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# Social media as a new space for communication and Muslim identity formation

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** This study discusses the role of social media, particularly Instagram and TikTok, as a space for the formation of Islamic identity among Indonesian Muslim youth amid a highly visual and competitive digital culture. The transformation of religious communication in the digital space marks the emergence of the phenomenon of digital religiosity, where piety is displayed through symbols, visual narratives, and online participation. **Methods:** A quantitative descriptive approach supported by qualitative analysis was used on 50 Muslim youth respondents who are active social media users. Data were collected through an online survey using a five-point Likert scale and analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis of open-ended responses. **Findings:** The results show that social media plays a significant role in shaping Muslim identity, especially among women aged 20–22 years. Islamic content on social media was found to increase understanding of Islamic values, motivation to worship, and reflective expressions of religiosity. However, the study also found ethical challenges such as digital *riya'* and algorithmic religiosity, where religious practices can shift to become performative due to the logic of popularity and platform algorithms. **Conclusion:** Social media functions as a laboratory for religious identity for Muslim youth, mediating between spiritual expression and popular culture while demanding strong religious digital literacy. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This study offers a new perspective through the integration of social identity and digital communication theories in the study of Islamic communication, as well as introducing the concept of digital Islamic identity as a form of reflective piety in the online space.

**KEYWORDS:** digital Muslim identity; social media; youth religiosity.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, developments in information and communication technology have brought about significant changes to global social and cultural structures. Social media has become an integral part of modern human life, enabling interactions across space and time, and shaping new ways of constructing meaning, identity, and community. According to Kuntari (2023), the emergence of digital media has shifted communication patterns from hierarchical to more open, participatory, and interactive network models. These changes have not only affected the dynamics of interpersonal communication, but have also given rise to new phenomena in the context of self-expression and the construction of social identity in the digital space. In an era where the boundaries between private and public spaces are becoming increasingly blurred, social media has become an important arena in the process of identity formation, including religious identity.

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Indonesia, as one of the countries with the largest internet user population in the world, is a concrete example of this transformation. According to a report by We Are Social (2024), the number of active social media users in Indonesia has reached more than 167 million people, with a penetration rate of 60% of the total population. Of this number, the 18-25 age group ranks highest as the most active users, with Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube being the dominant platforms (Qadir, 2024; Trilestari et al., 2025). This phenomenon shows that teenagers are the group most involved in the flow of digital communication, where social media is not only a means of entertainment, but also a medium for self-expression, representation of values, and identity formation. In the context of religiosity, digital platforms not only mediate the dissemination of moral messages, but also shape new styles of religiosity that are visual, flexible, and open to interpretation.

For the Muslim community, social media has a more complex and multidimensional role. Its presence opens up new spaces for the dissemination of religious information, the strengthening of spiritual values, and the transformation of Islamic practices. Yati et al. (2023) explain that social media has expanded the concept of da'wah from mere formal lectures to interactive, personal, and visual religious communication. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok enable the delivery of moral messages through light and aesthetic content, such as short videos about hijrah, Islamic motivation, and halal lifestyles. This phenomenon is known as digital religiosity, a form of religiosity that is born and developed in the digital space (Hilalludin, 2025). Wahyudi (2021) adds that the younger generation of Muslims now uses social media to build religious branding, which is the image of Islam that is presented as part of a modern social identity that is relevant to popular culture.

From a theoretical perspective, identity formation in digital spaces can be explained through two main frameworks: Social Identity Theory and Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) Theory. Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner, explains that individuals construct their identities based on membership in certain social groups, which then become the basis for self-perception and social behavior (Robinson & Setyawan, 2025). In the context of social media, Muslim youth negotiate their identities through symbolic representations such as dress, language choice, or involvement in online Islamic communities. The processes of ingroup and outgroup are also reflected in this phenomenon, where Muslim youth build solidarity among fellow digital Muslims, while distinguishing themselves from values that are considered incompatible with their religious identity.

Meanwhile, CMC theory explains how digital interactions, even without face-to-face contact, can form meaningful social relationships. Through algorithms and online interactions, a virtual communication space called the digital ummah is formed, which is an online Muslim community that shares values, spiritual experiences, and moral support (Prasanti & Karimah, 2020). A recent study by Kahfi & Muhibbullah (2024) found that active participation in digital da'wah communities increases the sense of belonging to Islamic identity and strengthens religiously-based social solidarity.

Previous studies have discussed the relationship between social media and religiosity. Chanra & Tasruddin (2025) highlight how digital platforms play a role in changing patterns of da'wah message consumption. Hamdi (2022) emphasizes the phenomenon of performative religiosity, namely religious practices that emphasize symbolic and visual aspects rather than spiritual substance. Sahraz et al. (2025) also found that social media can be an arena for identity competition, where religious expression is often used to gain social capital. However, most of these studies focus on the phenomenon of digital da'wah in general and have not examined in depth how Muslim youth construct their Islamic identity in the midst of a highly visual, fast-paced, and competitive media culture.

In the Indonesian context, research on the identity of young Muslims on social media is still relatively limited. Faesol (2022) mentions that the religious expression of Indonesia's younger generation tends to be adaptive to digital trends, where Islamic values are articulated in a more modern, aesthetic, and publicly acceptable form. However, this phenomenon also raises ambiguity: does Islamic expression on social media truly reflect the

internalization of spiritual values, or is it merely a symbolic appearance commodified by digital platform algorithms? This research gap is important to explore further in order to understand the dynamics of young Muslim identity in an ever-evolving digital communication ecosystem.

Global studies also show that social media has changed the way people understand and communicate religious values. According to Hilalludin (2025), digital space not only represents social reality, but also creates a new reality that influences the perceptions and behavior of its users. This phenomenon has created a need for a more contextual approach to Islamic communication for the digital generation. In line with this view, Sahraz et al. (2025) emphasize the need for a new understanding of religious self-presentation, in which religious identity is not only understood as a personal belief but also as a form of social performance in front of an online audience.

Based on this theoretical and empirical background, this study seeks to answer a fundamental question: how does social media play a role in shaping Islamic identity among Indonesian Muslim youth? This study views social media not only as a means of communication, but also as an arena for symbolic interaction that mediates the construction of religious meaning, social identity, and new communities of faith in the digital space. Conceptually, this study has two main objectives. First, to analyze the role of social media, particularly Instagram and TikTok, in shaping the Islamic identity of Indonesian Muslim youth through digital communication and symbolic representation. Second, to identify the opportunities and challenges of this phenomenon for the development of authentic and reflective religious communication in the digital age.

Methodologically, this study uses a quantitative descriptive approach supported by qualitative analysis. An online survey was conducted on 50 Muslim students who are active social media users, using a five-point Likert scale instrument that measures the dimensions of Islamic value understanding, religious motivation, identity representation, and digital social interaction. The results of the instrument reliability test produced a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.946, indicating a very high level of internal consistency.

Thus, this study offers a novel approach (state of the art) in the form of integrating Islamic communication and digital identity theories in the context of Indonesian youth. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of technology-based religious communication literature, while also offering practical insights for Islamic digital literacy efforts among teenagers. The following analysis will describe the profile of respondents, patterns of Islamic social media use, and how the relationship between the intensity of digital engagement and the formation of Muslim identity is represented through empirical data from the survey results.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Research design

This study employs a quantitative descriptive approach supported by qualitative analysis to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media as a space for communication and identity formation among Muslim youth. The quantitative descriptive approach was selected because it enables the researcher to describe social phenomena factually through numerical data while measuring respondents' perceptions and attitudes toward social issues. Meanwhile, the qualitative element enriches the findings by capturing subjective perspectives and contextual interpretations derived from respondents' narrative responses. The research design applied in this study is cross-sectional, in which data collection was conducted within a specific period to capture ongoing social phenomena without manipulating variables. This design is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to analyze the current relationship between social media use and the formation of Islamic identity among Muslim youth in the digital era.

## 2.2 Population and sampling technique

The population of this study consists of Muslim youth in Indonesia who actively use social media, particularly Instagram and TikTok. The selection of these platforms is based on reports indicating that both applications are among the most widely used social media platforms by Indonesian teenagers and serve as primary spaces for digital identity expression (Qadir, 2024; Trilestari et al., 2025). Their strong visual orientation and engagement-based algorithms make them highly relevant as media for expressing religious values and identity. The sampling technique used in this research is purposive sampling. Respondents were selected based on several criteria: (1) aged between 15 and 25 years old, (2) Muslim, and (3) active users of social media for at least the past year. This sampling method was chosen to ensure that participants possessed direct and relevant experience related to the phenomenon being investigated.

## 2.3 Data collection instrument and procedure

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed using Google Forms via social networking platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram. The research instrument consisted of two main sections. The first section gathered respondents' demographic characteristics, including gender, age, and dominant social media platform used. The second section consisted of six closed-ended statements measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). These statements were designed to measure respondents' perceptions regarding the role of social media in communication and the formation of Islamic identity. In addition, one open-ended question was included to provide respondents with an opportunity to express their personal views concerning the positive and negative impacts of social media on Muslim youth identity formation.

Before the main data collection process, the instrument underwent content validity testing through literature review and consultation with two lecturers specializing in Islamic communication and social research methodology. Each statement item was evaluated in terms of clarity, relevance to the research variables, and suitability within the context of digital religiosity. To ensure reliability, an internal consistency test was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient on 50 respondents with the assistance of SPSS version 26 software. Based on the criteria proposed by Maulana (2022), an alpha coefficient of  $\geq 0.70$  indicates good reliability. The test results showed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.946, indicating that the instrument possesses a very high level of internal consistency and is appropriate for use in the primary research analysis.

## 2.4 Data analysis technique

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including frequency distribution, percentages, and mean scores for each Likert-scale indicator. These analyses were intended to describe general trends in respondents' attitudes toward the phenomenon under investigation. The results were subsequently presented in the form of tables, bar charts, and pie charts to facilitate visual interpretation. All quantitative data processing was conducted using Microsoft Excel and SPSS version 26. Meanwhile, qualitative data obtained from the open-ended responses were analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify themes, patterns, and trends in respondents' opinions. The analysis process involved three stages: (1) data reduction to identify the main ideas from respondents' answers, (2) coding by grouping responses into thematic categories such as positive and negative impacts, and (3) interpretation to understand the meaning of respondents' perspectives within the context of digital religious communication. This approach aligns with contemporary social communication research methodologies that

integrate numerical and thematic analysis to generate a more holistic understanding of religious communication behavior in digital spaces (Nurrisa et al., 2025).

In drawing conclusions, this study applies an inductive approach by interpreting empirical findings to understand the relationship between the intensity of social media use and the formation of Islamic identity among Muslim youth. The entire research process was conducted in accordance with social research ethics, where participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. No personal information such as full names, contact details, or social media accounts was collected, and all participants provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Respondent characteristics

The analysis of respondent characteristics aims to provide an empirical description of the profile of Muslim teenagers who use social media, which is the focus of this study. A total of 50 respondents participated in an online survey distributed through various digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram. The choice of online distribution was intended to reach groups of adolescents who are active in the digital space while ensuring diversity in social backgrounds and social media usage experiences. Thus, the respondent profile in this study is considered sufficiently representative to describe the general trends among young Muslim social media users in Indonesia.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by gender

Category	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	17	24.0%
Female	33	66.0%

The majority of respondents in this study were female (66%), while males accounted for 34%. The dominance of female participation shows that this group tends to be more active in digital activities related to religiosity and religious communication. Muttaqin (2022) explains that women have a tendency to communicate more expressively and empathetically, making social media a safe space to share spiritual reflections and religious experiences. This phenomenon is reinforced by Shamim (2024) findings, which state that Generation Z Muslim women often use social media to balance piety and modernity through visual content such as OOTD hijrah, spiritual quotes, and reflective videos.

The active involvement of women signifies a shift in the function of social media from merely a space for expression to an arena for the construction of Islamic identity and the representation of new gender roles. Zaid et al. (2022) reveal that women act as cultural brokers, connecting traditional Islamic values with modern religious expressions that bridge piety and digital aesthetics. In this context, female dominance is not merely a statistical figure, but reflects the dynamics of communicative and aesthetic piety, where spiritual values are articulated through visual symbols and personal narratives on social media.

Table 2. Age distribution of respondents

Category	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
17–19 tahun	15	30.0%
20–22 tahun	32	64.0%
23–25 tahun	3	6.0%

Most respondents were aged 20–22 years old (64%), followed by the 17–19 age group (30%) and 23–25 age group (6%). This age range falls within the emerging adulthood phase, which is a period of transition to adulthood where individuals begin to develop

independence in values and spiritual reflection. Febriansyah & Hariry (2025) refer to this phase as an important stage in the formation of religious orientation because individuals begin to internalize religious teachings through personal interpretation, not just family inheritance.

In the digital context, this generation displays a reflective and experimental form of religiosity, as explained by Rahmawati et al. (2024). They do not merely accept Islamic teachings as doctrine, but also interpret and express them personally through social media content. The digital space for this group functions as an identity laboratory where they experiment with expressions of Islam through visual language, clothing styles, humor, and everyday narratives. This phenomenon shows that religiosity is no longer dogmatic, but rather appears as a living and dynamic experience, intertwined between spiritual values and popular culture.

Table 3. Dominant social media platforms

Category	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Instagram	9	18.0%
TikTok	16	32.0%
Keduanya	23	46.0%

Most respondents (46%) use Instagram and TikTok simultaneously, followed by single users of TikTok (32%) and Instagram (18%). The combination of these two platforms shows a pattern of cross-platform engagement between the consumption of visual-aesthetic content and short narrative videos. Zaid et al. (2022) refer to this phenomenon as a form of micro-dakwah, or the dissemination of Islamic messages in a concise but highly impactful manner.

Instagram functions as an “identity showcase” that displays symbols of Islam such as Islamic clothing and quotations from the Qur'an, while TikTok acts as a more spontaneous and emotional arena for performative expression (Aunul, 2019). The interoperability between these two platforms creates a model of da'wah that is adaptive to the algorithms and communication styles of the younger generation. This phenomenon supports Al Yusran & Hasnawati (2024) view of the formation of a digital ummah, which is an online religious community connected across regions and cultures through active user participation.

Thus, the characteristics of the respondents in this study indicate that Indonesian Muslim youth, especially women aged 20–22 years, are the main actors in the construction of digital Islamic identity. They are not only recipients of da'wah messages but also producers of religious values that are articulated creatively and reflectively in cyberspace.

### 3.2 Analysis of islamic-themed social media use

The analysis of Islamic-themed social media usage aims to understand the extent to which Muslim teenagers utilize digital platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok, as a means of gaining religious understanding while expressing their religious identity. Social media, as a digital ecosystem rich in audiovisual and interactive content, has become a new space where religious practices take place in a hybrid form, combining spiritual dimensions with popular culture. Survey data shows that the average Likert score for the six indicators of social media use is above 3.5, which indicates a high level of respondent agreement with the role of digital platforms in shaping religious understanding and expression.

These results show that although Muslim teenagers do not always access Islamic content regularly (lowest score = 3.50), when they do access such content, the experience has a significant effect on their religious understanding and motivation. The highest score was obtained on the indicator “Islamic content on social media helps me understand Islamic values in a fun way” (mean = 4.28), indicating that social media is effective as an experiential medium for da'wah, where Islamic values are conveyed through visual, narrative, and emotional approaches. These findings are in line with the Digital Religion theory proposed

by Aunul (2019), which explains that modern religious practices occur not only in physical spaces but also in hybrid online-offline spaces, where digital interactions play an important role in shaping religious experiences. Table 4 shows the distribution of the average score for each indicator:

Table 4. Average likert scale scores

No	Question	Average (Mean)
1	I often access Islamic-themed content on Instagram/TikTok	3.50
2	Islamic content on social media helps me understand Islamic values in a fun way	4.28
3	I feel more motivated to live my life according to Islamic teachings after seeing digital da'wah content	4.00
4	Social media influences the way I present my identity as a Muslim	3.98
5	I use Instagram/TikTok to share content that reflects my identity as a Muslim	3.62
6	Social media has become a new space for communication that strengthens relationships between Muslims in the digital age	3.84

Participatory experiences on social media enable Muslim youth to learn and interpret Islamic teachings through content that is contextual and relevant to their daily lives. For example, short lecture videos on TikTok that link Islamic values to daily activities, quotations from the Qur'an in attractive visual formats, and motivational videos about hijrah that emphasize personal spiritual strengthening have been shown to increase engagement and religious awareness (Yoharsa et al., 2024). This approach shows that experiential da'wah can encourage higher emotional engagement than traditional da'wah methods, because participants not only receive information, but also feel and interpret the message through personal experience.

On the other hand, the lowest score on the indicator of frequency of access to Islamic content indicates that social media consumption is situational and influenced by a number of factors, including platform algorithms, user mood, popular content trends, and peer influence (Ibad, 2025). This phenomenon reflects the attention economy, where the success of delivering religious messages is highly dependent on the visual appeal, interactivity, and emotional resonance of the content. Therefore, digital da'wah strategies need to adapt to the logic of competitive platforms, for example through the development of edutainment-based content that combines entertainment, education, and empathy to increase audience engagement and strengthen the quality of the message (Zulaikha & Bashori, 2025).

In addition, social media serves as a participatory and expressive space where Muslim youth can display their religious identity. The indicator "Social media influences how I display my identity as a Muslim" has an average score of 3.98, indicating a significant influence on the construction of digital identity. The content uploaded ranges from photos of modest clothing, videos reflecting on hijrah, to Islamic motivational quotes, which are part of a strategic self-presentation process (Marita et al., 2021). Through Instagram and TikTok feeds, Muslim youth construct a religious self-image, not only as an internal reflection but also as a social performance intended for a digital audience.

It is also important to note that there are gender differences in how adolescents express their religiosity in the digital space. Female respondents tend to emphasize visual and symbolic aspects, such as following hijab influencer accounts or young female religious teachers for inspiration on modest clothing and behavior. Meanwhile, male respondents are more focused on moral and spiritual aspects, such as watching short lectures or Islamic motivational content as a means of strengthening worship and self-awareness. These findings support Dwianti & Kristi (2023) view of piety as agency, where piety is not merely passive obedience, but an active expression in building a moral identity in modern society.

However, religious consumption and expression on social media are not entirely free from challenges. Platform algorithms that emphasize visual content and virality can

encourage the phenomenon of digital *riya'*, which is the practice of religion for the sake of social validation through likes, comments, and the number of followers (Kadri & Fachruddin, 2024; Marita et al., 2021). This shows that digital *da'wah* delivery strategies must consider the balance between spiritual values, content aesthetics, and algorithmic mechanisms so that the message is not reduced to mere entertainment or cultural commodities.

Collaboration between preachers, professional content creators, and digital communities is key to strengthening the quality of message delivery. Visual storytelling, interactive design, and short-form content formats relevant to the communication style of the younger generation can enhance religious understanding and motivation. Thus, social media functions as a laboratory for Islamic identity and modern religious learning, where understanding, motivation, and religious expression are dynamically and participatively interrelated.

### *3.3 Formation of muslim identity in the digital space*

Muslim identity on social media is formed through a process of self-reflection, social interaction, and symbolic representation that occurs repeatedly and dynamically. Digital platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, are not only a means of communication, but also function as a performative stage where individuals negotiate their Islamic values in front of a digital audience. The results of the study show that the statement "Social media influences the way I present my identity as a Muslim" has an average score of 3.98, indicating the significant influence of social media on the construction of religious identity among Muslim youth. These findings confirm that the digital world has become a social arena that shapes the way people understand, present, and interpret their Islam.

This concept can be analyzed through Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation. Individuals tend to strategically present themselves on the "front stage" to gain social recognition. In the context of social media, Instagram and TikTok feeds serve as virtual stages where Muslim teenagers showcase their religious self-image through carefully curated content. Photos of modest clothing, videos reflecting on hijrah, posts of quotations from the Qur'an, or Islamic motivational content are forms of representation of Islamic identity that they want to communicate to the digital public. Piety, in this case, is no longer just a personal aspect, but also a social performance that is displayed to an online audience (Sahraz et al., 2025).

Further analysis shows gender differences in how adolescents express their religious identity. Female respondents tend to emphasize visual and symbolic aspects. They follow hijab influencers, young female religious teachers, or Islamic content creators for inspiration on how to dress and behave modestly in the digital public sphere. In contrast, male respondents tend to emphasize moral and spiritual aspects, such as watching short lectures, Islamic motivational content, or videos reminding them to pray. This pattern shows that religious expression in the digital space is gendered, where men and women build piety through different symbols and communication strategies. This is in line with Dwianti & Kristi (2023) view of piety as agency, which emphasizes that piety is an active expression in shaping moral identity in modern society.

Although social media opens up new spaces for religious expression, this phenomenon also gives rise to spiritual ambivalence. Some respondents realize that expressions of Islam on social media are often trapped in the logic of popularity and personal branding. The concept of digital *riya'* proposed by Ihsan et al. (2017) explains that religious practices are sometimes carried out to gain social validation through likes, comments, and the number of followers. This phenomenon is reinforced by platform algorithms that highlight visually appealing content over the substance of the message (Zamzami et al., 2023). As a result, the forms of piety that go viral are not always the most spiritually meaningful, but rather those that are easily accepted by the audience and platform algorithms. Muslim identity in the

digital space, therefore, is the result of a negotiation between personal intentions, social norms, and the algorithmic logic that governs content visibility.

However, the formation of digital identity is not always superficial or performative. Some respondents use social media as a means to deepen their understanding of religion and share positive values. They write personal reflections on the process of hijrah, share moral messages, or support social movements based on Islamic values. Such activities indicate the transformative dimension of digital religiosity, where piety is realized through tangible social participation. The Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) framework explains that digital communication can build emotional closeness and spiritual solidarity, even without face-to-face interaction (Al Yusran & Hasnawati, 2024).

These findings also show that digital Muslim identity is dynamic and constantly changing in line with developments in technology, popular culture, and social norms. Islamic values are understood and interpreted within a complex digital context, where messages, visuals, and interactions influence how individuals express their religiosity. Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach combining communication theory, sociology of religion, and digital media studies is essential for analyzing this phenomenon in a comprehensive and contextual manner.

Thus, the formation of Muslim identity in the digital space can be understood as a reflective and social negotiation process, in which piety is not only symbolically demonstrated, but also interpreted through active participation, personal reflection, and digital social interaction. Social media provides a digital laboratory for Muslim youth to learn, interpret, and express their Islamic values, while building spiritual solidarity in the online community.

### *3.4 Social media as a space for religious communication*

Social media has evolved into a strategic space for religious communication, enabling Muslim youth to engage in spiritual practices, share moral values, and strengthen faith-based social networks. Research findings indicate that the average score for the statement "Social media has become a new space for communication that strengthens relationships among Muslims" is 3.84, indicating a high level of agreement with the role of digital platforms as a means of religious outreach and interaction. Interactions that occur through comments, live streaming features, direct messages, and online discussions in da'wah groups show that social media is not only a medium for disseminating information, but also an arena for learning, reflection, and internalization of Islamic values among teenagers.

This phenomenon is in line with the concept of the digital ummah proposed by Al Yusran & Hasnawati (2024), which emphasizes the emergence of a global Muslim community through digital networks. In this digital community, solidarity no longer depends on geographical proximity, but on shared values, interests, and spiritual goals. Instagram and TikTok function as spaces for interaction that bring together individuals from various backgrounds in a shared religious discourse. A study by Muhja & Shahnaz (2025) confirms that such networks are a source of moral and emotional support, especially for Muslim youth who are in minority environments or have limited access to offline religious activities.

In addition to its potential as a space for preaching, social media also presents significant challenges. Some respondents reported the emergence of extreme debates, cyber-takfir, and the spread of hate speech among communities. Wulandari et al. (2021) emphasize that platform algorithms tend to reinforce echo chambers, which are information spaces that only display content that aligns with the user's views. As a result, the space for dialogue becomes narrow and has the potential to cause religious identity polarization. This phenomenon shows that social media is a paradoxical social arena: it strengthens solidarity, but it can also trigger ideological conflicts.

In this context, the concept of ethical engagement becomes highly relevant. Lubis & Kadri (2024) and Mesenu & Yernawilis (2025) emphasize the importance of a

communication approach that prioritizes honesty, empathy, and manners in conveying religious messages. This digital ethics requires users to not only disseminate accurate information but also ensure that the delivery of messages contains values of compassion, respects diversity of views, and minimizes social conflict. This approach is in line with the principle of *akhlaq al-karimah*, which places ethics as the main foundation of Islamic communication. By applying this principle, social media has the potential to become a space for character building, morality, and spirituality for the younger Muslim generation.

Another phenomenon that has emerged is collaborative preaching on digital platforms. Preaching authority, which was previously monopolized by clerics or formal institutions, has now become more open and distributed. Influencers, content creators, and online communities are helping to shape modern religious discourse. This transformation opens up opportunities for a more egalitarian, contextual, and participatory dissemination of Islam. However, this condition also demands greater ethical responsibility so that religious messages are not reduced to mere entertainment or cultural commodities.

Furthermore, social media serves as an arena for reflective learning and interactive dialogue. Muslim youth use digital platforms to ask questions, discuss, and interpret Islamic teachings contextually. Through these activities, they build critical awareness of religious messages, develop Islamic digital literacy skills, and strengthen their capacity to identify credible content. This practice shows that social media can serve as a spiritual laboratory that combines learning, social participation, and religious identity.

Thus, social media is not merely a passive means of communication, but an interactive ecosystem that influences how Muslim youth understand, interpret, and express Islamic values. Digital platforms provide a space for them to build spiritual solidarity, broaden their horizons, and internalize moral values creatively. However, its effectiveness greatly depends on the ability of users to apply religious digital literacy, Islamic communication ethics, and critical awareness, so that this space remains productive for the formation of identity, spirituality, and Islamic brotherhood.

### *3.5 Respondents' perceptions of the impact of social media*

Analysis of open-ended responses in the questionnaire shows that Muslim teenagers' perceptions of social media are multi-dimensional, encompassing positive and negative impacts that interact with each other in their digital experiences. Positive impacts are seen in how social media broadens religious knowledge, increases motivation to worship, and strengthens religious-based social relationships. Most respondents stated that platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are able to present light, enjoyable, and accessible religious content, including short videos, reflective quotes, and interactive lectures packaged visually and narratively. This allows Islamic values to be understood contextually and relevantly in daily life, in line with the concept of experiential *da'wah* (Arifianto, 2022), which emphasizes personal experience as an effective medium for conveying spiritual messages in a participatory and emotional form.

In addition to being a learning tool, social media also functions as a space for representing religious identity. Respondents, especially women, feel proud to display their Muslim identity through religious symbols on their personal profiles, such as wearing the hijab, including holy verses in their bios, and posting content that highlights moral values and spirituality. This phenomenon reflects the emergence of a new public piety, where piety is not merely a private practice but is represented in the digital public sphere as part of a modern lifestyle. According to Muvid (2023), this indicates a shift from private religiosity toward an open, dialogical, and contextually adaptive model of Islamic communication, while also strengthening the internalization of moral and spiritual values among youth.

However, negative perceptions also arise, especially regarding performative piety or religious image-building. Some respondents highlighted that pious practices are sometimes displayed more to gain social validation through likes, comments, or the number of followers than as a reflection of sincere faith. This phenomenon is in line with the concept

of algorithmic religiosity (Wibowo & Triadi, 2025), where algorithmic logic and platform virality often determine the visibility of religious content more than its spiritual substance. This condition poses the risk of ideological polarization, where echo chambers narrow the space for dialogue, reinforce bias, and increase the potential for social conflict among Muslim youth. Several respondents also reported the emergence of hate speech, extreme debates, and the spread of unverified religious information, which ultimately leads to social fragmentation in the digital realm.

In this context, strengthening reflective religiosity is very important (Purwati et al., 2024). Reflective awareness encourages adolescents to assess the intentions, context, and social impact of religious practices on social media. Ideal digital spirituality is not merely "Islamic in appearance," but also "Islamic in meaning," that is, building awareness, empathy, and morality in every digital interaction. Such activities can include writing personal reflections, sharing experiences of hijrah, supporting Islamic value-based social movements, or commenting constructively on da'wah content. These practices demonstrate the transformative dimension of digital religiosity, where social media becomes a space for learning, solidarity, and active participation in modern religious life.

Furthermore, respondents' perceptions indicate that social media requires both digital literacy and spiritual literacy. Religious digital literacy enables youth to evaluate the credibility of information, understand algorithms, and filter content that is in line with Islamic values. Meanwhile, spiritual literacy emphasizes a substantial understanding of religious teachings, ethical awareness, and sincere intentions in expressing religiosity online. The combination of the two is an important foundation for social media to function as a means of faith development, not just a venue for religious image-building, while minimizing the risk of spiritual distortion and social conflict.

Thus, Muslim teenagers' perceptions of social media are complex and ambivalent. On the one hand, digital platforms offer great potential for religious learning, spiritual motivation, and identity strengthening; on the other hand, this space also presents ethical challenges, risks of polarization, and performative tendencies. This phenomenon underscores the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of digital religiosity, combining the study of religion, communication, and media sociology, so that the younger generation can use social media wisely, creatively, and meaningfully.

### *3.6 Comparative discussion and implications*

The results of this study show that social media has become a complex ecosystem of religious communication, in which young Muslims are not merely consumers of content, but also active participants in the process of producing religious meaning. These findings reinforce previous studies, such as Mu'awanah (2022), Zaid et al. (2022), and Febriani & Desrani (2021), which emphasize the significant role of social media in spreading Islamic values and shaping religious identity. However, the novelty of this research lies in its conceptual approach that highlights digital Islamic identity, namely Islamic identity that is constructed through symbolic, algorithmic, and active digital practices. This identity is not passively born from content consumption, but rather through the process of self-representation, community participation, and value negotiation that occurs between users, platforms, and digital culture.

This phenomenon indicates that social media is not merely a communication tool, but also a cultural ecosystem that shapes the way young Muslims think, believe, and behave. In the context of digital da'wah, this study introduces the idea of interactive da'wah, which is a dialogical and participatory form of two-way da'wah. Every individual now has the potential to become a digital da'i, not limited to formal lecture content, but through simple actions such as spreading messages of kindness, writing soothing comments, or displaying good character in online interactions. Digital da'wah is no longer hierarchical but collaborative, as a process of meaning production that occurs between users and platforms, in line with interactive communication theory (Putrawansyah & Hasbullah, 2023) which

emphasizes the importance of active participation and emotional engagement of the audience.

From a practical perspective, this study emphasizes the need to strengthen Islamic digital literacy. This competency includes the ability to assess the credibility of religious information, understand platform algorithms, filter content that is in line with Islamic values, and be aware of moral responsibilities in social media. Mastery of Islamic digital literacy enables the younger generation to avoid the pitfalls of extremism, the commodification of religious symbols, and the spread of religious hoaxes. Furthermore, this literacy becomes the foundation for the formation of Islamic communication ethics in the digital public sphere, where the values of manners and morals become the guidelines for interaction.

From an educational perspective, these findings recommend the integration of digital Islamic communication studies into the curriculum of universities and da'wah institutions. An interdisciplinary approach that combines Islamic studies, communication science, and media sociology enables students to understand Islam as a dynamic value system amid technological advances. With this understanding, a generation of cyber da'i (preachers) will emerge who are intelligent, creative, and have ethical and spiritual awareness in digital da'wah. Strengthening religious digital literacy is also relevant to support a vision of moderate and inclusive da'wah, based on the principle of rahmatan lil 'alamin, so that religious messages can be widely accepted without reducing their spiritual substance.

Furthermore, this study reveals the transformation of religious authority structures in the digital age. Whereas previously the dominant authority in preaching was held by clerics or formal institutions, today that authority is more open and distributed, including influencers, content creators, and online communities. This situation opens up opportunities for the spread of Islam in an egalitarian and contextual manner, but it also demands ethical responsibility so that religious messages do not merely become entertainment or cultural commodities. Collaboration between preachers and professional content creators is key to improving the quality of message delivery through visual storytelling, interactive design, and short-form content formats that are relevant to the communication style of the younger generation.

In addition, the phenomenon of the digital ummah shows that Islamic identity is now transnational and collaborative. Social media enables the formation of a global Muslim community connected through values, symbols, and religious communication practices in virtual spaces. This phenomenon is in line with the concept of a cultural ecosystem, where social media becomes a socio-cultural space for the global Muslim community to represent, negotiate, and contextualize Islam in contemporary reality (Rizqi, 2025; Zaid et al., 2022).

The conclusion of this discussion confirms that social media is not merely a communication tool, but rather a space for the production of religious meaning that shapes new identities, spiritualities, and solidarity among young Muslims. The digital space offers great potential for strengthening faith and Islamic brotherhood, but it also requires vigilance against spiritual banality, performative piety, and algorithmic manipulation. The success of da'wah in the digital age depends heavily on the ability of Muslims to balance technological creativity and depth of values, as well as openness in communication and spiritual sincerity. Thus, this study emphasizes the need for adaptive, ethical, and participatory digital da'wah strategies, as well as the development of comprehensive digital and spiritual literacy as the foundation for shaping a modern Muslim generation that is critical, creative, and has integrity.

#### 4. Conclusions

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that social media, especially Instagram and TikTok, play a significant role in shaping the Islamic identity of Indonesian Muslim youth. This phenomenon emerges through symbolic interactions, digital community participation, and performative yet reflective self-representation. Social media

is not only a medium for disseminating Islamic content, but also functions as an identity laboratory where Muslim youth explore spiritual values, express religiosity, and build social solidarity in the digital ecosystem. User characteristics show that female adolescents aged 20–22 are the main actors in the construction of digital Islamic identity, emphasizing visual and symbolic aspects in expressing piety. Meanwhile, male adolescents tend to focus on moral and spiritual aspects through Islamic motivational content and short lectures. This pattern confirms the existence of a gendered approach in the expression of digital religiosity. Analysis of social media use shows that although the frequency of access to Islamic content is situational, the content consumed has a significant influence on understanding Islamic values, motivation to worship, and ways of expressing religious identity. Social media enables experiential da'wah practices, where Islamic values are conveyed through personal experiences, visual narratives, and emotional interactions that are contextual to the lives of young people.

However, the study also found ethical and spiritual challenges, such as the phenomenon of digital *riya'*, algorithmic religiosity, and the potential for ideological polarization. Religious practices are sometimes performative in order to gain social validation, while platform algorithms emphasize visually appealing content over spiritual substance. Therefore, religious digital literacy and spiritual literacy are important aspects to ensure that social media functions as a means of productive and meaningful faith development. Conceptually, this study confirms that the formation of Muslim identity in the digital space is dynamic, transformative, and collaborative. Social media opens up space for teenagers to interpret, express, and practice Islamic values creatively, while building a digital ummah community that strengthens spiritual solidarity. From an educational and da'wah perspective, these findings recommend strengthening Islamic digital literacy, integrating digital Islamic communication studies into the curriculum, and collaboration between preachers and content creators to convey religious messages in an ethical, relevant, and inclusive manner. Thus, social media is not merely a communication tool, but a cultural ecosystem that shapes the way young Muslims think, believe, and behave, making it an important arena for learning, spiritual reflection, and the construction of Islamic identity in the digital age.

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### **Author Contribution**

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### **Data Availability Statement**

The data supporting the findings of this study are publicly available in an online database. The datasets can be accessed at: <https://bit.ly/appendix-socialmedia>

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Declaration of Generative AI Use

Not available.

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