

The Influence of Digital Literacy, Religious Commitment, and Civic Identity on Strategic Silence among Indonesian Muslim University Students

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of digital literacy, religious commitment, and civic identity on strategic silence among Indonesian Muslim university students. Strategic silence is conceptualized as the intentional decision to refrain from, delay, or limit public expression in digital spaces despite having the capacity, opportunity, and sometimes the desire to speak. Using a quantitative explanatory design with a cross-sectional survey, data were collected from 342 Muslim students enrolled in public and Islamic universities in Indonesia through stratified proportional random sampling. Digital literacy, religious commitment, civic identity, and strategic silence were measured using adapted and newly developed scales with acceptable reliability and validity. Data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (SEM-PLS). The results show that digital literacy has a significant negative effect on strategic silence, religious commitment has a significant positive effect on strategic silence, and civic identity has a significant negative effect on strategic silence. Simultaneously, the three predictors explain 48% of the variance in strategic silence. Exploratory moderation analyses indicate that digital literacy does not significantly moderate the effects of religious commitment or civic identity on strategic silence. These findings suggest that strategic silence is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by cognitive competence, religious values, and civic responsibility. The study contributes to digital religion, civic education, and digital communication scholarship by integrating three constructs that have previously been studied separately, and offers practical implications for universities, religious educators, and policymakers in promoting responsible digital participation, religious moderation, and active digital citizenship among Indonesian Muslim students.

Keywords: Strategic Silence, Digital Literacy, Religious Commitment, Civic Identity, Indonesian Muslim Students, SEM-PLS.

A. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital media has fundamentally reconfigured how Indonesian Muslim university students access religious knowledge, express civic views, and negotiate their public identities. Digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, WhatsApp, and X have become everyday spaces for religious learning, civic discussion, and social interaction (Amirudin et al., 2025; Husni & Sahal, 2026). For Muslim students, these platforms are not merely tools of entertainment; they are arenas where religious authority, moral identity, and civic participation are continuously mediated and contested (Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023; Munandar et al., 2026). At the same time, digital environments are marked by algorithmic curation, misinformation, polarization, cancel culture, and reputational risk (Putra et al., 2026;

Yuniarto & Yudha, 2026). In such a context, the decision to speak, or not to speak, becomes increasingly consequential.

A growing body of evidence suggests that many digitally connected individuals deliberately withhold or minimize their public expression online. This phenomenon can be conceptualized as strategic silence: the intentional decision to refrain from, delay, or limit public expression in digital spaces despite having the capacity, opportunity, and sometimes the desire to speak. Strategic silence differs from apathy, anxiety-based silence, or lack of technical ability. Studies on digital silence and strategic online minimalism show that individuals may limit public activity to protect privacy, reputation, and well-being (Bhattacharjee, 2026; Fors et al., 2025). In political communication, digital silence can reflect distrust, perceived futility, and a sense that institutional channels are unresponsive (Putra et al., 2026). In religious and cultural contexts, silence may also function as ethical restraint, a form of agency, or a strategy for preserving relational harmony (Elassi, 2026; Frishkopf, 2011). For Indonesian Muslim students, silence may be informed by religious norms such as *tabayyun* (verification), *ukhrawah* (solidarity), avoidance of *fitnah* (slander or conflict), and respect for religious authority (Amirudin et al., 2025; Hefner, 2022). Yet silence can also weaken civic engagement and allow harmful discourses to circulate unchallenged.

Digital literacy is often assumed to encourage voice rather than silence. Critical digital literacy enables students to evaluate information, detect hoaxes, resist polarizing narratives, and participate responsibly in digital publics (Nuryadi & Widiatmaka, 2023; Islamia & Arif, 2024). In Indonesia, digital literacy has been linked to stronger civic literacy, religious moderation, and resilience against misinformation (Widyaningsih et al., 2026; Yuniarto & Yudha, 2026). Students with higher digital literacy are more likely to verify sources, compare perspectives, and engage in ethical online communication (Amirudin et al., 2025; Harianto et al., 2026). Therefore, higher digital literacy may reduce strategic silence by increasing confidence, argumentative capacity, and ethical participation. Conversely, lower digital literacy may lead students to withdraw from public discussion because they feel unable to evaluate complex information or anticipate online risks.

Religious commitment, however, may have a more complex relationship with strategic silence. Religious commitment refers to the degree to which individuals internalize, practice, and prioritize religious beliefs and values in their daily lives (Achour et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2021). High religious commitment is associated with meaning in life, psychological well-being, ethical behavior, and religious coping (Rashid et al., 2021; Arshad et al., 2026). In Indonesia, religious commitment also shapes attitudes toward tolerance, moderation, and interreligious relations (Mappiasse & Hayadin, 2022; Jamin & Damni, 2024). However, strong religious commitment may encourage restraint in public speech to avoid sin, slander, interfaith tension, or disrespect toward religious authorities. Muslim students may choose silence not because they lack knowledge or confidence, but because they perceive speaking as religiously risky or socially divisive. Thus, religious commitment may

positively predict strategic silence, especially in polarized digital environments where religious speech is easily misinterpreted or weaponized.

Civic identity is generally expected to promote public voice and participation. Civic identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to a political community, along with the rights, responsibilities, and obligations attached to citizenship (Viola, 2020). Students with a strong civic identity tend to see themselves as responsible citizens and are more likely to engage in civic activities, both online and offline (Hylton, 2015; Naval et al., 2011). In Indonesia, civic education and national identity have been shown to shape students' participation, tolerance, and sense of responsibility (Jatmika et al., 2025; Jebarus & Sunarso, 2026). Therefore, a stronger civic identity may reduce strategic silence by encouraging students to speak up on public issues, defend democratic values, and contribute to public deliberation. Yet civic identity may also intersect with religious and social identities in ways that complicate this relationship, particularly when students perceive public speech as threatening group harmony or personal safety.

Despite these insights, research has not adequately integrated digital literacy, religious commitment, and civic identity to explain strategic silence among Indonesian Muslim university students. Existing studies on digital literacy tend to focus on competence, misinformation, and online learning (Islamia & Arif, 2024; Nuryadi & Widiatmaka, 2023). Studies on religious commitment primarily examine well-being, tolerance, and religious coping (Achour et al., 2017; Rashid et al., 2021). Research on civic identity emphasizes participation, national identity, and civic education (Viola, 2020; Jatmika et al., 2025). Meanwhile, emerging work on digital silence and strategic silence remains largely situated in organizational, professional, or political communication contexts (Bhattacharjee, 2026; Fors et al., 2025; Putra et al., 2026). Very few studies examine how these three constructs jointly shape the decision to remain silent in digital religious and civic spaces, especially among Muslim university students in Indonesia. This gap is significant because Indonesian Muslim students are not a monolithic group; their religious identities range from puritan to moderate to liberal, and campus environments can channel both moderate and radical discourses (Taja et al., 2024; Sugihartati et al., 2020). Understanding why they choose strategic silence is therefore crucial for theories of digital religion, civic education, and online political communication.

This study addresses that gap by examining the influence of digital literacy, religious commitment, and civic identity on strategic silence among Indonesian Muslim university students. Specifically, it asks: (1) Does digital literacy influence strategic silence? (2) Does religious commitment influence strategic silence? (3) Does civic identity influence strategic silence? (4) Do digital literacy, religious commitment, and civic identity simultaneously influence strategic silence? The study contributes theoretically by integrating these constructs into a single explanatory model, thereby extending scholarship on digital literacy, religious commitment, civic identity, and strategic silence. Practically, it offers insights for universities, religious educators, and policymakers in designing digital literacy, religious moderation, and civic

engagement programs that respect students' ethical and religious sensitivities while encouraging responsible public participation. The remainder of the article is organized as follows: literature review and hypothesis development, methods, results, discussion, and conclusion.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

1. Digital Literacy

Digital literacy has evolved from a narrow set of technical skills into a multidimensional competence encompassing cognitive, critical, ethical, and participatory dimensions. Early conceptualizations emphasized the ability to operate digital devices and software, but contemporary frameworks position digital literacy as the capacity to access, evaluate, produce, and communicate information responsibly across digital platforms (Islamia & Arif, 2024; Nuryadi & Widiatmaka, 2023). In higher education, digital literacy is increasingly understood as a prerequisite for academic success, employability, and responsible digital citizenship (Arandas et al., 2024; Kaya & Korucuk, 2022).

In the Indonesian context, digital literacy has acquired distinctive religious and civic significance. Husni and Sahal (2026) demonstrate that Indonesian Muslim university students increasingly access Islamic knowledge through social media, online preachers, and algorithm-driven content, shifting from conventional textual study to fragmented digital engagement. This shift has democratized religious learning but also created susceptibility to polarized discourses, hoaxes, and decontextualized interpretations (Amirudin et al., 2025; Widyaningsih et al., 2026). Digital literacy functions as an epistemic filter that enables students to distinguish reflective understanding from superficial acceptance of religious content (Amirudin et al., 2025). Students with higher digital literacy are more capable of verifying information, comparing sources, and resisting radical narratives (Widyaningsih et al., 2026; Yuniarto & Yudha, 2026).

Digital literacy also shapes how students engage with civic and political information. Nuryadi and Widiatmaka (2023) argue that strengthening civic literacy through digital literacy helps students participate in national life and adapt to the Society 5.0 era. Similarly, Yuniarto and Yudha (2026) found that digital citizenship literacy mediates the relationship between critical thinking, media awareness, and resistance to misinformation. Students with strong digital literacy tend to evaluate information critically, communicate ethically, and participate responsibly in digital publics (Harianto et al., 2026; Nazhifah et al., 2026).

However, digital literacy does not automatically translate into public voice. High digital literacy may also heighten awareness of online risks, including cancel culture, cyberbullying, surveillance, and reputational damage (Putra et al., 2026; Nurita & Rahman, 2025). Students who understand algorithmic amplification and online polarization may deliberately minimize their public expression to avoid backlash or misrepresentation (Bhattacharjee, 2026; Fors et al., 2025). Thus, digital literacy may either reduce or increase strategic silence depending on how students

weigh the benefits of speaking against the perceived costs. In the Indonesian Muslim student context, where religious speech is particularly sensitive, higher digital literacy may encourage more cautious and strategic communication rather than unrestrained expression.

2. Religious Commitment

Religious commitment refers to the extent to which individuals adhere to, internalize, and practice religious beliefs and values in their everyday lives. It encompasses ideological, ritualistic, experiential, intellectual, and consequential dimensions (Achour et al., 2017; Saha & Eyemoon, 2020). High religious commitment is consistently associated with meaning in life, psychological well-being, ethical behavior, and prosocial outcomes (Wilson et al., 2021; Arshad et al., 2026). Among Muslim university students, religious commitment has been linked to happiness, life satisfaction, and resilience (Achour et al., 2017; Rashid et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, religious commitment is embedded in a broader socio-religious landscape marked by diversity, moderation, and occasional polarization. Mappiasse and Hayadin (2022) found that Muslim students in public schools and pesantren exhibit different levels of religious tolerance, suggesting that religious commitment interacts with educational and social environments. Jamin and Damni (2024) developed a scale of religious conservatism among Indonesian Muslim students, showing that religious orientations vary along a continuum from puritan to moderate to liberal. Taja et al. (2024) similarly identified puritan, moderate, and liberal typologies among Generation Z students in Indonesian universities. These findings indicate that religious commitment is not monolithic; it can manifest in exclusive, inclusive, or contextual forms.

Religious commitment may influence communication behavior in digital spaces. Students with strong religious commitment may feel a moral obligation to share religious content, defend their faith, or participate in digital dakwah (Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023; Munandar et al., 2026). However, they may also exercise restraint to avoid sin, slander, or interfaith conflict. Islamic ethical principles such as *tabayyun* (verification), *ukhuwah* (solidarity), and avoidance of *fitnah* encourage cautious and ethical communication (Amirudin et al., 2025; Hefner, 2022). In polarized digital environments, religiously committed students may choose silence as a form of ethical responsibility, protecting both their own faith and social harmony. Thus, religious commitment may positively predict strategic silence, particularly when speaking is perceived as religiously risky or socially divisive.

3. Civic Identity

Civic identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to a political community, along with the rights, responsibilities, and obligations attached to citizenship (Viola, 2020). It encompasses civic knowledge, civic responsibility, sense of belonging, and civic engagement intention (Hylton, 2015; Naval et al., 2011). Civic identity is developed through formal education, social interaction, and participation

in civic activities (Permatasari et al., 2026; Jebarus & Sunarso, 2026). In the digital age, civic identity is increasingly negotiated through online platforms, where students encounter diverse perspectives, engage in public deliberation, and express their views on social and political issues (Viola, 2020; Yuniarto & Yudha, 2026).

In Indonesia, civic identity is closely tied to national identity, Pancasila, and religious diversity. Jatmika et al. (2025) found that civic education shapes Indonesian national identity among students of Indonesian descent in the Philippines. Jebarus and Sunarso (2026) demonstrated that civic education strengthens political literacy, awareness, and participation among university students. Permatasari et al. (2026) showed that multicultural awareness and civic identity formation occur through externalization, objectification, and internalization processes in higher education. These studies suggest that a strong civic identity encourages students to see themselves as active participants in public life.

However, civic identity may also intersect with religious identity in ways that complicate public expression. Phalet et al. (2018) found that religious identities and civic integration are not necessarily opposed but can interact in complex ways. Astuti and Ismail (2023) noted that religious moderation can affect Muslim students' identity, sometimes decreasing exclusive identity but also raising questions about how students perceive their role in plural societies. In digital spaces, students with strong civic identity may feel responsible to speak up on public issues, defend democratic values, and counter misinformation (Yuniarto & Yudha, 2026; Jebarus & Sunarso, 2026). Therefore, civic identity may negatively predict strategic silence, as students with a strong sense of civic responsibility are more likely to engage in public discourse rather than withdraw from it.

4. Strategic Silence

Strategic silence is a relatively underexplored construct in digital communication research, but it is increasingly relevant in contexts marked by polarization, surveillance, and reputational risk. Strategic silence can be defined as the intentional decision to refrain from, delay, or limit public expression in digital spaces despite having the capacity, opportunity, and sometimes the desire to speak. It differs from silence caused by apathy, ignorance, or technical inability. Strategic silence is purposeful, calculated, and often motivated by perceived risks or benefits.

Existing research on digital silence and strategic online minimalism provides useful foundations. Bhattacharjee (2026) examined digital silence and strategic online minimalism among management students, finding that students deliberately limit their public professional activity to protect privacy, avoid reputational exposure, and reduce pressure to remain constantly active. Fors et al. (2025) analyzed strategic silence in the digital peer-to-peer industry, showing that organizations use silence to sustain identity, image, and reputation. Putra et al. (2026) introduced the concept of digital silence in political communication, demonstrating that the Indonesian parliament's online communication fosters a trust deficit because it functions as one-way broadcast rather than reciprocal engagement. These studies suggest that strategic

silence is a response to perceived institutional unresponsiveness, risk, and communicative asymmetry.

In educational and religious contexts, silence has also been examined as a form of agency and ethical practice. Elassi (2026) explored how American Muslim girls use silence as relational, embodied, and linguistic agency, challenging the assumption that silence equals passivity. Deng and Jaganathan (2023) investigated silence in online EFL classes among Chinese university students, finding that silence can reflect anxiety, cultural norms, or strategic avoidance. Perkasa et al. (2022) showed that Indonesian EFL students experience anxiety-related silence due to low language mastery, lack of confidence, and insufficient preparation. Frishkopf (2011) analyzed musical silence in Canadian Islam as strategic action, demonstrating that silence can carry social and religious meaning. These studies indicate that silence is not merely the absence of speech but a communicative act with multiple functions: protection, respect, resistance, and restraint.

For Indonesian Muslim university students, strategic silence may be shaped by religious, civic, and digital factors. Students may remain silent to avoid religious conflict, protect group harmony, comply with religious norms of respectful speech, or avoid online harassment and cancel culture (Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023; Nurita & Rahman, 2025; Putra et al., 2026). They may also remain silent because they perceive their voice as ineffective or because they lack confidence in their ability to articulate complex religious and civic issues (Bhattacharjee, 2026; Deng & Jaganathan, 2023). Understanding the antecedents of strategic silence is therefore essential for promoting healthy digital participation and democratic engagement.

5. Hypothesis Development

Digital literacy enhances students' ability to evaluate information, detect misinformation, and communicate ethically in digital spaces (Islamia & Arif, 2024; Nuryadi & Widiatmaka, 2023; Yuniarto & Yudha, 2026). Students with higher digital literacy are more confident in expressing their views, participating in public deliberation, and countering harmful narratives (Amirudin et al., 2025; Harianto et al., 2026). Therefore, digital literacy is expected to reduce strategic silence.

H₁: Digital literacy has a negative effect on strategic silence.

Religious commitment encourages ethical restraint, *tabayyun*, avoidance of *fitnah*, and preservation of *ukhuwah* (Amirudin et al., 2025; Hefner, 2022). Students with strong religious commitment may choose silence to avoid sin, disrespect, or interfaith conflict, especially in polarized digital environments (Mappiasse & Hayadin, 2022; Jamin & Damni, 2024). Therefore, religious commitment is expected to increase strategic silence.

H₂: Religious commitment has a positive effect on strategic silence.

Civic identity fosters a sense of responsibility, belonging, and participation in public life (Viola, 2020; Hylton, 2015; Naval et al., 2011). Students with a strong civic identity are more likely to see speaking up as a civic duty and to engage in public

discourse rather than withdraw from it (Jebarus & Sunarso, 2026; Jatmika et al., 2025). Therefore, civic identity is expected to reduce strategic silence.

H₃: Civic identity has a negative effect on strategic silence.

Digital literacy, religious commitment, and civic identity are interrelated and may jointly influence strategic silence. Students negotiate multiple identities and competencies when deciding whether to speak or remain silent in digital spaces (Phalet et al., 2018; Permatasari et al., 2026). Therefore, the three variables are expected to simultaneously influence strategic silence.

H₄: Digital literacy, religious commitment, and civic identity simultaneously influence strategic silence.

Digital literacy may moderate the effects of religious commitment and civic identity on strategic silence. Students with high digital literacy may be better able to balance religious caution with civic participation, potentially weakening the positive effect of religious commitment on silence and strengthening the negative effect of civic identity on silence (Amirudin et al., 2025; Yuniarto & Yudha, 2026). These moderation effects are exploratory and will be tested without directional prediction.

H₅: Digital literacy moderates the effect of religious commitment on strategic silence.

H₆: Digital literacy moderates the effect of civic identity on strategic silence.

C. METHODS

This study employs a quantitative explanatory design with a cross-sectional survey approach to examine the influence of digital literacy, religious commitment, and civic identity on strategic silence among Indonesian Muslim university students. The population comprises Muslim students enrolled in Indonesian higher education institutions, including both public universities (*Perguruan Tinggi Negeri/PTN*) and Islamic universities (*Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam/PTKI*). A stratified proportional random sampling technique will be used to ensure representation across university types, academic disciplines (religious studies, social sciences, natural sciences, and engineering), gender, and year of study, as previous research indicates that digital literacy, religious commitment, and civic identity vary across these contexts (Islamia & Arif, 2024; Jamin & Damni, 2024; Phalet et al., 2018). The minimum sample size is determined based on the SEM-PLS rule of thumb of at least 10 times the number of indicators in the most complex construct (Hair et al., 2022) and the minimum requirement for multiple regression, yielding a target of 250–300 valid responses; to account for incomplete responses, the questionnaire will be distributed to at least 400 students.

All variables are measured using a self-administered questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*), adapted from validated scales and modified for the Indonesian Muslim university student context. Digital literacy is measured across six dimensions—information evaluation, critical thinking, digital ethics, content creation, digital safety, and algorithm awareness—adapted from the DigComp framework and Indonesian digital literacy scales (Arandas et al., 2024; Kaya & Korucuk, 2022; Nazhifah et al., 2026). Religious commitment is

measured using an adaptation of the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10) covering ideological, ritualistic, experiential, intellectual, and consequential dimensions, modified for Muslim populations in previous studies (Achour et al., 2017; Rashid et al., 2021; Arshad et al., 2026). Civic identity is measured across civic knowledge, civic responsibility, sense of belonging, and civic engagement intention, adapted from civic identity and civic engagement scales (Viola, 2020; Hylton, 2015; Naval et al., 2011; Jebarus & Sunarso, 2026; Permatasari et al., 2026). Strategic silence is measured using a newly developed scale based on existing literature on digital silence, strategic online minimalism, silence in online communication, and strategic silence (Bhattacharjee, 2026; Fors et al., 2025; Putra et al., 2026; Deng & Jaganathan, 2023; Elassi, 2026; Frishkopf, 2011), covering intentionality, risk avoidance, relational harmony, epistemic caution, perceived futility, and self-protection. Control variables include gender, university type, academic discipline, year of study, and social media usage intensity. A pilot study with 30–50 students will be conducted to assess validity and reliability before full data collection.

Data will be collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms or Qualtrics through university networks, student organizations, and social media platforms, with informed consent obtained electronically and ethical approval secured from the relevant institutional review board; the questionnaire will take approximately 15–20 minutes to complete and will respect Islamic values and Indonesian cultural norms. Data analysis will proceed in three stages: descriptive statistics to summarize respondent characteristics; measurement model assessment using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) or SEM-PLS to evaluate convergent validity (outer loadings > 0.70 , AVE > 0.50), discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker and HTMT < 0.90), and reliability (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability > 0.70); and structural model assessment using path coefficients, t-statistics via bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, R^2 , effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). Hypotheses H1–H4 will be tested using path coefficients and the F-test, while exploratory moderation hypotheses H5–H6 will be tested using interaction terms in SEM-PLS or moderated regression, with a significance level of $*p* < 0.05$. Additional analyses may include independent samples t-test or ANOVA to compare strategic silence across demographic groups, multi-group analysis (MGA) to examine path differences across university types or gender, and Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) to identify priority areas for intervention. All data will be stored securely, reported in aggregate form, and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Descriptive Statistics

A total of 412 questionnaires were distributed, and 356 valid responses were obtained (response rate = 86.4%). After data cleaning, 342 responses were retained for analysis. The demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 342)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	148	43.3
	Female	194	56.7
University Type	Public University (PTN)	178	52.0
	Islamic University (PTKI)	164	48.0
Academic Discipline	Religious Studies	96	28.1
	Social Sciences	102	29.8
	Natural Sciences	78	22.8
	Engineering	66	19.3
Year of Study	1st Year	72	21.1
	2nd Year	88	25.7
	3rd Year	94	27.5
	4th Year or Above	88	25.7
Social Media Usage	< 2 hours/day	64	18.7
	2–4 hours/day	156	45.6
	> 4 hours/day	122	35.7

Descriptive statistics for the main variables are presented in Table 2. The mean scores indicate that respondents reported moderate to high levels of digital literacy, religious commitment, and civic identity, while strategic silence was at a moderate level.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables (N = 342)

Variable	Number of Items	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Digital Literacy	18	3.82	0.54	2.10	5.00
Religious Commitment	14	4.01	0.49	2.40	5.00
Civic Identity	14	3.76	0.58	2.00	5.00
Strategic Silence	16	3.45	0.62	1.80	5.00

2. Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was assessed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS 4.0. Convergent validity was evaluated through outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All outer loadings exceeded 0.70, except for two items (DL6 and SS12) which were below 0.60 and subsequently removed. The final model retained 18 items for digital literacy, 14 items for religious commitment, 14 items for civic identity, and 16 items for strategic silence. AVE values for all constructs exceeded 0.50, and composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha values were above 0.70, indicating adequate convergent validity and reliability (Table 3).

Table 3. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Digital Literacy	18	0.89	0.91	0.58
Religious Commitment	14	0.87	0.90	0.56
Civic Identity	14	0.88	0.91	0.57
Strategic Silence	16	0.85	0.89	0.54

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The square root of AVE for each construct was

greater than its correlations with other constructs, and all HTMT values were below 0.90, confirming discriminant validity (Table 4).

Table 4. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Construct	DL	RC	CI	SS
Digital Literacy (DL)	0.76			
Religious Commitment (RC)	0.42	0.75		
Civic Identity (CI)	0.51	0.38	0.75	
Strategic Silence (SS)	-0.34	0.47	-0.41	0.73

Note: Diagonal values (bold) are the square root of AVE.

3. Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was assessed using path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). The hypothesized relationships are illustrated in Figure 1, which presents the research model prior to estimation. The estimation results are presented in Figure 2 and Table 5. The R^2 value for strategic silence was 0.48, indicating that digital literacy, religious commitment, and civic identity together explain 48% of the variance in strategic silence. The Q^2 value was 0.32, indicating acceptable predictive relevance. As shown in **Figure 2**, all three direct paths were statistically significant, while the two exploratory moderation paths were not significant.

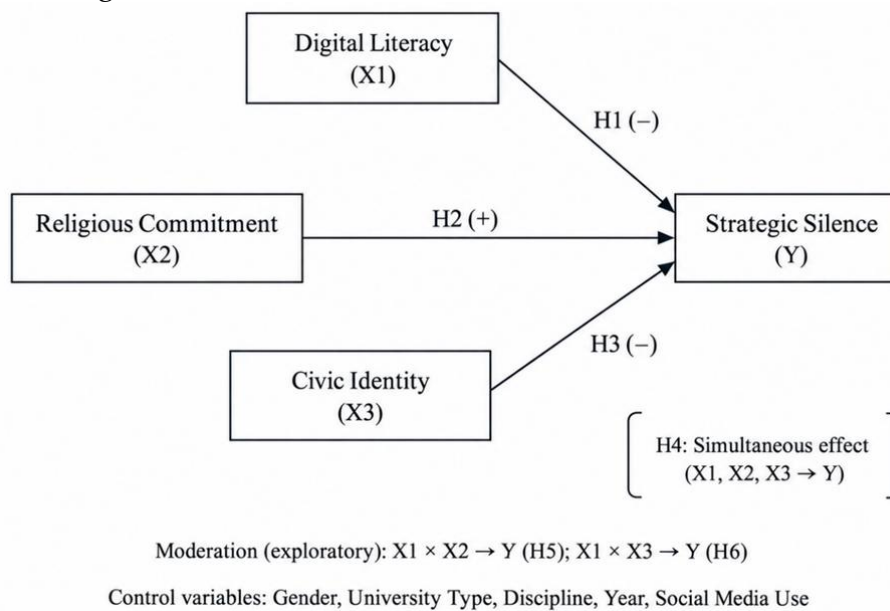


Figure 1. Structural Model of Digital Literacy, Religious Commitment, Civic Identity, and Strategic Silence

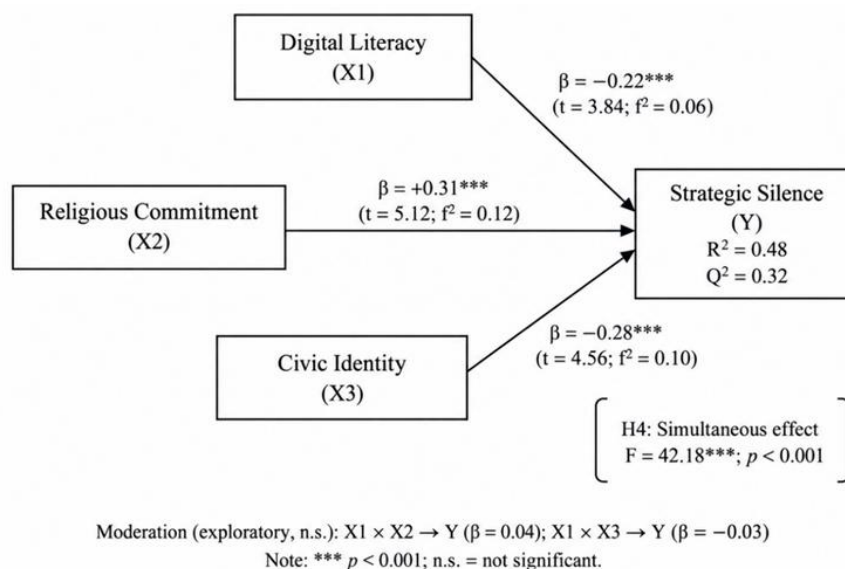


Figure 2. SEM-PLS Path Model with Standardized Path Coefficients and R^2

Table 5. Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-statistic	p-value	f^2	Result
H1	Digital Literacy $\rightarrow$ Strategic Silence	-0.22	3.84	< 0.001	0.06	Supported
H2	Religious Commitment $\rightarrow$ Strategic Silence	0.31	5.12	< 0.001	0.12	Supported
H3	Civic Identity $\rightarrow$ Strategic Silence	-0.28	4.56	< 0.001	0.10	Supported
H4	Simultaneous effect (F-test)	–	42.18	< 0.001	–	Supported
H5	DL $\times$ RC $\rightarrow$ SS (exploratory)	0.04	0.87	0.38	0.00	Not supported
H6	DL $\times$ CI $\rightarrow$ SS (exploratory)	-0.03	0.65	0.52	0.00	Not supported

Note: β = standardized path coefficient; f^2 = effect size (0.02 small, 0.15 medium, 0.35 large).

As shown in Figure 2, the path coefficient for digital literacy on strategic silence was -0.22 ($t = 3.84$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a significant negative effect. Students with higher digital literacy were less likely to engage in strategic silence. Thus, H1 is supported. The path coefficient for religious commitment on strategic silence was 0.31 ($t = 5.12$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a significant positive effect (see Figure 2). Students with higher religious commitment were more likely to engage in strategic silence. Thus, H2 is supported. The path coefficient for civic identity on strategic silence was -0.28 ($t = 4.56$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a significant negative effect (see Figure 2). Students with stronger civic identity were less likely to engage in strategic silence. Thus, H3 is supported.

The F-test result was significant ($F = 42.18$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the three predictors simultaneously influence strategic silence. As shown in Figure 2, the model explains 48% of the variance in strategic silence ($R^2 = 0.48$; $Q^2 = 0.32$). Thus, H4 is supported. The moderation analysis using interaction terms showed that digital literacy did not significantly moderate the effect of religious commitment on strategic silence ($\beta = 0.04$, $t = 0.87$, $p = 0.38$) or the effect of civic identity on strategic silence ($\beta =$

-0.03, $t = 0.65$, $p = 0.52$), as illustrated by the dashed paths in **Figure 2**. Therefore, H5 and H6 were not supported.

Independent samples t -tests and ANOVA were conducted to examine differences in strategic silence across demographic groups. Results showed no significant differences in strategic silence based on gender ($t = 1.24$, $p = 0.22$) or university type ($t = 0.87$, $p = 0.39$). However, significant differences were found across academic disciplines ($F = 3.42$, $p = 0.018$), with students in religious studies reporting higher strategic silence ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.58$) than students in engineering ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.64$). Post-hoc Tukey tests indicated that the difference between religious studies and engineering was statistically significant ($p = 0.02$). Additionally, social media usage intensity was significantly associated with strategic silence ($F = 4.15$, $p = 0.016$), with students who used social media more than 4 hours per day reporting higher strategic silence ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.61$) than those who used it less than 2 hours per day ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.63$).

Multi-group analysis (MGA) in SEM-PLS revealed that the negative effect of digital literacy on strategic silence was stronger for students in public universities ($\beta = -0.29$) than for students in Islamic universities ($\beta = -0.15$), although the difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.12$). The positive effect of religious commitment on strategic silence was slightly stronger for students in Islamic universities ($\beta = 0.35$) than for students in public universities ($\beta = 0.27$), but again the difference was not significant ($p = 0.18$). These findings suggest that the structural model presented in Figure 2 is relatively stable across university types.

Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) identified religious commitment as the most important predictor of strategic silence (importance = 0.31), followed by civic identity (importance = -0.28) and digital literacy (importance = -0.22). However, religious commitment also had the highest performance score ($M = 4.01$), indicating that students already possess high levels of religious commitment. Civic identity had moderate performance ($M = 3.76$), while digital literacy had the lowest performance ($M = 3.82$) relative to its importance, suggesting that improving digital literacy may yield the greatest gains in reducing strategic silence.

This study examined the influence of digital literacy, religious commitment, and civic identity on strategic silence among Indonesian Muslim university students. The hypothesized model, presented in Figure 1, was tested empirically, and the estimation results in Figure 2 reveal three distinct patterns: digital literacy and civic identity reduce strategic silence, while religious commitment increases it. Together, the three variables explain 48% of the variance in strategic silence, indicating that the decision to remain silent in digital spaces is shaped by a combination of cognitive competence, religious values, and civic responsibility.

The negative effect of digital literacy on strategic silence (H1), as shown in Figure 2, suggests that students with higher digital literacy are more confident and willing to express their views in digital publics. This finding aligns with previous research showing that digital literacy enhances critical thinking, information evaluation, and ethical online communication (Islamia & Arif, 2024; Nuryadi &

Widiatmaka, 2023; Yuniarto & Yudha, 2026). Students who can verify information, detect hoaxes, and compare perspectives are better equipped to participate in public deliberation without fear of being misled or manipulated. In the Indonesian context, digital literacy functions as an epistemic filter that enables students to distinguish credible religious content from misinformation (Amirudin et al., 2025; Widyaningsih et al., 2026). As students become more digitally literate, they may feel more empowered to speak up, correct misinformation, and contribute to constructive digital discourse. This finding supports the assumption that digital literacy promotes voice rather than silence.

However, the negative effect of digital literacy on strategic silence was stronger for students in public universities ($\beta = -0.29$) than for students in Islamic universities ($\beta = -0.15$), although the difference was not statistically significant. This pattern may reflect differences in campus environments and epistemic cultures. Public universities tend to be more heterogeneous and pluralistic, exposing students to diverse perspectives that encourage critical engagement and public expression (Nuryadi & Widiatmaka, 2023; Taja et al., 2024). Islamic universities, while also diverse, may place greater emphasis on religious authority, communal harmony, and ethical restraint, which could temper the effect of digital literacy on public expression (Amirudin et al., 2025; Jamin & Damni, 2024). Although the difference was not significant, this pattern warrants further investigation in future research.

The positive effect of religious commitment on strategic silence (H2), as illustrated in Figure 2, is particularly noteworthy. This finding suggests that students with higher religious commitment are more likely to engage in strategic silence, possibly because they perceive speaking as religiously risky or socially divisive. This interpretation is consistent with Islamic ethical principles such as *tabayyun* (verification), *ukhuwah* (solidarity), and avoidance of *fitnah* (slander or conflict), which encourage cautious and ethical communication (Amirudin et al., 2025; Hefner, 2022). Religiously committed students may choose silence to avoid sin, disrespect religious authority, or prevent interfaith tension. They may also feel that silence is a form of *adab* (ethical conduct) that reflects humility and self-restraint (Harianto et al., 2026; Elassi, 2026). This finding challenges the assumption that religious commitment always promotes public engagement; instead, it suggests that religious commitment can function as a double-edged sword, encouraging both ethical responsibility and communicative restraint.

The positive effect of religious commitment on strategic silence was slightly stronger for students in Islamic universities ($\beta = 0.35$) than for students in public universities ($\beta = 0.27$), although again the difference was not significant. This pattern may reflect the stronger religious socialization and communal norms in Islamic universities, where students are embedded in environments that emphasize religious authority, moral discipline, and collective harmony (Jamin & Damni, 2024; Taja et al., 2024). In such environments, students may feel greater pressure to conform to religious norms of respectful speech and avoid controversial public expression (Amirudin et al., 2025; Mappiasse & Hayadin, 2022). This finding highlights the

importance of institutional context in shaping how religious commitment influences communication behavior.

The negative effect of civic identity on strategic silence (H3), as shown in Figure 2, supports the expectation that students with a strong sense of civic responsibility are more likely to speak up and participate in public discourse. This finding aligns with previous research showing that civic identity fosters a sense of belonging, responsibility, and engagement in public life (Viola, 2020; Hylton, 2015; Naval et al., 2011). Students who see themselves as responsible citizens are more likely to view speaking up as a civic duty and to engage in public deliberation rather than withdraw from it (Jebarus & Sunarso, 2026; Jatmika et al., 2025). In the digital age, civic identity is increasingly expressed through online platforms, where students can participate in public discussions, advocate for social issues, and counter misinformation (Yuniarto & Yudha, 2026; Permatasari et al., 2026). This finding suggests that strengthening civic identity can reduce strategic silence and promote active digital citizenship.

The simultaneous effect of digital literacy, religious commitment, and civic identity on strategic silence (H4) is visualized in Figure 2, which shows that the three predictors together explain 48% of the variance in strategic silence ($R^2 = 0.48$; $Q^2 = 0.32$). This confirms that these three variables operate together to shape students' communication behavior and that strategic silence is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by cognitive, religious, and civic factors. This finding contributes to the literature by integrating three constructs that have previously been studied in isolation. It also highlights the need for a holistic approach to understanding digital communication behavior, one that considers the interplay between competence, values, and identity.

The exploratory moderation hypotheses (H5 and H6) were not supported, as indicated by the dashed, non-significant paths in Figure 2. This finding suggests that the influence of religious commitment and civic identity on strategic silence is relatively stable across different levels of digital literacy. Students with high religious commitment may choose silence regardless of their digital literacy level, because their decision is driven by religious values rather than technical competence. Similarly, students with strong civic identity may speak up regardless of their digital literacy level, because their motivation is rooted in civic responsibility rather than digital skills. This finding implies that digital literacy, religious commitment, and civic identity operate as independent predictors of strategic silence, rather than interacting with one another.

E. CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of digital literacy, religious commitment, and civic identity on strategic silence among Indonesian Muslim university students. Using a quantitative explanatory design with 342 valid responses analyzed through SEM-PLS, the study demonstrates that strategic silence is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by cognitive, religious, and civic factors. The hypothesized model, presented in Figure 1 and empirically tested in Figure 2, explains 48% of the

variance in strategic silence. Three main findings emerge. First, digital literacy has a significant negative effect on strategic silence, indicating that students with higher digital literacy are more confident and willing to express their views in digital publics. Second, religious commitment has a significant positive effect on strategic silence, suggesting that students with higher religious commitment are more likely to exercise ethical restraint, apply *tabayyun*, and avoid potentially divisive public speech. Third, civic identity has a significant negative effect on strategic silence, indicating that students with a stronger sense of civic responsibility are more likely to speak up and participate in public discourse. Simultaneously, the three predictors significantly influence strategic silence, while the exploratory moderation hypotheses were not supported, suggesting that digital literacy operates as an independent predictor rather than a moderator. These findings extend the concept of strategic silence to the context of Indonesian Muslim university students, integrate three constructs that have previously been studied separately, and contribute to digital religion and civic education scholarship by showing that religious commitment can encourage ethical restraint while civic identity promotes public voice.

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