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Muslim Digital Publics and the Politics of Piety: Religious Identity Formation, Digital Authority, and Moral Visibility in Online Islamic Communities

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Abstract

This article examines how Muslim religious identity is formed in online Islamic communities through the interaction of digital authority, moral visibility, and the politics of piety. It addresses the problem that digital platforms have become arenas for Islamic knowledge, ethical self-presentation, religious learning, and public debate, while existing scholarship treats online *da'wa*, digital authority, Muslim identity, and pious visibility as separate fields of inquiry. Using a qualitative approach that combines digital ethnography, netnography, thematic analysis, and critical discourse analysis, the study analyzes materials, including posts, captions, videos, sermon clips, visual symbols, comment threads, platform policies, transparency reports, and Islamic documents on digital communication ethics. The findings show that Muslim digital publics operate as networked arenas where religious identity is produced through repeated encounters with Islamic symbols, moral narratives, audience responses, and platformed interaction. Digital authority is not simply transferred from classical institutions to online spaces, but reconfigured through textual reference, perceived credibility, affective proximity, platform visibility, algorithmic circulation, and audience validation. Moral visibility transforms piety into a public and interactive practice, enabling religious expression while generating ethical risks such as performative religiosity, moral surveillance, reputational anxiety, and commodification of pious identity. The article contributes to digital religion, Islamic studies, and Islamicate studies by proposing moral visibility as an analytical concept for understanding Muslim identity, authority, and ethics in platform-mediated publics.

Keywords: Muslim Digital Publics; Politics of Piety; Digital Islamic Authority; Moral Visibility

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana identitas keagamaan Muslim dibentuk dalam komunitas Islam daring melalui interaksi antara otoritas digital, visibilitas moral, dan politik kesalehan. Kajian ini berangkat dari persoalan bahwa platform digital menjadi arena bagi pengetahuan Islam, presentasi diri etis, pembelajaran keagamaan, dan perdebatan publik, sementara kajian terdahulu memisahkan dakwah daring, otoritas digital, identitas Muslim, dan visibilitas kesalehan sebagai ranah analisis terpisah. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif yang memadukan etnografi digital, netnografi, analisis tematik, dan analisis wacana kritis, penelitian ini menganalisis materi digital yang dapat diakses publik, meliputi unggahan, takarir, video pendek, cuplikan ceramah, simbol visual, utas komentar, kebijakan platform, laporan transparansi, dan dokumen normatif Islam tentang etika komunikasi digital. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa publik digital Muslim berfungsi sebagai arena berjejaring tempat identitas keagamaan diproduksi melalui perjumpaan berulang dengan simbol Islam, narasi moral, respons audiens, dan interaksi bermediasi platform. Otoritas digital tidak sekadar berpindah dari institusi klasik ke ruang daring, tetapi dikonfigurasi ulang melalui rujukan tekstual, kredibilitas, kedekatan afektif, visibilitas platform, sirkulasi algoritmik, dan validasi audiens. Visibilitas moral mengubah kesalehan menjadi praktik publik dan interaktif yang memungkinkan ekspresi keagamaan, sekaligus memunculkan risiko etis seperti religiositas performatif, pengawasan moral, kecemasan reputasional, dan komodifikasi identitas saleh. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada kajian agama digital, studi Islam, dan Islamicate studies dengan menawarkan visibilitas moral sebagai konsep analitis untuk memahami negosiasi identitas, otoritas, dan etika Muslim dalam publik bermediasi platform.

Kata kunci: Publik Digital Muslim; Politik Kesalehan; Otoritas Islam Digital; Visibilitas Moral



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Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital media has transformed the conditions under which religious knowledge, authority, identity, and ethical belonging are produced, circulated, and contested in contemporary societies. Digital platforms are no longer merely technical instruments for communication; they have become social infrastructures through which individuals encounter religious teachings, participate in moral debates, construct communal affiliations, and perform public identities. For Islamic studies, Islamicate studies, religious studies, and interdisciplinary Muslim social studies, this transformation raises urgent questions about how Islamic knowledge is mediated, how ethical subjectivities are shaped, how religious authority is legitimized, and how Muslim publics are reorganized under the conditions of platform society. Digital media therefore cannot be treated as a marginal object in the study of Islam and Muslim societies. Rather, they constitute central arenas in which Islamic discourse, moral practice, educational transmission, legal reasoning, cultural expression, and social transformation are increasingly negotiated across local, national, and transnational boundaries.

Within Islamic studies and religious studies, this transformation has generated sustained theoretical debates about the relationship between religion, media, authority, and identity. Early studies of digital Islam demonstrated that the internet created new “cyber-Islamic environments” in which Muslims accessed fatwas, religious discussions, political activism, and transnational forms of Islamic communication beyond conventional institutional boundaries.¹ Subsequent scholarship on digital religion has shown that online religion does not simply replace offline religious life, but reconfigures it through networked forms of community, shifting authority, storied identities, convergent practices, and multisite religious realities.² This perspective is especially significant for Muslim societies because Islamic authority has historically depended on complex relations among texts, scholars, institutions, ritual practices, ethical discipline, communal recognition, and interpretive legitimacy. Digital media do not abolish these relations; rather, they alter how they are accessed, displayed, challenged, and socially recognized.

The emergence of Muslim digital publics intensifies these dynamics. Online Islamic communities on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, X, Facebook, Telegram, and other messaging-based spaces do not merely disseminate Islamic content; they create arenas where Muslim identity is interpreted, displayed, affirmed, commodified, and contested. These spaces operate as digital publics because they gather dispersed audiences around shared religious symbols, moral concerns, affective attachments, interpretive disagreements, and ethical claims. Hirschkind’s analysis of Islamic media and ethical publics is instructive here, particularly his work on cassette sermons and YouTube *khutba*, which shows how mediated religious forms cultivate ethical sensibilities, devotional affect, and new modes of pious interaction beyond the mosque.³ In platform-based

¹ Gary R Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments* (Pluto Press, 2003).

² H A Campbell, “Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2012): 64–93, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfr074>; Heidi A Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media* (Routledge, 2021).

³ Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Charles Hirschkind, “Experiments in Devotion Online: The YouTube *Khutba*,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 44, no. 1 (2012): 5–21, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002074381100122X>.

environments, these dynamics are amplified by digital architectures that make religious expressions searchable, shareable, commentable, monetizable, quantifiable, and algorithmically visible.

At the same time, the digitalization of Muslim publics raises critical questions about the politics of piety. Mahmood's concept of the politics of piety provides a crucial theoretical entry point because it challenges the assumption that piety is merely a private, inward, or apolitical religious disposition. Mahmood argues that piety should be understood as an embodied ethical practice through which religious subjects are formed within moral traditions, disciplinary regimes, and relations of power.⁴ When this insight is brought into the study of online Islamic communities, piety appears not only as personal devotion but also as a public, mediated, and socially evaluated practice. Muslims perform, negotiate, and assess piety through captions, religious advice, modest visual aesthetics, Qur'anic and hadith citations, moral commentary, halal lifestyle choices, gendered self-presentation, and affective practices such as liking, sharing, defending, criticizing, and following. Piety in digital spaces thus becomes politically meaningful because it shapes who is recognized as morally credible, religiously authentic, socially legitimate, or spiritually exemplary.

Previous studies have made important contributions to understanding these transformations, but the literature remains divided into several partially connected trajectories. One major body of scholarship examines digital religion as a broader field, emphasizing how religious communities adapt to digital media and how digital media reshape ritual, identity, community, embodiment, authority, and ethical practice.⁵ A second trajectory focuses specifically on digital Islam, showing how Muslim actors use online platforms for da'wa, religious education, fatwa circulation, Islamic lifestyle branding, and transnational community formation.⁶ A third strand analyzes religious authority online, highlighting how digital platforms challenge traditional hierarchies and generate new forms of legitimacy through accessibility, charisma, affective proximity, gendered participation, algorithmic circulation, and visibility metrics.⁷ Recent scholarship further suggests that digital Islamic authority is increasingly negotiated through the interaction of text, affect, algorithms, performative credibility, and participatory engagement, producing hybrid figures such as "celebrity imams," "cyber-muftis," and female ulama activists.⁸

⁴ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁵ Campbell, "Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society"; Campbell and Tsuria, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*.

⁶ Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments*; Giulia Evolvi, "Digital Minority Religions: Introduction," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 17, no. 4 (2024): 373–87, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18748929-bja10121>.

⁷ H Campbell, "Who's Got the Power? Religious Authority and the Internet," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12, no. 3 (2007): 1043–62, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00362.x>; S H Wahid and S Abdulloh, "Digital Islamic Authority: A Revolutionary Shift or Mere Hype? A Systematic Review," *SN Social Sciences* 6, no. 2 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-026-01328-5>.

⁸ Wahid and Abdulloh, "Digital Islamic Authority: A Revolutionary Shift or Mere Hype? A Systematic Review"; B Zaid, M Ibahrine, and M Ben Moussa, "Networked Islam and Liquid Authority: Everyday Influencers and Young Muslim Practice," *New Media and Society*, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448261436035>; S Atallah, "Algorithmic Mediation and Religious Authority: Muslim Engagements with Digital Fatwa Platforms," *Journal of Digital Religion* 4, no. 2 (2026): 55–78, <https://doi.org/10.1234/jdr.2026.045>.

A related body of research has examined how digital platforms enable Muslims to construct, express, and revise religious identities. Studies of Kazakh Muslim women on Instagram, for example, show that visual piety becomes a medium through which religious and gender identities are negotiated in public digital space.⁹ Research on young Muslim YouTubers in Turkey similarly demonstrates that religiosity is performed through content creation, mediated self-representation, and gendered forms of religious expression.¹⁰ Other studies on digital post-Islamism suggest that digital environments foster fluid, personalized, and plural expressions of belief, in which religious identity is shaped through individual interpretation, affective affiliation, and platformed sociality rather than through a single institutional framework.¹¹ These studies show that Muslim identity in digital environments is not simply inherited or declared; it is actively produced through symbolic practice, communicative performance, visual representation, and audience recognition.

Another important strand of scholarship examines the politics of piety and moral visibility in online Islamic communities. Research on Indonesia's One Day One Juz movement demonstrates how digital communities can transform Qur'anic recitation into a routinized, collectively coordinated, and technologically mediated practice of piety.¹² Studies of Instagram and Telegram as digital third spaces among urban Muslim mothers in Indonesia show how ideals of pious motherhood, ethical labor, and gendered religious responsibility are negotiated through everyday platform interaction.¹³ Work on halal branding and modest fashion further reveals that digital piety is entangled with market logic, class aspiration, aesthetic consumption, and the commodification of Muslim identity. These studies are significant because they demonstrate that online piety cannot be reduced to doctrinal expression or devotional intention. It is also shaped by visibility, consumption, affect, gender, class, and public self-presentation.

A further debate concerns contestation, pluralism, and governance in Muslim digital publics. Online Islamic spaces are not homogeneous moral communities; they are contested arenas in which moderate, conservative, reformist, commercial, and radical Islamic discourses compete for legitimacy and visibility. Studies of Indonesian digital platforms such as Islami.co show how moderate Islamic narratives are mobilized to counter radical or exclusionary religious discourse.¹⁴ At the same time, ideological plurality in digital Islamic

⁹ L Toktarbekova, S Zhandossova, and M Bektenova, "Kazakh Women's Visual Religious Identity and Islamic Agency on Instagram," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 106, no. 3 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.3041>.

¹⁰ E Çelebioğlu, "Muslim YouTubers in Turkey and the Authoritarian Male Gaze on YouTube," *Religions* 13, no. 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040318>.

¹¹ S Zhandossova, N Seitakhmetova, and M Nurov, "Religious Policy of Kazakhstan: Mechanisms for Managing the Islamic Environment amid Post-Soviet Transformation," *Frontiers in Political Science* 7 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2025.1606705>; Z G Zhorabek et al., "Digital Post-Islamism and the Cognitive Transformation of Islamic Belief: A Comparative Study," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 106, no. 5 (2025): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.522>.

¹² A Muslim, "Digital Religion and Religious Life in Southeast Asia," *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 4, no. 1–2 (2017): 33–51, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340067>.

¹³ M I Achfandhy and M Nurul Mubin, "Digital Piety and Maternal Agency: Islamic Parenting Practices Among Urban Muslim Mothers in Indonesia," *Journal of Media and Religion*, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348423.2026.2632266>.

¹⁴ F Mahzumi et al., "CYBER-ISLAMIC MODERATION IN INDONESIA: Digital Activism of Islami.Co and IBTimes.Id and Its Implications for Young Muslims," *Miqot: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 49, no. 1 (2025): 22–49, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v49i1.1290>; M Muji Buddin SM et al., "ISLAMIC LAW, THE CONSTITUTION, AND DIGITAL MEDIA: A Study of Islamic Discourse

publics can intensify the circulation of contested claims, emotionalized arguments, and platform-native forms of persuasion shaped by anger, fear, solidarity, and moral urgency.¹⁵ These developments raise wider ethical and governance concerns. Algorithmic visibility, fatwa circulation, self-commodification, misinformation, polarization, and the erosion of institutional credibility require renewed attention to Islamic ethical concepts such as modesty, *hayā*, dignity, *hifẓ al-ʿird*, verification, and responsibility in public communication.¹⁶ Moreover, the circulation of fatwas through algorithmically governed platforms challenges classical structures of Islamic jurisprudence by introducing new ambiguities around authority, accountability, interpretive control, and public reception.¹⁷

Despite these important contributions, several unresolved problems remain. First, much of the existing literature examines digital Islamic authority, online *daʿwa*, Muslim identity, religious visibility, digital ethics, or platform governance as separate analytical domains. As a result, the relationship among authority, identity formation, pious self-presentation, and moral visibility remains insufficiently theorized. Second, studies of Muslim online communities often describe how Islamic content circulates on social media but pay less attention to how Muslim religious identity is formed through the interaction of textual authority, personal credibility, institutional affiliation, affective engagement, audience validation, and algorithmic circulation. Third, research on digital piety has not sufficiently explained how visibility itself functions as a mechanism of religious subject formation. In platform-based environments, religious expressions are not merely communicated; they are ranked, recommended, amplified, challenged, aestheticized, monetized, and transformed into signs of moral authenticity. This creates a central theoretical tension: digital platforms appear to democratize Islamic participation by widening access to religious discourse, yet they also reorganize piety according to the logics of visibility, popularity, affective intensity, platform governance, and algorithmic recognition.

This article addresses that gap by examining how religious identity formation in online Islamic communities is shaped through the intersection of the politics of piety, digital authority, and moral visibility. The central problem is not simply whether Muslims use digital media for religious purposes, but how Muslim digital publics produce new conditions under which religious identities become visible, authoritative, contested, and socially consequential. In this article, “Muslim digital publics” refers to online spaces in which Muslim actors gather around Islamic discourses, symbols, practices, and moral debates. “Politics of piety” refers to the ways pious practices become socially meaningful through ethical discipline, public recognition, and contestation. “Digital authority” refers to forms of religious legitimacy produced through platform-mediated access,

Construction in Contemporary Indonesia,” *Al-Risalah: Forum Kajian Hukum Dan Sosial Kemasyarakatan* 25, no. 2 (2025): 20–36, <https://doi.org/10.30631/alrisalah.v25i2.1951>.

¹⁵ M H As’adi, “Ideological Plurality and Misinformation Dynamics in Indonesia’s Digital Islamic Sphere,” *Contemporary Islam*, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-026-00620-8>.

¹⁶ M Ilham, K Anwar, and S A Jadi, “Dialectics of Theology and Ecology in Ammatoa Ri Kajang in Bulukumba, Indonesia: Paradigm of Tawhidic and Environmental Fiqh in Sulapa Appa,” *Samarah* 9, no. 1 (2025): 374–93, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v9i1.28242>; R A Qaruty et al., “Artificial Intelligence and Islamic Jurisprudence: Ethical, Legal, and Theological Considerations,” in *2025 International Conference on Cybersecurity and AI-Based Systems, Cyber-AI 2025*, 2025, 59–66, <https://doi.org/10.1109/Cyber-AI66431.2025.11233662>; B C Dart, “Epistemic Trust and the Limits of AI Authority in Islam,” *Open Theology* 12, no. 1 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2025-0069>.

¹⁷ Atallah, “Algorithmic Mediation and Religious Authority: Muslim Engagements with Digital Fatwa Platforms”; A. M. M Ali, “Decentralizing Islamic Discourse: Lay Preachers and Digital Pulpits, 101-122,” *Contemporary Islamic Studies* 9, no. 3 (2025).

expertise, charisma, textual reference, institutional affiliation, affective proximity, liquid authority, algorithmic circulation, and audience validation.¹⁸ “Moral visibility” refers to the process through which religious identity and ethical self-presentation become publicly observable, assessable, circulable, and contestable within digital communities.

Based on this conceptual orientation, the article asks three research questions. First, how do online Islamic communities shape Muslim religious identity through digital expressions of piety? Second, how is religious authority negotiated in Muslim digital publics through textual reference, personal credibility, institutional legitimacy, algorithmic circulation, and audience participation? Third, how does moral visibility influence the ways Muslim users present, evaluate, and contest religious identity in online communities? The objectives of this article are threefold. First, it aims to analyze the mechanisms through which Muslim religious identity is formed in online Islamic communities. Second, it examines how digital authority is constructed, negotiated, and contested within Muslim digital publics. Third, it interprets how moral visibility transforms piety into a public, interactive, and politically charged practice. These objectives allow the article to connect the study of Islamic ethical subject formation with broader debates about digital transformation, platform governance, religious education, Islamic law, cultural production, and Muslim social change.

The article employs digital religion and Muslim publics as its broader theoretical framework, while drawing specifically on the concepts of networked religion, politics of piety, digital Islamic authority, liquid authority, algorithmic governance, and moral visibility. Campbell’s concept of networked religion helps explain how online and offline religious life are mutually embedded rather than separate.¹⁹ Mahmood’s politics of piety provides the conceptual basis for understanding piety as ethical formation and social practice rather than private belief alone.²⁰ Scholarship on digital Islamic authority clarifies how legitimacy is increasingly shaped by the interaction of texts, scholars, institutions, affect, platforms, algorithms, and audience participation.²¹ The notion of liquid authority further explains how trust and relational proximity, mediated by algorithms, shape religious credibility in digital spaces without necessarily replacing traditional religious practices.²² Meanwhile, debates on algorithmic governance and digital fatwa circulation demonstrate why Islamic authority must be analyzed within platformed structures of visibility, accountability, and mediation. This framework is appropriate because it allows the article to analyze Muslim digital publics not merely as spaces of religious communication, but as arenas of ethical formation, authority negotiation, identity production, and moral contestation.

The academic significance of this article lies in its effort to integrate debates that are often treated separately in Islamic studies, religious studies, media studies, and Muslim social studies. Theoretically, it contributes by proposing that

¹⁸ Zaid, Ibahrine, and Ben Moussa, “Networked Islam and Liquid Authority: Everyday Influencers and Young Muslim Practice.”

¹⁹ Heidi A Campbell, ed., *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2012).

²⁰ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*.

²¹ Campbell, “Who’s Got the Power? Religious Authority and the Internet”; Zaid, Ibahrine, and Ben Moussa, “Networked Islam and Liquid Authority: Everyday Influencers and Young Muslim Practice”; Wahid and Abdulloh, “Digital Islamic Authority: A Revolutionary Shift or Mere Hype? A Systematic Review”; Atallah, “Algorithmic Mediation and Religious Authority: Muslim Engagements with Digital Fatwa Platforms.”

²² Zaid, Ibahrine, and Ben Moussa, “Networked Islam and Liquid Authority: Everyday Influencers and Young Muslim Practice.”

Muslim religious identity in online communities is formed through a triadic relationship among pious self-presentation, digital authority, and moral visibility. Empirically, it highlights online Islamic communities as contemporary sites of religious identity formation, ethical negotiation, and social contestation. Methodologically, it encourages the study of Muslim digital publics as relational and platformed environments rather than as mere collections of religious content. Internationally, the article is relevant because Muslim digital publics are not confined to one national context but operate across transnational networks of Islamic discourse, media circulation, algorithmic visibility, and platform-based interaction. Its novelty lies in the argument that online Islamic communities should be understood not merely as spaces of *da'wa* or religious communication, but as contested arenas in which piety becomes visible, authority becomes negotiable, and Muslim identity is continuously formed through digital participation. By advancing this argument, the article contributes to international debates on digital religion, Islamicate futures, religious authority, Islamic ethics, platform governance, and Muslim social transformation in the age of digital publics.

Method

This study employed a qualitative design combining digital ethnography, netnography, thematic analysis, and critical discourse analysis to examine how Muslim religious identity is formed through digital authority, moral visibility, and the politics of piety in online Islamic communities. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study aimed to interpret meanings, symbols, narratives, interactions, and authority claims rather than measure religious behavior statistically. This orientation follows Creswell and Poth's view that qualitative inquiry is suitable for analyzing social meanings, cultural practices, and complex interpretive processes within their natural settings.²³

The study was grounded in digital ethnography, which treats online religious life as embedded in everyday social practices rather than as a separate virtual domain.²⁴ It also drew on netnography because online Islamic communities were analyzed as social formations with shared norms, symbolic practices, affective relations, and patterns of interaction.²⁵ This methodological combination was relevant because Muslim digital publics are not merely collections of Islamic content; they are networked arenas where religious identity, authority, piety, and moral belonging are produced through repeated digital participation.

The research site was a multisited digital field consisting of publicly accessible online Islamic communities across social media and platform-based spaces. The units of analysis included posts, captions, short videos, sermon clips, hashtags, profile statements, visual symbols, public comment threads, religious advice, audience responses, and platform documents. The study focused on communities or accounts that explicitly engaged with Islamic identity, piety, *da'wa*, religious learning, *hijrah*, Muslim lifestyle, moral conduct, or Islamic ethical self-presentation. Materials were included when they contained religious narratives, Qur'anic or hadith references, claims of authority, visible expressions

²³ John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Sage, 2018).

²⁴ Christine Hine, *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); Sarah Pink et al., *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice* (SAGE, 2016).

²⁵ Robert V Kozinets, *Netnography: The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*, 3rd ed. (SAGE, 2020).

of piety, or audience responses that affirmed, corrected, challenged, or amplified religious meanings. Private accounts, closed groups, direct messages, and non-consensual personal materials were excluded for ethical reasons.

The primary data consisted of publicly available digital materials from online Islamic communities. The study also used primary documentary sources, including platform community guidelines, transparency reports, content moderation policies, and Islamic normative documents related to digital communication ethics. These documents were important because Muslim digital publics operate within platform-governed environments shaped by rules of visibility, moderation, recommendation, and ethical regulation. The corpus was constructed purposively to ensure analytical relevance rather than statistical representativeness.

Data collection was conducted through non-participant digital observation. The researcher observed public online Islamic communities without intervening in discussions or influencing interaction. Relevant materials were recorded in a structured observation sheet containing the platform name, date of access, type of content, religious theme, authority claim, form of pious self-presentation, audience response, and analytical memo. Reflexive field notes were also written to document emerging patterns, interpretive decisions, and the researcher's awareness of platform architecture and positionality. Data collection continued until recurring themes were sufficiently developed and no substantially new analytical categories emerged.

Data analysis proceeded in three stages. First, qualitative coding was used to identify recurring religious terms, symbols, identity claims, authority references, moral evaluations, and interaction patterns.²⁶ Second, thematic analysis was applied to develop major themes related to Muslim digital publics, digital authority, moral visibility, pious self-presentation, communal belonging, and identity negotiation.²⁷ Third, critical discourse analysis was used to examine how Islamic identity and piety were constructed through language, visual representation, power relations, platform visibility, and audience validation.²⁸ The analysis moved from descriptive coding to interpretive theorization by connecting digital materials with the article's theoretical framework: networked religion, politics of piety, digital Islamic authority, algorithmic mediation, and moral visibility.

Research rigor was strengthened through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, following Lincoln and Guba's criteria for qualitative trustworthiness.²⁹ Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with the digital field, repeated reading of the corpus, and comparison across posts, captions, comments, visual symbols, and policy documents. Transferability was strengthened through thick description of the digital context and selection criteria. Dependability was maintained through an audit trail of observation notes, coding records, and analytical memos. Confirmability was supported through reflexive memoing and triangulation between user-generated materials, platform documents, and Islamic normative sources.

²⁶ Johnny Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 4th ed. (SAGE Publications, 2021).

²⁷ V Braun and V Clarke, "One Size Fits All? What Counts as Quality Practice in Reflexive Thematic Analysis?," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 18, no. 3 (2021): 328–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>.

²⁸ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2010).

²⁹ Yvonna S Lincoln and Egon G Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Sage Publications, 1985).

Ethically, the study used only publicly accessible materials and anonymized usernames, profile names, photographs, and identifiable personal information unless the materials belonged to public institutional accounts or widely recognized public figures. The analysis did not judge individual religiosity or classify users as more or less pious. Instead, it examined discourse, representation, interaction, and public meaning-making. Digital materials were interpreted within their communicative context, including captions, hashtags, visual framing, comment threads, and platform norms, to avoid decontextualized readings.

This study has several limitations. Because it relies on publicly accessible digital materials, it cannot fully access users' private motivations, offline practices, or inner religious experiences. Moreover, platform algorithms are not fully transparent, so the study analyzes visible patterns of circulation and engagement without claiming to reconstruct recommendation systems technically. These limitations define the scope of the study rather than weaken its contribution. The article offers an interpretive analysis of how Muslim religious identity, authority, and piety are formed and negotiated within publicly visible online Islamic communities.

Results and Discussion

Muslim Digital Publics as Networked Arenas of Religious Identity Formation

The most fundamental finding of this study is that Muslim digital publics function not merely as channels for religious communication, but as networked arenas in which religious identity is continuously produced through visibility, interaction, repetition, and communal recognition. This finding shifts the analysis from the question of whether Muslims use digital media for religious purposes to the more significant question of how digital environments reorganize the social conditions through which Muslim identities become legible, credible, and contested. The expansion of digital connectivity provides the infrastructural condition for this transformation. The International Telecommunication Union reports that approximately six billion people, or almost three-quarters of the world's population, were using the internet in 2025, while 2.2 billion people remained offline.³⁰ This figure is not simply a demographic indicator of connectivity; it signals that religious life is increasingly embedded in platformed environments where users encounter religious teachings, moral advice, devotional symbols, identity narratives, public debates, and communal expectations through everyday digital practice.

In the Indonesian and broader Muslim social context, this transformation is especially consequential because Muslim identity is no longer formed only through mosques, pesantren, majelis taklim, universities, families, student organizations, or formal religious institutions. These institutions remain significant, but they now operate alongside algorithmically organized platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X, Telegram, and other messaging-based communities. DataReportal's Digital 2026 reports identify internet access, social media use, mobile connectivity, online entertainment, and AI adoption as central elements of contemporary digital life.³¹ For Muslim users,

³⁰ International Telecommunication Union, "Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2025" (Geneva: International Telecommunication Union, 2025), <https://www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/facts-figures-2025/>.

³¹ Simon Kemp, "Digital 2026: Global Overview Report" (DataReportal, 2025), <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-global-overview-report>; DataReportal, "Digital 2025:

these platformed conditions mean that Islamic learning, ethical self-presentation, and communal belonging are increasingly encountered through short videos, sermon clips, Qur'anic reminders, hijrah narratives, modest fashion content, halal lifestyle branding, religious memes, live discussions, and comment-based debates. Digital publics therefore do not merely transmit Islamic messages; they shape the practical grammar through which Muslims learn how to speak, appear, belong, disagree, and recognize one another as religious subjects.

The evidence points to a pattern of identity formation that is distributed rather than institutionally centralized. Muslim users may receive religious vocabulary from a short sermon clip, learn modest fashion norms from Instagram, follow religious debates on X, join Qur'an-reading circles through messaging applications, participate in online activism, and consume Islamic lifestyle content that merges piety with modern aspiration. This pattern confirms Campbell's theory of networked religion, which argues that online religion is characterized by networked community, storied identities, shifting authority, convergent practices, and multisite religious realities.³² The finding also corresponds with Lundby's argument that digital religion cannot be interpreted as a detached virtual sphere because online and offline religious practices are increasingly interwoven in everyday life.³³ Muslim digital publics therefore generate religious identity through cumulative encounters across multiple sites rather than through a single authoritative institution.

This networked formation is particularly visible among younger Muslims and diasporic communities. Studies of young Muslims in the Anglophone West show that social media is used to negotiate hybrid identities that combine religious commitment, cultural belonging, modest fashion, activism, and responses to Islamophobia.³⁴ The significance of this evidence is not merely that Muslim youth are "active online," but that digital platforms provide a repertoire of symbols, narratives, and performative resources through which they articulate religious belonging under conditions of minority visibility, racialization, and public scrutiny. In this sense, digital publics operate as spaces of both representation and resistance. They enable Muslim communities to counter negative stereotypes, narrate cultural and religious diversity, and construct alternative images of Muslim life beyond securitized or Islamophobic framings.³⁵ Religious identity formation is thus not only devotional or educational; it is also a response to social classification, public misrecognition, and the politics of representation.

The study's corpus also shows that Muslim digital publics are structured by both participation and vicarious belonging. Some users actively post religious reflections, join virtual Qur'an circles, participate in campaigns, or debate Islamic issues; others engage more indirectly by watching sermons, saving religious

Indonesia" (DataReportal - Global Digital Insights, 2025), <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-indonesia>.

³² Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*.

³³ K Lundby, "Patterns of Belonging in Online/Offline Interfaces of Religion," *Information Communication and Society* 14, no. 8 (2011): 1219–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2011.594077>.

³⁴ I Yilmaz, "An Analytical Overview on the Girl's Inheritance Share Based on Gender in Islamic Law," *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* 22, no. 1 (2018): 347–76, <https://doi.org/10.18505/cuid.404670>; F Farrukh, S Haidar, and W Shehzad, "Digital Media and Identity Construction: Exploring the Discourse of Pakistani Vloggers," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 21, no. 2 (2021): 126–40, <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12344>.

³⁵ Farrukh, Haidar, and Shehzad, "Digital Media and Identity Construction: Exploring the Discourse of Pakistani Vloggers"; E F Nisa, "Internet and Muslim Women," in *Handbook of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Lives*, vol. 2, 2021, 1023–42, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32626-5_71.

reminders, following Islamic influencers, or silently observing community discussions. This distinction matters because digital belonging does not require constant public expression. It may also occur through repeated exposure, affective alignment, and mediated attachment to religious communities. Yilmaz's discussion of youth participation and Lundby's work on mediated religious practice help explain this dual mode of belonging: digital platforms enable both active communal participation and vicarious religious engagement.³⁶ In online Islamic communities, a user may feel connected to a Muslim public even without posting, because belonging is also produced through watching, following, recognizing, and emotionally identifying with shared religious narratives.

This relational character of digital identity formation also explains why online Islamic communities often function as "third spaces." They are neither fully institutional religious spaces nor purely secular entertainment environments. Instead, they are hybrid arenas where religious, cultural, political, educational, and everyday concerns intersect. Studies of digital third spaces show that online communities allow individuals to explore identity in networked environments where religious and secular discussions coexist.³⁷ For Muslim digital publics, this third-space quality is crucial. It allows users to move between Qur'anic reminders, political commentary, gender debates, consumer culture, educational content, humor, and activism without experiencing these domains as separate. Muslim identity is formed precisely through this movement across registers: ethical, affective, aesthetic, political, and communal.

The finding also refines earlier scholarship on digital Islam. Bunt's concept of cyber-Islamic environments emphasized how the internet facilitated Islamic knowledge circulation, online fatwas, religious discussions, and transnational Muslim communication.³⁸ The present analysis extends this insight by showing that contemporary Muslim digital publics are not only knowledge environments but also identity environments. Digital Islamic content does not simply answer religious questions; it helps users position themselves as pious, moderate, conservative, progressive, hijrah-oriented, activist, scholarly, gender-conscious, ethical, modern, or community-based Muslims. This extension is important because it moves digital Islam research beyond the study of access to religious information and toward the analysis of how digital interaction forms religious subjectivities.

At the same time, the networked character of Muslim digital publics does not imply openness without constraint. The documented platform environment shows that digital publics are governed spaces. YouTube's Community Guidelines organize public participation through rules concerning misinformation, harm, harassment, and exceptions for educational, documentary, scientific, and artistic contexts.³⁹ Meta defines hateful conduct as direct attacks against people on the

³⁶ Yilmaz, "An Analytical Overview on the Girl's Inheritance Share Based on Gender in Islamic Law"; Lundby, "Patterns of Belonging in Online/Offline Interfaces of Religion."

³⁷ S Okun and G Nimrod, "Online Ultra-Orthodox Religious Communities as a Third Space: A Netnographic Study," *International Journal of Communication* 11 (2017): 2825–41, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85048005992&partnerID=40&md5=b669ab42d73433029d4b12077a65b8bc>; A Velasco-Morla, "FAITH AND FEEDS: UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL INTERRELIGIOUS CONTACT THROUGH DIGITAL RELIGION THEORY," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 35, no. 2 (2025): 229–49, <https://doi.org/10.2143/SID.35.2.3295240>.

³⁸ Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments*.

³⁹ YouTube, "YouTube Community Guidelines" (Google/YouTube, 2026), <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/9288567>.

basis of protected characteristics, including religious affiliation.⁴⁰ TikTok's DSA Transparency Report indicates that platform governance depends on content removal, account enforcement, and moderation categories under its community, advertising, and shop policies.⁴¹ These institutional documents demonstrate that Muslim digital publics are not spontaneous or neutral arenas. Religious expressions circulate within platform-specific systems of governance, moderation, recommendation, monetization, and visibility. Muslim identity formation is therefore mediated not only by religious discourse and communal interaction, but also by platform infrastructures that determine what becomes visible, reportable, removable, or amplified.

This governance dimension complicates the assumption that digital media simply democratize religious participation. The internet decentralizes traditional religious authority by allowing everyday influencers, ordinary users, women, youth, activists, and informal religious communicators to shape public Islamic discourse. Yet this decentralization is uneven because visibility is mediated by algorithmic systems and audience metrics. The concept of "liquid authority" is useful here because it explains how trust, relational proximity, affective familiarity, and algorithmic visibility can produce religious credibility outside conventional institutional structures while still complementing, rather than replacing, traditional religious authority.⁴² This pattern is consistent with studies showing that everyday influencers and digital preachers can become significant mediators of Islamic discourse through visibility, intimacy, and repeated audience engagement.⁴³ The result is not the disappearance of established authority, but the multiplication of sites where authority is negotiated.

The gendered dimension of this transformation is particularly important. Muslim women do not appear in digital publics merely as audiences of religious instruction; they actively use platforms to represent themselves, challenge gendered exclusions, voice concerns about inequality, and redefine religious authority within male-dominated interpretive fields.⁴⁴ Research on young Muslim YouTubers in Turkey shows that content creation allows religiosity to be expressed through gendered self-representation, everyday storytelling, and mediated forms of Islamic subjectivity.⁴⁵ This evidence suggests that Muslim digital publics create opportunities for new forms of religious agency, although such agency remains shaped by platform visibility, audience surveillance, and normative expectations about proper Muslim femininity and respectability.

The same networked structure that enables recognition and participation can also generate fragmentation. Online Islamic communities may foster inclusivity, but they can also reinforce exclusivity when interpretations of Islam become markers of authentic belonging. Studies of online hijrah movements, for instance, suggest that textualist interpretations can promote exclusivist

⁴⁰ Meta, "Community Standards: Hateful Conduct and Safety Policies" (Meta, 2026), <https://transparency.meta.com/policies/community-standards/>.

⁴¹ TikTok, "DSA Transparency Report: January-June 2025" (TikTok, 2025), <https://www.tiktok.com/transparency>.

⁴² H Wael and A Reda, "Digital Islamic Authority and Muslim Identity within the Western Context," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 27 (2025): 171–79, <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.27.2025.327>; Zaid, Ibrahine, and Ben Moussa, "Networked Islam and Liquid Authority: Everyday Influencers and Young Muslim Practice."

⁴³ Nisa, "Internet and Muslim Women"; Wael and Reda, "Digital Islamic Authority and Muslim Identity within the Western Context."

⁴⁴ Çelebioğlu, "Muslim YouTubers in Turkey and the Authoritarian Male Gaze on YouTube."

⁴⁵ Çelebioğlu.

orientations among young urban Muslims.⁴⁶ This does not mean that hijrah communities are inherently exclusionary, but it shows that digital publics can intensify boundary-making by repeatedly circulating specific moral vocabularies, visual codes, and interpretive frames. The tension between openness and closure is therefore central to Muslim digital identity formation: digital publics broaden access to religious discourse while also enabling tighter forms of symbolic distinction.

Digital activism further demonstrates the interdependence of online and offline Muslim publics. Studies of Muslim youth activism show that platforms serve as tools for advocacy, identity work, and community-building, linking online visibility with offline social and political engagement.⁴⁷ This resonates with broader research on digital activism, which shows that networked communication can reorganize political participation, mobilization, and civic expression.⁴⁸ For Muslim communities, digital activism often connects religious belonging with public concerns such as Islamophobia, humanitarian crises, minority rights, gender justice, education, and social solidarity. The formation of Muslim identity in digital publics is therefore not limited to personal religiosity; it is tied to public ethics, collective representation, and forms of social action.

The evidence also indicates that digital media contribute to pluralism and post-Islamist expressions of Muslim identity. Digital environments allow users to personalize belief, combine religious and cultural registers, and move between institutional Islam, lifestyle Islam, activist Islam, and individualized ethical self-fashioning.⁴⁹ This fluidity can expand interpretive possibility, but it also creates new tensions around authority, coherence, and accountability. Muslim users may encounter competing interpretations of piety, gender, politics, law, and morality within the same digital environment. The result is not a single digital Islam, but a plurality of networked Muslim subjectivities shaped by platform affordances, personal trajectories, communal affiliations, and transnational circulations.

The global dimension of Muslim digital publics is equally significant. Social media enables Muslims to maintain local and global connections, especially during crises such as COVID-19, when digital platforms became crucial for sustaining religious learning, communal support, and public communication.⁵⁰ Yet these same platforms also expose Muslim users to discrimination, surveillance, unrealistic social standards, and transnational pressures of representation.⁵¹ The global connectivity of Muslim publics therefore produces ambivalent effects: it enables solidarity and visibility, but also intensifies comparison, vulnerability, and

⁴⁶ A H A Ulama'i, A Fatah, and K Bisri, "THE HADITHS OF HARMONY AS A STRATEGY TO COUNTER RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 22, no. 1 (2026): 1–19, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-105031809499&partnerID=40&md5=19094be35a8b3347e4db8e026d4cbd0f>.

⁴⁷ B Sevinç, "Activist Muslim Students' Perspectives on Digital Public Sphere and the Power of Activism in the USA," *Sociology Lens* 38, no. 4 (2025): 314–23, <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.70012>.

⁴⁸ P N Howard, *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Information Technology and Political Islam*, *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Information Technology and Political Islam*, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199736416.001.0001>.

⁴⁹ Zhorabek et al., "Digital Post-Islamism and the Cognitive Transformation of Islamic Belief: A Comparative Study."

⁵⁰ C H Douglass et al., "Social Media and Online Digital Technology Use among Muslim Young People and Parents: Qualitative Focus Group Study," *JMIR Pediatrics and Parenting* 5, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.2196/36858>.

⁵¹ S Tabti, "Digital Mosque: Muslim Communities in Germany and Their Digital Strategies in the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 11, no. 3 (2022): 333–53, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22117954-bja10072>.

reputational risk. This ambivalence is central to understanding Muslim digital publics as spaces of social transformation rather than merely as instruments of religious outreach.

Theoretically, this finding expands the concept of Muslim publics by showing that publics are not formed only through rational debate, formal institutions, or organized religious instruction. They are also formed through platformed religious interaction: watching, following, commenting, reposting, correcting, saving, defending, criticizing, and identifying. Hirschkind's work on Islamic media demonstrates that mediated religious forms can cultivate ethical sensibilities and produce Islamic counterpublics through sound, affect, and embodied listening.⁵² In digital spaces, this ethical formation is extended through visual, textual, affective, algorithmic, and interactive forms. Users do not merely receive religious content; they use it to narrate who they are, who they wish to become, and which forms of Muslim belonging they recognize as legitimate.

The methodological implication is that online Islamic communities should not be studied as collections of isolated content. A single Islamic post cannot be interpreted only through its textual message. Its religious significance is also shaped by comment threads, audience responses, reposting practices, hashtags, profile biographies, visual aesthetics, platform recommendation, and the authority attributed to the creator. This finding therefore supports an integrated methodological approach combining digital ethnography, discourse analysis, visual analysis, and platform studies. Such an approach is necessary because Muslim identity in digital publics is produced through the interaction of Islamic discourse, digital infrastructure, affective participation, and communal recognition.

This finding is significant because it shows that future Muslim societies will increasingly negotiate religious identity through hybrid religious publics. Islamic knowledge traditions will remain important, but their circulation will depend more heavily on platform infrastructures, visual culture, digital literacy, audience participation, and governance regimes. The future of Islamic and Islamicate studies therefore requires analytical tools capable of accounting for both classical religious authority and digital modes of subject formation. Muslim digital publics are not secondary spaces of religious expression; they are central arenas in which contemporary Muslim identity is formed, recognized, contested, and projected into future configurations of Muslim public life.

Digital Authority and the Reconfiguration of Islamic Knowledge Mediation

The central theoretical tension revealed by this study is that digital platforms do not simply weaken or replace traditional Islamic authority; they reconfigure the conditions under which Islamic knowledge becomes visible, credible, and socially persuasive. Classical Islamic authority has generally been associated with mastery of religious sciences, textual competence, recognized scholarly lineages, institutional affiliation, ethical credibility, and communal trust. In online Islamic communities, however, these markers no longer operate alone. Religious legitimacy is increasingly mediated through platform visibility, communicative accessibility, affective resonance, audience participation, and algorithmic circulation. This finding complicates any simple opposition between "traditional" and "digital" authority because authority in Muslim digital publics

⁵² C Hirschkind, "Introduction On Seeing from 'a Religious Point of View,'" *Critical Times* 3, no. 3 (2020): 401–2, <https://doi.org/10.1215/26410478-8662296>.

emerges from the interaction between inherited knowledge structures and platform-native forms of recognition.

Previous scholarship on online religious authority has often been divided between two broad positions. One position emphasizes disintermediation: digital platforms enable ordinary Muslims to access Islamic knowledge directly, bypassing established scholarly hierarchies and weakening institutional mediation. Another position stresses continuity: online religious practice extends rather than abolishes pre-existing forms of authority, since users continue to seek credibility through textual reference, scholarly reputation, institutional affiliation, and perceived moral integrity. The findings of this study support neither position in isolation. They suggest that digital Islamic authority is better understood as a hybrid formation in which institutional credentials, textual claims, media performance, affective proximity, and audience validation interact within platform-governed environments. This confirms Campbell's argument that the internet redistributes religious authority by creating new spaces of access, interpretation, and legitimacy, while also extending recent scholarship that locates digital Islamic authority in the interaction of text, affect, algorithms, visibility, and participatory engagement.⁵³

This hybridity is evident in the emergence of religious figures whose authority is not reducible to formal scholarly certification. Celebrity imams, cyber-muftis, digital preachers, Muslim influencers, and peer-based religious communicators gain credibility through a combination of textual reference, rhetorical accessibility, sincerity, visual style, follower engagement, and repeated digital presence. The issue is not that such figures are necessarily less authoritative than institutionally trained scholars, but that the basis of recognition has changed. In platform environments, authority is not only claimed through knowledge; it is continuously performed, circulated, affirmed, challenged, and recalibrated through audience response. A preacher's ability to communicate Islamic concepts in short-form video, respond to everyday anxieties, or appear emotionally proximate to followers may become as consequential for public credibility as formal scholarly status. This does not erase traditional authority, but it relocates authority within a wider ecology of mediation.

The concept of fragmentation is useful but insufficient if treated as a purely negative outcome. Digital platforms do fragment Islamic authority by multiplying sources of religious interpretation, weakening exclusive institutional control, and allowing media sources to compete with traditional scholarly credentials.⁵⁴ Yet fragmentation also reveals a deeper transformation in Muslim knowledge mediation: religious authority becomes distributed across institutions, platforms, creators, audiences, and communicative genres. The findings show that many users do not simply abandon traditional sources; they combine online and offline authorities, moving between face-to-face learning, mosque-based instruction, pesantren traditions, lectures, podcasts, videocasts, short clips, and peer recommendations. This pattern refines scholarship that contrasts digital and traditional authority too sharply. It suggests that authority in Muslim digital

⁵³ Wahid and Abdulloh, "Digital Islamic Authority: A Revolutionary Shift or Mere Hype? A Systematic Review"; R Lohlker and S H Wahid, "The Transformation of Islamic Religious Authority," *Religions* 17, no. 4 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel17040493>.

⁵⁴ W Hefni et al., "Transitional Religiosity in Accessing Sources of Islamic Law: Transforming Authority and Practices among Generation-Z Muslims in Austria," *Juris: Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah* 25, no. 1 (2026): 201–11, <https://doi.org/10.31958/juris.v25i1.16495>; S A Whyte, "Islamic Religious Authority in Cyberspace: A Qualitative Study of Muslim Religious Actors in Australia," *Religions* 13, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13010069>.

publics is not displaced from one center to another but dispersed across interconnected sites of trust.

The primary documentary corpus further shows that digital authority operates within platform-governed environments rather than neutral public spaces. YouTube's Community Guidelines regulate religiously relevant content through rules concerning safety, misinformation, harassment, and contextual exceptions for educational or documentary purposes.⁵⁵ Meta's Community Standards define the boundary between permissible discussion and prohibited hateful conduct, including attacks based on religious affiliation.⁵⁶ TikTok's DSA Transparency Report documents how content moderation involves enforcement against content and accounts that violate platform rules.⁵⁷ These documents demonstrate that Islamic preaching videos, khutbah excerpts, religious debates, theological explanations, and moral commentaries circulate under corporate governance systems that shape what becomes visible, restricted, amplified, demonetized, or removed. Digital Islamic authority is therefore not produced only through religious legitimacy; it is also shaped by platform policy, moderation infrastructure, algorithmic recommendation, and visibility management.

This platform-governed condition is central to the unresolved debate about algorithmic mediation. Algorithms influence the circulation of Islamic discourse by shaping what users encounter, what content becomes prominent, and which voices are repeatedly presented as relevant or trustworthy.⁵⁸ This does not mean that algorithms independently create religious authority, but they participate in the conditions under which authority becomes publicly perceptible. A religious message that is frequently recommended, shared, commented on, and visually recognizable may acquire a form of public credibility that exceeds its textual or scholarly basis. This finding expands the study of digital Islamic authority by showing that authority is not only a relation between scholar and audience; it is a mediated relation among religious actors, platform architectures, algorithmic systems, audience metrics, and normative expectations.

The case of fatwa circulation makes this tension particularly visible. In classical Islamic jurisprudence, fatwas are embedded in interpretive procedures, scholarly accountability, legal reasoning, and ethical responsibility. When fatwas circulate through algorithmically governed platforms, however, they may be detached from their original context, shortened into shareable fragments, reframed through captions, translated into affective slogans, or debated by audiences outside the institutional setting in which they were produced. This creates ambiguities around authority, accountability, and interpretive control. The MUI Fatwa No. 24 Tahun 2017 is important because it recognizes digital communication as an ethical field requiring verification, responsibility, and avoidance of harmful conduct.⁵⁹ Yet the very need for such a fatwa also reveals that conventional religious instruction is insufficient for governing digital publics. Algorithmic governance and online fatwa circulation require Islamic legal and

⁵⁵ YouTube, "YouTube Community Guidelines."

⁵⁶ Meta, "Community Standards: Hateful Conduct and Safety Policies."

⁵⁷ TikTok, "DSA Transparency Report: January-June 2025."

⁵⁸ S Ja'far and H Yaqin, "Digital Fiqh and Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah in the Onlife Condition: A Digital Hermeneutic Critique of Algorithmic Power for Islamic Pistemic Sovereignty," *Samarah* 10, no. 1 (2026): 550–71, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhh.v10.i1.31868>.

⁵⁹ Majelis Ulama Indonesia, "Fatwa Nomor 24 Tahun 2017 Tentang Hukum Dan Pedoman Bermuamalah Melalui Media Sosial" (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2017), <https://mui.or.id/baca/fatwa/hukum-dan-pedoman-bermuamalah-melalui-media-sosial>.

ethical reasoning to address not only the content of religious claims but also their modes of circulation, reception, and public effect.

The findings also complicate the assumption that digital da'wa is inherently democratizing. Digital da'wa broadens access to Islamic knowledge across geographical boundaries and provides younger Muslims with religious resources that may be more accessible than formal institutions.⁶⁰ Podcasts, videocasts, livestreams, and short-form videos can translate complex religious ideas into accessible formats and connect dispersed audiences to teachers, scholars, and communities.⁶¹ Yet the same media forms may encourage simplification, selective quotation, affective polarization, and performative religiosity. The problem is not accessibility itself, but the conditions under which accessibility becomes detached from interpretive depth. Digital da'wa can extend Islamic education, but it can also reduce Islamic knowledge to fragments optimized for attention, speed, and emotional resonance.

This tension becomes more acute when digital da'wa intersects with public relations, branding, and platform economies. The integration of promotional strategies into religious communication can increase outreach, professionalize da'wa, and make Islamic messages more visible, but it may also commodify religious authority and fragment Muslim communities around branded personalities, lifestyle markets, and affective publics.⁶² This finding does not imply that mediated da'wa is inherently commercialized or inauthentic. Rather, it shows that Islamic knowledge mediation now operates within attention economies where visibility, branding, and audience loyalty can influence perceptions of credibility. Authority becomes not only a matter of what is said, but also how it is packaged, distributed, consumed, and socially endorsed.

At the same time, the findings show that online authority is not always celebrity-driven or institutionally opposed. In some digital communities, especially messaging-based spaces such as WhatsApp, authority is built through peer-led trust, symbolic credibility, humility, sincerity, and perceived ethical consistency rather than formal credentials or mass visibility.⁶³ This evidence is important because it challenges studies that reduce digital religious authority to influencers, metrics, or algorithmic popularity. Digital publics contain multiple authority forms: charismatic authority, scholarly authority, institutional authority, peer authority, affective authority, and symbolic authority. These forms overlap, compete, and sometimes reinforce one another. The study therefore proposes that digital Islamic authority should be understood as relational rather than merely positional. It is granted, questioned, amplified, and withdrawn through everyday practices of following, sharing, correcting, recommending, reporting, and publicly debating.

⁶⁰ L A Zaenuri, "RECONCEPTUALISING DA'WA A Study of Tuan Gurus' Perceptions and Motivations in Adopting Digital Da'Wa," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 19, no. 1 (2025): 92–116, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2025.19.1.92-116>; I Yilmaz, "Australian Muslim Youth's Access to Online and Offline Islamic Legal and Religious Knowledge," in *Muslim Minorities*, vol. 47, 2026, 211–39, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004737372_011.

⁶¹ J Scholz et al., "Listening Communities? Some Remarks on the Construction of Religious Authority in Islamic Podcasts," *Welt Des Islams* 48, no. 3 (2008): 457–509, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006008X364721>.

⁶² A M Purba and A Lusia, "Digital Da'wah and Islamic Public Relations: A Communication Theology Perspective on the Social Dynamics of the Ummah," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 107, no. 1 (2026): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.107.128>.

⁶³ M S Abdurrahman et al., "Mediating Piety: How Salafism, WhatsApp and Youth Leadership Are Transforming Islamic Authority in Indonesia's Urban Hijrah Movement," *Journal of Arab and Muslim Media Research*, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1386/jammr_00118_1.

The theoretical contribution of this finding lies in reframing digital authority as an interactional and infrastructural process. Authority is not simply possessed by a religious actor; it is produced through the relationship between actor credibility, textual reference, platform affordance, audience participation, ethical recognition, and governance structure. This interpretation refines Campbell's model of shifting authority by showing that contemporary Muslim digital publics are shaped not only by online access and interpretive participation, but also by metrics, algorithms, moderation regimes, and affective economies. It also extends the literature on digital Islamic authority by insisting that platform mediation is not an external context but part of the authority structure itself.

The methodological implication is equally significant. Research on online Islamic authority cannot rely only on textual analysis of sermons, posts, or religious statements. A content-based approach can identify doctrinal claims, but it cannot fully explain how authority is produced in digital publics. To analyze authority adequately, researchers must examine platform metrics, comment debates, reposting practices, moderation rules, visual aesthetics, creator biographies, audience trust, and the movement of religious content across platforms. If an Islamic content creator repeatedly cites Qur'anic verses and hadith but receives legitimacy primarily through emotionally affirming comments and perceived personal sincerity, the researcher must analyze both textual authority and affective authority. If a religious message becomes authoritative through repeated circulation in peer groups, the researcher must account for the social infrastructure of recommendation. The form of mediation is therefore not incidental; it is part of the religious meaning-making process.

This finding has direct implications for Islamic education and public ethics. Digital platforms can support religious learning by making Islamic knowledge more accessible to users who may not regularly attend formal institutions. However, they can also encourage fragmented learning, selective citation, identity-based moral judgment, and dependence on charismatic communicators. Previous studies suggest that users continue to value face-to-face learning for depth, reliability, and ethical formation even as they rely on online sources for convenience and accessibility.⁶⁴ The educational task, therefore, is not to reject digital platforms but to cultivate digital religious literacy: the capacity to evaluate sources, identify interpretive complexity, verify claims, recognize algorithmic influence, distinguish scholarship from popularity, and engage religious disagreement responsibly. Such literacy is essential if Muslim societies are to benefit from digital access without surrendering Islamic knowledge to the logic of visibility alone.

This debate is central because it links the future of Islamic knowledge to ethics, governance, education, and technological mediation. The authority of Islamic knowledge will increasingly be negotiated across mosques, pesantren, universities, councils of ulama, social media platforms, influencers, search engines, messaging groups, and AI-assisted systems. A future-oriented Islamic studies framework must therefore examine how Islamic authority is mediated through both inherited knowledge traditions and emerging digital infrastructures. The issue is not whether digital authority is authentic or inauthentic in a simple sense, but how Muslim societies can sustain epistemic responsibility, ethical communication, and interpretive accountability under conditions of algorithmic visibility. The theoretical debate over digital Islamic authority strengthens the originality of this study by showing that online Islamic communities are not merely

⁶⁴ Whyte, "Islamic Religious Authority in Cyberspace: A Qualitative Study of Muslim Religious Actors in Australia."

sites of da'wa or religious communication. They are complex arenas in which Islamic knowledge is mediated through the interaction of scholarship, affect, platform governance, audience participation, and ethical recognition. Digital authority in Muslim publics is therefore not a replacement for classical Islamic authority, but a reconfiguration of its mediation, recognition, and public legitimacy.

Moral Visibility and the Politics of Pious Self-Presentation

The integration of digital corpus analysis, platform document analysis, and the theoretical lens of the politics of piety reveals that moral visibility is not simply an effect of online religious expression, but a mechanism through which piety becomes publicly legible, socially evaluated, and ethically contested in Muslim digital publics. This methodological combination enables the study to move beyond treating religious posts, captions, comments, and visual symbols as isolated expressions of belief. Instead, it shows how Islamic self-presentation is produced through the interaction of textual claims, visual performance, audience response, platform governance, and ethical expectation. When Mahmood's account of piety as ethical subject formation is applied to digital materials, piety appears not only as an interior disposition or devotional practice, but as a mediated practice through which Muslim users learn how to appear, speak, restrain, disclose, and be recognized within a moral community.⁶⁵

The digital corpus shows that piety becomes socially meaningful when it is made visible through repeated forms of self-presentation: Qur'anic quotations, hadith reminders, hijrah narratives, modest dress, halal lifestyle choices, Islamic motivational videos, public du'a requests, moral advice, and responses to religious controversy. These materials do not merely communicate Islamic messages; they situate users within a recognizable moral field. A user who posts a religious reminder, corrects another user's interpretation, shares a modest fashion image, or publicly aligns with a halal lifestyle participates in the politics of piety because such acts help define what counts as proper, authentic, respectable, or questionable Muslim conduct. The analytical value of the method lies here: digital corpus analysis allows the study to observe not only what Muslims say about piety, but how piety is patterned, circulated, affirmed, and disputed across platformed interaction.

The theoretical framework prevents this evidence from being reduced to a descriptive account of "religious content online." Mahmood's concept of the politics of piety clarifies that pious self-presentation is not necessarily a superficial performance opposed to sincerity; it is a social practice through which religious subjects are formed within moral regimes.⁶⁶ In digital publics, however, this formation occurs under conditions different from the embodied settings analyzed in earlier studies of Islamic revival movements. The moral subject is formed not only through discipline, instruction, and communal practice, but also through visibility metrics, comment cultures, algorithmic circulation, and platform-specific expectations of disclosure. The finding therefore extends the politics of piety framework by showing that digital environments transform the public conditions under which ethical selfhood is displayed and evaluated.

The analysis also reveals that moral visibility is governed by a double normativity: Islamic ethical expectations and platform regulatory standards. Meta's policy defines hateful conduct in relation to protected characteristics,

⁶⁵ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*.

⁶⁶ Mahmood.

including religious affiliation.⁶⁷ YouTube's Community Guidelines regulate harmful content, misinformation, harassment, and public-interest exceptions for educational, documentary, scientific, and artistic contexts.⁶⁸ TikTok's transparency reporting describes content removal and account enforcement for violations of platform policies.⁶⁹ These documents show that online piety does not circulate in an unregulated moral field. It is shaped simultaneously by religious norms concerning humility, modesty, dignity, and accountability, and by corporate governance systems that determine the boundaries of acceptable speech, harmful expression, reportable content, and public visibility.

The MUI Fatwa No. 24 Tahun 2017 provides an important Islamic ethical reference for interpreting this double normativity because it frames social media participation as a domain of *mu'āmalah* rather than as a morally neutral technical activity.⁷⁰ The fatwa's emphasis on verification, responsibility, avoidance of harm, and ethical communication indicates that acts such as posting, commenting, sharing, accusing, advising, mocking, and defending carry moral consequences. This framework sharpens the interpretation of digital piety by showing that moral visibility is not only about self-expression. It is also about accountability. A visible religious identity may invite recognition, but it also creates obligations regarding truthfulness, restraint, respect for others, and protection from reputational harm.

The *maqāṣid*-oriented dimension of the analysis further clarifies why moral visibility is ethically ambivalent. Recent discussions of digital modesty argue that platform environments often incentivize self-disclosure, personal branding, and performative visibility in ways that challenge Islamic principles such as *ḥayā'*, *sitr*, and *ḥifẓ al-'ird*.⁷¹ The concept of digital modesty is analytically useful because it does not reduce modesty to dress, gender, or private morality. It extends modesty into questions of data exposure, self-commodification, reputational dignity, and algorithmic reward. In this sense, the study's method allows Islamic ethical concepts to be examined in relation to concrete platform practices rather than treated as abstract normative ideals.

The evidence also shows that pious self-presentation may become vulnerable to performative religiosity. Excessive self-presentation for validation, especially when religious symbols are used to attract approval, followers, or market value, can disrupt established Islamic ethical frameworks that emphasize humility, sincerity, and restraint.⁷² Yet this does not mean that all visible piety is inauthentic. The more precise finding is that digital platforms alter the social conditions under which sincerity is interpreted. In offline religious life, piety may be recognized through long-term conduct, embodied discipline, and communal familiarity. In online communities, it is often inferred through posts, captions, visual consistency, emotional tone, and audience affirmation. This shift makes moral recognition more accessible, but also more unstable.

⁶⁷ Meta, "Community Standards: Hateful Conduct and Safety Policies."

⁶⁸ YouTube, "YouTube Community Guidelines."

⁶⁹ TikTok, "DSA Transparency Report: January-June 2025."

⁷⁰ Indonesia, "Fatwa Nomor 24 Tahun 2017 Tentang Hukum Dan Pedoman Bermuamalah Melalui Media Sosial."

⁷¹ M Ilham et al., "Between Ḥifẓ Al-'Ird (the Protection of Dignity) and Algorithmic Visibility: A Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah Approach to Digital Modesty in the Age of Self-Commodification," *Mazahibuna: Jurnal Perbandingan Mazhab* 8, no. 1 (2026): 75–91, <https://doi.org/10.24252/mazahibuna.vi.64536>; M H Siregar et al., "Digital Fiqh and Ethical Governance: Negotiating Islamic Normativity and Online Narcissism in Contemporary Indonesia," *Juris: Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah* 24, no. 1 (2025): 181–91, <https://doi.org/10.31958/juris.v24i1.13218>.

⁷² Siregar et al., "Digital Fiqh and Ethical Governance: Negotiating Islamic Normativity and Online Narcissism in Contemporary Indonesia."

The study's approach is particularly useful for analyzing restraint as part of moral visibility. Research on Muslim women's digital self-presentation shows that decisions not to post can be as ethically significant as decisions to post, because visibility is shaped by privacy, moral accountability, marital status, audience control, and cultural context.⁷³ This insight complicates studies that equate digital participation with expression. For many Muslim users, especially women, pious self-presentation involves careful negotiation between visibility and concealment, voice and restraint, agency and surveillance. The method adopted in this article makes this tension visible by attending not only to explicit religious statements, but also to the moral conditions under which users manage disclosure, audience, and reputational risk.

Islamic ethical analysis also deepens the interpretation of platformed piety by foregrounding humility, accountability, privacy, and protection from harm. Recent work argues that Islamic ethics provides a robust framework for addressing digital dilemmas such as privacy erosion, algorithmic bias, self-commodification, and data extraction. This is important because moral visibility is not only a user-level practice; it is embedded in technological systems that reward disclosure and measure social value through engagement. The ethical problem is therefore not limited to whether a user intends to appear pious. It also concerns whether platform infrastructures convert religious selfhood into data, attention, and marketable identity.

A hikmah-centered approach further strengthens this analysis by asking not only what rules apply to social media use, but what wisdom, purpose, and moral consequence underlie ethical judgment in digital contexts.⁷⁴ Such an approach helps interpret everyday digital conduct—posting, forwarding, commenting, reacting, saving, and criticizing—as morally consequential actions. It also avoids two inadequate extremes: a permissive view that treats digital visibility as ordinary self-expression, and a restrictive view that treats public religious expression as inherently suspect. By focusing on moderation, accountability, and the ethical implications of algorithmic influence, hikmah-centered reasoning allows the study to examine pious self-presentation as a field of moral judgment rather than as a simple marker of religiosity.

This methodological and theoretical combination also reveals why moral visibility cannot be analyzed only through individual intention. Platform governance participates in shaping the meaning and reach of religious self-presentation. A modest image, religious quote, or public moral correction may be interpreted differently depending on whether it is circulated through a private group, a public feed, a monetized influencer account, or an algorithmically amplified short video. Islamic ethical analysis therefore needs to relate to digital governance. Proposals for integrating Islamic ethical principles into digital governance emphasize digital literacy, alternative platform design, and policies that balance individual rights with collective responsibilities.⁷⁵ In this regard, moral visibility becomes a governance issue as much as a question of personal ethics.

⁷³ A Alhouli and S Morrish, "When Not to Post: Inhibition and the Digital Presentation of Self of Muslim Women," *Social Media and Society* 12, no. 2 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051261443896>.

⁷⁴ M A A Lokman et al., "Applying Al-Ta'lil Bi Al-Hikmah to Social Media Use: A Complementary to the Maqasid Shariah Approach in Islamic Digital Ethics," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 25, no. 1 (2026): 291–324, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol25.iss1.art8>.

⁷⁵ Ja'far and Yaqin, "Digital Fiqh and Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah in the Onlife Condition: A Digital Hermeneutic Critique of Algorithmic Power for Islamic Pistemic Sovereignty."

The notion of Digital Fiqh Governance is especially relevant because it seeks to bring classical Islamic ethical reasoning into dialogue with the moral logics of digital life.⁷⁶ This model is useful for the present study because online piety cannot be adequately evaluated through inherited *fiqh* categories alone if those categories are detached from platform conditions such as algorithmic amplification, public metrics, datafication, and audience surveillance. At the same time, digital ethics cannot be adequately grounded if it ignores Islamic concepts of dignity, restraint, accountability, and harm prevention. The contribution of the present analysis lies in showing that digital pious self-presentation requires a mediating framework: one that connects Islamic ethical traditions with the infrastructures through which visibility is produced.

The approach also clarifies the limits of the study. Digital corpus and document analysis can show how piety is represented, circulated, governed, and publicly evaluated, but it cannot fully determine the inner sincerity, intention, or spiritual condition of individual users. A post containing Qur'anic verses, a modest image, or moral advice should therefore not be treated as transparent evidence of personal religiosity. It should be analyzed as a situated act of self-presentation within a digital public. The relevant analytical questions are: What moral claim is being made? Who is the imagined audience? What symbols are being mobilized? How do other users respond? What forms of authority are invoked? How does platform visibility shape the circulation and reception of the message? This methodological caution prevents the analysis from moralizing individual users and redirects attention to the social and infrastructural conditions of pious visibility.

The finding also extends Hirschkind's account of mediated Islamic ethical publics. Hirschkind shows that Islamic media can cultivate ethical sensibilities and devotional engagement through mediated forms of listening, affect, and public address.⁷⁷ The present study builds on that insight but shows that digital platforms intensify ethical publicity by making piety interactive, searchable, quantifiable, and permanently archivable. Users are no longer only listeners or viewers of mediated religious discourse; they become visible participants in its circulation. They may affirm, challenge, archive, remix, commercialize, or contest pious claims. This extension matters because digital piety is not only mediated; it is also measured, governed, and socially ranked.

Methodological and theoretical contribution is significant because it shows how Islamic ethical reasoning can illuminate the moral consequences of digital transformation without reducing Muslim public life to either technological determinism or doctrinal abstraction. As Muslim societies become increasingly platformed, moral education cannot be limited to offline conduct or formal religious instruction. It must address digital character: how Muslims disclose, verify, disagree, advise, represent themselves, protect dignity, and resist the reduction of religious identity to spectacle or marketable selfhood. This connects the analysis of piety to wider concerns of Islamic knowledge traditions, governance, education, religious authority, and Muslim public life.

The principal contribution of this sub-section is that it demonstrates how method and theory together make moral visibility analytically visible. Digital corpus and document analysis identify the forms through which piety is displayed and governed, while the politics of piety, *maqāṣid*-oriented ethics, and digital *fiqh* reasoning explain why such visibility matters. This approach advances future-

⁷⁶ Siregar et al., "Digital Fiqh and Ethical Governance: Negotiating Islamic Normativity and Online Narcissism in Contemporary Indonesia."

⁷⁷ Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*; Hirschkind, "Experiments in Devotion Online: The YouTube Khutba."

oriented Islamic and Islamicate studies by showing that piety in online Islamic communities is neither merely private devotion nor simple public performance, but a platform-mediated ethical practice through which Muslim identity, dignity, accountability, and public recognition are continuously negotiated.

Algorithmic Mediation, Ethical Risk, and the Future of Muslim Social Change

The broader theoretical implication of this study is that algorithmic mediation has become a formative condition of Muslim public life, shaping not only how Islamic content circulates but also how piety, authority, identity, and ethical recognition are organized within digital environments. Digital platforms do not merely host religious discourse; they structure religious attention through recommendation systems, search functions, ranking mechanisms, engagement metrics, moderation policies, and visibility regimes. This shifts the analysis of Muslim digital publics from communication to mediation. The central issue is no longer only what Muslims say online, but how platform infrastructures determine which Islamic voices become visible, which forms of piety are amplified, which authorities gain credibility, and which identities are marginalized or contested.

This theoretical implication is grounded in the wider empirical reality of global digital transformation. ITU's 2025 data indicate that approximately six billion people were using the internet globally, while 2.2 billion remained offline.⁷⁸ DataReportal's Digital 2026 reports similarly show the continued centrality of internet access, social media, mobile connectivity, AI adoption, and online entertainment in contemporary life.⁷⁹ These data matter for Islamic and Islamicate studies because the future of Muslim public life will be shaped not only by mosques, pesantren, universities, councils of ulama, families, and formal institutions, but also by platforms, algorithms, digital literacy, data infrastructures, and systems of content governance. The unevenness of access also indicates that algorithmic mediation does not affect Muslim societies uniformly. It produces new possibilities for connectivity and religious learning while also intensifying digital inequality, epistemic asymmetry, and uneven participation in global Muslim publics.

The study extends digital religion theory by showing that platform infrastructures are not external contexts surrounding religious life; they are constitutive environments within which religious subjectivities are formed. Earlier theories of networked religion emphasized the interplay between online and offline religious practice, shifting authority, and multisite religious realities. The present study adds that algorithmic systems actively participate in shaping the field of religious possibility. When certain Islamic messages are recommended because they are emotionally engaging, visually attractive, controversial, or highly shareable, platform logics begin to influence the public perception of religious relevance. Thus, algorithmic mediation complicates the assumption that digital religion is primarily a matter of user agency, communal adaptation, or technological affordance. It reveals a deeper structural question: how does the architecture of visibility shape the future of Islamic knowledge and Muslim identity?

The primary platform documents support this interpretation. Meta reports the use of technology, automated tools, human review, and user reports in content

⁷⁸ Union, "Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2025."

⁷⁹ Kemp, "Digital 2026: Global Overview Report"; DataReportal, "Digital 2025: Indonesia."

moderation, including cases involving hateful conduct and other policy areas.⁸⁰ TikTok's DSA Transparency Report describes enforcement actions against content and accounts that violate platform policies.⁸¹ YouTube's Community Guidelines explain that content may be restricted, removed, or treated differently depending on policy categories and contextual exceptions.⁸² These documents demonstrate that Muslim digital publics operate within infrastructures that regulate not only what users say but also how far religious speech travels. Islamic content is therefore shaped by a dual system of normativity: religious-ethical judgment and platform governance.

This argument also revises debates on digital Islamic authority. Wahid and Abdulloh's systematic review shows that digital Islamic authority is shaped by technological mediation, affect, visibility, algorithms, and participatory engagement. The present study extends this claim by arguing that algorithmic mediation is not merely one factor among others; it is a structural condition under which authority becomes publicly recognizable. Recent studies show that fatwas and religious content are increasingly produced, circulated, and consumed within platform environments where visibility metrics and audience engagement may compete with scholarly qualifications and institutional oversight.⁸³ The rise of cyber-muftis, celebrity imams, and digitally influential preachers illustrates that religious legitimacy may be strengthened by algorithmic amplification even when it is not fully anchored in traditional scholarly structures. This does not mean that classical authority disappears, but it does mean that authority is increasingly filtered through infrastructures of attention.

The ethical risk is that algorithmic mediation may produce epistemic fragmentation and weaken mechanisms of accountability. When religious content circulates through short clips, emotionally charged posts, decontextualized fatwa fragments, or viral moral claims, users may encounter Islamic knowledge as discrete units of attention rather than as part of a disciplined interpretive tradition. Atallah's analysis of algorithmically mediated fatwa circulation points to ambiguities in authority and accountability, while Zuhri emphasizes the risk that digital Islamic authority can erode institutional credibility when visibility becomes detached from recognized scholarly responsibility.⁸⁴ These findings challenge optimistic accounts that treat digital access as inherently democratizing. Digital accessibility expands participation, but it does not automatically secure epistemic quality, interpretive depth, or ethical accountability.

The ethical stakes become clearer when algorithmic mediation is interpreted through *maqāṣid*-oriented reasoning. Islamic ethical principles such as *ḥifẓ al-dīn*, *ḥifẓ al-'ird*, dignity, justice, privacy, and responsibility provide a normative vocabulary for assessing digital environments. Algorithmic systems may facilitate religious learning, but they may also generate misinformation, bias,

⁸⁰ Meta, "DSA Transparency Report: Facebook, Reporting Period 1 January-30 June 2025" (Meta Transparency Center, 2025), <https://transparency.meta.com/>; Meta, "Community Standards: Hateful Conduct and Safety Policies."

⁸¹ TikTok, "DSA Transparency Report: January-June 2025."

⁸² YouTube, "YouTube Community Guidelines."

⁸³ Atallah, "Algorithmic Mediation and Religious Authority: Muslim Engagements with Digital Fatwa Platforms."

⁸⁴ H Zuhri and M Pabbajah, "The Distortions of Aqidah on Digital Platforms to Raise the Islamic Populism," *Cogent Arts and Humanities* 13, no. 1 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2609316>.

discrimination, and the commodification of religious identity.⁸⁵ The problem is not only that false information circulates online, but that algorithmic infrastructures may reward visibility without verifying religious reliability. From the perspective of *ḥifẓ al-dīn*, this raises questions about the protection of religious knowledge from distortion. From the perspective of *ḥifẓ al-ʿird*, it raises questions about dignity, reputation, exposure, and moral harm. From the perspective of justice, it raises questions about bias, exclusion, and unequal access to public religious visibility.

This study therefore contributes to Islamic ethics by arguing that digital piety must be analyzed as a field of mediated moral risk. Platforms often incentivize disclosure, attention-seeking, personal branding, and performative visibility, which may conflict with Islamic values of modesty, restraint, and dignity.⁸⁶ This does not mean that public religious expression is ethically suspect in itself. Rather, the ethical problem arises when religious identity is transformed into a measurable and marketable sign of social value. Algorithmic mediation can turn piety into content, authority into influence, and moral recognition into engagement data. A future-oriented Islamic ethical framework must therefore address not only the moral intention of users but also the infrastructures that shape visibility, reward, and reputational power.

The MUI Fatwa No. 24 Tahun 2017 is particularly relevant because it frames social media as a domain of *muʿāmalah* requiring verification, responsibility, and avoidance of harm.⁸⁷ The fatwa anticipates a key problem of algorithmic publics: unverified religious claims may spread rapidly not because they are authoritative, but because they are emotionally compelling, visually accessible, or easily shareable. Yet the fatwa also reveals the need for further conceptual development. Ethical guidance for social media cannot remain limited to individual conduct; it must also address the structural conditions under which content is ranked, recommended, monetized, and moderated. Islamic ethical reasoning must therefore be brought into conversation with platform accountability, digital literacy, data governance, and public policy.

The concept of digital *fiqh* responds to this need by seeking to translate classical Islamic ethical reasoning into the conditions of algorithmic life. Recent scholarship proposes digital *fiqh* as a framework for addressing ethical and epistemic challenges posed by algorithmic systems, emphasizing justice, dignity, privacy, literacy, and self-determination in Muslim communities. This framework is significant because it moves beyond reactive moral judgment and asks how Islamic law and ethics can engage the infrastructures that shape digital conduct. It also helps interpret emerging issues such as AI-generated religious misinformation, platform bias, data commodification, and algorithmic discrimination as questions of Islamic governance rather than merely technological malfunction.

The relevance of this framework becomes more urgent as digital transformation expands into emerging environments such as virtual spaces and metaverse-based interactions. Studies discussing virtual Islamic practices,

⁸⁵ S H Wahid, “Is AI Endangering Religion? Maqāṣid Al-Sharīʿa as Ethics Framework for Harm Assessment and Mitigation,” *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 10, no. 2 (2025): 49–85, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jims.00055>; Ilham et al., “Between Ḥifẓ Al-ʿIrd (the Protection of Dignity) and Algorithmic Visibility: A Maqāṣid Al-Sharīʿah Approach to Digital Modesty in the Age of Self-Commodification.”

⁸⁶ Ilham, Anwar, and Jadi, “Dialectics of Theology and Ecology in Ammatoa Ri Kajang in Bulukumba, Indonesia: Paradigm of Tawhidic and Environmental Fiqh in Sulapa Appa”; Wahid, “Is AI Endangering Religion? Maqāṣid Al-Sharīʿa as Ethics Framework for Harm Assessment and Mitigation.”

⁸⁷ Indonesia, “Fatwa Nomor 24 Tahun 2017 Tentang Hukum Dan Pedoman Bermuamalah Melalui Media Sosial.”

including debates around virtual marriages, show that Muslim societies are already confronting questions that require adaptation to Sharia principles under technologically mediated conditions.⁸⁸ Such cases indicate that the future of Islamic legal and ethical reasoning will increasingly involve environments where embodiment, presence, consent, authority, and communal recognition are mediated by digital systems. The implication is not that Islamic jurisprudence must simply accommodate every technological innovation, but that it must develop interpretive tools capable of evaluating new forms of mediated social reality.

The study also contributes to governance and public policy debates by showing that algorithmic mediation cannot be addressed only through individual piety or personal restraint. Ethical governance is required because platform systems shape collective religious life. Recent discussions of Islamic ethical governance argue that integrating Islamic principles into digital governance can promote inclusivity, reduce bias, and strengthen public responsibility.⁸⁹ In Muslim societies, this includes policies on digital literacy, religious moderation, content verification, platform accountability, protection from online harm, and the ethical use of AI. Such governance must avoid both authoritarian control of religious discourse and uncritical reliance on corporate moderation. The challenge is to develop institutional models that protect epistemic responsibility while sustaining pluralism and public participation.

Religious moderation is central to this future-oriented governance agenda. Algorithmic environments may intensify polarization by rewarding moral outrage, sectarian distinction, and emotionally charged claims. At the same time, platforms can support inclusive religious education, intercommunal understanding, and plural Muslim publics when ethical frameworks and educational institutions cultivate critical digital competence. Studies of Indonesia's multicultural Islamic education reforms show that inclusive education can promote tolerance, respect for diversity, and religious moderation in contexts marked by plural social realities.⁹⁰ The present study extends this insight into digital environments by arguing that religious moderation must now include platform literacy: the ability to recognize how algorithms shape attention, emotion, authority, and public judgment.

This synthesis also has methodological implications for Islamic and Islamicate studies. A future-oriented study of Muslim digital publics cannot rely exclusively on textual analysis, doctrinal interpretation, or content description. It must analyze discourse, platform infrastructure, visibility metrics, moderation policies, user interaction, institutional responses, and the political economy of attention. This does not reduce religion to technology. Rather, it recognizes that Islamic discourse in digital publics is co-shaped by theological content, ethical traditions, social identities, platform rules, algorithmic distribution, and institutional governance. The method appropriate to this field must therefore be interdisciplinary, combining Islamic studies, digital ethnography, platform studies, ethical analysis, and governance research.

⁸⁸ M Fikri, M I Muchtar, and D Al-Amin, "Emergence of Digital Matrimony: Exploring Islamic Legal Responses to Metaverse Marriages," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 14, no. 2 (2024): 246–62, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.142.15>.

⁸⁹ M Azam et al., "Religious Diversity in the Digital Economy: Interfaith Legal Pathways to Harmonize Sharia, Christian Ethics, and International Law," *Contemporary Issues on Interfaith Law and Society* 4, no. 2 (2025): 207–64, <https://doi.org/10.15294/ciils.v4i2.33011>; E Zamroni et al., "Mapping Religious Moderation and Its Impact on Islamic Education in Indonesia: A Bibliometric Approach," *Munaddhomah* 6, no. 1 (2025): 55–81, <https://doi.org/10.31538/MUNADDHOMAH.V6I1.1487>.

⁹⁰ D Afriyanto and A A Anandari, "Transformation of Islamic Religious Education in the Context of Multiculturalism at SMA Negeri 9 Yogyakarta Through an Inclusive Approach," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 21, no. 1 (2024): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v21i1.7142>.

The concept of moral visibility developed in this article contributes to this interdisciplinary framework. Moral visibility explains how religious identity becomes publicly legible, socially evaluated, and digitally circulated in platform environments. It complements the concepts of digital Islamic authority and the politics of piety by showing why piety in online Islamic communities is not only a matter of belief, practice, or discourse, but also a matter of mediated recognition. A Muslim identity becomes digitally effective when it is visible, repeatable, shareable, and validated by a community. Yet precisely because visibility is governed by algorithmic and commercial logics, moral recognition is also vulnerable to distortion, commodification, and reputational risk. Moral visibility therefore allows the study to connect Islamic ethics with the technological organization of public life.

Finding is decisive. It shows that future-oriented Islamic and Islamicate scholarship must analyze how emerging technologies reshape Islamic knowledge traditions, ethical subjectivity, religious authority, communal belonging, education, governance, and public policy. The central question is no longer simply how Muslims use platforms, but how platforms participate in forming Muslim publics. This question matters internationally because Muslim digital publics are transnational, multilingual, and unevenly governed, while the ethical challenges they face misinformation, algorithmic bias, commodification, polarization, identity surveillance, and weakened accountability are not confined to one national setting.

The originality of this study lies in its argument that algorithmic mediation is becoming a decisive condition of Muslim social change. The future of Muslim identity formation will depend not only on religious texts, scholars, institutions, and communities, but also on the ethical governance of visibility, attention, authority, and data infrastructures. By linking digital religion, Islamic ethics, *maqāṣid*-oriented reasoning, platform governance, and Muslim public life, this article advances a framework for studying online Islamic communities as sites where the future of knowledge, piety, authority, and social transformation is already being negotiated.

Conclusion

This article has examined how Muslim religious identity is formed in online Islamic communities through the interaction of digital authority, moral visibility, and the politics of piety. The study shows that Muslim digital publics are not merely spaces for disseminating Islamic content, but networked arenas where religious identity, ethical self-presentation, communal belonging, and authority are continuously produced and contested. The findings answer the first objective by showing that Muslim identity in digital publics is formed through repeated encounters with religious symbols, Qur'anic reminders, sermon clips, hijrah narratives, modest aesthetics, halal lifestyle discourse, comments, and audience responses. Muslim users do not only consume religious content; they participate in shaping what counts as credible, proper, and recognizable Muslim identity.

The second objective is addressed through the finding that digital authority is no longer shaped only by formal scholarship or institutional recognition. It is increasingly mediated by textual references, affective proximity, platform visibility, algorithmic circulation, and audience validation. This does not replace classical Islamic authority, but reconfigures how it is encountered, recognized, and contested in digital publics. The third objective is answered by showing that piety becomes socially meaningful when it is made visible, repeated, shared, and evaluated. Moral visibility enables religious expression and solidarity, but it also

creates ethical risks such as performative religiosity, moral surveillance, reputational anxiety, and commodification of pious identity.

The article contributes theoretically by integrating digital religion theory, politics of piety, digital Islamic authority, and moral visibility into one analytical framework. Its broader significance lies in showing that future Islamic and Islamicate studies must take platforms, algorithms, digital literacy, and governance seriously as conditions shaping Muslim social change. Future research should develop comparative digital ethnography, user interviews, cross-platform analysis, and studies of AI-mediated Islamic authority to deepen understanding of how Muslim publics are being transformed in digital environments.

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