

Tolerance as a Foundation of Mental Health among Indonesian Youth in the Digital Era: The Role of Multicultural Intelligence and Cross-Ethnic and Interreligious Friendship

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ABSTRACT	
<p>ARTICLE INFO: Received March 03, 2026</p> <p>Revised April 09, 2026</p> <p>Accepted April 25, 2026</p> <p>KEYWORDS: Cross-Ethnic and Interreligious Friendships, Digital Era, Multicultural Intelligence, Tolerance</p>	<p>The digital era presents both challenges and potential threats to the sustainability of local cultural values in Indonesia. Rapid advancements in information technology have contributed to shifts in traditional wisdom, which in some contexts are reflected in a growing tendency toward intolerance. This phenomenon poses risks to national identity and may disrupt social harmony within a multicultural society. However, empirical research that comprehensively integrates psychological perspectives remains limited, particularly in examining the role of multicultural intelligence in enhancing cognitive understanding of diversity, as well as the contribution of cross-ethnic and interreligious friendships in fostering prosocial behavior. Therefore, further research is needed to systematically investigate the interplay of these factors as a strategic approach to mitigating intolerance in the context of the digital era. Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of multicultural intelligence and cross-ethnic and interreligious friendships as predictors of tolerance among university students in the digital era. A quantitative approach with a multiple linear regression design was employed. The study involved 1,038 students from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, selected using a convenience sampling technique. The research instruments included the Cultural Intelligence Scale, the Cross-Ethnic and Interreligious Friendship Scale, and the Tolerance Scale. The results indicated that multicultural intelligence and cross-ethnic and interreligious friendships significantly predicted tolerance ($F = 633.814$, $p < 0.05$). These findings suggest that tolerance can be cultivated through enhancing individuals' understanding of diversity and through positive social interactions with people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of implementing educational programs based on cross-ethnic, interreligious, and cultural literacy within academic environments on a continuous basis. Such programs are expected to support young people in consistently internalizing and practicing tolerance in diverse social contexts.</p>

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of the digital era has influenced various aspects of global society, including Indonesia. Digital transformation not only brings advancements in information and communication technology but also introduces complex social challenges, one of which is the increasing tendency toward intolerance among young people. This phenomenon is particularly concerning in Indonesia, a country characterized by high levels of diversity in terms of religion, ethnicity, race, language, and culture. Historically, Indonesian society has been recognized for its traditions of social cohesion and mutual cooperation, which serve as mechanisms for preserving local cultural values (Hayat, 2016; Surajiyo, 2019). Such collectivist social practices have contributed to Indonesia's reputation as a society with relatively high levels of tolerance in multicultural contexts (Kusmanto & Elizabeth, 2018).

However, the advent of the digital era has brought significant changes to social dynamics. Shifts in traditional wisdom and the decreasing implementation of cultural values in daily life are suspected

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to weaken the practice of tolerance within society (Yoga, 2018). Intolerance has increasingly emerged as a prominent social phenomenon in the digital era. It manifests not only through discriminatory behaviors but also in negative thought patterns, emotions, and attitudes such as hatred, prejudice, and hostility toward other groups without clear justification (Qodir, 2016; Zhou et al., 2022). This condition has the potential to generate long-term impacts on social stability and may threaten the sustainability of harmonious coexistence in a pluralistic society (Haryani, 2019).

If tendencies toward intolerance continue to rise, fostering future generations with inclusive mindsets and respect for differences becomes increasingly challenging. Conflicts involving religious or ethnic differences remain frequent and are often driven by low empathy, insufficient mutual respect, and limited understanding of diversity. In addition, the proliferation of social media has expanded the dissemination of hate speech, discriminatory narratives, and hostile rhetoric, which can shape young people's perceptions of other groups (Mackey & Dolven, 2018).

A survey conducted by the Wahid Foundation revealed that approximately 60% of respondents exhibited tendencies toward intolerance against certain religious, ethnic, or community groups (Wahid Foundation, 2016). These findings indicate that the implementation of tolerance in the digital era continues to face serious challenges. Consequently, strategic efforts are needed to reinforce the values of tolerance, particularly among young people, through the cultivation of inclusive understanding and social behavior (Verkuyten et al., 2020).

From a psychological perspective, tolerance is conceptualized as an individual's capacity to manage responses to negative stimuli from the social environment and to constructively accept differences as part of maintaining psychological well-being and mental health (Ersanli & Mameghani, 2016). Tolerance is not only related to accepting diversity but is also reflected in tangible behaviors, including mutual respect, patience, and the responsible exercise of freedom of expression (Ersanli & Mameghani, 2016). Therefore, fostering tolerance is an essential component in the development of integrative individual character, both within family education and academic contexts.

One factor hypothesized to contribute to the development of tolerance is multicultural intelligence. Multicultural intelligence refers to an individual's ability to understand, appreciate, and effectively adapt within culturally diverse environments (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). The model developed by Earley and Ang encompasses four primary dimensions: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral. These dimensions describe an individual's capacity to understand cultural differences, manage cross-cultural knowledge, and exhibit adaptive behaviors in diverse social interactions (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). Conceptually, multicultural intelligence serves as a framework that enables individuals to interact effectively within pluralistic societies (Koriakina et al., 2019; Kochoska & Gramatkovski, 2025).

Empirical studies indicate that individuals with high levels of multicultural intelligence tend to exhibit better adaptability in diverse social environments and demonstrate greater openness to differences (Figueroa & Hofhuis, 2024). Moreover, integrating multicultural intelligence in educational contexts has been shown to enhance students' tolerance toward others from different cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds (Azmi & Kumala, 2019; Han et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the limited accessibility and partial implementation of multicultural education remain contributing factors to the persistence of intolerance in various social contexts (Nugraha et al., 2020).

In addition to multicultural intelligence, friendship relationships also play a role in shaping tolerance. Friendship represents a form of social relationship characterized by emotional closeness, trust, and positive reciprocal interactions (Adams & Taylor, 2015). The quality of friendship encompasses several core components, including emotional support, empathy, honesty, commitment, and shared activities, all of which strengthen social bonds (Adams & Taylor, 2015). Furthermore, friendship functions as a source of social support and a coping mechanism in navigating life's challenges (Srivastava & Bano, 2025).

Within multicultural societies, friendships that span ethnic and religious boundaries have the potential to reinforce tolerance and reduce intergroup prejudice. Intensive social interactions with individuals from different backgrounds can foster more inclusive understanding and increase acceptance of diversity (Lewis, 2019). Conversely, limited intergroup interaction can reinforce stereotypes and prejudices, potentially leading to discriminatory attitudes (Devaki et al., 2025). Previous research has demonstrated that high-quality friendships contribute to the development of social character and the enhancement of tolerance among youth (Kurniawan & Sudrajat, 2018). However, other studies have still observed tendencies for social exclusion and discrimination against minority groups (Sumaktoyo, 2020).

Given these dynamics, ethnic and religious intolerance continues to pose challenges within Indonesian society. Among youth, low levels of tolerance and increased potential for radicalism have been observed in some cases (Qodir, 2016). Therefore, an empirical investigation is necessary to identify psychological and social factors that contribute to enhancing tolerance among young people in the digital era.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the role of multicultural intelligence and cross-ethnic and interreligious friendships as predictors of tolerance among Indonesian youth in the digital era. The research hypothesis posits that multicultural intelligence and cross-ethnic and interreligious friendships significantly predict tolerance among young Indonesians in the digital context.

METHODS

Participants

The study involved 1,038 Indonesian university students aged 17 to 23 years, comprising 561 males and 477 females. Participants represented various ethnic groups in Indonesia, including Javanese, Batak, Maluku, Timorese, Papuan, Minahasa, Dayak, Toraja, and others, as well as six legally recognized religions in Indonesia. Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling technique. A demographic overview of all participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Participant Demographic Data

Characteristics	Description	Valid (N)	Percentage
Gender	Male	561	54%
	Female	477	46%
Age	17 years	59	5.7%
	18 years	94	9.1%
	19 years	241	23.2%
	20 years	161	15.5%
	21 years	223	21.5%
	22 years	157	15.1%
	23 years	103	9.9%
Ethnicity	Javanese	211	20.3%
	Batak	105	10.1%
	Maluku	87	8.4%
	Timorese	94	9.1%
	Papuan	41	4%
	Minahasa	47	4.5%
	Dayak	62	6%
	Toraja	44	4.2%
	Others	347	33.4%
Religion	Islam	449	43.3%
	Christian	418	40.2%
	Catholic	138	13.3%
	Hinduism	11	1.1%
	Buddhism	15	1.4%
	Confucianism	7	0.7%

Data Collection Procedure

Data for this study were collected using three psychological instruments: the Multicultural Intelligence Scale, the Cross-Ethnic and Interreligious Friendship Scale, and the Tolerance Scale. Prior to data collection, all instruments underwent content validity and construct validity evaluations. Content validity was assessed through an expert judgment process involving four evaluators, consisting of two experts in psychology and two experts in linguistics. This process aimed to ensure construct alignment, clarity of item wording, and appropriate language usage within the cultural context of the study. Subsequently, the instruments were pilot-tested on 60 young adults who were not included as study participants to assess item comprehensibility and clarity.

Following instrument validation, the researchers obtained the necessary research approvals and prepared informed consent forms as part of the ethical procedures. The instruments were then formatted as online questionnaires and distributed to participants via Google Forms. Questionnaire links were disseminated through multiple social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram. The data collection period lasted two months.

Before completing the questionnaire, participants were asked to read and provide consent via the informed consent form, which included information regarding the study's objectives, procedures, and participant rights and responsibilities. Participation was confirmed by selecting the "agree" option on the consent form prior to proceeding with the questionnaire. As an appreciation for their participation, the researchers provided an incentive of IDR 100,000 for five participants selected through a lottery after data collection was completed.

Research Instruments

Multicultural Intelligence Scale

Multicultural intelligence was measured using the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) developed by Earley and Ang (as cited in Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). This scale consists of 12 favorable items presented in a four-point Likert response format, namely: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). One example of an item is: *"I know the appropriate ways to express my behavior when interacting with people from different cultures."* Instrument quality testing indicated that all items met the validity criteria, with item-total correlation values ranging from 0.310 to 0.782. Reliability analysis showed that the scale demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.851.

Cross-Ethnic and Interreligious Friendship Scale

Interethnic and interreligious friendship relations were measured using the Interethnic and Interreligious Friendship Scale, which was developed based on three components of friendship as proposed by Adams and Taylor (2015). This scale consists of 9 favorable items presented in a four-point Likert response format: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). An example of an item is: *"I have friends from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, and we share experiences in various situations, both difficult and enjoyable."* Validity testing indicated that all items met the criteria, with item-total correlation values ranging from 0.421 to 0.667. Reliability analysis showed excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.886.

Tolerance Scale

Tolerance was measured using the Tolerance Scale developed by Ersanli and Mameghani (2016). The scale consists of 11 favorable items presented in a four-point Likert response format: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). An example item is: *"When interacting with others, I try to regulate my behavior so as not to hurt their feelings."* Validity testing indicated that all items met the criteria, with item-total correlation values ranging from 0.304 to

0.741. Reliability analysis demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.827.

Data Analysis

This study employed a quantitative approach with a multiple linear regression design to examine the roles of multicultural intelligence and cross-ethnic and interreligious friendships as predictors of tolerance among Indonesian youth in the digital era. Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression to assess the contribution of each predictor variable to tolerance. All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 24 for Windows.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of the simultaneous (overall) test presented in Table 2 indicate an F value of 633.814 ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that multicultural intelligence and cross-ethnic and interreligious friendship jointly serve as significant predictors of tolerance among Indonesian youth in the digital era.

Table 2. Simultaneous Test (F Value)

F	Sig.
633.814	0.000

Based on the results of the partial (t) test presented in Table 3, multicultural intelligence was found to have a significant effect on tolerance, with a standardized coefficient of $\beta = 0.516$ ($p < 0.05$). Additionally, cross-ethnic and interreligious friendship also demonstrated a significant influence on tolerance, with a standardized coefficient of $\beta = 0.300$ ($p < 0.05$).

Table 3. Partial Test (t Value)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	4.221	0.730	—	5.783	< .001
Multicultural Intelligence	0.451	0.023	0.516	19.346	< .001
Cross-ethnic and Religious Friendship Relations	0.351	0.031	0.300	11.252	< .001

The results of the coefficient of determination test presented in Table 4 indicate an R^2 value of 0.551, suggesting that tolerance can be predicted by multicultural intelligence and cross-ethnic and interreligious friendship factors by 55.1%, while the remaining variance is explained by other factors.

Table 4. Coefficient of Determination Test

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	SE of Estimate
1	0.742	0.551	0.550	3.177

The results of the categorization analysis presented in Table 5 indicate that the mean score of participants' multicultural intelligence falls within the high category (50.9%). For cross-ethnic and interreligious friendship, the mean score of participants also falls within the high category (53.5%). Similarly, the mean score for tolerance is classified as high (55.9%). High scores across these three variables suggest that an enhanced understanding and knowledge of diversity in Indonesia contributes to individuals' ability to demonstrate tolerant behavior. This finding aligns with Azmi and Kumala (2019), who asserted that individuals with well-developed or high multicultural intelligence are more likely to apply tolerant behaviors in daily life. Furthermore, the establishment of strong cross-ethnic and interreligious friendships can help minimize issues related to intolerance (Kurniawan & Sudrajat, 2018).

Table 5. Categorization of Research Variables

Variable	N	%	Level
Multicultural Intelligence	528	50.9	High
Cross-ethnic and Religious Friendship Relations	555	53.5	High
Tolerance	580	55.9	High

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the hypotheses proposed were supported. The findings suggest that multicultural intelligence and cross-ethnic and interreligious friendships play a significant role in predicting the tolerance attitudes of Indonesian youth in the digital era. These results demonstrate that, although the dynamics of digitalization are often associated with an increased potential for social conflict, young people still possess the capacity to develop and maintain tolerant behaviors through enhanced multicultural understanding and inclusive social interactions.

This finding provides a different perspective compared to previous surveys conducted by the Wahid Foundation (2016), which reported concerning tendencies toward intolerance among Indonesian youth. Similarly, Mackey and Dolven (2018) highlighted that some young individuals exhibit intolerance through various forms of social expression, such as radicalism, discriminatory demonstrations, and rejection of specific ethnic or religious groups.

Nevertheless, the current study indicates that opportunities for achieving harmonious social life amid national identity challenges remain viable. The high levels of tolerance observed among participants can be explained by an increased knowledge of cultural diversity and the establishment of positive cross-ethnic and interreligious friendships. Multicultural intelligence enables individuals to comprehend different cultural values more comprehensively, allowing them to adapt social behaviors effectively in pluralistic environments (Figueroa & Hofhuis, 2024). Additionally, cross-ethnic and interreligious friendships provide constructive interaction spaces for developing mutual respect and fostering more inclusive social relationships.

Within this context, individuals are afforded opportunities to broaden their perspectives on the cultural values held by others. Cross-cultural understanding developed through intensive social interaction contributes to enhanced empathy and social sensitivity (Hasgimianti, 2017). Friendships formed in culturally diverse settings also strengthen individuals' ability to understand others' perspectives, promoting empathetic attitudes and prosocial behaviors (Chan & Benner, 2025). Consequently, these positive personal values further support the development of tolerant attitudes toward others (Susanto & Kumala, 2019).

The relatively high level of tolerance observed in this study also provides optimism for the establishment of safe and peaceful social environments, both within communities and academic settings. Diversity can serve as a social learning resource for developing respect and understanding for differences (Sukardi & Efianingrum, 2025). In line with this, Ansori (2020) emphasized that intolerance can be minimized when individuals possess high awareness of diversity and are able to internalize values of appreciation for differences in daily life.

From a psychological perspective, tolerance yields numerous benefits for individuals and society. It strengthens interpersonal relationships, enhances social cohesion, and fosters harmonious social life (Belasheva & Petrova, 2016; Saldatova & Rasskazova, 2019). Tolerant character is also associated with individuals' openness to the presence of other groups, both majority and minority, as part of pluralistic social dynamics (Lombu et al., 2019). Therefore, cultivating character oriented toward valuing diversity is essential for building a democratic and inclusive society (Hjerm et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the application of tolerance is closely linked to the internalization of national values, which serve as a moral foundation in social life. Strengthening national values, as reflected in the principles of Pancasila, can help prevent the emergence of radicalism and anarchism, which may disrupt social order (Kelly, 2018). In this context, tolerance can be understood as a manifestation of

individuals' commitment to life values that emphasize social well-being and societal harmony (Casram, 2016; Tumanggor & Mularsih, 2020).

The study also found that participants' multicultural intelligence was categorized as high. This reflects that Indonesian youth in the digital era are capable of adapting to global developments without abandoning their local cultural identities. This ability is crucial for mitigating potential social conflicts arising from differences in cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds. Knowledge of cultural diversity also enhances individuals' capacity to accept differences and promotes the development of tolerance as part of an inclusive social identity (Korol et al., 2016).

In addition to multicultural intelligence, friendship relations were shown to be an essential factor supporting the development of tolerance. Friendship is a fundamental form of social relationship in human life and plays a vital role in psychological development across the lifespan (Carmichael, 2017). Healthy friendships provide emotional support, increase self-confidence, and strengthen individuals' ability to build positive social interactions with their environment. These findings align with Kurniawan and Sudrajat (2018), who reported that the quality of peer relationships contributes to the development of tolerant character among students.

Within multicultural societies, cross-ethnic friendships offer opportunities for individuals to develop a broader understanding of diverse social identities. Interactions within multiethnic environments can reinforce social bonds and foster more inclusive relationships (Bagci et al., 2017). Furthermore, relationships with individuals from different ethnic backgrounds contribute to psychological well-being through the formation of healthy and sustainable social connections (Lessard et al., 2020). Previous studies have also demonstrated that cross-ethnic friendships reduce social prejudice and enhance the quality of social life in diverse settings (Maulana et al., 2018; Killen et al., 2022).

Cross-ethnic friendships can also increase prosocial behaviors, as these relationships are grounded in humanistic values emphasizing mutual respect and support (Jutengren & Medin, 2019). Positive social relationships provide safety, emotional support, and improve psychological well-being (Munniksmä & Juvonen, 2019). Similarly, cross-religious friendships contribute significantly to tolerance. Interactions in interfaith friendships help reduce fear, prejudice, and distrust toward other religious groups. These relationships foster empathy, compassion, and acceptance of diverse beliefs, thereby minimizing potential social conflicts such as violence, discrimination, or intimidation, and promoting harmonious social life (Han et al., 2022; Devaki et al., 2025).

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that cross-ethnic and interreligious friendships provide significant social support for individuals—psychologically, socially, and emotionally. These relationships also help individuals develop more open social identities and prevent hostile social attitudes (Lino et al., 2020). Therefore, establishing inclusive social relationships is a critical factor in strengthening tolerance among youth.

Thus, the findings of this study underscore that tolerance attitudes can continue to develop positively among youth in the digital era. The enhancement of multicultural intelligence and the establishment of cross-ethnic and interreligious friendships serve as crucial factors supporting the creation of harmonious social interactions within a pluralistic society. The cultural diversity inherent in Indonesian society can serve as a valuable social learning resource for young people, enabling them to broaden their cultural understanding, cultivate inclusive social relationships, and uphold tolerance as a foundational value for peaceful and sustainable social life.

Implication

This study offers several implications. First, tolerance can be actualized because individuals are capable of learning to develop and cultivate multicultural knowledge within the Indonesian context. Second, there remains an opportunity to achieve a diverse social life, as digital-era youth continue to build cross-cultural relationships that help minimize attitudes of intolerance.

Limitation

This study has several limitations that should be considered. First, it did not explore the duration of relationships or the experiential dynamics formed in cross-ethnic and interfaith friendships, nor the underlying reasons for the levels of tolerance exhibited by participants. Second, the study did not conduct comparative analyses based on gender or ethnographic assessments, limiting the in-depth exploration of variations in experiences across different groups. These limitations should be taken into account in future research to investigate these aspects more comprehensively.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that multicultural intelligence and cross-ethnic and interfaith friendship relations are significant predictors of tolerance attitudes among Indonesian youth in the digital era. On a partial basis, both multicultural intelligence and cross-ethnic and interfaith friendship relations independently serve as predictors of tolerance attitudes in this population. Categorization analyses indicate that all three variables fall within the high category, suggesting that youth in the digital era possess a strong understanding of diversity, supported by social relationships in the form of cross-ethnic and interfaith friendships, which is subsequently reflected in consistent tolerant behaviors. Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. For parents, the results can serve as a guideline for instilling values of tolerance from an early age, enabling children to demonstrate acceptance and appreciation of cultural differences in broader social contexts. For academic institutions, the study encourages the development of cross-cultural literacy programs that allow students to continuously practice tolerant behaviors in their interactions with others. At the community level, traditional leaders can design initiatives that unite diverse community members while simultaneously strengthening social cohesion. Furthermore, for future research, this study can be expanded through longitudinal investigations to explore practical strategies for addressing issues of intolerance within society.

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