moral integrity of the younger generation.

#### **4. Effectiveness of PAI Strategies in Strengthening Identified Morals**

The effectiveness of Islamic Education strategies in strengthening students' morals is identified through tangible behavioral changes, increased internalization of religious values, and strengthened ethical and spiritual awareness. Learning strategies that emphasize exemplary role models (*uswah hasanah*), habitual worship, reflective dialogue, and the integration of morals into lesson material have been proven to increase self-control and a sense of moral responsibility. Recent research shows that religious education models that combine cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects have a significant impact on reducing deviant behavior and increasing prosocial attitudes in students' lives.<sup>25</sup> The success of this strategy lies in its ability to make religious values a system of meaning that guides daily actions, rather than merely theoretical knowledge.

The effectiveness is also evident in the application of an experience-based

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<sup>23</sup> Farid Panjwani dan Lynn Davies, *Religious Education and the Challenge of Extremism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2025), 60–62.

<sup>24</sup> Tariq Ramadan, *Teaching Islam: Spirituality and Ethics in Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 68–70.

<sup>25</sup> Abdullah Sahin, *Spirituality, Values and Educational Leadership in Islamic Contexts* (Leicester: Kube Publishing, 2024), 35–37.

learning approach that links Islamic teachings to contemporary contexts, especially the dilemmas arising from students' use of social media. Through case simulations, digital ethics discussions, and spiritual reflection, this religious education strategy helps students develop the moral skills to make ethical decisions in the digital world.<sup>26</sup> Recent studies show that this type of contextual learning improves moral reasoning and maturity in decision-making, so that students' morals are not only shaped by doctrine, but also by contextual understanding.

The effectiveness of Islamic Education strategies has been identified in the development of a religious and moral school culture. Habit-forming programs such as congregational prayer, Quran recitation, respect for manners, and strengthening digital communication ethics create a moral climate conducive to students. Recent research shows that a school environment rich in spiritual and social values has a positive correlation with increased empathy, discipline, and social responsibility among students.<sup>27</sup> In this context, religious education strategies are not only implemented in the classroom, but are integrated thoroughly into the school culture.

The strategy of strengthening morality through Islamic Religious Education has also proven effective in building moral resilience in students, namely the ability to resist negative influences, social pressures, and temptations to engage in deviant behavior. Through the internalization of the concepts of taqwa, patience, gratitude, and tawakal, this religious education establishes a spiritual fortress that enables students to manage negative impulses and pressures from the digital environment.<sup>28</sup> Recent studies show that strengthening the spiritual dimension in religious education contributes significantly to long-term moral resilience, which is based not only on external compliance but also on internal conviction.

The effectiveness of Islamic Education strategies in strengthening students' morals can be identified from the transformation of attitudes, behaviors, and value orientations. Systematic, reflective, and contextual strategies build harmony

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<sup>26</sup> Farid Panjwani, *Teaching Moral Reasoning in Islamic Education* (London: Routledge, 2024), 41–43.

<sup>27</sup> Yusef Waghid, *Islamic Education and Social Justice* (Cham: Springer, 2025), 52–54.

<sup>28</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion, Spirituality and the Moral Formation of Youth* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2024), 60–62.

between moral rationality and spirituality, so that students have clear ethical guidelines for interacting in the real world and in the digital realm. Contemporary research concludes that religious education designed as a continuous character building system is one of the most effective strategies in addressing the moral challenges of the younger generation in the era of social media.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Social media has become a dominant space in the lives of students, significantly influencing their mindset, attitudes, and moral behavior. The high intensity of social media use, which is repetitive and integrated into daily activities, encourages instant communication, visual culture, and multitasking tendencies that impact the quality of direct social interaction, focus on learning, and self-control. This condition shows that social media is no longer just a communication tool, but has transformed into a new agent of socialization that shapes the value system and moral orientation of students.

The identified moral degradation includes an increase in digital aggression, a decline in academic integrity, the growth of a hedonistic and materialistic lifestyle, a crisis of empathy, and a weakening of awareness of norms of decency and social ethics. This phenomenon shows that the moral problems of students are not only related to superficial behavioral deviations, but have touched on the dimensions of character, social empathy, and awareness of the dignity of oneself and others. Social media acts as a medium that accelerates the normalization of deviant behavior through algorithms, viral culture, and the absence of direct social control.

The influence of social media on students' morals has been identified in the form of a shift in standards of right and wrong, a weakening of ethical reflection, an increase in moral relativism, and a decrease in the role of traditional authority figures such as teachers and religious leaders in shaping values. Social media indirectly acts as a "hidden curriculum" that teaches students pragmatic, permissive, and instant values. As a result, a generation has been formed that is more vulnerable to the pressures of popularity, social validation, and consumerist culture than to the reinforcement of transcendent moral principles. In this context, Islamic Religious Education has proven to have a very important mitigating role.

Islamic Religious Education functions as an internal fortress through the internalization of the values of honesty, responsibility, manners, spiritual awareness, and the strengthening of digital literacy based on Islamic ethics. Its role is not only reactive but also proactive in building religious moderation, moral resilience, and awareness of spiritual responsibility as servants and caliphs. Islamic Religious Education is able to restore students' life orientation from mere social validation to a meaning of life based on faith and noble values.

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