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Published in the USA  
International Journal of Media and Information Literacy  
Issued since 2016.  
E-ISSN: 2500-106X  
2024. 9(1): 142-160

DOI: 10.13187/ijmil.2024.1.142  
<https://ijmil.cherkasgu.press>



## Correlative Effects Between Digital Literacy and Religious Authority Among Academic Communities in Indonesia

Nurdin Laugu <sup>a,\*</sup>, Muhammad Solihin Arianto <sup>a</sup>, A'dillah Mustafa <sup>b</sup>, Mukhlis <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

<sup>b</sup> Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam, Malaysia

<sup>c</sup> Universitas Brawijaya Malang, Indonesia

### Abstract

This research found a dynamic orientation between digital literacy and religious authority. A quantitative approach leads the authority to influence digital literacy. In contrast, the qualitative one passes the opposite direction, i.e. the more literate to technology, the closer religious behaviour to traditional religious authority. This research discusses three important issues. Firstly, digital literacy influencing religious behaviour illustrates the awareness of the importance of digital technology in religious social practices. This awareness creates the idea of the importance of technological literacy in building socio-religious practices. Secondly, the impact of digital literacy on religious authority is discovered by the development of digital literacy associated with disseminating religious knowledge on social media. However, due to their instability, social media platforms cannot be used as a standard for authorizing religious sources. Consequently, some referred to traditional sources. Lastly, the dynamics of religious authority investigate the constellation of dialectical processes that refer to standard terminology in religious practices. Those processes have led to a big question about the actuality of religious authority in society. The actuality of the dominant religious authority tends to lead to technology in practice, but the conceptual point of the authority is in the conventional realm.

**Keywords:** digital literacy, religious authority, digital religion, conventional religion.

### 1. Introduction

Digital literacy discourse in the last decade has become increasingly stronger as digital terms spread in almost every aspect of people's lives, such as digital religion and digital society. This term describes technological trends and domination of social practices through the cultural mediation of actors as a form of technological hegemonic (Schalk, 2018). This mediation process has contributed greatly to the socio-religious practices of the millennial era, which is experiencing a shift from print tradition to digital modernization (Campbell, 2020). This era is marked by a monopoly on communication and information technology in almost every individual and group struggle. Technological monopolies, besides having a significant impact on societal progress, also have technological excesses that tend to be destructive, such as hoaxes (Siddiqui, Singh, 2016), or against established traditions, such as threats to religious authority and local wisdom (Højsgaard, Warburg, 2005).

To face this hegemonic technology, some social actors are still resistant, but others have moved with social change reasoning (Khaidir, 2006; Nashrullah, 2016) to maximize their role in

\* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: [nurdin@uin-suka.ac.id](mailto:nurdin@uin-suka.ac.id) (N. Laugu), [solihin.arianto@uin-suka.ac.id](mailto:solihin.arianto@uin-suka.ac.id) (M.S. Arianto), [adillah973@uitm.edu.my](mailto:adillah973@uitm.edu.my) (A. Mustafa), [mukhlis@ub.ac.id](mailto:mukhlis@ub.ac.id) (Mukhlis)

the development of millennial society. One form of digital literacy is adapting and adopting technological roles into social leadership. Digital literacy is the ability to master computer technology whose information is based on digital sources and social media and to interpret social practices via internet networks (Lankshear, Knobel, 2008; Rowsell, Pahl, 2015). Digital literacy is becoming an important vehicle for approaching knowledge (Reedy, Parker, 2019). American Library Association (ALA, 2020), for example, places terminology as an effort to use information and communication technology in finding, evaluating, creating, and communicating information.

The emergence of two forms of societal response to technological hegemony is interesting to see as religious authority, which for several centuries to the last few decades had been enjoyed by those whose knowledge is based on printed books (Campbell, 2020). This printed religious authority began to find competitors when the new culture of religious authority and digital religion emerged (Højsgaard, Warburg, 2005). Digital religion refers not only to religion, as practiced and articulated online, but also to how media and digital spaces shape and are shaped by religious practice. There is a synergy and dialectical mutual influence in the struggle between religion and digital technology toward forming current religious social practices. Campbell (Campbell, 2013) used this term to discuss the state of religion about digital and cultural artifacts, where religion and digital meet each other. The impact of the debate between religion and digital has given rise to new phenomena, such as the disruption of conventional religious authority on the one hand and the emergence of new digital religious authority on the other (Herzfeld, 2017). How this phenomenon is responded to by society is interesting to study, and the research will take PTKIN (State Islamic Religious Colleges) academics as subjects because they have been intensively involved in religious issues.

The matters of the phenomena will be viewed from conceptual frameworks as follow. A shift in religious authority following the development of information and technological mediation processes has framed the social structure of society. This mediation has inherently driven a cultural shift from print tradition to digital-modernization (Pshenichnykh, Novi, 2023). This phenomenon can be read through the conceptual framework of new media technology. The digitalization of society and its literacy is an inevitable development in technological mediation, which is one of the outputs of the struggle of ideas rather than a technical practice (Farlina et al., 2022). One struggle currently developing is the emergence of concepts emphasizing mastery of ideas, which require careful evaluation of information and intelligent analysis and synthesis. This process is based on a concept that presents a diverse list of specific skills and techniques to meet the qualifications that can create a digitally conscious society. It is illustrated by a phenomenon initially based solely on semantic meaning, namely the ability to read and write. It is defined as the ability to understand information in various presentations. The multimedia nature of digital information emphasizes the meaning, which describes the complexity of articulation and synergism in society (Lankshear, Knobel, 2008; Pechinkina, Vepreva, 2023).

New articulations of technology and social synergism have given rise to the concept of digital religion, which is pervasive in religious practice. This concept begins with communication technology that influences the way people practice religion. The internet and various technological devices are increasingly being used in religious practices. Digital religion is a new framework for articulating the evolution of online religious practices, as is often done in religious practices, such as sending online prayers and other practices (Campbell, Tsuria, 2022). Digital religion not only refers to religion as practiced and articulated online but also shows how religious practices shape digital media and spaces. As a concept, this situation allows society to talk about the current state of religion concerning digital artifacts (Campbell, 2013). Grieve (Grieve, 1995) looked at digital religion as representing a distinct cultural sphere of unique religious practice, but not dichotomous with other forms of religion. Understanding digital religion helps scholars encourage discourse to see online religion as an innovation in media space and an expression of important religious ideologies in contemporary culture, which can change practice and meaning-making itself (Campbell, 2017; Tsuria, 2020).

The emergence of digital religion has helped the religious development and propagation process, but at the same time, traditional religious authorities are experiencing crucial challenges. The question of how this authority can be maintained is one of the keys that can be considered. Meyrowitz in Campbell (Campbell, 2013) stated that authority weakens when information systems are combined. A leader's authority is reduced when a medium allows different people to have open access and gain greater control over social knowledge and information. There is a dominant conceptualization that holds the forms of religious authority are transformed by digital technologies, which are seen as replacing traditional doctrines and domains of belief, which are

often embedded in hierarchical forms of communication, structures, ideologies, and texts, which Hill (Hill, 2002) considered to be authoritative in reason, science, institution, and religious traditions. Besides that, religious authority is also determined by other elements, such as the local wisdom of the community (Nixon, 2019), which is known in other terms as local intelligence. This intelligence refers to the character of original values that are local, inherited from generation to generation, and different from global values (Daniah, 2016; Syamsiyatun, Wafiroh, 2013).

## 2. Materials and methods

This research method includes research approaches, research objects and subjects, research data collection, research instruments, frameworks, and research stages. This research is a qualitative descriptive study with a constructivist approach. Qualitative descriptive is research conducted with an attempt to explain what is in a natural setting using multi-methods that are seen as they are, then interpreted by researchers following individual and societal understandings. Meanwhile, the constructivist or interpretive approach is intended as an attempt to interpret the meaning of a phenomenon of human action and thought through a description of the basic structure of reality which is evidence of human self as individuals and groups in society (Denzin, Lincoln, 1994; Laugu, 2015). This approach is backed up by quantitative measurement using Likert Scale with interpretation by percentage in order to understand quantitative levels of understanding. Before the qualitative method began, the researchers distributed quantitative instruments to potential respondents as can be seen in the Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Number of populations, respondents, and informants

No	Research Location	Population		Respondent		Informant	
		Lecturer	Student	Lecturer	Student	Lecturer	Student
1	UIN Alauddin Makassar	19	577	10	77	4	5
2	UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta	23	577	21	82	4	5
3	UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta	20	837	12	56	4	5
4	UIN Raden Fatah Palembang	12	372	11	94	4	5
Total		74	2363	54	309	17	20

This study used four data collection techniques, namely: interviews, observation, documentation, and FGD (Focus Group Discussion). Interviews are questions posed directly and indirectly to a number of research informants, which consist of three elements, namely students and lecturers. Observation is a direct observation made by researchers in the field.

**Table 2.** Informants' codes

No	UIN Alauddin Makassar		UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta		UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta		UIN Raden Fatah Palembang	
	Lecturer	Student	Lecturer	Student	Lecturer	Student	Lecturer	Student
1	Alau-Lo1	Alau-So1	Suka-Lo1	Suka-So1	Syah-Lo1	Syah-So1	Rafa-Lo1	Rafa-So1
2	Alau-Lo2	Alau-So2	Suka-Lo2	Suka-So2	Syah-Lo2	Syah-So2	Rafa-Lo2	Rafa-So2
3	Alau-Lo3	Alau-So3	Suka-Lo3	Suka-So3	Syah-Lo3	Syah-So3	Rafa-Lo3	Rafa-So3
4	Alau-Lo4	Alau-So4	Suka-Lo4	Suka-So4	Syah-Lo4	Syah-So4	Rafa-Lo4	Rafa-So4
5	-	Alau-So5	-	Suka-So5	-	Syah-So5	-	Rafa-So5
Number	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	5

Documentation refers to documents related to the formal object of research. FGDs were conducted by inviting a number of informants and resource persons to explore the research material. Those informants' identification is coded as follows.

The data collected from all techniques are validated through triangulation techniques on three aspects, namely data sources, data collection techniques, and time (Arikunto, 2010; Denzin, Lincoln, 1994; Sugiyono, 2006). To interpret the level of conformity between what respondents want and the content of the statements submitted to them, an interpretation of the Likert Scale interval values is used which is converted into percentage (Jamieson, 2024) interval values as follows.

**Table 3.** Interpretation of percentage levels

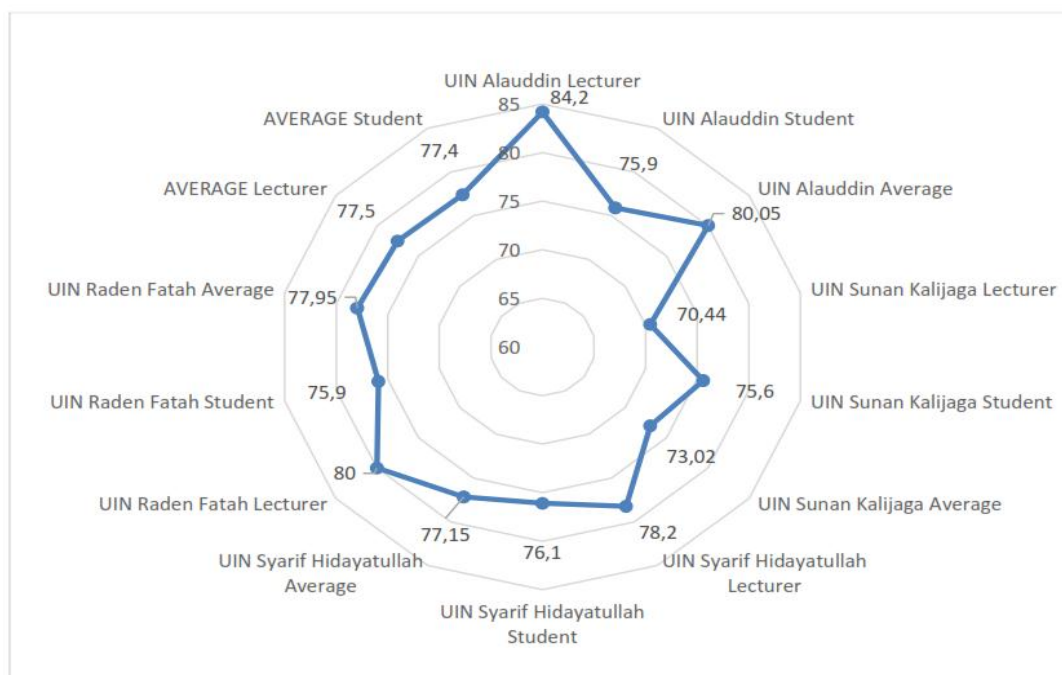
No	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
1	90-100	Outstanding
2	80-89	Excellent
3	70-79	Very Good
4	60-69	Good
5	50-59	Fair
6	49 Down	Poor

### 3. Discussion and results

This research is seen in two approaches, namely qualitative and quantitative, even though the research is actually qualitative descriptive research. Therefore, a quantitative approach is only used to help explain qualitative phenomena regarding the object of research, namely digital literacy and religious authority that occur in the life of the academic community. Therefore, this research presentation is divided into two main parts, namely quantitative display of questionnaire data and qualitative analysis of interview results.

#### Quantitative Display of Data Questionnaire

This research generally discusses three main issues, namely the effect of digital literacy on religious behavior, the impact of digital literacy on religious authority, and the dynamics of religious authority in the era of digital technology. The questionnaire results were presented at four universities, including UIN Alauddin, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, and UIN Raden Fatah. Each location describes the results of interviews from two groups, which include lecturers and students. The percentage results that describe the condition and situation of digital literacy and religious authority as can be seen in Figure 1 below.



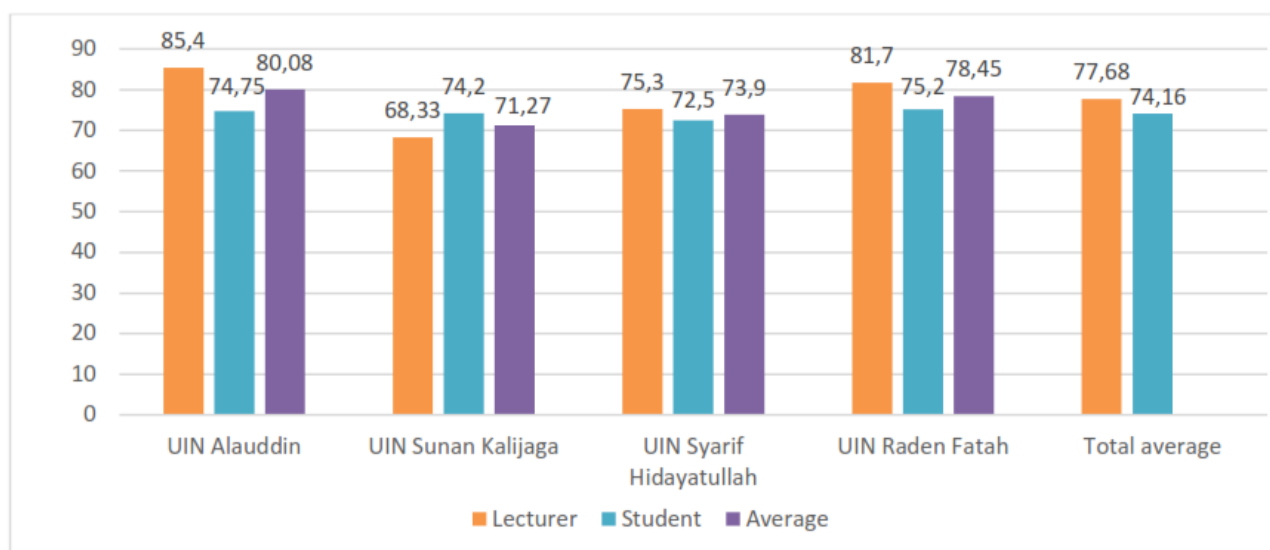
**Fig. 1.** Average values of relations between digital literacy and religious authority

The data shows two dimensions, namely the first is the condition of the institution which is represented by lecturers and students and the second is the topic being researched. In the first dimension, respondents' answers regarding the effect of digital literacy on religious authority were reflected by 77.5 % among lecturers and 77.4 % among students. This percentage is in the very good range, although the response from Gen Z students, which was initially predicted to be higher, was actually 0.1 % lower. The highest value of the response was Alauddin, namely 80.05 % with an Excellent interpretation, while the other three were in the range of 70 to 79 % with a very good interpretation. The lowest score was Sunan Kalijaga, namely 73.02 %, while the other two were Syarif Hidayatullah with a score of 77.15 % and Raden Fatah with a score of 77.95 %.

In the second dimension which includes three important issues, namely the effects of digital literacy on religious behavior, the impact of digital literacy on religious authorities, and the dynamics of religious authority in the digital technology era, it is generally illustrated with an average figure of 77.5 % or entering a reaction condition at a very good level. The highest values from respondents were on the second issue related to the impact of digital literacy on religious authority, namely 78.6 %, followed by the third issue regarding the dynamics of religious authority in the digital technology era with 77.5 %, then the first issue related to the effect of digital literacy on religious behavior as much as 76.3 %. The quantitative data illustrates that the respondents' answers among lecturers and students are at the same level, namely at 70 to 79 %, with the meaning of very good.

The three issues above are described in detail in quantitative form as illustrated in the following three figures, [Figure 2](#), [Figure 3](#), and [Figure 4](#).

In [Figure 2](#) issues related to the effect of digital literacy on religious behavior are as follows.

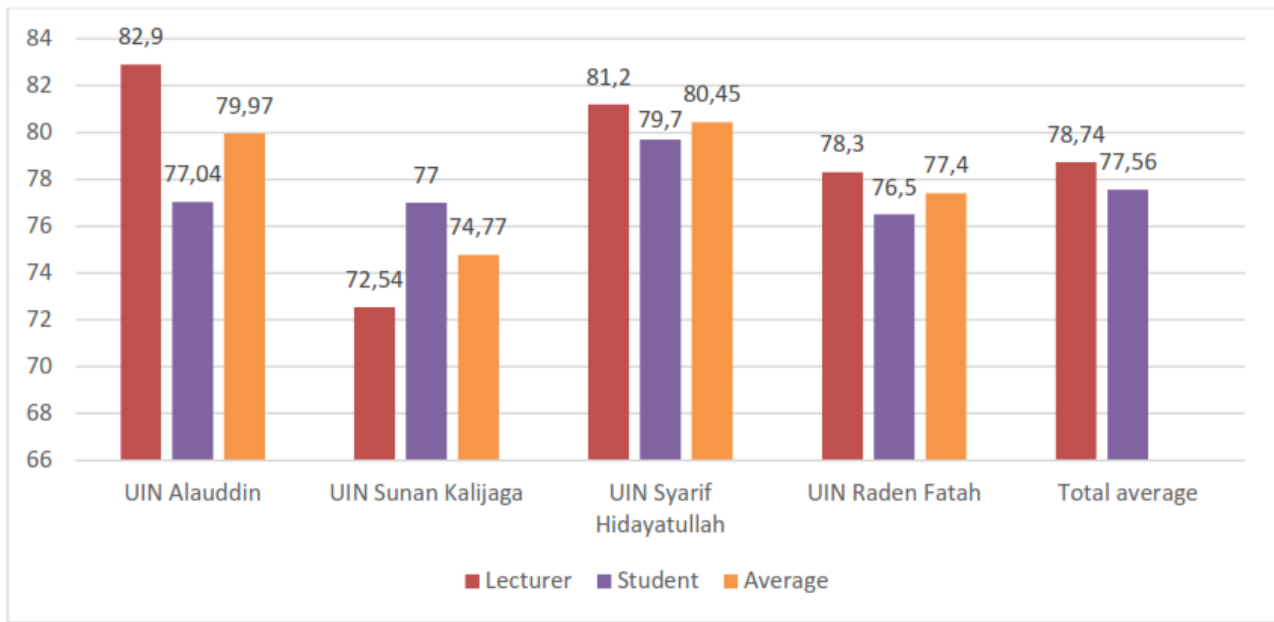


**Fig. 2.** The effect of digital literacy on religious behavior in percentage

The effects of digital literacy were concluded from six situations experienced by respondents, which include the importance of digital technology as a tool in society; university digital technology facilities and influences religious behavior; digital literacy competency supports in religion; religious practice has shifted from traditional to digital; digital technology is a dominant media for learning religious knowledge; and digital media are dominant sources influencing religious behavior.

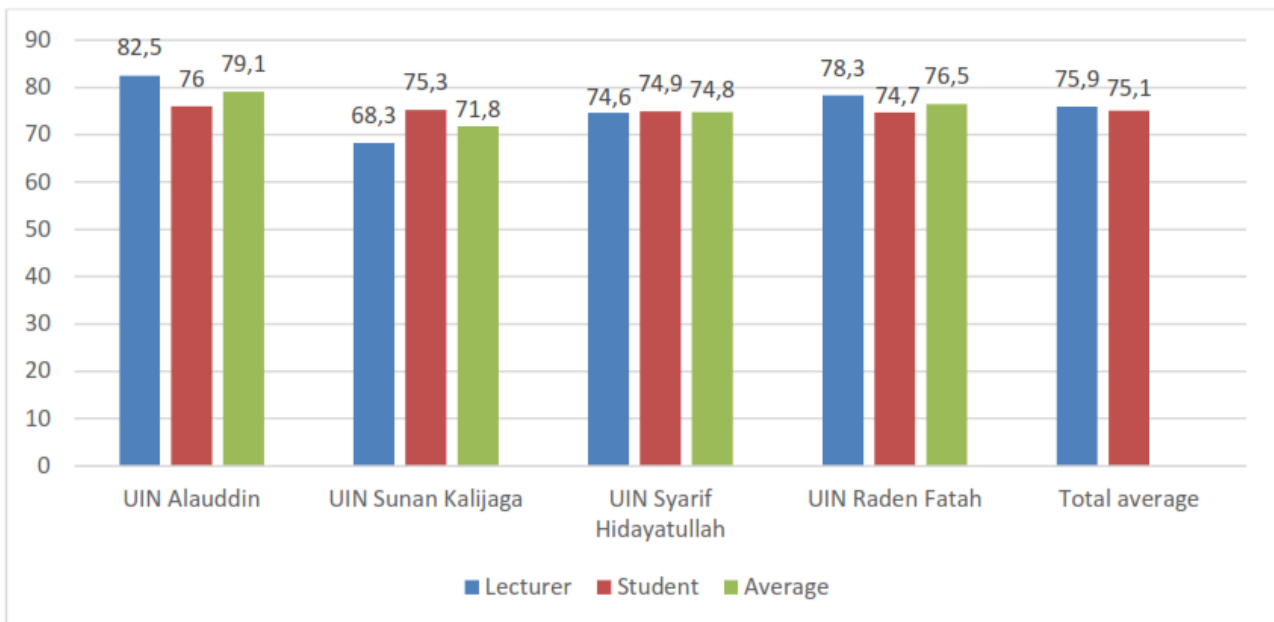
As for [Figure 3](#) is related to the level of impact of digital literacy on religious authorities. This impact is the average of the six issues explored, including the crucial role of religion in resolving personal and social affairs; the important role of religious figures in contemporary issues, such as religious, political, economic, social, and cultural; the urgency of religious symbols, such as the Koran, *Ulama*, *Ustadz*, *Habib*, etc. are in people's lives; the need of religious organizations, groups, and communities in society; religious learning methods available on digital media can replace conventional (offline) methods; and the dominance of digital media compared by printed media in religious understanding.





**Fig. 3.** The impact of digital literacy on religious authorities in percentage

Figure 4 describes the level of dynamics of religious authority in the era of digital technology, which is also formed from six things, which include: great influence of new digital media, such as social media, in religious authorities; a must of digital media to maintain religious authority; the importance of digital media in religious preaching carried out by religious figures; the role of digital media in religion among people; the correlation of digital technology development toward religious authority; and the threat of digital literacy toward conventional (offline) religious authority, such as reduction of traditional preaches congregations.



**Fig. 4.** The effect of digital literacy on religious behavior in percentage

*Qualitative Analysis of Interview Results*

The following analysis will focus on qualitative analysis, which looks at informants' responses to the abovementioned critical issues. Data on this phenomenon will be explored from 37 informants consisting of 17 lecturers and 20 students. The informants were taken from four institutions, each with 4 lecturers and 5 students. Some data is presented verbatim, and others are

presented based on the meaning obtained from the informants. The data presentation and analysis can be seen in the following discussion.

### *The Effect of Digital Literacy on Religious Behavior*

Technological developments have changed many things in worldly matters and religious affairs (Højsgaard, Warburg, 2005). These changes have illustrated a variety of phenomena and dialectics of public opinion in addition to aspects of their direct impact on people's lives, especially in religious behavior. Based on the conceptual bases and the reality of the phenomena of the academic community in the four locations, those dialectics can be seen in three main issues regarding the influence of digital literacy on religious behavior (Bellar, Campbell, 2023), namely technology as a tool for modern culture, the urgency of technological literacy in religious behavior, and technological mediation and religious practices among the university community. These three issues will be presented as follows.

Digital technology has opened and encouraged a new atmosphere of communication and interaction in modern society. The novelty of this communication and interaction is not only felt in the mundane aspects of society but also in the *ukhrawiah* aspect, which is shown in religious behavior, which experiences a dynamic through digital technology. The dynamic of this technology has signaled its urgency in the struggles of society, where almost no activity escapes the use of technology (Afrilyasanti et al., 2022). Therefore, mastery of digital technology is no longer a secondary need but a primary demand that must always exist in an advanced society. The achievement of programs through technological assistance is the same between the informants. They believe that the presence of digital technology is an essential tool for society to improve their performance in their jobs. Therefore, they realize that the technology currently being developed needs to be utilized to the fullest, especially for them, the holders of religious authority, so that the religious resources found can be more extensive so that their religious insights are more advanced and comprehensive, which ultimately develops their religious behavior (Echchaibi, Hoover, 2023). However, in particular, they think that their religious behavior is not controlled by technology; it is just that digital technology has made it easier for them to recall previously learned religious knowledge (Clark, Lindsey, 2022).

In addition to the urgency of digital technology in the religious practices of the academic community, digital technology has a remarkable influence on the community's religious practices. In the use of mobile phones, for example, the academic community in general, and students in particular, feel that technology in everyday life is a primary need, inseparable from their every social interaction (Zaluchu, 2020). This mobile phone technology has a profound impact, so they are powerless to be separated, which can go beyond primary needs, such as surviving quietly without eating and drinking for spiritual reasons or because of religious practices. However, if someone needs to remember to bring their cell phone to work or to their university, they will experience some discomfort throughout the day or return home to retrieve their forgotten cell phone. This condition illustrates that technology is essential in mediating daily life and culture (Barker, 2000).

“...the presence of digital technology and its development provides many things that people need to develop and make changes in their life to be more modern and efficient. This occurs especially in general communication, such as in hospitality, where people are in direct contact with each other. However, with technology, this gathering can be replaced by long-distance communication via cell phones, audio calls, or video calls. I practice them... sometimes when I am still busy, I can still stay in touch through cell phone, long distance (Syahid-LO4)” and others, because our daily lives follow religious norms... (Rafah-SO1)”.

The results of the interviews above show that the presence of technology with all the literacy tools and capacities of the university community has a significant impact on their religious behavior, which is generally driven by the intense mediation of technology due to the perceived efficiency of society. From interaction to information retrieval in religious practices, digital technology has influenced them, resulting in the development of activities from conventional practices to digital practices. Mastery of digital technology has shifted their conventional religious practices and traditions towards digitalization and has influenced their interactions with others. Therefore, media literacy education becomes significant in such a case (Levitskaya, Fedorov, 2021). This is supported by several informants, such as Suka-LO2, Alau-LO4, and Syahid-SO2, stating the same thing that the existence of university technology facilities would encourage them to engage more in digital communication, including aspects of their religious behavior that were widely affected.

Along with the development of technology and its impact on society, technological literacy is a fundamental element many people own. This is important so that they can use it the most while at the same time avoiding adverse effects that have the potential to become a source of problems for modern life, such as fraud and hoax news. Literacy capacity in dealing with technology through digital literacy has and will facilitate optimizing the benefits of technology in every aspect of life, especially in religious practices and behavior (McClure, 2017). The mastery of technology by religious groups has assisted them in disseminating their religious ideas efficiently and maximally. The development of this technology cannot be avoided. People have various perspectives due to differences in social, economic, and religious backgrounds, and so on. However, this difference is only sectoral and microscopic because urban and rural areas are not a significant consideration in the influence of digital technology on their religious behavior. This condition does not mean technology is not essential, but several other variables have reduced its impact on socio-religious practices (Humeira, Sarwono, 2019).

The midpoint of equal access to technology is a significant momentum for the progress of every member of society. The presence of technology with social media facilities creates a dynamic cultural atmosphere. However, this development requires a shared awareness of the importance of technological literacy in their every action. Without literacy, the impact of hoaxes and fraud, as well as other detrimental actions, will cause disharmony and chaos in society (Afrilyasanti et al., 2022). The success of literacy building will encourage the birth of an insightful and civilized society, which will contribute enormously to creating comfortable conditions for building social harmony. This position will spur high social civility in every aspect of their lives. The process of arriving at this status shows the urgency of technology in patterns and practices of religious behavior (Cheek, 2018). Digital literacy encourages a more profound understanding on the one hand and the urgency of religious behavior on the other. This discussion can be seen in the informants as follows.

"... yes, of course, technology is critical in people's lives, including religious affairs, so technology is urgent for religious behavior... (Rafah-L03), people can easily get religious knowledge anytime and anywhere, just open YouTube, whatever is available so that everyone can be influenced to a matter or topic in a religious issue that is, of course, related to everyone's religious behavior in the future... the point is that technology is very urgent to develop religion. However, of course, it must be equipped with technological literacy so as not to get caught in the negative trap of technology, spreading hoaxes and becoming news users - Hoax news or preaching that deviate from the real religion... (Alau-L01)".

The interview results above illustrate the urgency of technology and digital literacy for the religious behavior of the university community. They use technology in various activities, especially religious activities. The use of technology, such as watching lectures via YouTube videos and using Zoom for *Tahlilan* activities and so on, shows the development of religious behavior, which is usually entirely conventional and now uses technology as a complement. Technology increases the quantity of community involvement in religious activities because people who are far away can be involved through Zoom and Google Meet applications, as well as other technological means. They believe that digital technology is unavoidable in today's modern society (Smit et al., 2024). The other informants, such as Syahid-L02 and Suka-L01, described the strategic function of technology in supporting every university community activity.

The urgency of digital technology regarding the university community's religious behavior is evident in the interviews with several informants from the students, among them, Suka-SO2, Alau-SO5, and Rafah-SO4. They believe that the existence of digital technology today is closely related to their religious behavior, even though conventional discourse remains dominant at a certain level because their religious insights still depend directly on *Ustadz* figures as an absolute authority. They feel that more than their religious knowledge is insufficient to filter out what is right and what is wrong, so in addition to using technology as a means of information retrieval, a *Ustadz* is needed to ensure information is available among them through digital technology. The urgency of digital technology occurs in every student, even though the level of urgency differs between them due to differences in culture and other backgrounds that mediate a variety of impacts in society (Horeck, 2018).

Technological developments and digitization in various social domains and practices, including the religious area, have undergone a process of technological mediation, which has slowly created changes in response and behavior towards religious practices. This change from conventional to digital religious practices occurs in the mediation process. The university community is experiencing digitizing activities, such as conventional administration and learning



processes, towards optimizing the utilization of communication technology facilities. These processes eventually give birth to religious behavior dominated by technological means. This phase describes the process of mediating technology, where all activities and behaviors are strengthened by technological means, such as mobile phones and laptops (Groot et al., 2023). Those technological means also bring various applicable facilities in building communication, such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, and so on.

The emergence of these technological facilities has helped and encouraged the improvement of each individual's results. This achievement played a significant role in shifting people's mindsets. Effectiveness and efficiency have become essential loci of technology discourse in understanding various hoaxes (Levitskaya, Fedorov, 2021). Communities can give birth to achievements that go far beyond what is produced by conventional activities. Therefore, technology has penetrated almost every area of life more quickly, especially the religious sphere. The rapid development of this technology has played a fast mediation process. As a means of communication, digital technology has succeeded in taking a very strategic position in people's lives. This technological mediation runs as if no changes have been made. The mediation process in this religious practice can be seen in the results of the joint interview with the following.

"... I feel that technology has an extraordinary influence; technology is everywhere; without technology, it seems we cannot live, forget to bring our cellphones when we go to the office, we cannot be calm; all our data, our communications are all in it... Sometimes, people ask about certain things; they can only be answered if the cell phone gets carried away because everything is stored on the cell phone. Therefore, we must keep up with technological developments, because if we do, we will definitely be left behind with information, and so on... (Syahid-Lo3)".

The results of the interview above strengthen the position of the importance of technology in the discourse of technology mediation. Students, as the millennial generation, can be guessed by their answers to the position of technology in their lives. It is just that their answers have something in common when it comes to the realm of religion. They tend to see technology as entertainment only when associated with religious discourse. This is because they think that religion cannot be further intervened by technology because of religion's status as a sacred area, so anything obtained is related to religion; a conventional verification process is needed, as do some other lecturers who already believe in such things. In essence, technology is a mandatory tool for everyone who wants to move abreast of current developments (Fasting, Schofield, 2023). The rapid development of information has spawned new vocabulary, such as big data, data science, and so on. All of this illustrates the dissemination of information that moves very fast and large, so a certain mechanism is needed in technology to be able to overcome this (Tselykh, Levitskaya, 2022).

#### *The Impact of Digital Literacy on Religious Authorities*

Digital literacy is a formulation of technology education in building the foundation of its usefulness for society. Axiologically, technology with all its products can produce adaptation and adoption in the mediation process, which, in the end, the community has the eligibility to exploit for the benefit of humanity (Bajwa et al., 2022). Technological devices, especially digital ones, were born as demands for extending social practices, including religious practices, with all of their trimmings. Digital technology has shown a new discourse in religious life (Campbell, 2013). Does the presence of technology with the formulation of public knowledge have an articulation effect on religious authority, along with an explanation that will explain three main issues, namely the dissemination of religion based on social media platforms, religious and educational literacy, and the emergence of new religious terminologies become important for a variety of issues (Lister et al., 2024).

The presence of information technology, especially in social media, has had a spectacular impact on information struggles and social relations. This impact covers almost all areas of community life, including the religious area (Anwar, Mujib, 2022). Religious dissemination has experienced rapid development due to the emergence of social media platforms, which facilitate the communication process in digital media activities and conventional activities supported by social media facilities (Carah et al., 2022). Conventional and digital interactions have formed a new technology community. On the one hand, conventional activities are maintained and developed through a technological approach; namely, technological means are used to assist these conventional processes (Farlina et al., 2022). This can be seen in the *Taklim* assemblies revealed by several informants who showed how many conventional religious programs are still running; the difference is preparation and correspondence through social media facilities.

Increasingly advanced social media facilities have encouraged increased dissemination of religious discourse via YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc. This type of social media has provided different spaces and various choices for audiences to choose according to their needs and chemistry. At this point, social media becomes the most vital choice in following the circulation of information and even knowledge, which includes the religious field (Sazali et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2023). In the religious sector, the community has easy access to religious information and knowledge and conveys and disseminates religious information and knowledge through YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, and so on (Agarwal, Jones, 2022). The presence of this social media seems more accurate, although some of it has also been modified or even manipulated, said several informants. However, according to them, with the literacy skills possessed by social media users, the effects of manipulation and hoax problems can be avoided and prevented.

"... social media such as YouTube, TikTok, and others help me when I want to give lectures, especially if the invitation is urgent. YouTube is a solution, and I can get a lot of information and insights... when it comes to differences in religion, I still refer directly to the book... (Rafah-LO1).

However, the point is that this YouTube medium helps to get inspiration for lecture themes. You do not have to spend a long time reading when the invitation to a lecture is approaching... social media is very effective as a source of information. However, you have to have basic knowledge from your own experience of religion so that it is not easily influenced by many views that may not be relevant to our cultural context; it must be filtered so as not to mislead... (Suka-LO4)".

The results of these interviews illustrate that the dissemination of religion through social media is highly favored by the public, including academics (Spinde et al., 2023). The specific reason for using it is efficiency, which is the production engine towards the output of an activity. They make social media an effective and efficient source of information (Kuo, Jackson, 2024) because it is open and can be used anytime. Using social media as religious information and knowledge is a social practice coherent with the instantaneous conditions and needs of modern society. Even though social media is also recognized as having weaknesses, they can be overcome by comparing different media sources. There is internal validation among academics who use social media, in addition to their past knowledge. Digital media as a technological device has metamorphosed into a social tool that builds a new order in people's lives (Masduki, 2021). This social media platform has created three elements of new social community construction among academics, namely social media as a source of information, especially religious knowledge, as a source of religious entertainment, and as an engine for producing outward efficiency of community religious activities. This new social construction embodies the process of technological mediation in the shift of conventional culture towards the late modern ecosystem of society. Such atmosphere subtly becomes a big challenge to a reading culture (Mehmood et al., 2021; Woods, 2023).

Religious literacy is the foundation of religious understanding, which can be a solution to overcome differences. Religious literacy in this context is intended as urgent awareness of the position of religion as a dogmatic guide for society. The status of religion is seen as something other than knowledge based on logic and scientific activity. However, it is seen as subjective-normative knowledge that must be positioned as the possession of belief for every religious owner. So, its position is a transcendental truth owned by every person or group of people, which other different groups cannot challenge. This understanding is considered religious literacy, the impact of which is to give birth to a tolerance for differences in every religion (Zuhdi, Sarwenda, 2020). This situation forms internal and external awareness in an interactional framework amid substantial societal differences.

This substantial difference requires an educational process in society. Education in question is an activity that requires a figure who can be a guide or role model for the community. Figures and excellence in education will be able to give birth to religious literacy. Sources of religious literacy will develop through religious groups or communities in which different views and perspectives grow. These differences can be managed and mediated together to create harmony between them. This condition develops because of the foundation of religious literacy owned by each member of society in the frame of social change (Camarero et al., 2018). The fast traffic of religious information through social media platforms can be distinguished from any differences because there is a disposition of religious literacy traditions among religious community groups that recognize the urgency of being prominent in society.

"... the issue of religious literacy is important in encouraging moderation and tolerance among religious people, even within the same religion, for example as Muslims, of course, they also have differences from other people. We believe that religious symbols such as clerics, *ustadz*,

religious leaders, and so on have a strategic position to provide education to the public... leaders or ustadz are still believed to be people who can be followed in their footsteps, so whatever is considered right, we follow... especially our awareness as religious people and think that religion is a way of life and truth, ... every religion must believe in the truth of their religion ... so we understand each other ... (Alau-Soi)".

The interview results illustrate that awareness of differences is needed to build a harmonious society. Religious literacy is critical in creating conducive and comfortable conditions amid the development and progress of communication technology in digital media and social media (Tiusanen, 2023). Media that creates human capabilities beyond the three dimensions of communication flow. The flow points for sending and receiving messages are blurred due to the sophistication of human technology in communication and information. To deal with this technological sophistication, religious symbols need to play their role in educating the public. *Ustadz, Kiyai*, and other religious leaders are essential in dealing with, directing, and creating information. This position is strategic in the current explosion of information and big data. If the information content created and appearing to the public does not carry a good message, then the consequence is that the contents of resistance arguments cannot be avoided. This condition will create an unstoppable situation, and the social effects will result in significant problems that will lead to a chaotic society, and the implications for the religious sphere maybe be fatal (Sazali et al., 2020).

Therefore, according to all informants, digital community early education in modern religious discourse needs to emerge as a stream of public interest. This education will give birth to religious literacy, which encourages every member of society to respect the differences in other people's choices, especially in the religious realm. The choice of a different religion or different schools and perspectives within a religion is the prerogative of every individual. Concerning that choice, religious literacy has become necessary in the modern world of digital technology. Society within this framework will emerge as a group of tolerant and harmonious individuals in different spaces and times. Therefore, religious teachers or religious authorities are essential figures that they are expected to follow. They consider teachers and religious leaders essential in creating conditions for harmony in the digital media technology era, which is open to everyone equally (Abror et al., 2021; Nassiri, 2024). This condition allows everyone to be involved and contribute to every public issue.

Digital religion was born as a result of the development of digital technology, which it refers to as mutually carried out and articulated online – the influence of religion on the one hand and the influence of digital technology on the other. So, this situation was triggered by the dialectical reaction of religion and digital. The integration has no theological impact because both are in their respective positions. Technology is developing as a necessary means of carrying out religious practices. Religion has become a way of life that is increasingly spreading and is being recognized for its strategic position in building harmonious social relations. So, there is synergy and dialectical mutual influence in the struggle for religion and digital technology to realize religious and social practices in this millennial era. Campbell (Campbell, 2013) defined this terminology as a discourse on the state of religion about digital and cultural artifacts, where religion and digital greet each other. The existence of technology with all its facilities has formed a new religious community, religious practices, and behavior shift from conventional practices to digital ecosystems. The emergence of many religious figures in the digital space indicates this new religious ecosystem (Evolvi, 2022).

This digital ecosystem describes a change in the religious paradigm at the level of implementation of religious practices. Both conceptually and ideologically, religious understanding still refers to the substance of religious texts that have been understood so far. So, the emerging changes are at the secondary level, enabling religious practices to be carried out effectively and efficiently through digital technology. Conventional religious authority can be disrupted, but this authority has metamorphosed into digital ecosystem authority. However, this is still speculative because it turns out that mastery of technology is not a determining variable for the transition from conventional to digital ecosystems, even though they are unique (Jitsaeng, Tuamsuk, 2022). This shift illustrates a lot that conventional processes are still working optimally on the one hand, while digital processes are rushing on the other. The emergence of the famous *Ustadz* and *Kiyai* in the digital space is increasingly unstoppable. This is an indicator of digital power on this religious issue.

"... the question about digital religion, I think, is natural because this term has been discussed a lot, and I do not think there is anything strange... it is just that the term picks up the momentum

of an era of very great communication technology,... access to information is so very easy, studying religion is easy with access to the internet, technological facilities for studying many religions... this is what makes fun and influence people to study religion easily, although there are also negative impacts for certain people who have no religious basis... basically, digital religion is a religion in which people uses technological means to carry out his religious activities, such as praying, lecturing, and various forms of religious acts through technological means... (Syahid-So5)".

This interview shows that digital religion is an essential new terminology for religious communities because it provides a dialectical space for meetings between religion and technology. This meeting provides benefits that enable the efficiency of community religious practices. They have equal space of openness to engage in conversations between communities in all their interests, especially religious discourse. The birth of the term digital religion determines the direction of religious discussion about technology (Berger, Golan, 2023). There is a dialectical mix that encourages people to read religion through digital, on the one hand, and understand technology about religion on the other. The presence of the terminology will help people understand the era that is different from previous eras. Likewise, the acceleration of the transfer of religious information and knowledge that occurs within the framework of digital religion is a gateway for community digital literacy, which will eventually give birth to a literacy-based community, not only in the religious realm but also in social and other domains (Siuda, 2021). This issue develops at almost every level of community education, as among students, who also have views that are relevant to the abovementioned views.

The community generally understands the ins and outs of these religious practices, so they have awareness at their respective levels. This relates to social discourse and cultural positions that place self-adaptation efforts towards digital religion. Grieve (Grieve, 1995) stated that digital religion represents a distinct cultural sphere of unique religious practice but is not dichotomous with other forms of religion. This societal understanding of digital religion helps scholars push past discourses that only saw online religion as an innovation in a unique media space to consider how online religious practice is becoming an essential expression of religion in contemporary culture. Therefore, digital religion shows different cognitive qualifications between online and offline religions (Zekrist, 2023). This relationship is reflected in the social structure and cultural practices in a society filled with technology and information. Digital religion seeks to offer a reflection on how religion works in a digital environment, the indications of which can be seen in the key characteristics, which include ideology and new media, which can change not only practice but also the process of making meaning itself (Campbell, 2017; Tsuria, 2020).

#### *The Dynamics of Religious Authority in the Digital Technology Era*

Religious authority is a phenomenon that is widely seen from the sociological realm. Religious authority is understood more as a building or social construction than a theological one (Burge, Djupe, 2022). Even so, religious authority is considered an interconnected issue that influences the construction of beliefs and social reality. Therefore, religious authority becomes a contestative arena for various interest groups (Rumadi, 2012). Authority as a social construction, which in turn is religious authority as a social construction formed from religious foundations, which is based on theological aspects, creates a status quo phenomenon that perpetuates a position in society, such as the religious authority of religious figures, such as *Kyai*, *Ustadz*, and others. Conventional religious authorities in today's millennial society have faced challenges from the digital technology era, which gave birth to technological power to strengthen people's communication positions (Bingaman, 2023). In this regard, this religious authority will be seen in three main discussion areas: conventional religion versus digital religion, religious dialectics with technological culture, and new patterns of actuality of religious authority. These three things will be discussed in the following presentation.

Conventional religious discourse is meant in the context of religious practices that are still intact, or at least there is resistance to the development and use of digital technology in carrying out and promoting religion in society. This conventional religious practice has shown its existence as a space of authority practiced and maintained in carrying out and maintaining religious purity (Osim, Eteng, 2021). In addition, conventional religious authority maintains humanist relations between individuals practicing religion amid a society dominated by digital technology facilities, including social media, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and so on. Meanwhile, digital religion is a religious practice that experiences dialectics with digital technology. Religion is practiced by using technological means,



on the one hand, and digital usage that follows religious preferences. Religion and digital greet each other in religious and social practices (Usman et al., 2023).

Conventional-based religion is not only developing and being maintained in areas far from urban areas but also in urban areas that are still prevalent and practiced by educated people. Technologically educated people do not guarantee their position to use social media technology as a source of religious information. Conversely, on a particular scale, rural people only sometimes use conventional approaches to studying religion (Echchaibi, Hoover, 2023). Therefore, the digitization of religion is still in the process of a long dialogue because the character of digital technology is still developing rapidly, and its stability is very dependent on the literacy competence of the community. This literacy position is a determining factor in digital society (Kazakov, 2022). Social harmony can be realized if people have good digital literacy.

"... digital culture about religion is starting to get busy, such as listening to lectures on YouTube, praying, *Tahlilan*, and so on, we can all follow the digital form... so yes, it is normal and friends have heard of this technology, but it does not mean religious activities the conventional nature is gone, in fact it is still being carried out busily, even more crowded than before, even though the impact of the pandemic is still being felt, but slowly conventional meetings to discuss religious matters... namely Islam is starting to develop and more and more because friends from the village have started to arrive and crowded, and conventional activities are fun... (Suka-SO5)".

This interview shows a tendency to choose conventional methods, even though they are millennials, which is synonymous with the technological era. They have discovered and used digital technology from their childhood. They must be kept from technological facilities for each of their activities. However, in religion, they have a cautious view of technological means. Therefore, they believe that the information and knowledge about Islam must be verified if it relates to substantial religion to avoid misleading things. So, integrated media system needs to play a role in a such issue (Aharoni, 2022). In general, conventional religion and digital religion develop together. Among lecturers, the digital approach is more manageable than that of students. Because lecturers already have previous insight, religious information obtained from digital media is automatically verified. In contrast, students do not yet have adequate religious insight, so they need validation from *Ustadz* and other religious leaders.

Religion and technological culture have dialectics. Religion as a teaching of life runs through religious practices, while a technological culture is a culture that is influenced by technology. Fundamentally, religion, culture, and technology are fundamental entities that are integrally interconnected. These three essential entities emerged as a discourse on socio-religious practices in the life of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 society. Martin Heidegger states that technology is the application of knowledge that connects humans with the intersubjectivity of the material and supernatural world (Alawa, 2017). He believes that technology affects the world outside human existence and uniquely works in the human world. Through technology, humans then manifest differently. Technology has opened up new possibilities for being and becoming, enabling them to relate to others differently. This phenomenon is reinforced by Ross and Nightingale, who say that humans are increasingly becoming integrated with technology. Therefore, when humans depend on technology, technology will also increasingly depend on humans (Siregar, 2021).

The connection between religion and technological culture has illustrated that religion's position has experienced an improvisational process that gave birth to new communities based on digital religious practices. The closeness between technology and religion is getting stronger because of the mediation process of technology through culture (Siregar, 2021). The dialectic between religion and technological culture is reflected in the behavior of modern society. Advances in technology through social media have formed a new mainstream within the framework of optimizing shared opportunities and equal access in the world of information. Everyone has the same right to convey information, not just as a recipient at the end of the information cycle. They can become recipients of information in the first line so that new knowledge can be owned as new as other community members. Therefore, the flow of information that opens up new channels in social media, such as WhatsApp and YouTube, has given rise to technological mediation, shaping society's technological culture (Ferdig, 2018). This process has given birth to a dialectical process of religion with technological culture, which is increasingly showing the phenomenon of digitalization of religious practices. This discourse can be seen in the following interview results.

"...religious practices are indeed colored by a technological culture, where there is religion there is also technology available, so it is no longer pure conventional culture...all technology helps



the realization of religion...for example, we want to give lectures even though we do not have time, with technology we can follow through youtube, so this helps people and has started to become a culture... yes listening to lectures via youtube, or now with TikTok is not boring because it takes certain phases... and still there is the full version, you can watch it anytime... of course, this helps us in religion... (Suka-SO1)".

The interview illustrates a dialectic between religion and technological culture through social media. The informants realized the importance of using technology in socio-religious practices. They illustrate that technology dramatically contributes to the development of religion through technological facilities. However, technology can also be destructive if the need for beauty must be addressed through literacy competence. Open access, both transferring and receiving information, can be used by certain people to spread false information (Ulzheimer, et al., 2021) and knowledge that everyone can access (Lei et al., 2023). At this point, technology can only be destructive if society has a base to deal with today's information explosion. All information flows quickly and can be reached easily by everyone. This flow of information creates a new community within the framework of religion, along with technology. The presence of technology with two sides has created a contest between religion and technological culture. This contest is formed through the interests of religion and technology, which mutually work and produce society's culture through digital technology and religious culture.

The new pattern of the actuality of religious authority has been in the spotlight since the emergence of new media based on social media platforms. Some claim a shift from the old authority to the new religious authority. The new authority is an authority that emerges and takes an important position in the context of preferences for social and religious practices that are different from the preferences of the old religious authority. This position occupies new media spaces, such as the presence of preachers who use digital media to convey their religious messages, which incidentally have inadequate scientific foundations for religion (Permana, Nashrullah, 2022). Furthermore, Haryadi (Haryadi, 2020) said that this shift in authority can be seen in the phenomenon of massive waves in the use of social media, such as YouTube and Facebook, in searching for religious sources. The presence of the internet in this new form of media has succeeded in opening up new spaces for discussion, the process of seeking knowledge, recovering from identity crises, and spiritual experiences, as well as the distribution of religious values not only relying on certain authorities. In this situation, new media in the form of social media has become an essential part of daily life. Internet and new media users see the positive side by referring to digital media as an essential source of information for religious discourse.

In addition, social media is equalitarian, whose quality is controlled by the media users. If the new media users have digital literacy competence, then they have the potential to be safe from misleading information. The phenomena of hoaxes and deception in social media interactions have potential space, which depends on the social media users (Taheri et al., 2023). If this happens, then the condition of society will be fatal because religious knowledge is essential and ritualistic. This shift occurred due to a community of technology lovers who exceeded the limits of reasonableness. Therefore, society must understand the conditions in terms of the use of new technology within the framework of a strategic position of religion in building religious authority (Haryanto, 2022). A new phenomenon related to the popularity of digital preachers occurs because of their ability to show new methodical and populist patterns in religious learning. People are impressed and become followers. The influence of this media shows domination on everyone through its strategic spaces, which are based on their conditions and needs. The social and religious situations of society differ from one another, the output of which gives birth to choices that can be the same or different in actualizing religion. This kind of condition can be seen from interviews with the following informants.

"... I believe that conventional religious authority cannot be replaced by digital authority because conventional authority brings something special that no one else has, except charismatic clerics... these charismatic *Kyai* are always sought after, and people do not think about digital usage. These charismatic figures, like Habib Lutfi and others... are always sought after. People always want conventional ones... indeed, with digital sources, social media platforms have drastically changed the spread of religion. However, again, for charismatic matters, it is not that easy to shift to digital ... (Rafah-LO4)."

This interview shows that conventional religious authority is still the choice among informants. They believe the truth can be held firmly in the lectures delivered directly by *Ustadz*, clerics, and other religious leaders. They consider that lectures still need verification from other

sources because they are still vulnerable to manipulation through the editing mechanism. This means that lectures via YouTube, for example, bring many possibilities that can differ from religion's scientific basis. According to them, religious authority still lies with conventional authority. The religious discourse that occurs in the digital area is only considered an effective and efficient supporting discourse in transferring religious information and knowledge. This digital channel has two types, namely informational and religious entertainment (Lövheim, Hjarvard, 2019). Even though lectures on YouTube and other social media have the power of information, their reliability still needs to be strictly verified, and there are many modifications and edits for specific purposes. This is one of the key reasons why religious authority still lies in the conventional realm, even though the use of social media is already massive.

#### 4. Conclusion

The results of this study can be concluded in three crucial points, namely, the influence of digital literacy on religious behavior, the impact of digital literacy on religious authority, and the dynamics of religious authority in the digital technology era. The first topic analyzes three issues: the discourse of digital technology about modern culture, the existence of digital literacy, which is very important in shaping religious behavior, and the process of mediating technology in the context of university community religious practices. Conclusively, these three issues illustrate that people are aware of the importance of digital technology in every action and practice of their social religion, so there must be a technology mastery mechanism that must be implemented to have competence in utilizing digital technology. This awareness gave birth to the importance of technological literacy in optimizing the results of their socio-religious practices.

The second issue discusses the impact of digital literacy on religious authorities in the context of the dissemination of religion through new social media technologies, the discussion of religious literacy within the framework of strengthening public education in the digital era of religion, and the emergence of new religious terminology, such as digital religion and digital prayer. These issues analytically illustrate that the development and progress of society's digital literacy correlates with the dissemination of religious knowledge on social media; however, until now, social media platforms have not been used as a standard for authorizing religious sources. This happens because digital literacy is still in the same process as religious literacy in finding a suitable literacy model or approach through education from authoritative figures as in the conventional realm. In this regard, the terminological discourse of the combination of religion and digital in the form of digital religion also experiences technological mediation through cultural processes.

The last point is the discourse on the dynamics of religious authority in the context of the digital technology era, which discusses the contestation of conventional religion with digital religion, the dialectical meeting between religion and technological culture, and new patterns of actualized religious authority in today's society. This issue explains that the presence of new technology in the form of social media has resulted in a dynamic community life process. In particular, the dynamics of this society can be seen in their religious practices, which are tug-of-war between conventional and digital areas. On the one hand, religious practices take authority in the conventional realm but take their practice more dominantly in the digital realm. This constellation describes a dialectical process in referring to standard terminology in religious practice. This dialectical process has led to a big question about the actuality of religious authority in society. Explicitly, the interviews show that the actuality of the dominant religious authority tends to be dominated by technology in practice. However, the conceptual grip of authority is in the conventional realm.

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