

Muslim Life in the Digital Era: Islam, Identity, and Social Media

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Article Information	Abstract
Keywords: <i>Muslim Life, Digital Islam, Islamic Identity, Social Media, Digital Religion, Religious Authority</i> Sub. 20th, Dec. 2025 Rev. 9th, Feb. 2026 Pub. 15rd, May. 2026 Vol. 01, No. 02, 2026 DOI: JIISR 	The development of digital technology has transformed the ways Muslims access religious knowledge, express Islamic identity, participate in religious communities, and interact with religious authorities. Social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and WhatsApp have become important spaces for Islamic communication and everyday religious engagement. In Indonesia, this transformation is significant because digital media have become deeply embedded in social life. DataReportal reported approximately 230 million internet users and 180 million social media user identities in Indonesia in late 2025, demonstrating the extensive reach of digital communication in the country. This article examines Muslim life in the digital era by focusing on the relationship between Islam, identity, and social media. The study employs a qualitative literature review approach and draws on scholarship concerning digital religion, mediatization, religious identity, Islamic knowledge, and religious authority. The discussion is organized into four themes: social media as a new space for Muslim religious life; the formation of digital Muslim identity; the transformation of Islamic knowledge and religious authority; and the opportunities and challenges of digital religious engagement. The article argues that social media do not merely function as communication tools but have become social environments in which Islamic meanings are produced, circulated, interpreted, and negotiated. Muslim identity in the digital era is increasingly networked, visible, flexible, and shaped by interactions between religious traditions and digital culture. At the same time, digitalization creates challenges related to misinformation, fragmented authority, religious commodification, and algorithmic visibility. Understanding contemporary Muslim life therefore requires an approach that connects religious studies with sociology, media studies, and digital culture.

1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology has brought significant changes to contemporary social life. Communication, education, economic activities, political participation, and religious practices are increasingly conducted through digital platforms. Smartphones and social media have become part of everyday life, enabling individuals to access information and maintain social

relationships across geographical boundaries.

Muslim religious life has also been affected by this transformation. Religious lectures can be watched through YouTube, Islamic quotations can be circulated on Instagram, religious discussions can take place in WhatsApp groups, and short preaching videos can reach large audiences through TikTok. These developments demonstrate that religious experience is no longer limited to physical spaces such as mosques, pesantren, madrasahs, universities, or Islamic study circles. The Indonesian context is particularly important for understanding this transformation. DataReportal reported that Indonesia had approximately 230 million internet users at the end of 2025, representing 80.5 percent of the population. The same report identified approximately 180 million social media user identities in October 2025, equivalent to 62.9 percent of the population (DataReportal, 2026). These figures indicate that digital media have become a significant part of the social environment in which Indonesians construct relationships, communicate ideas, and express cultural and religious identities.

The increasing use of social media has created new opportunities for Islamic communication. Religious institutions can distribute educational materials to wider audiences, preachers can communicate beyond the limits of physical gatherings, and Muslims can access religious resources from different regions and intellectual traditions. However, the digitalization of religion also raises important questions concerning the reliability of religious information, the authority of online preachers, the construction of Islamic identity, and the influence of commercial and algorithmic systems.

The concept of digital religion provides a useful framework for examining these developments. Digital religion refers to the interaction between religious practices and digital media. It does not simply mean the transfer of religious activities from physical spaces to the internet. Rather, it concerns the ways religious beliefs, identities, communities, and authorities are negotiated within digital environments (Campbell, 2012). Campbell's concept of networked religion is particularly relevant because contemporary religious communities often exist simultaneously in online and offline spaces. Religious activities may begin in a mosque, continue through a WhatsApp group, circulate on Instagram, and become the subject of discussion on YouTube or TikTok. Online and offline religious life are therefore increasingly interconnected.

The transformation also involves the issue of religious authority. Hjarvard (2016) argues that mediatization changes the conditions under which religion becomes visible and authoritative. In the

digital environment, religious messages are not distributed solely according to scholarly credentials or institutional recognition. Visibility may also be influenced by communication style, audience engagement, emotional appeal, follower numbers, and platform algorithms. Recent studies on Indonesian Muslim communities indicate that social media have contributed to the reconfiguration of religious authority. Traditional ulama and Islamic institutions continue to play important roles, but they now coexist with digital preachers, Muslim influencers, content creators, and online religious communities (Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023; Cahyono et al., 2026).

This article examines the relationship between Islam, identity, and social media in contemporary Muslim life. It focuses on four questions:

1. How do social media create new spaces for Muslim religious life?
2. How do digital platforms contribute to the construction of Muslim identity?
3. How do social media transform access to Islamic knowledge and religious authority?
4. What opportunities and challenges emerge from digital Muslim religious engagement?

The article argues that digitalization has produced a new social environment in which Muslim identity and religious practices are continuously negotiated. Contemporary Muslim life cannot be understood through a simple opposition between tradition and modernity. Instead, it should be examined as a hybrid process involving religious traditions, digital technologies, social networks, and changing forms of authority.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Digital Religion and Networked Religious Life

Digital religion examines the relationship between religious life and digital communication technologies. Campbell (2012) emphasizes that religious communities do not merely use technology as a neutral instrument. They interpret, adapt, and negotiate digital media according to their religious values, social structures, and cultural contexts.

Digital religion includes online preaching, digital Qur'anic learning, religious podcasts, livestreamed sermons, online discussion groups, Islamic websites, and religious content on social media. These practices demonstrate that digital media have become part of the infrastructure of contemporary religious life.

Campbell's concept of networked religion explains how religious communities are formed through interactions between online and offline spaces. Networked religion is characterized by

networked community, shifting authority, narrative identity, convergent practice, and a multisite reality (Campbell, 2012). These characteristics can be observed in contemporary Muslim communities, where religious knowledge and identity circulate across multiple platforms.

The concept of mediatization is also important. Hjarvard (2008, 2016) explains that media do not simply transmit religious messages but influence the ways religion is represented, organized, and experienced. The format of social media encourages religious communication to become more visual, concise, interactive, and responsive to audience engagement. Therefore, digital religion should be understood as a transformation of the social conditions of religious practice rather than simply the use of new communication tools.

2.2. Islamic Identity in Contemporary Society

Religious identity is formed through beliefs, practices, symbols, social relationships, and cultural experiences. It is not only an internal matter but also a social process through which individuals communicate who they are and to which communities they belong. In the digital era, Muslims can express their religious identities through photographs, videos, captions, hashtags, Islamic clothing, religious quotations, online discussions, and participation in digital religious campaigns. Social media therefore provides a public space for the representation and negotiation of Islamic identity.

Digital identity is also reflexive. Individuals can continuously evaluate, modify, and present themselves to different audiences. A Muslim may express religious commitment through Islamic content while simultaneously participating in popular culture, global fashion, entertainment, and other digital trends

This situation produces a hybrid form of Muslim identity. Hybrid identity does not necessarily indicate a contradiction between religious tradition and modern culture. Instead, it reflects the ways individuals combine different cultural and religious resources in everyday life. Recent research on Muslim digital identities in Indonesia and Thailand shows that social media function as spaces in which Muslims negotiate faith, authority, cultural belonging, and public expressions of piety (Kheryadi & Chorbwhan, 2025).

2.3. Islamic Knowledge and Religious Authority

Social media have expanded access to Islamic knowledge. Muslims can now encounter lectures, religious explanations, Qur'anic interpretations, hadith discussions, and Islamic educational materials without being physically present in a formal religious institution.

This development offers several benefits. It reduces geographical barriers, provides flexible learning opportunities, and enables religious institutions to reach broader audiences. However, the abundance of religious content also creates challenges concerning credibility and verification. Digital platforms do not always distinguish between scholarly explanations, personal opinions, popular religious messages, and commercial content. Short videos may simplify complex theological or legal questions. Content that generates strong emotional reactions may become more visible than content that offers detailed scholarly arguments.

The transformation of religious authority is therefore central to the study of digital Islam. Religious authority may be associated with formal education, institutional affiliation, scholarly reputation, charisma, communication skills, audience trust, and digital visibility. Recent studies argue that Indonesian religious authority is increasingly fragmented and reconfigured through social media. Traditional ulama continue to possess institutional and scholarly legitimacy, while digital preachers and influencers gain visibility through online networks (Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023; Cahyono et al., 2026).

3. Metodology Research

This article employs a qualitative literature review approach. The study does not use primary data from interviews, surveys, participant observation, or social media scraping. Instead, it examines academic publications and relevant reports concerning digital religion, Islamic identity, social media, religious knowledge, and religious authority.

The literature was selected based on three criteria. First, the sources discuss the relationship between religion and digital media. Second, the literature provides theoretical or empirical insights into Muslim religious life. Third, recent studies concerning Indonesia are prioritized to strengthen the contextual relevance of the discussion. The analysis uses thematic interpretation. The selected literature is organized into four analytical themes:

- 3.1. Social media as a new space for Muslim religious life;**
- 3.2. The formation of digital Muslim identity;**
- 3.3. The transformation of Islamic knowledge and religious authority; and**
- 3.4. The opportunities and challenges of digital religious engagement.**

The analysis is informed by the concepts of digital religion and networked religion developed by Campbell (2012), the concept of mediatization developed by Hjarvard (2008, 2016), and

sociological perspectives on identity, knowledge, and authority.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Social Media as a New Space for Muslim Religious Life

The first finding indicates that social media have become important spaces for contemporary Muslim religious life. Religious practices are no longer limited to physical institutions such as mosques, pesantren, madrasahs, Islamic universities, and study circles. They increasingly take place through digital platforms that connect users across geographical and institutional boundaries. A religious lecture delivered in a mosque, for example, can be recorded and distributed through YouTube. Short sections of the lecture may then be edited into videos for TikTok or Instagram Reels. The content can subsequently be shared through WhatsApp groups and discussed by users who were not present at the original event. This process illustrates how religious messages move across different spaces and audiences.

From the perspective of digital religion, online and offline religious activities should not be viewed as separate worlds. They are interconnected and mutually influence one another (Campbell, 2012). A person may attend a conventional religious study group while also following online preachers, participating in digital discussions, and accessing Islamic educational materials through social media. This development creates a hybrid religious environment. The mosque, pesantren, family, university, and digital platform may function together as sources of religious learning and social interaction. Digital media thus extend the reach of religious communities and enable Muslims to maintain religious connections beyond local geographical boundaries.

The emergence of digital religious spaces also changes the temporal character of religious engagement. Religious content can be accessed repeatedly and at any time. Recorded sermons, podcasts, and short videos allow users to organize religious learning according to their personal schedules. However, the digital space is not merely an open container for religious messages. It has its own communication formats and technical characteristics. Content is often shaped by visual presentation, short duration, audience reaction, and the demand for continuous engagement. As a result, religious communication is increasingly influenced by the logic of digital platforms. The first finding therefore demonstrates that social media have become an important part of Muslim religious life. They do not eliminate conventional religious spaces but expand and connect them through a hybrid network of religious communication.

4.2. The Formation of Digital Muslim Identity

The second finding concerns the formation of Muslim identity through social media. Digital

platforms provide opportunities for Muslims to express, display, and negotiate their religious identities in public spaces. Islamic identity may be represented through religious clothing, Qur'anic quotations, Islamic greetings, religious educational content, participation in online campaigns, and the sharing of personal religious experiences. These practices allow users to communicate their relationship with Islam to a wider audience.

The visibility of religious identity on social media also makes identity more interactive. Users do not simply present themselves; they receive comments, approval, criticism, and responses from others. Religious identity is consequently shaped through social interaction and audience recognition. This process can be explained through the concept of reflexive identity. In late modern society, individuals continuously construct and revise their identities through social experiences and available cultural resources (Giddens, 1991). Social media intensify this process because users can continuously select, edit, and publish representations of themselves. Digital Muslim identity is therefore not necessarily identical to traditional institutional identity. A young Muslim may participate in local religious rituals, attend a pesantren-based study group, follow international Muslim scholars, consume Islamic fashion content, and engage with popular culture at the same time.

Such practices indicate the emergence of a hybrid Muslim identity. This identity combines inherited religious traditions with contemporary digital culture. It should not automatically be understood as a weakening of religious commitment. In some cases, social media may provide new ways for Muslims to learn, communicate, and express their faith. However, the public display of religious identity may also create pressure to perform piety. Users may feel encouraged to present an idealized religious self through carefully selected images, captions, or videos. The distinction between sincere religious expression and public performance can therefore become difficult to determine from social media content alone.

Research on Muslim digital identities indicates that social media are important arenas for negotiating faith, cultural belonging, and religious authority (Kheryadi & Chorbwhan, 2025). The second finding thus shows that digital Muslim identity is increasingly visible, networked, reflexive, and shaped by the interaction between Islamic values and digital culture.

4.3. The Transformation of Islamic Knowledge and Religious Authority

The third finding indicates that social media have expanded access to Islamic knowledge while simultaneously transforming the structure of religious authority. In the past, access to Islamic knowledge was strongly connected to formal institutions and recognized religious teachers. Muslims

commonly obtained religious instruction through mosques, pesantren, madrasahs, Islamic universities, study circles, and established ulama. Digital platforms have expanded this structure by allowing religious information to circulate beyond institutional boundaries.

A Muslim can now access religious lectures from different regions, compare interpretations, follow several preachers, and participate in online discussions. This creates greater opportunities for religious learning and participation. Nevertheless, wider access does not automatically guarantee reliable knowledge. Social media users encounter a wide range of content, including scholarly explanations, personal interpretations, motivational messages, controversial opinions, and commercial religious material. The user must therefore evaluate the credibility of the information.

Digital platforms also influence how religious authority is produced. In addition to scholarly knowledge and institutional recognition, authority may be associated with follower numbers, audience engagement, communication style, visual presentation, and algorithmic visibility. Hjarvard (2016) explains that mediatization changes the conditions through which religious authority becomes publicly visible. In the digital context, a religious figure may gain influence because they communicate effectively through short videos, respond to popular questions, or generate strong audience engagement.

Recent studies of Indonesia describe this process as the fragmentation or reconfiguration of religious authority. Traditional ulama and Islamic institutions remain important, but their authority now coexists with digital preachers, influencers, and online religious communities (Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023; Cahyono et al., 2026). This transformation should not be understood as a complete replacement of ulama by social media personalities. Rather, religious authority becomes more plural and negotiated. A Muslim may trust an established scholar for questions of Islamic jurisprudence, follow a digital preacher for spiritual motivation, and join an online community for everyday religious discussion.

The central issue is therefore the relationship between knowledge-based authority and visibility-based authority. Scholarly expertise remains important, but digital communication skills and platform visibility increasingly influence how religious messages reach the public. The third finding demonstrates that social media have democratized access to religious information while also making the evaluation of religious credibility more complex.

4.4. Opportunities and Challenges of Digital Religious Engagement

The fourth finding concerns the opportunities and challenges created by digital Muslim religious

engagement. Social media provide several opportunities for Muslim communities. First, they expand the reach of Islamic education and preaching. Religious institutions can communicate with audiences beyond their immediate geographical areas. Second, they facilitate religious participation among individuals who may have limited access to formal religious institutions. Third, they create new forms of community, solidarity, and mutual support.

Digital media can also support the preservation and circulation of Islamic knowledge. Lectures, religious discussions, Qur'anic recitations, and educational materials can be recorded and accessed by future audiences. This creates a digital archive of religious communication. In addition, social media allow Muslims to respond to social issues from an Islamic perspective. Religious communities can use digital platforms to promote charity, humanitarian assistance, environmental awareness, social solidarity, and public education.

However, digital religious engagement also creates several challenges. The first is the circulation of unverified religious information. A religious quotation may be shared widely without a clear source or adequate explanation. The second challenge is the simplification of complex Islamic teachings into short and highly attractive content. The third challenge concerns religious polarization. Digital platforms can encourage users to interact mainly with people who share similar views. This may create echo chambers and reduce opportunities for constructive engagement with different interpretations.

The fourth challenge is the commodification of religious content. Religious messages may be presented through commercial strategies involving branding, advertising, product promotion, and influencer culture. Although commercial activity is not necessarily incompatible with religious communication, it raises questions about the relationship between religious authority, popularity, and economic interests.

The fifth challenge is algorithmic visibility. Social media algorithms influence which content becomes more visible to users. Content that is emotional, controversial, or visually attractive may receive more attention than content that is careful and academically grounded. Recent studies of platformized religious authority argue that algorithmic systems increasingly influence the production and circulation of religious legitimacy (Sulfikar & Yasmine, 2026). Muslim communities therefore need to develop a balanced approach to digital religious engagement. Users should be encouraged to verify religious information, examine the background of content creators, compare interpretations, and maintain respectful dialogue. Religious institutions and scholars also need to improve their digital

communication without sacrificing scholarly depth and ethical responsibility.

5. Conclusion

The development of social media has transformed contemporary Muslim life. Digital platforms have become important spaces for religious learning, Islamic communication, identity formation, community interaction, and the negotiation of religious authority. This article identified four central findings. First, social media have become new spaces for Muslim religious life that are connected to, rather than completely separate from, conventional religious institutions. Second, digital platforms contribute to the formation of Muslim identities that are increasingly visible, reflexive, flexible, and networked. Third, social media have expanded access to Islamic knowledge while producing a more plural and contested landscape of religious authority. Fourth, digital religious engagement creates important opportunities for education, preaching, community building, and public participation, but it also generates challenges related to misinformation, fragmentation, commodification, polarization, and algorithmic visibility.

The analysis demonstrates that contemporary Muslim identity cannot be understood through a simple opposition between tradition and modernity. Digital Muslim life is better understood as a hybrid process in which Islamic traditions interact with digital culture, social networks, and platform technologies. Social media should therefore not be viewed merely as instruments for distributing religious messages. They have become social environments in which religious meanings are produced, circulated, interpreted, and contested. For future research, empirical studies are needed to examine how particular Muslim groups, especially Generation Z, university students, pesantren communities, Muslim women, and urban Muslim communities, use specific platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp. Such research can provide a more detailed understanding of how digitalization is reshaping Muslim identity, religious authority, and everyday Islamic practices in Indonesia.

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