



# Islamic Religious Education and Muslim Youth Identity on Social Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Instagram and TikTok Content in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of digital technology has led to the proliferation of social media platforms, significantly influencing various aspects of life, including the formation of religious identity among Muslim adolescents. This study examines the role of Islamic education in shaping Muslim identity in the digital era through critical discourse analysis. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected from social media content related to Islamic education and identity formation. The analysis focuses on how Islamic educational messages are conveyed, received, and interpreted across digital platforms. The findings indicate that Islamic education plays a crucial role in strengthening religious identity among Muslim youth by fostering a sense of belonging and providing moral guidance amid globalization and modernization. The novelty of this study lies in its examination of the intersection between Islamic education and digital media, highlighting social media's potential as a strategic tool for disseminating Islamic values and countering radical ideologies. This research underscores the importance of leveraging digital platforms to enhance Islamic teaching effectiveness and contribute to the development of a resilient Muslim identity in the contemporary digital landscape, offering insights for educators, policymakers, and religious leaders in promoting positive religious identity and countering extremist narratives.

## ABSTRAK

*Munculnya teknologi digital telah menyebabkan proliferasi platform media sosial, yang berdampak signifikan pada berbagai aspek kehidupan, termasuk pembentukan identitas religius di kalangan remaja Muslim. Penelitian ini menyelidiki dampak pendidikan Islam dalam membentuk identitas Muslim di era digital melalui analisis wacana kritis. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, data dikumpulkan dari konten media sosial yang berkaitan dengan pendidikan Islam dan pembentukan identitas. Analisis difokuskan pada bagaimana pesan-pesan pendidikan Islam disampaikan, diterima, dan ditafsirkan di platform media sosial. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa pendidikan Islam memainkan peran penting dalam memperkuat identitas religius di kalangan remaja Muslim, memberi mereka rasa keterikatan dan panduan moral di tengah tantangan globalisasi dan modernisasi. Keaslian studi ini terletak pada pemeriksaannya mengenai persimpangan antara pendidikan Islam dan media digital, menekankan potensi media sosial sebagai alat untuk menyebarluaskan nilai-nilai Islam dan melawan ideologi radikal. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya memanfaatkan platform digital untuk meningkatkan efektivitas pengajaran Islam, sehingga berkontribusi pada pengembangan identitas Muslim yang tangguh dalam lanskap digital kontemporer. Penelitian ini menawarkan wawasan yang signifikan bagi pendidik, pembuat kebijakan, dan pemimpin agama mengenai penggunaan*

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*strategis media sosial dalam mempromosikan identitas religius yang positif dan melawan narasi ekstremis.*

## **Introduction**

Social media has increasingly become a central arena in which Indonesian Muslim youth shape, negotiate, and express their religious identities. Unlike earlier generations, whose Islamic identity was primarily formed through family, formal education, and established religious institutions, contemporary Muslim adolescents encounter Islam largely within digitally mediated environments. These platforms expose young users to fragmented and algorithmically curated religious discourses, ranging from messages promoting moderation and tolerance to simplified, populist, and even radical interpretations of Islam (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). Consequently, intensive engagement with online religious content does not automatically result in a coherent, reflective, or moderate Islamic identity (Soedjiwo et al., 2025). Instead, many Muslim youths experience identity ambiguity, uncertainty about religious authority, and difficulty distinguishing normative Islamic teachings from ideologically driven narratives circulating on social media.

This issue is particularly significant in the Indonesian context, where religious moderation constitutes a national priority, and social media increasingly functions as a site of ideological contestation between moderate and radical Islamic narratives (Marzuki et al., 2021; Yilmaz & Shakil, 2023). While digital platforms expand access to Islamic knowledge and enable youth to connect with religious communities, they simultaneously expose users to misleading or ethically conflicting content (Priambodo, 2019; Kusumastuti et al., 2024). These dynamics underscore the urgent need to examine how Islamic meanings are constructed and internalized within digital spaces.

Theoretically, this study draws on religious identity formation theory, which conceptualizes identity as a socially constructed and continuously negotiated process shaped through interaction, discourse, and power relations. Religious identity is therefore not a fixed inheritance but an ongoing interpretive project influenced by dominant narratives and symbolic representations. This perspective aligns with digital religion theory, which emphasizes that digital media do not merely transmit religious messages but actively reshape religious authority, practices, and meaning-making processes. In this sense, social media emerges as a critical site of religious socialization where discourse plays a decisive role in shaping how young Muslims understand Islam and position themselves within broader religious communities (Machin & Mayr, 2022; Wodak, 2021).

Traditionally, Islamic education has played a vital role in shaping Muslim identity through the transmission of religious knowledge and the cultivation of moral and ethical values, including justice, tolerance, and social responsibility. In the digital age, however, Islamic education faces a dual challenge: maintaining pedagogical integrity while competing within online environments characterized by emotionally persuasive and visually driven content (Sugiyono & Khojir, 2021). Although social media offers substantial educational potential, the dissemination of Islamic messages without pedagogical structure or critical guidance also poses significant risks (Assidiq, 2023).

Existing research has explored the intersections between Islamic education, youth identity, and social media, highlighting both the positive role of digital platforms in enhancing religious engagement (Kusumastuti et al., 2024) and the integration of digital technologies within Islamic educational institutions (Fathurrohman & Rizqi, 2021; Suroyo et al., 2023). Other studies emphasize the importance of media literacy in navigating misleading online religious content (Priambodo, 2019; Nurkamiden, 2021). However, much of this literature remains largely descriptive, focusing on patterns of use or institutional adaptation rather than

examining how Islamic educational meanings are discursively produced and contested in everyday digital interactions.

This study advances existing scholarship in three key ways. First, it conceptualizes social media not merely as a technological tool but as a discursive arena in which Islamic meanings are actively produced, negotiated, and contested. Second, it foregrounds ideological tensions between religious moderation and radicalism, examining how Islamic educational discourse operates to reinforce moderate Muslim identities while countering extremist interpretations. Third, the study refines the application of critical discourse analysis (CDA) within Islamic education research by linking textual analysis of social media content to broader socio-religious contexts and processes of identity formation (Rosyad & Ma'arif, 2020; Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). Put simply, this approach examines how language, symbols, and narratives used online shape young Muslims' understanding of Islam.

Accordingly, the primary objective of this study is to analyze the role of Islamic education in shaping Muslim youth identity in the digital age through social media discourse. Specifically, it aims to: (1) identify discursive strategies used to communicate Islamic educational messages on social media; (2) examine how these messages are received and interpreted by Muslim youth; and (3) explore how Islamic educational discourse mediates ideological tensions between moderation and radicalism in Indonesia's digital landscape. The findings suggest that Islamic education, when strategically articulated through social media, can function as a critical discursive resource for strengthening moderate religious identity and fostering critical religious awareness.

This paper is structured as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical framework and research methodology. This is followed by an analysis of Islamic educational discourse on social media, a discussion of key findings, and concluding implications for Islamic education, policy, and future research.

## Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how Islamic education contributes to the formation of Muslim youth identity in digital environments. As social media has become a primary space for religious learning and interaction, Islamic educational messages are no longer conveyed solely through formal institutions but are increasingly produced, circulated, and contested online. CDA was therefore used to conceptualize discourse not simply as language, but as a form of social practice through which power relations, ideological positions, and identity processes are constructed and negotiated. Guided by Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the analysis integrated textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice, enabling the study to connect micro-level linguistic and semiotic features of social media content with broader socio-religious contexts in Indonesia, particularly the ideological tension between religious moderation and radical interpretations of Islam.

The research was conducted entirely within digital spaces accessed by Indonesian Muslim youth, focusing on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), and YouTube due to their widespread use among adolescents and young adults and their central role in shaping contemporary religious discourse. The research population consisted of Muslim youth in Indonesia who actively engaged with Islamic educational content on these platforms. Data were collected through online observation, documentation, and in-depth interviews. Online observation, conducted through non-participant digital ethnography, examined naturally occurring interactions on social media to understand how Islamic educational messages were framed, responded to, and

negotiated in real time, allowing identity construction to be observed as an ongoing and interactive process. Documentation involved systematically gathering digital artifacts, including posts, captions, comments, images, videos, and linked articles, which served as primary discourse texts analyzed for linguistic choices, visual symbolism, narrative structures, and ideological framing. In-depth interviews using a semi-structured format explored how Muslim youth interpreted and made meaning of Islamic educational content encountered online. These interviews were conducted via digital communication platforms, audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and integrated into the discourse analysis as interpretive and contextual material.

Data analysis proceeded through several interconnected stages. Textual and audiovisual materials were first transcribed, organized, and manually coded, after which the data were thematically categorized to identify dominant discourses related to Islamic education, Muslim identity, religious moderation, and radical narratives. CDA was then applied following Fairclough's framework, with textual analysis focusing on vocabulary, modality, metaphors, and representational strategies used to communicate Islamic values. Discursive practice analysis examined how content was produced, circulated, and consumed across platforms, while social practice analysis situated these discourses within Indonesia's broader socio-religious landscape, where digital media significantly influence religious authority and identity negotiation. Throughout the six-month research period from July to December 2024, the researcher acted as an observer and analyst, interpreting digital discourse while maintaining reflexive awareness of analytical positioning. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation of data sources and methods, allowing insights from social media texts, observations, and interviews to be cross-checked for consistency. Peer debriefing with scholars in Islamic education and digital media studies further enhanced analytical rigor and minimized interpretive bias, thereby strengthening the overall credibility of the study.

## Results and Discussion

### Result

#### *Islamic Educational Discourse and the Construction of Everyday Muslim Identity*

Analysis of social media content indicates that one of the most prominent discourses shaping Muslim youth identity is the articulation of everyday piety. Across platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, Islamic educational messages commonly frame religiosity as something that coexists seamlessly with modern and youthful lifestyles. Rather than presenting religious practice as rigid or demanding, these messages depict Islam as relevant to everyday experiences and personal growth. From a linguistic perspective, this discourse is marked by the use of informal, inclusive expressions such as "*ngaji santai*," "*kita sebagai Muslim muda*," and "*Islam itu nggak ribet*." These lexical choices deliberately minimize the perceived gap between religious learning and daily life, positioning Islamic identity as approachable and lived rather than distant or burdensome. Religious engagement is thus framed as something that can be integrated into ordinary routines without requiring drastic lifestyle changes. This framing is further reinforced through short-form video captions that emphasize practicality and incremental commitment, for example, "*cukup mulai dari hal kecil*" (just start with small things). Such phrasing constructs religious devotion as a gradual and personalized process, allowing Muslim youth to recognize themselves as legitimate believers even when their religious practices are still in development. Faith is presented not as an all-or-nothing obligation, but as an evolving journey shaped by individual circumstances. Semiotic elements strengthen this discourse through the use of casual clothing, familiar

everyday settings, and soft, aesthetically pleasing visual styles. Together, these linguistic and visual strategies produce a representation of Muslim identity in which religiosity aligns with authenticity, self-improvement, and contemporary youth culture. In this construction, being Muslim is not portrayed as a constraint, but as a meaningful and attainable aspect of modern youth identity.

### ***Discourses of Moderation and the Moral Framing of Muslim Identity***

A second key finding highlights the prominence of a discourse of religious moderation embedded within Islamic educational content on social media. This discourse systematically frames Muslim identity through moral principles such as tolerance, justice, compassion, and peaceful coexistence, presenting moderation not as a peripheral or contextual stance, but as an essential and defining dimension of being Muslim in contemporary society. Across the analyzed content, moderation is articulated as a moral orientation that is inseparable from Islamic identity itself, particularly in plural and digitally mediated social contexts. Rather than positioning moderation as an optional ethical preference or a strategic response to social diversity, these messages consistently construct it as a normative expectation rooted in Islamic teachings. Moderation is framed as something Muslims *ought* to embody, regardless of situational pressures or ideological differences. This framing elevates moderation from the level of personal disposition to that of moral obligation, thereby integrating it into the core definition of religious authenticity.

From a linguistic standpoint, this discourse relies heavily on normative and declarative statements that function to fix moral meaning. Expressions such as “*Islam mengajarkan kasih sayang*” (Islam teaches compassion) and “*Muslim sejati adalah yang membawa rahmat*” (a true Muslim is one who brings mercy) operate as moral predicates that link Islamic identity directly to ethical virtues. Analytically, these statements do more than convey religious teachings; they perform identity work by delineating who qualifies as an authentic Muslim. Moderation, in this framing, is not described as an individual choice or interpretive stance, but as an intrinsic marker of Muslimness itself. By embedding ethical imperatives within definitional claims about Islam and Muslims, the discourse establishes clear moral boundaries while maintaining an inclusive and non-confrontational tone. Rather than explicitly condemning alternative interpretations, it implicitly marginalizes them by positioning compassion and moderation as the moral baseline. This strategy allows the discourse to assert normative authority without adopting an overtly polemical or exclusionary register, making it particularly resonant within digital environments that value positivity and emotional accessibility.

Visual and audiovisual elements further reinforce this moral construction of moderation. The analyzed content frequently incorporates calming background music, soft color palettes, and imagery depicting communal harmony, intergenerational interaction, or everyday social cooperation. These aesthetic choices work semiotically to associate Islamic teachings with emotional calmness, safety, and social balance. In addition, references to national unity and civic responsibility appear alongside religious explanations, subtly aligning Islamic values with broader ideals of social cohesion and collective belonging. In several TikTok videos examined, on-screen text such as “*berbeda bukan berarti bermusuhan*” (difference does not mean hostility) is displayed simultaneously with religious commentary. This juxtaposition strengthens an interpretation of Islam that foregrounds coexistence and mutual respect, particularly in contexts marked by diversity. The repetition of such phrases across multiple videos

suggests a patterned discursive strategy rather than isolated rhetorical choices, indicating an intentional effort to normalize moderation as a moral default.

Through the interplay of linguistic framing and visual aesthetics, this discourse constructs Muslim youth identity as ethically grounded, emotionally reflexive, and socially responsible. Youth are interpellated as moral agents whose religious commitment is demonstrated not through rigidity or confrontation, but through empathy, restraint, and concern for social harmony. At the same time, this discourse functions as a form of counter-narrative, implicitly challenging representations that equate religious devotion with intolerance, extremism, or social division. Rather than rejecting religious commitment, the moderate discourse redefines piety itself. It offers an alternative understanding of what it means to be a devout Muslim, one that is closely tied to ethical sensitivity, civic harmony, and peaceful engagement with difference. In doing so, it contributes to the formation of a moral identity that is both religiously grounded and socially attuned, reflecting how Islamic educational content on social media actively participates in reshaping contemporary Muslim subjectivities.

### ***Ideological Tension and Discourses of Religious Rigidity***

Alongside moderation-oriented narratives, the analysis also reveals the presence of discourses marked by rigidity and absolutism, most visibly within hijrah-related content. These discourses tend to frame religious commitment in uncompromising terms, presenting Islam as a system of fixed rules that leave little room for interpretation or negotiation. At the linguistic level, such texts frequently rely on declarative and prescriptive statements, including expressions like *"Islam sudah jelas aturannya"* and *"tidak ada tawar-menawar dalam kebenaran."* The consistent absence of modal verbs or softening language conveys religious meaning as absolute and unquestionable, positioning obedience as the primary marker of authenticity. Through this linguistic construction, religious authority is asserted rather than discussed. Semiotically, these messages are commonly reinforced through serious facial expressions, monochromatic or dark-toned visuals, and the prominent use of strong religious symbols. Together, these elements project a sense of certainty, discipline, and moral authority. Visual style thus functions not merely as an aesthetic choice but as a semiotic resource that strengthens the rigidity of the message being conveyed. This discourse constructs Muslim identity in distinctly binary terms, drawing a clear boundary between those perceived as fully committed and those considered insufficiently faithful. While such framing may foster a strong sense of group belonging and moral clarity, it simultaneously limits interpretive flexibility and reduces space for pluralism within religious understanding. The coexistence of moderation-oriented and rigid discourses ultimately underscores the fragmented and contested discursive landscape in which Muslim youth continuously negotiate their religious identities in digital spaces.

### ***Interactional Discourse and Identity Negotiation in Digital Spaces***

Analysis of comment sections and patterns of user interaction demonstrates that identity formation in digital religious spaces operates as an interactional and dialogical process rather than as a unidirectional transmission of meaning from content creator to audience. Empirical evidence from user responses indicates that Muslim youth do not engage with Islamic educational content as passive recipients. Instead, they actively use digital interaction through comments, replies, and endorsements as a discursive arena in which religious meanings are evaluated, aligned with, or contested. Supportive responses such as *"ini relate banget sama kehidupan aku"* (this really relates to my life) and

*“akhirnya ada dakwah yang nggak menghakimi”* (finally, preaching that doesn’t judge) function as more than expressions of personal approval. Analytically, these comments signal discursive alignment with moderation-oriented educational narratives that emphasize empathy, lived experience, and moral reflexivity. By explicitly framing religious messages as “relatable” and “non-judgmental,” users articulate a preference for interpretations of Islam that recognize everyday struggles and moral ambiguity. These interactions position moderation not merely as an abstract theological stance, but as an affective and experiential resource through which youth negotiate their religious selves.

Such comments also perform identity work in public view. By endorsing empathetic discourse, users implicitly situate themselves within a moral community that values compassion, inclusivity, and contextual understanding. In this sense, the comment section becomes a site where religious identity is enacted relationally, through visible acts of agreement that reaffirm both individual positioning and collective norms. In contrast, oppositional responses such as *“terlalu liberal”* (too liberal) or *“kurang tegas”* (not firm enough) mark moments of resistance and ideological tension within the same digital spaces. These comments reflect alternative interpretive frameworks in which religious authority is associated with firmness, clarity, and doctrinal certainty. Rather than rejecting the content outright, such critiques often target its perceived moral softness, revealing competing assumptions about what constitutes authentic Islamic pedagogy. Analytically, these reactions illustrate how discursive boundaries are drawn and contested through everyday interaction, transforming comment sections into arenas of symbolic struggle over Islamic legitimacy.

The coexistence of supportive and oppositional responses within the same threads demonstrates that social media functions as a site of ongoing discursive negotiation rather than consensus formation. Through interactional exchanges, Muslim youth actively position themselves vis-à-vis competing religious narratives, using language to signal affiliation, dissent, or ambivalence. Identity formation thus emerges not simply from exposure to Islamic educational content, but through processes of engagement, interpretation, agreement, disagreement, and public debate. These findings underscore the importance of viewing digital religious spaces as participatory environments in which Islamic meanings are continuously produced and redefined. Comment sections operate as micro-level sites of meaning-making, where ideological orientations are not only expressed but shaped through interaction. Rather than passively receiving religious instruction, youth participate in its reinterpretation, revealing identity negotiation as an emergent outcome of dialogical engagement embedded within everyday digital practice.

## **Discussion**

### ***Islamic Education as a Discursive Process of Identity Formation***

The findings of this study extend beyond the commonly repeated assumption that social media simply strengthens Muslim identity among youth. Rather than functioning as a unidirectional force of reinforcement, Islamic education on social media operates as a discursive space in which Muslim identity is actively hybridized. Identity formation is shown not as a linear intensification of religiosity, but as a continuous process of negotiation between religious norms, youth culture, and platform-specific modes of communication. In line with religious identity formation theory, identity is constructed through ongoing engagement with language, symbols, and social interaction (Abidin, 2021). This study, however, contributes further analytical insight by demonstrating that such engagement does not produce a single or uniform Islamic identity. Instead, it gives

rise to hybrid religious subjectivities that reflect the intersections of faith, everyday life, and digital culture.

The discourse of everyday piety clearly illustrates this process of hybridity. Islamic educational content frequently blends informal language, motivational self-improvement narratives, and visual aesthetics associated with contemporary youth lifestyle culture. Expressions such as “*pelan-pelan hijrah*” and “*Islam itu relevan buat anak muda*” linguistically soften doctrinal boundaries and reposition religious commitment as flexible, gradual, and personally meaningful. Through this framing, religiosity is presented as something that evolves alongside individual experience rather than as an immediate or total transformation. This discursive pattern builds upon earlier studies of youth religiosity (Kusumastuti et al., 2024) by revealing how linguistic accessibility and symbolic familiarity function as identity-bridging strategies. These strategies enable Muslim youth to inhabit both modern and religious identities without experiencing them as contradictory or mutually exclusive. In this sense, Islamic education becomes persuasive not solely through theological authority, but through its capacity to translate religious meanings into culturally resonant and emotionally relatable forms.

### ***Moderation, Counter-Radicalism, and Discursive Strategy***

A central contribution of this study lies in its identification of sustained discursive tension between narratives of religious moderation and forms of conservative rigidity within Islamic educational content circulating on social media. Rather than conceptualizing moderation as a stable ideological position or a clearly defined endpoint of religious learning, the findings demonstrate that moderation is continuously produced, reinforced, and negotiated through everyday discursive practices. These practices include recurring moral framings, the strategic use of inclusive pronouns, and affective appeals to harmony, empathy, and compassion. Together, they position moderation not as a political compromise or externally imposed agenda, but as an ethical orientation that is intrinsic to Islamic identity itself. Through these discursive strategies, moderation is framed as a moral responsibility embedded within the lived experience of being Muslim. Linguistically, moderation is articulated through repeated references to mercy, tolerance, balance, and social responsibility, often grounded in Qur’anic language or prophetic exemplars. Such references function to naturalize moderation as a normative religious virtue rather than an optional or contested stance. The emphasis on collective language such as “we,” “our community,” or the broader *ummah* (the global Muslim community) further reinforces an inclusive moral horizon, encouraging youth to understand religious commitment in relational and socially responsive terms.

In contrast, conservative discourses within the same digital spaces rely on markedly different linguistic and rhetorical strategies. These narratives are characterized by absolutist language, an authoritative and directive tone, and the frequent use of rigid moral binaries. Religious meaning is presented as fixed, unambiguous, and non-negotiable, leaving little room for contextual interpretation or ethical deliberation. Such discursive choices construct an identity grounded in certainty, discipline, and exclusivity, drawing clear boundaries between what is deemed correct and incorrect belief, practice, or affiliation. Within this framework, ambiguity is often framed as weakness, and questioning is interpreted as moral deviation rather than sincere inquiry. The simultaneous circulation of these contrasting discourses reinforces earlier scholarly concerns regarding ideological polarization in digital religious spaces (Dozan & Hadi, 2020; Rahman et al., 2024). However, this study advances existing debates by demonstrating that polarization is not merely a reflection of pre-existing ideological

differences among users. Instead, it is actively produced and amplified through language, symbols, visual aesthetics, and affective modes of representation. Social media platforms provide the conditions in which these discourses are repeatedly encountered, compared, and evaluated, often within the same algorithmically curated feeds.

From a critical discourse perspective, the tension between moderation and conservatism is enacted both linguistically and semiotically. Textual choices, visual styles, and modes of address collectively position Muslim youth as moral subjects who must continually choose, negotiate, or strategically combine competing identity scripts in their everyday digital engagements (Campbell, 2021). Youth are not passive recipients of ideological messages; rather, they are interpellated as agents responsible for aligning themselves with particular moral frameworks while navigating the risks of exclusion, judgment, or misrecognition. This discursive struggle also underscores a key methodological contribution of the study. Whereas much previous research treats ideological orientation as a measurable or fixed outcome often categorized along a moderation–radicalism continuum, the present analysis foregrounds the micro-level processes through which ideological positions are normalized, contested, or resisted in routine online interactions. By attending to these discursive mechanisms, the study reveals how Islamic educational content functions not as a neutral conduit of religious values but as an active participant in ideological contestation within the digital public sphere. Over time, these interactions shape how religious meanings are stabilized, destabilized, and reconfigured, contributing to the formation of dynamic and contested Muslim identities in contemporary digital contexts.

### ***Youth Identity Negotiation in Psychological and Anthropological Contexts***

Drawing on insights from Islamic psychological thought, the findings can be understood through the lens of the Muslim self as a dynamic and morally oriented subject rather than a fixed or fully coherent entity. Within this framework, identity is shaped through ongoing struggles between intention, ethical aspiration, and external influence, often conceptualized in Islamic thought as tensions within the *nafs* (the self or inner being). Rather than viewing adolescence solely as a developmental stage of exploration, this study highlights how Muslim youth experience identity negotiation as a continuous process of moral calibration in response to competing religious discourses encountered in digital spaces. Identity uncertainty, from this perspective, is not merely a sign of developmental immaturity but reflects an intensified ethical and spiritual struggle shaped by contemporary media environments. Social media platforms expose youth to multiple and often contradictory religious narratives, each presenting distinct moral hierarchies and prescriptions for proper Islamic conduct. Moderate theological interpretations, conservative moral injunctions, motivational religious messaging, and highly aestheticized performances of piety are algorithmically juxtaposed within the same online spaces. This simultaneity places sustained pressure on the moral self, requiring youth to constantly evaluate, internalize, or resist different normative claims. As a result, identity formation becomes less about achieving doctrinal certainty and more about negotiating ongoing tensions between competing moral and spiritual expectations.

From an anthropological standpoint, the study further contributes to understandings of digital religious socialization by conceptualizing social media as a space in which Islamic norms are not simply transmitted from authority to audience, but actively interpreted and reconstructed through everyday interaction (Husna et al., 2022; Farkas et al., 2018). Online religious communities, including hijrah-oriented networks, operate simultaneously as spaces of ethical cultivation and as arenas of ideological

negotiation. They offer youth a sense of belonging and moral reassurance, while also exposing them to internal disagreements over authenticity, authority, and correct religious practice. This dual function gives rise to forms of Muslim identity that are neither fully traditional nor entirely modern. Instead, identities emerge as situational, relational, and context-dependent, shaped by the interplay between personal moral striving and the discursive norms dominant within particular digital communities. Taken together, these findings challenge simplified assumptions that increased engagement with online religious content necessarily results in stronger, more stable, or more homogeneous religious identities. Rather, they suggest that digital religious participation produces complex and hybrid identity trajectories, structured by continuous interaction with diverse and sometimes contradictory religious discourses within the contemporary digital environment.

### ***Implications for Islamic Education in the Digital Era***

The central contribution of this study lies in its identification of discursive tension between narratives of religious moderation and conservative rigidity within Islamic educational content on social media. Rather than approaching moderation as a fixed or predetermined ideological endpoint, the findings demonstrate that moderation is actively produced through recurring moral framings, the strategic use of inclusive pronouns, and affective appeals to harmony, empathy, and compassion. Through these discursive practices, moderation is positioned as an ethical obligation embedded within Muslim identity itself, rather than as an external political or normative agenda imposed from outside the religious tradition. In contrast, conservative discourses rely on distinctly different discursive strategies. The use of absolutist language, authoritative tone, and rigid binary moral distinctions constructs an identity grounded in certainty, discipline, and exclusivity. Religious meaning is presented as fixed and unquestionable, leaving little space for ambiguity or interpretive plurality. The simultaneous presence of these competing discourses confirms earlier concerns regarding ideological polarization within digital religious spaces (Dozan & Hadi, 2020; Rahman et al., 2024). However, this study advances existing debates by demonstrating that polarization is not merely a reflection of divergent beliefs but is actively produced and sustained through discourse.

From a critical discourse perspective, the tension between moderation and conservatism is enacted through both linguistic and semiotic means. Muslim youth are positioned as subjects who must continually choose between, negotiate, or strategically combine competing identity scripts as they navigate digital religious environments. This ongoing discursive struggle foregrounds an important methodological contribution of the study. While much prior research treats ideological orientation as a measurable outcome, this analysis reveals the micro-level discursive processes through which ideological positions are normalized, contested, or resisted in everyday online interactions. Within this framework, Islamic education does not function as a neutral channel for transmitting religious values. Instead, it emerges as an active participant in ideological contestation within the digital public sphere, shaping how religious meanings are articulated, challenged, and reconfigured through ongoing interaction.

### ***Youth Identity Negotiation as a Discursive and Social Process***

From a psychological perspective, the findings of this study align with a substantial body of developmental research that conceptualizes adolescence and emerging adulthood as periods characterized by identity exploration, uncertainty, and ongoing self-definition (Douglass et al., 2022b; Crocetti et al., 2022). During this life stage, individuals actively

experiment with values, beliefs, and social roles while simultaneously navigating pressures for coherence and stability. However, this study complicates such developmental accounts by demonstrating that identity confusion among Muslim youth cannot be adequately explained as an internal or age-bound psychological process alone. Rather, identity ambiguity emerges as a socially and discursively produced condition, shaped by prolonged and repetitive exposure to competing religious narratives circulating within digital environments. Unlike earlier models of religious socialization that emphasize linear transmission from authoritative institutions such as family, mosque, or religious educators, this study shows that contemporary Muslim youth encounter religious meanings in fragmented, juxtaposed, and often contradictory forms. Social media platforms intensify this dynamic by algorithmically placing moderate, conservative, motivational, and highly aestheticized religious messages within the same communicative space. A single scrolling session may expose youth to doctrinal sermons, lifestyle-oriented *hijrah* (spiritual migration or religious self-transformation) content, inspirational quotes framed in Islamic language, and polemical debates over orthodoxy. This simultaneity disrupts the possibility of a singular interpretive framework, pushing youth away from the adoption of a fixed religious stance and toward a mode of identity formation defined by continuous negotiation.

In this context, identity formation is less about achieving ideological consistency and more about managing discursive contradictions. Youth are required to reconcile divergent moral expectations, affective appeals, and symbolic representations of what it means to be a “good Muslim” in contemporary society. This process often produces a sense of uncertainty that is not necessarily pathological but structural, embedded within the communicative conditions of digital religiosity itself. As such, identity instability should not be interpreted solely as a developmental deficit, but as a rational response to an environment saturated with competing truth claims and normative pressures.

From an anthropological standpoint, these findings extend existing understandings of digital religious socialization by reframing social media as an active site of meaning-making rather than a passive channel of religious dissemination (Husna et al., 2022; Farkas et al., 2018). Islamic norms, values, and practices are not simply transmitted from religious authorities to youth audiences; instead, they are continuously reinterpreted, contested, and reconstructed through interaction. Youth do not merely consume religious content; they comment on it, remix it, selectively internalize it, and deploy it strategically within their own social contexts. In doing so, they become co-producers of religious meaning rather than its recipients.

Online religious communities, including *hijrah*-oriented networks, exemplify this dynamic particularly clearly. These spaces function simultaneously as sites of belonging and as arenas of ideological negotiation. On the one hand, they offer emotional support, moral reassurance, and a sense of collective identity grounded in shared religious aspirations. On the other hand, they expose participants to internal disagreements over religious authority, authenticity, and practice. The same community that provides comfort and certainty may also generate anxiety by presenting multiple, and sometimes conflicting, models of religious commitment. This dual function destabilizes binary distinctions between “traditional” and “modern” Islam, revealing instead a spectrum of hybrid positions that are continually reworked. As a result, the identities that emerge from these digital engagements are neither fully traditional nor entirely modern, neither wholly conservative nor unequivocally progressive. Rather, they are situational, relational, and context-dependent. Youth may articulate different versions of their religious selves depending on the platform they inhabit, the audience they address, and

the discursive norms that dominate a particular online space. A young person might perform heightened piety within a *hijrah* community while simultaneously adopting a more flexible or individualized religious stance in secular or mixed online environments. Such shifts should not be read as inconsistency or hypocrisy, but as evidence of adaptive identity work within pluralized social fields.

Taken together, these findings challenge reductive assumptions that increased engagement with online religious content necessarily produces stronger, more stable, or more homogeneous religious identities. Contrary to narratives that frame digital religiosity as a source of moral clarity or ideological consolidation, this study suggests that digital religious participation often generates complexity rather than closure. Exposure to diverse discursive influences does not resolve identity questions; instead, it multiplies them. Youth are compelled to navigate overlapping moral regimes, negotiate authority claims, and continually recalibrate their religious self-understandings. Ultimately, this research points to the emergence of complex and hybrid identity trajectories shaped by ongoing interaction rather than by linear development or doctrinal indoctrination. Muslim youth identity in the digital age should therefore be understood as an open-ended process, one that unfolds through sustained engagement with heterogeneous religious discourses, affective communities, and algorithmically mediated communicative environments. Recognizing this complexity is essential for moving beyond simplistic portrayals of digital Islam as either a threat to authenticity or a vehicle for revival, and toward a more nuanced understanding of how religious subjectivities are formed, contested, and lived in contemporary digital contexts.

### ***Implications for Islamic Education in the Digital Era***

The implications of these findings point to the need to reconceptualize Islamic education in the digital era not merely as a process of instruction, but as a form of discursive intervention. The emergence of hybrid identities and persistent ideological tensions suggests that effective Islamic education must engage not only with the accuracy of religious content, but also with the ways in which that content is discursively framed and communicated. Strengthening digital literacy, critical interpretive capacities, and awareness of ideological positioning, therefore, becomes essential for enabling Muslim youth to navigate competing religious narratives in a reflective and responsible manner (Sari & Prasetya, 2022; Widjaja et al., 2022). By illustrating how identity hybridity, discursive tension, and ideological negotiation arise through specific linguistic and semiotic patterns, this study offers a substantive contribution to scholarship in Islamic education. It redirects analytical attention away from the question of whether social media influences Muslim identity toward a more nuanced examination of how Islamic identity is discursively produced, contested, and hybridized within digital environments. In doing so, the study positions Islamic education as a strategic actor with the capacity to cultivate reflective, moderate, and contextually grounded Muslim identities amid the complexities and challenges of the digital age.

### **Conclusion**

This study shows that Islamic education on social media functions not as a neutral channel of religious transmission but as a dynamic discursive arena where Muslim youth identity is actively produced, negotiated, and hybridized. Islamic educational content shapes identity through linguistic, visual, and interactional strategies that resonate with

youth culture, allowing religious values to be embedded within everyday digital practices. The findings also reveal a persistent tension between moderation-oriented and conservative Islamic discourses, each constructing different models of what it means to be a “good Muslim.” Moderation emphasizes tolerance and moral responsibility, while conservative narratives rely on absolutist language and rigid interpretive boundaries.

These competing discourses demonstrate that Muslim youth identity formation in digital spaces is neither linear nor uniform. Instead, identity emerges through continuous exposure to diverse and often conflicting ideological messages. Social media intensifies this process by collapsing multiple religious discourses into a shared environment, producing both opportunities for exploration and moments of identity strain. Digital platforms thus operate as new sites of religious socialization where Islamic norms are continually reconstructed through interaction, and online communities, including hijrah-oriented networks, serve simultaneously as sources of moral support and arenas of ideological contestation.

The study contributes to scientific and policy discussions by highlighting the need for a deeper examination of how religious meanings are constructed within digital environments. Future research should explore how Muslim youth interpret online religious narratives over time and how these interpretations shape self-understanding. For curriculum designers, the findings underscore the importance of integrating media literacy and digital discourse analysis into Islamic education to equip students with the skills needed to critically assess online religious content. For policymakers, the results point to the urgency of supporting structured digital religious literacy initiatives that promote moderation, reduce polarization, and encourage collaboration among educators, scholars, and digital content creators.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The focus on major social media platforms introduces platform bias, and the six-month observation period limits the ability to capture long-term shifts in discourse and identity development. Additionally, as with all Critical Discourse Analysis, interpretation is influenced by the researcher's subjectivity despite triangulation and peer debriefing. These limitations clarify the study's analytical boundaries while opening pathways for future research, including multi-platform comparisons, longitudinal studies, and mixed-methods approaches to deepen understanding of Islamic education, digital media, and Muslim youth identity formation.

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