



Blasphemy Among Generation Z: Finding A Balance Between Freedom Of Expression And Tolerance

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Abstract. Generation Z, born in the digital age, faces the challenge of balancing freedom of expression and religious tolerance. Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right, but there is a risk of blasphemy or insult to certain religions that can trigger controversy and conflict. This research aims to explore the problem of blasphemy among Generation Z and the efforts to create a balance between the principles of freedom of expression and religious tolerance. The results show that with a combination of education, dialogue, fair regulation, the role of the media, and the active participation of Gen Z can create a more tolerant and inclusive environment without sacrificing healthy freedom of expression. Generation Z has great potential to become agents of change by achieving harmony between these two equally important principles.

Keywords: generation Z, freedom of expresiion, religious tolerance

1. Introduction

In this interconnected digital era, the freedom of expression appears boundless. Individuals across all ages now possess the means to readily voice their opinions, ideas, or criticisms through numerous social media platforms. Particularly, the younger generation, often referred to as Generation Z, has been raised with unrestricted access to a plethora of information and social media channels. However, this unfiltered expression also harbors the potential to undermine the values of tolerance and stir discord among groups, particularly concerning sensitive topics like religion.

In recent years, the public has been alarmed by a surge in blasphemy cases committed by Generation Z through social media. These range from uploading videos deemed disrespectful to holy books, spreading statuses considered insulting to religious figures, to creating content that harasses religious symbols. Blasphemy cases that gain traction in cyberspace garner widespread attention and ignite heated debates about the boundaries of freedom of expression and religious tolerance.

Indonesia, as a country with high religious diversity, is not immune to this problem. Despite being regulated in PNPS Law No. 1 of 1965 on the prevention, abuse and or blasphemy of religion, blasphemy cases continue to emerge, both in the real world and in cyberspace. The blasphemy debate among Generation Z is basically a clash between two equally important principles, namely freedom of expression and religious tolerance. Freedom of expression is one of the human rights guaranteed by law. However, on the other hand, Indonesia is also a country that upholds religious tolerance and protects every citizen to embrace their respective religions and beliefs.

This clash between freedom of expression and religious tolerance is a difficult dilemma to solve. On the one hand, freedom of expression is a right that must be protected, but on the other hand, excessive expression and harassment of other religions also contradicts the

principle of religious tolerance upheld in Indonesia. Therefore, in this article the author will try to explore the dynamics of blasphemy among Generation Z, examine the views of various parties, and try to find a fair and balanced solution in dealing with this issue. The young generation is the nation's asset that must be directed wisely so that their potential can develop optimally without violating the values of tolerance and diversity that are the main pillars of the life of the nation and state in Indonesia(Sundari *et al.*, 2023).

2. Methods

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach that focuses on literature studies. In this research, there are two types of data sources used, namely primary and secondary data. Primary data sources are obtained through an examination of the Qur'an and a number of laws and regulations. As in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia.

Secondary sources of this book are legal materials or books and journals that have relevance to the topic discussed. By collecting references in the form of books and journal articles and then analyzing them to get solutions to the problems discussed. The data obtained from various legal materials is then analyzed with a comparative approach.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Polemics on Freedom of Expression among Generation Z

According to KBBI, religion is a teaching or system that regulates the procedure for believing and worshipping God Almighty, as well as rules for humans and their interactions with their environment.(Siti Faridah, 2018) On the other hand, the Oxford Student Dictionary defines religion as the belief in a supernatural force that creates and controls the universe. Furthermore, according to Emile Durkheim, religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices about the sacred, which unites all adherents into a moral community called ummah.(AS, 1995)

Religion is a principle of humanity that is realized into reality through belief in supernatural and material things, and this belief is formed in the personal realm. Religiously, it means belief in religion. There are not many religions in the world today. The reality of social life allows us to take into account the differences and diversity among humans.(Siti Khurotin, 2010) The new problems that occur today begin with the reality that religious conflict is seen as a real phenomenon, blasphemy against religion is often carried out. This is inseparable from the existence of rules that state freedom of expression(Afriani *et al.*, 2023).

Social media has become the main platform for young people, especially Generation Z, to express themselves and share content. However, on the other hand, unwise use of social media has the potential to cause blasphemy cases. In general, blasphemy is an act of humiliation or demeaning behavior towards the beliefs of a person or group. In fact, there is no definition or explanation of the meaning and elements of blasphemy in the KUHP. There is also no clear definition and detailed elements in Article 4 of Law No.1/PNPS/1965 on the prevention of abuse and blasphemy of religion.(Asfinawati, Muhammad Isnur, 2018)

"Every person is prohibited from deliberately in public telling, advocating or seeking public support, to carry out an interpretation of a religion adhered to in Indonesia or to carry out religious activities that resemble religious activities of that religion, which interpretation and activities deviate from the main teachings of that religion."

From the article, it can be concluded that blasphemy can be in the form of words, writings, pictures, or actions that contain elements of hostility towards certain religions, misuse of religious teachings, and desecration of symbols or means of religious worship. This

law applies to protect the six recognized religions in Indonesia, namely Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

With this definition, blasphemy is not only limited to words or writings, but also includes actions, images, or symbols that can be considered insulting or harassing a religion practiced in Indonesia. In the context of Generation Z and social media, blasphemy can occur through posts, videos, memes, or other digital content that is considered to denigrate or attack certain religious teachings, figures, or symbols.

Several cases of abuse have occurred, such as the viral case of a teenager insulting Islam through the TikTok social media platform in Bali (Riza, 2020). Another incident, similar to the one in 2023, involved a teenager insulting the Qur'an, resulting in their arrest by the police (Muhammad Afdal Afrianto, 2023). These incidents were not isolated, as at the end of 2023, there was also a case of blasphemy by teenagers in Banyuwangi who used harsh and indecent language to denigrate the greatness of God Almighty. This action garnered attention from netizens, incited mass outrage, and led to arrests (Hidayat, 2023).

Generation Z, born in the digital era, has different characteristics from previous generations. They are used to fast and open access to information, as well as almost unlimited freedom of expression in cyberspace. However, on the other hand, they tend to lack understanding of the limits of expression, especially regarding sensitive issues such as religion. The lack of education on religious tolerance and media literacy is a challenge in preventing blasphemy among Generation Z.

Generation Z, which grew up in the digital age, has a unique perspective on freedom of expression. They are the first generation to truly grow up with unlimited access to news and social media platforms. For Generation Z, freedom of expression is important and almost essential. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2018 found that the majority of teens in the United States (ages 13 to 17) consider freedom of expression to be very important. They are used to openly sharing their opinions, ideas and expressions on social networks, blogs or other digital platforms. Freedom of expression is considered a fundamental right and they demand a safe space to express their thoughts without censorship or undue restrictions. (Emily A. Vogels, Risa Gelles Watnick, 2022)

Safeguards are an essential element of democracy, highlighting the importance of freedom of opinion and expression. The existence of safeguards is indicative of a democratic state. As a nation, we value the principle of freedom of assembly, expression and open discussion. When power is vested in the people, safeguarding freedom of expression and opinion is of paramount importance, as this allows for oversight, criticism and recommendations on governance. To uphold popular sovereignty and achieve effective governance, democratic states must ensure the protection of the right to access information, which is a fundamental human right, and promote transparency of public information, which is an important aspect of freedom of expression.

3.2. Freedom of Expression or Promoting Tolerance

Since Indonesia's independence in 1945, the Constitution has continued to emphasize the importance of freedom, as seen in Article 28, and this principle is further strengthened in Article 28 and Article 28E paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. which states: *"everyone has the right to freedom of association, assembly and expression"*. This means that the recognition of these freedoms has a history as long as the birth of this country.

Freedom of expression is a basic right of every human being. This is in accordance with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Geneva 1948, which states: *"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to*

hold opinions without coercion and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." This freedom is a form of expression both orally and in writing through any media without restriction from any party. Along with the development of technology, freedom of expression through the media not only includes print media and broadcasting media, but also through online media.(Elsam, 2001)

Human rights are rights that are inherent in all human beings biologically, that provide moral and legal guarantees for all human beings, and that protect against all forms of slavery, oppression, the right to freedom from deprivation, persecution or treatment. To enjoy the fact that, for whatever reason, human beings are incapable of living a life worthy of the glory of God. Freedom of religion and belief is not just an issue for the state and NGOs that advocate for human rights and religious freedom. But it is the responsibility of all religious people, both internally and externally, towards followers of other religions. Therefore, freedom of religion is the responsibility of all parties.(Yusdani, 2011)

John Locke said that all individuals have inherent rights to life, liberty, and property which belong to themselves and cannot be taken or taken away by the state.(Rhona K. M, Smith, 2008) Indonesia is a country that guarantees the right to freedom of religion and worship as stipulated in Article 29 UUD 1945.(Fatmawati, 2011) One of the characteristics of the Indonesian rule of law is that there is no strict and absolute separation between religion and the state, because religion and the state have a harmonious relationship.(Adji, 1985) A distinctive feature of the Indonesian rule of law is the close relationship between religion and the state, based on the Almighty God. In the Pancasila state of law there should be no separation between religions, either absolute or otherwise. Because it is not in line with Pancasila and UUD 1945.(Siti Faridah, 2018)

Freedom of association and expression as an integral part of democracy in this reform era is not without limits but is also limited by the human rights of others and the law. This is solely intended to ensure recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and to fulfill the requirements of justice in accordance with ethical considerations, religious values, security and public order in a democratic society.

Islam recognizes the freedom of opinion and expression, but this freedom must be accompanied by responsibility. As stated in Surah al-Isra; verse 36 which translates "and do not follow what you have no knowledge of. Indeed, hearing, sight, and heart will all be held accountable." This verse is often associated with freedom of expression because it contains the principle that one should not issue statements or expressions that are not based on true and clear knowledge. In the context of freedom of expression, this verse can be interpreted as a warning not to disseminate information or opinions that are baseless, false, or seditious.

Islam teaches that human beings should exercise their freedom of expression responsibly, based on correct knowledge, and avoid spreading misleading or damaging information or opinions. Freedom of expression in Islam is recognized, but it must be balanced with prudence, honesty, and avoiding things that can cause harm to others. This verse reminds mankind to use their senses and intellect properly before expressing something.

But on the other hand, religious tolerance is often echoed. Religious tolerance is an attitude of patience and restraint that does not interfere with or offend the religion or belief system and worship of adherents of other religions. The concept of religious tolerance leads to an open attitude and willingness to accept various kinds of differences, both ethnicity, skin color, language, customs, culture, language, and religion. It is fitting that humans follow God's instructions in responding to these differences. Because God always reminds us of human diversity in terms of religion, ethnicity, skin color, customs, and so on. Freedom and tolerance

are often contradictory in human life. This is especially true in diverse communities. This issue becomes even more complex when discussed in the realm of religion. Religious freedom is seen as an obstacle to harmony. Because in its implementation, it is impossible for someone not to affect the comfort of others. As a result, the exercise of freedom inhibits inter-religious harmony. (Devi, 2009)

Tolerance is one of the fundamental values of democracy, but it has an ambivalent power that is manifested in two forms: the rigid form and the democratic form. Tolerance means tolerating or allowing others to be themselves, respecting others, honoring their traditions and origins. Tolerance encourages dialog to convey forms of recognition. This is the picture. (Craig, 2011) Tolerance in solid form. Tolerance means being open and accepting the beauty of differences, and the seed of tolerance is love, which is characterized by compassion and affection. (Davies, 2010) Tolerance is also about respecting individuality and difference while removing divisive masks and resolving tensions resulting from chaos. Tolerance is one of the core teachings of Islam. Tolerance parallels other fundamental teachings, such as compassion (rahmah) wisdom (hikmah), universal benefit, and justice. (Farrell, 2014)

Religious tolerance is tolerance that covers the issue of human beliefs related to the beliefs or divinity that he adheres to. People must be given the freedom to believe and embrace the religion of their choice and show respect for the implementation of the teachings they embrace or believe in. (Cassanova, 2008) Religious tolerance is the realization of the expression of religious experience in the form of community. Tolerance is a form of accommodation in social interaction. Religious believers should strive to increase tolerance to prevent ideological and physical conflicts between people of different religions and to maintain social stability. Religious believers must be able to eliminate extreme fanaticism that leads to the loss of religious tolerance. (Siti Faridah, 2018)

Tolerance is a positive attitude. As a country based on Pancasila, Indonesia provides and guarantees the freedom of its citizens to embrace any religion or belief they wish without coercion. This has been stated in the UUD 1945 article 29 paragraph 2, that:

"The State guarantees the freedom of every citizen to embrace their respective religions and to worship according to their religions and beliefs."

Religious tolerance is needed to ensure social stability from ideological coercion and even physical conflict in society. The development of an educated society and a tolerant religious community is a prerequisite for achieving this goal. Ideal religious tolerance must be built through the active participation of all members of society. However, although the above attitude can be achieved between religious communities, it does not mean that the realization of tolerance means the mixing of social interests and beliefs. Tolerance that does not concern the realm of individual religious beliefs or doctrines. But it is all about social charity between brothers and sisters as a nation. (Anita Khusnun, 2016)

Blasphemy cases create a tension between freedom of expression and religious tolerance. While freedom of expression is a fundamental human right protected by law, blasphemy against religious symbols and teachings is deemed offensive and can deeply hurt the sentiments of followers. The enforcement of blasphemy laws in Indonesia aims to safeguard religion. However, Indonesia also upholds legal instruments and human rights that regulate and protect freedom of expression, belief, religion, and worship based on individual faith. This duality presents complexities; while the constitution safeguards freedom of expression and belief, exercising this freedom may sometimes clash with religious norms, leading to accusations of blasphemy.

Freedom of expression is not unlimited freedom. There are certain limitations such as not inciting hatred, violence or inciting discrimination against certain groups. Religious

tolerance is also important to appreciate diversity and maintain interfaith harmony. Blasphemy can trigger conflict and disrupt social harmonization. There must be a balance between the protection of freedom of expression and the prevention of excessive blasphemy that threatens public order. The context of the use of freedom of expression needs to be considered. Criticism delivered in a polite and well-founded manner is different from deliberate insults. Ultimately, fair and proportional policies and law enforcement are needed in dealing with blasphemy cases. Protecting freedom of expression but also preventing abuses that can trigger conflict and intolerance.

Indonesia has legal rules regarding blasphemy cases. Initially, the regulation was in the form of a Presidential Determination (Penpres) by President Soekarno, which was issued on January 27, 1965. The background of this Presidential Decree is that more and more kebathinan and belief sects have sprung up which are considered to endanger major religions in Indonesia. In the end, this Presidential Decree became a law called Law No. 1/PNPS/1965 on the Prevention and/or Blasphemy of Religion. The blasphemy law covers two types of blasphemy: first, the deviation of six religions that are officially recognized by the state. The blasphemy of the six religions is as explained in Articles 1 and 4 of Presidential Decree No. 1/PNPS/1965. Second, the act of blasphemy is a different legal procedure to be submitted to the prosecution process. (Irwan Ahmad Akbar, 2019)

In blasphemy cases, the two concepts above often clash. Supporters of freedom of expression believe that criticism and satire of a particular religion are legitimate and protected forms of expression. They claim that there is nothing sacred or forbidden in criticizing or being sarcastic. In contrast, those who promote religious tolerance argue that desecration or humiliation of religious symbols, teachings, and holy figures is unacceptable behavior. They argue that freedom of expression has its limits and one should not offend or insult the religious beliefs of others.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and is protected by the Constitution and international legal instruments. It includes the freedom to express opinions, be creative and express oneself without censorship or interference from others. It is an important pillar of a democratic and open society. On the other hand, religious tolerance is also highly valued, especially in a pluralistic and multicultural society like Indonesia. Religious tolerance entails respect and appreciation for different religious beliefs and practices. Defamation or insulting a particular religion is considered an act of intolerance and can hurt the feelings of the faithful.

3.3 Research Result

Cases of blasphemy among Generation Z often occur, whether intentionally or not. Some examples are memes or jokes that are considered insulting to religion, scathing criticism of certain religious practices, or even direct insults to religious figures or symbols. This has sparked controversy and strong reactions from offended religious groups. The main challenge facing Generation Z is how to balance freedom of expression with religious tolerance. On the one hand, they want to enjoy the right to express their opinions and creativity without restrictions through social media. On the other hand, they also need to respect the beliefs and faiths of others, and avoid actions that could hurt or trigger conflict.

Some steps that can be taken to overcome this problem are to educate and improve the digital literacy of Generation Z, by providing a better understanding of the limits of expression in the digital world. They should be taught to respect diversity and avoid hate speech or blasphemy against certain religions. Generation Z can increase their understanding and empathy towards different religious beliefs and practices by engaging in cross-cultural dialog

and understanding through positive dialog and interaction. This will help them appreciate differences and reduce the risk of unintentional blasphemy.

In dealing with the issue of blasphemy among Generation Z, the role of various parties is needed. The government plays a role in enforcing the law and providing education about religious tolerance and the limits of freedom of expression. Educational institutions need to integrate tolerance education and media literacy in the curriculum. Religious organizations can also play a role in promoting dialogue between religious teachings and preventing radicalism among the younger generation.

Clear regulations and fair law enforcement in dealing with blasphemy cases are needed. Punishment should be proportional and not excessive, so as not to limit reasonable freedom of expression. Media and influencers followed by Generation Z have an important role to play in promoting tolerance and avoiding content that could be considered as blasphemy, they can set an example and campaign for the importance of respecting togetherness. Generation Z itself must be actively involved in this effort. They can be agents of change by practicing tolerance, respecting differences, and campaigning for the importance of responsible freedom of expression. By combining education, dialogue, fair regulation, the role of the media, and the active involvement of Generation Z, we can create a more tolerant environment that values diversity without compromising healthy freedom of expression. Generation Z has great potential to become agents of change in realizing harmony between freedom of expression and religious tolerance.

Facing this dilemma requires a thoughtful and balanced approach. Freedom of expression must be respected, but it must also be balanced with the responsibility not to spread hatred, incite discrimination, or unfairly insult the religious beliefs of others. Religious tolerance must also be maintained, but not at the expense of healthy criticism and discussion on religious topics. Ultimately, freedom of expression and religious tolerance are principles that must be upheld in a civilized and democratic society. The challenge is to find the right balance so that these two principles can coexist without interfering with each other.

4. Conclusions

Generation Z faces the challenge of reconciling freedom of expression and religious tolerance in the context of blasphemy. In the digital age, they have many opportunities to express themselves, but they also have the potential to intentionally or unintentionally harm or pollute certain religious beliefs.

Finding a balance between these two equally important principles is not easy. However, there are several steps that can be taken to address this issue: educating and improving digital literacy is essential to help Generation Z understand the boundaries of expression and respect diversity, engaging in cross-cultural dialogue and understanding can increase empathy and reduce the risk of unintentional desecration, and Generation Z itself must be actively involved in this effort, by practicing tolerance, respecting differences, and campaigning for responsible freedom of expression.

A combination of education, dialog, fair regulation, the role of the media, and the active participation of Gen Z can create a more tolerant and inclusive environment without compromising healthy freedom of expression. Generation Z has great potential to become agents of change by achieving harmony between these two equally important principles.

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