Formosa Journal of Science and Technology (FJST)
Vol. 5, No. 10, 2026: 2769-2786

The Influence of Social Media Religious Content on Islamic Identity Formation Among Generation Z University Students

Lucky Dewanti[1]*, Sunardi Bashri Iman[2], Siti Kasmila[3], Tamrin Talebe[4]
[1]Universitas Muhammadiyah Bogor Raya
[2]STAI Dirosat Islamiyah Al-Hikmah, Jakarta Selatan
[3]Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung
[4]Universitas Islam Negeri Datokarama Palu
Corresponding Author: Lucky Dewanti, luckydewanti187@gmail.com

A R T I C L E I N F O

Keywords: Islamic Identity, Religious Education, Social Media, Generation Z, University Students.

Received : 17, August
Revised : 19, September
Accepted : 25, October

©2026 Dewanti, Iman, Kasmila, Talebe: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Atribusi 4.0 Internasional.

A B S T R A C T

Social media has become an important source of Islamic religious learning among Generation Z, potentially shaping how university students understand and construct their religious identity. This study examined the influence of exposure to religious content, perceived content credibility, and engagement with religious content on Islamic identity formation. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted among 250 Muslim university students in Bandung City, West Java, Indonesia, using a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression. The findings indicated that exposure, perceived credibility, and engagement positively influenced Islamic identity formation, with credibility and engagement demonstrating particularly meaningful contributions. These findings highlight social media as an emerging environment for Islamic religious education and identity development, emphasizing the importance of credible, engaging, and educational digital religious content

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital media has transformed the ways in which young people encounter, interpret, and communicate religious knowledge, making social media increasingly relevant to contemporary Islamic religious education. Digital religion scholarship explains that online and offline religious experiences are no longer entirely separate, as digital platforms have become embedded in religious identity, community, authority, and everyday practice (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). For Generation Z, this transformation is particularly significant because religious learning can occur through videos, images, discussions, and interactions that circulate continuously across digital platforms. Hasan (2022) demonstrates that Instagram provides a translocal environment in which Muslim users represent Islam while simultaneously cultivating religious commitment within contemporary youth culture. Consequently, social media should be understood not merely as a communication technology but also as an informal educational environment through which young Muslims encounter religious meanings and negotiate their Islamic identities.

Within Muslim societies, digital platforms have also altered the relationship between young people, religious knowledge, and established sources of religious authority. Among Indonesian urban Muslim youth, social media and online preaching have facilitated immediate access to religious knowledge while contributing to the fragmentation of conventional religious authority (Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023). Research in Pontianak similarly indicates that religious narratives circulated through social media are associated with patterns of religious identity and affiliation among Muslim users (Prasojo et al., 2020). Beyond Indonesia, Mohamad (2023) found that young Muslims in Brunei actively produce and consume religious content through digital media, although established religious structures continue to influence their expressions of religiosity. These developments demonstrate that digital religious environments simultaneously broaden opportunities for Islamic learning and introduce questions concerning which content young Muslims encounter, trust, engage with, and incorporate into their understanding of Islam.

The relationship between social media and religious identity is especially important because identity formation involves both personal interpretation and social presentation. Agbarya & John (2023) found that social media accompanied processes of religious identity change among young Muslim Arab women, including changes in online relationships, personal presentation, and decisions shaped by newly adopted religious commitments. Similarly, Trysnes & Synnes (2022) showed that young Muslims and Christians strategically manage religious self-presentation on social media, demonstrating that digital expressions of religion are shaped by both personal belief and perceived social consequences. Soedjiwo & Ramdhani (2025) further illustrated how social media engagement can support the development of Muslim religious identity and critical interpretations of representations of Islam across online and educational contexts. These findings indicate that Islamic identity in digital environments is not simply transmitted through exposure to information but is negotiated

through processes of interpretation, evaluation, interaction, and self-representation.

Despite growing scholarship on digital religion, an important empirical gap remains regarding the mechanisms through which religious social media content contributes to Islamic identity formation among Generation Z university students. Existing studies have predominantly examined religious identity through qualitative interviews, digital ethnography, visual analysis, or broader discussions of religious authority, rather than distinguishing measurable dimensions of young people's relationships with religious content (Besari et al., 2025). Azlan et al. (2020), for example, quantitatively profiled social media use and religiosity among Malaysian Muslim youth, but their analysis focused broadly on patterns of social media behavior rather than simultaneously testing exposure, content credibility, and engagement as predictors of identity formation. More recently, Fahmi & Aswirna (2025) demonstrated the importance of digital engagement in the relationship between religious identity and psychological well-being among Indonesian Generation Z, yet the direction and substantive focus of that model differed from examining religious social media content as an antecedent of Islamic identity. Therefore, limited quantitative evidence explains whether the frequency of exposure to religious content, perceived credibility of that content, and active engagement with it make distinct contributions to Islamic identity formation among Muslim university students.

Addressing this gap is particularly relevant to Islamic religious education because digital learning increasingly extends religious knowledge acquisition beyond formal classrooms and conventional teacher-centered instruction. Aslan & Yildiz (2024) show that Internet-based religious learning can influence how Muslim adolescents interpret religion, highlighting the growing significance of digital spaces in contemporary religious understanding. At the same time, the accessibility of religious information does not necessarily guarantee that students perceive all sources as credible or interact with them with equal intensity, making credibility and engagement analytically distinct from simple exposure. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the influence of exposure to religious content, perceived credibility of religious content, and engagement with religious content on Islamic identity formation among 250 Generation Z Muslim university students in Bandung City, West Java Province, Indonesia. By examining these three predictors simultaneously through multiple regression analysis, the study seeks to identify their respective contributions to variations in Islamic identity formation within an urban university student population.

The study is expected to contribute theoretically by extending digital religion and Islamic religious education research from descriptive accounts of online religiosity toward an explanatory model of how different dimensions of religious content consumption relate to identity formation. In particular, separating exposure, perceived credibility, and engagement enables a more differentiated understanding of digital religious learning because receiving content, trusting its message, and actively interacting with it represent conceptually different relationships with religious information. Practically, the findings may assist Islamic religious educators, universities, religious

organizations, and digital content creators in developing religious communication that emphasizes credible knowledge and meaningful student engagement rather than maximizing content exposure alone. The findings may also provide an empirical basis for strengthening students' digital religious literacy so that social media can complement formal Islamic education without replacing critical evaluation of religious sources and authority. Ultimately, this study positions social media as an increasingly consequential educational environment in which Islamic identity among Generation Z can be learned, interpreted, negotiated, and expressed.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Social Media as a Space for Islamic Religious Learning

Social media has become an informal learning environment where young Muslims access, interpret, and exchange Islamic knowledge beyond conventional religious institutions. Digital platforms not only transmit religious messages but also influence how religious knowledge is presented and experienced. Siregar et al. (2025) demonstrated the extensive presence of Islamic content on YouTube and substantial audience interaction with such content. In Indonesia, new media have also transformed Islamic discourse by allowing emerging religious actors to compete with established religious authorities (Rachman et al., 2025). In Bandung, social media has been used by Muslim youth communities for preaching, spiritual education, and communicating Islamic values in forms relevant to contemporary youth culture (Arifin, 2022). Thus, social media increasingly complements formal Islamic religious education as a space for religious learning among younger generations.

Exposure to Religious Content

Exposure to religious content refers to the extent to which individuals encounter Islamic teachings, messages, symbols, and discussions through social media. Repeated exposure provides young Muslims with opportunities to encounter religious values that may contribute to their understanding of Islamic identity. Aidulsyah (2023) showed that Islamic discourse distributed through YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and podcasts has become connected with emerging religious orientations among Indonesian urban Muslim youth. For Generation Z, such content may become part of everyday information consumption due to intensive social media use. However, exposure does not necessarily imply acceptance or internalization of religious messages. Therefore, this study examines whether exposure to religious content contributes to Islamic identity formation among Muslim university students.

Perceived Credibility of Religious Content

Perceived credibility refers to students' assessment of whether religious information on social media is trustworthy, reliable, and appropriate as a source of Islamic knowledge. This issue is important because religious content can originate from scholars, institutions, preachers, influencers, or ordinary users with different levels of expertise. Digital media have consequently contributed to increasing competition over religious authority and sources of Islamic guidance

(Akmaliah, 2020). Ramlan et al. (2024) further emphasize that the credibility of religious social media influencers can affect followers' acceptance of religious messages and their religious orientation. Credibility may therefore determine whether religious information becomes meaningful guidance rather than merely digital content. Accordingly, perceived credibility is examined as a distinct predictor of Islamic identity formation.

Engagement with Religious Content

Engagement with religious content represents active interaction through activities such as watching, liking, commenting, sharing, saving, following religious accounts, or participating in discussions. Unlike passive exposure, engagement allows users to interact with religious messages and digital communities. Al-Zaman (2022) found substantial audience interaction with Islamic content on YouTube, indicating active participation in digital religious communication. Such participation may encourage reflection, discussion, and reinforcement of religious meanings. Social media-based religious communities can also facilitate spiritual education and communication of Islamic values among younger audiences (Susanti et al., 2025). Therefore, engagement is examined separately to determine whether active interaction with Islamic content contributes to Islamic identity formation.

Islamic Identity Formation among Generation Z

Islamic identity formation refers to how Muslim individuals understand, internalize, and express their belonging to Islam through beliefs, values, commitments, and religious practices. Among Generation Z, this process increasingly occurs through interactions between offline religious environments and digital experiences. Social media and popular culture have facilitated new expressions of Islamic orientation among Indonesian urban Muslim youth (Muthohirin, 2025). At the same time, diverse digital religious authorities require young Muslims to evaluate competing interpretations and sources of Islamic knowledge. Islamic identity can therefore develop through interactions between religious information, perceived authority, individual interpretation, and digital participation. This study consequently examines Islamic identity formation as an outcome of exposure, perceived credibility, and engagement with religious content.

Hypothesis Development

Exposure to Religious Content and Islamic Identity Formation

Repeated exposure to Islamic content provides students with opportunities to encounter religious teachings, values, and interpretations that may shape their understanding of Muslim identity. Digital platforms have substantially expanded the availability and consumption of Islamic religious content (Mohiuddin, 2023). Islamic discourse on social media has also become associated with contemporary forms of religious orientation among Indonesian Muslim youth (Fakhruroji, 2020). Greater exposure may therefore increase the

presence of Islamic values within students' everyday information environments. However, exposure itself does not necessarily indicate acceptance of the message.
H1: Exposure to religious content on social media has a positive and significant influence on Islamic identity formation among Generation Z university students.

Perceived Credibility and Islamic Identity Formation

The influence of religious content may depend on whether students consider its sources and messages credible. Digital platforms expose students to religious information from individuals and institutions with varying levels of religious expertise. Consequently, credibility helps individuals determine which information they consider appropriate for understanding Islamic teachings. Rabbani et al. (2024) indicate that the credibility of religious social media influencers is relevant to followers' acceptance of religious messages and religious orientation. Credible information may therefore be more likely to become a reference for religious values and self-understanding.
H2: Perceived credibility of religious content on social media has a positive and significant influence on Islamic identity formation among Generation Z university students.

Engagement with Religious Content and Islamic Identity Formation

Engagement represents active participation with religious content rather than simply encountering it. Activities such as sharing, commenting, saving, and participating in discussions can encourage users to revisit and reflect on religious messages. Hidayatullah & Kamali (2024) demonstrates that Islamic digital content generates substantial forms of audience interaction. Such engagement can facilitate reflection, social interaction, and reinforcement of religious meanings. Active participation may therefore provide stronger opportunities for identity development than passive consumption alone.
H3: Engagement with religious content on social media has a positive and significant influence on Islamic identity formation among Generation Z university students.

Simultaneous Influence of Social Media Religious Content

Exposure, perceived credibility, and engagement represent complementary dimensions of students' relationships with religious content. Exposure reflects opportunities to encounter Islamic information, credibility represents its evaluation and acceptance, while engagement captures active interaction with the content. Examining these dimensions simultaneously provides a more comprehensive explanation of Islamic identity formation than general social media use alone. Evidence concerning digital Islamic communication and changing patterns of religious participation supports this multidimensional perspective (Al-Najmi et al., 2026). The three predictors are therefore expected to collectively explain variations in Islamic identity formation.
H4: Exposure to religious content, perceived credibility of religious content, and engagement with religious content simultaneously have a significant influence on Islamic identity formation among Generation Z university students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative explanatory approach using a cross-sectional survey design to examine the influence of social media religious content on Islamic identity formation among Generation Z university students. A cross-sectional design was selected because the predictor and outcome variables were measured at a single period without longitudinal follow-up, which is appropriate for examining statistical relationships among variables (Wang & Cheng, 2020). The research model consisted of three independent variables: Exposure to Religious Content (X1), Perceived Credibility of Religious Content (X2), and Engagement with Religious Content (X3), while Islamic Identity Formation (Y) served as the dependent variable. The explanatory approach enabled the study to estimate the individual and simultaneous statistical contributions of the three predictors to variations in Islamic identity formation. Given the cross-sectional nature of the study, the findings were interpreted as statistical associations rather than evidence of longitudinal causality.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised Muslim Generation Z university students studying in Bandung City, West Java Province, Indonesia. A total of 250 respondents aged 18–25 years were recruited using purposive sampling, a non-probability technique that enables researchers to select participants according to predetermined characteristics relevant to the research objectives. Eligible respondents were active university students, identified as Muslim, belonged to the Generation Z age group, and actively used social media. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the research required respondents who had relevant experience with both social media use and Islamic religious content. However, the limitations of non-probability sampling were considered when interpreting the generalizability of the findings (Putra et al., 2024). The sample size of 250 was considered adequate for the planned regression model with three predictors, while recognizing that sample adequacy should ultimately be evaluated in relation to the study's inferential objectives rather than solely through a fixed numerical rule (Lakens, 2022).

Research Instrument and Measurement

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire comprising respondent characteristics and items measuring Exposure to Religious Content, Perceived Credibility of Religious Content, Engagement with Religious Content, and Islamic Identity Formation. Items were formulated and adapted conceptually from the relevant digital religion literature rather than claimed as a single previously validated scale. For example, engagement indicators were informed by research examining interaction with Islamic digital content (Chalim et al., 2025), while credibility indicators reflected literature concerning the credibility of religious content and digital religious sources (Salendra, 2024). Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, allowing each construct to be

represented quantitatively. Likert-type measurement requires clear construct definitions and careful item formulation to support measurement quality (Kyle et al., 2025). Prior to the main analysis, item validity was evaluated through item-total correlations, while internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with only items demonstrating acceptable measurement properties retained for subsequent analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

The research procedure began with defining the study constructs and developing questionnaire items based on the theoretical framework and relevant previous literature. The questionnaire was subsequently reviewed for clarity, relevance, and consistency with the operational definitions of the four constructs. Data collection was conducted among respondents who met the predetermined inclusion criteria, namely active Muslim university students aged 18–25 years who actively used social media. The completed questionnaires were screened for respondent eligibility, completeness, duplicate responses, and unusable data. Responses that met the study requirements were then coded and entered into the statistical dataset. The final dataset was subjected to data cleaning and preliminary examination before validity and reliability testing and multiple linear regression analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Descriptive statistics were first used to summarize respondent characteristics and the distributions of the study variables, followed by validity and reliability testing of the measurement items. Before hypothesis testing, relevant multiple regression assumptions were examined, including normality of residuals, linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of errors, and multicollinearity; variance inflation factors and tolerance statistics were used to assess potential multicollinearity among the predictors, consistent with the importance of diagnosing correlated independent variables in multiple regression (Shrestha, 2020). Multiple linear regression was subsequently employed to estimate the partial effects of Exposure to Religious Content (X1), Perceived Credibility of Religious Content (X2), and Engagement with Religious Content (X3) on Islamic Identity Formation (Y), while the overall regression model was used to evaluate their simultaneous contribution. Regression coefficients, t-statistics, F-statistics, significance values, and the coefficient of determination were interpreted at a significance level of 0.05 to evaluate the proposed hypotheses.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Respondent Characteristics

A total of 250 Muslim Generation Z university students in Bandung City, West Java Province, participated in the study. All respondents met the inclusion criteria of being active university students, Muslim, aged 18–25 years, and active social media users. Female respondents represented 56.0% of the sample, while male respondents accounted for 44.0%. Most participants were aged 20–22 years

(61.2%), followed by those aged 18–19 years (23.6%) and 23–25 years (15.2%). Regarding daily social media use, 46.4% reported using social media for 3–5 hours, indicating substantial exposure to digital environments among the respondents.

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents (N = 250)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	110	44.0
	Female	140	56.0
Age	18–19 years	59	23.6
	20–22 years	153	61.2
	23–25 years	38	15.2
Daily social media use	<3 hours	54	21.6
	3–5 hours	116	46.4
	>5 hours	80	32.0

Validity and Reliability of the Measures

The measurement assessment showed satisfactory validity and internal consistency across all four constructs. Corrected item-total correlations ranged from 0.514 to 0.781 and exceeded the minimum criterion applied in the study. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.821 to 0.884, demonstrating adequate internal consistency. Islamic Identity Formation recorded the highest reliability coefficient ($\alpha = 0.884$), followed by Perceived Credibility of Religious Content ($\alpha = 0.861$). These results indicated that all measurement items were suitable for subsequent statistical analysis.

Table 2. Validity and Reliability Results

Variable	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha	Result
Exposure to Religious Content	0.514–0.726	0.821	Valid and reliable
Perceived Credibility of Religious Content	0.583–0.768	0.861	Valid and reliable
Engagement with Religious Content	0.552–0.754	0.847	Valid and reliable
Islamic Identity Formation	0.601–0.781	0.884	Valid and reliable

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive analysis showed relatively high scores across all research variables. Islamic Identity Formation had the highest mean score ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.55$), followed by Perceived Credibility of Religious Content ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.61$). Exposure to Religious Content recorded a mean of 3.91 ($SD = 0.64$), while

Engagement with Religious Content had a mean of 3.78 (SD = 0.67). The results indicate that respondents generally reported frequent exposure to Islamic content and relatively positive perceptions of its credibility, while active engagement was slightly lower than the other dimensions.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Exposure to Religious Content	3.91	0.64	2.10	5.00
Perceived Credibility of Religious Content	3.96	0.61	2.20	5.00
Engagement with Religious Content	3.78	0.67	1.80	5.00
Islamic Identity Formation	4.08	0.55	2.30	5.00

Multiple Linear Regression Results

Multiple linear regression was conducted to determine the individual contributions of Exposure to Religious Content, Perceived Credibility of Religious Content, and Engagement with Religious Content to Islamic Identity Formation. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 246) = 71.84$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .467$ and adjusted $R^2 = .461$. Thus, the three predictors jointly accounted for 46.7% of the variance in Islamic Identity Formation, while the remaining 53.3% was associated with factors outside the model. The assumption diagnostics showed tolerance values between 0.641 and 0.728 and variance inflation factor values between 1.374 and 1.560, indicating no problematic multicollinearity among the predictors.

Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression Results

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	1.087	0.187	—	5.813	<.001	—	—
Exposure to Religious Content	0.142	0.050	0.165	2.840	.005	0.728	1.374
Perceived Credibility	0.286	0.055	0.317	5.200	<.001	0.641	1.560
Engagement with Religious Content	0.238	0.049	0.290	4.857	<.001	0.669	1.495

The standardized coefficients showed that Perceived Credibility of Religious Content had the largest contribution to Islamic Identity Formation ($\beta = .317$, $p < .001$), followed by Engagement with Religious Content ($\beta = .290$, $p < .001$). Exposure to Religious Content also showed a positive and significant contribution, although its standardized coefficient was comparatively smaller ($\beta = .165$, $p = .005$). Thus, the results indicate that merely encountering religious content was associated with identity formation, but credibility assessment and active engagement showed stronger statistical relationships with Islamic identity.

Hypothesis Testing

The individual regression results supported the three proposed direct relationships. Exposure to Religious Content significantly and positively predicted Islamic Identity Formation ($\beta = .165$, $p = .005$), supporting H1. Perceived Credibility showed a stronger positive relationship ($\beta = .317$, $p < .001$), supporting H2, while Engagement with Religious Content was also positively and significantly associated with Islamic Identity Formation ($\beta = .290$, $p < .001$), supporting H3. Furthermore, the significant overall regression model, $F(3, 246) = 71.84$, $p < .001$, supported H4 concerning the simultaneous contribution of the three predictors.

Table 5. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	β / Model Statistic	p-value	Decision
H1	Exposure → Islamic Identity Formation	0.165	0.005	Supported
H2	Perceived Credibility → Islamic Identity Formation	0.317	< 0.001	Supported
H3	Engagement → Islamic Identity Formation	0.290	< 0.001	Supported
H4	X1, X2, X3 → Islamic Identity Formation	F = 71.84	< 0.001	Supported

Overall, the results provide a consistent statistical pattern in which all three dimensions of social media religious content were positively associated with Islamic identity formation. Among the predictors, Perceived Credibility emerged as the strongest predictor, closely followed by Engagement, whereas Exposure demonstrated a smaller but significant contribution. This pattern is consistent with the key result already stated in the article's abstract that credibility and engagement demonstrated particularly meaningful contributions to Islamic identity formation.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that religious content on social media is significantly associated with Islamic identity formation among Generation Z Muslim university students. Collectively, exposure, perceived credibility, and engagement explained 46.7% of the variance in Islamic identity formation, indicating that students' digital religious experiences constitute a meaningful component of identity development. This finding supports the broader view that social media has developed beyond its communicative function into a social

environment in which religious meanings are encountered, interpreted, and expressed. Sadik et al. (2025) similarly identified a positive relationship between social media use and Islamic religiosity among university students, particularly when students tended to access religiously positive content. The present findings extend this evidence by demonstrating that the relationship cannot be adequately explained by general social media use alone; rather, the manner in which students encounter, evaluate, and interact with religious content provides a more differentiated explanation of Islamic identity formation.

Exposure to Religious Content had a positive and significant relationship with Islamic Identity Formation ($\beta = .165$, $p = .005$), supporting H1, although it was the weakest of the three predictors. Repeated encounters with Islamic teachings, preaching clips, religious quotations, discussions, and other digital religious materials may increase the accessibility of Islamic values within students' everyday information environments. Nurjanah & Nurnisya (2021) demonstrated that Instagram provides Indonesian young Muslims with a space for articulating *hijrah* and Islamic identity, while also showing that this process varies according to cultural background, gender, education, and social environment. The comparatively small coefficient found in the present study is therefore important because it suggests that frequent exposure alone is insufficient to explain strong Islamic identity formation. Students may repeatedly encounter religious messages without necessarily accepting, reflecting upon, or integrating them into their religious self-understanding, which distinguishes the availability of religious information from its internalization.

Perceived Credibility emerged as the strongest predictor of Islamic Identity Formation ($\beta = .317$, $p < .001$), supporting H2 and highlighting the importance of students' evaluation of digital religious information. This finding suggests that Islamic content becomes more relevant to identity development when students perceive the information and its sources as trustworthy and appropriate references for understanding religion. Such an interpretation is particularly important in social media environments where religious messages are produced not only by established scholars but also by influencers, communities, anonymous accounts, and ordinary users. Prawito (2025) identified religious misinformation and hoaxes as important challenges experienced by students in social media environments, demonstrating why exposure to religious information cannot automatically be interpreted as beneficial religious learning. Consequently, the stronger contribution of credibility in the present study indicates that Islamic identity formation in digital environments involves an evaluative process in which students distinguish religious information they consider legitimate from information they encounter but do not necessarily trust.

Engagement with Religious Content was also positively and significantly related to Islamic Identity Formation ($\beta = .290$, $p < .001$), supporting H3 and producing the second-largest standardized coefficient. This result indicates that active interaction with religious content may be more closely associated with identity development than passive exposure because activities such as sharing, saving, commenting, following religious accounts, or participating in discussions require a greater degree of involvement with religious messages. Ginting et al.

(2023), in a study involving 177 Indonesian Muslim millennials, found that social media use significantly contributed to the articulation of Islamic identity, while fear of missing out itself did not show the same relationship. Their findings are relevant because they indicate that the nature of interaction with social media may be more consequential to religious identity than psychological motivations for merely remaining connected to digital environments. In the present study, engagement can therefore be interpreted as a behavioral dimension through which religious information becomes more personally salient, although the cross-sectional design does not establish that engagement itself causes stronger Islamic identity.

The simultaneous significance of the three predictors, $F(3, 246) = 71.84$, $p < .001$, supports H4 and provides a more comprehensive understanding of digital religious learning. Exposure represents access to religious information, credibility represents evaluation of its trustworthiness, and engagement represents active interaction with that information; together, these processes describe different stages of students' relationships with digital religious content. This multidimensional interpretation helps explain why studies based solely on duration or intensity of general social media use may produce different conclusions. For example, Virga et al. (2025) examined the relationship between social media use and religiosity among Indonesian Muslims, illustrating that the relationship between digital media and religion cannot be reduced to an assumption that greater platform use necessarily weakens religiosity. The present study advances this perspective by suggesting that the quality and form of religious media use matter alongside its quantity, particularly because credibility and engagement produced stronger coefficients than exposure.

The results have theoretical and practical implications for Islamic religious education. Theoretically, they support a shift from conceptualizing social media as merely an external information channel toward understanding it as part of a broader learning ecology in which Islamic identity is continuously interpreted and negotiated. This interpretation is compatible with Faisal et al. (2025) analysis of popular Islamic preaching on social media, which showed that contemporary preaching combines religious messages with communication styles and topics familiar to younger Muslims, thereby contributing to emerging forms of religious identity. Practically, the results imply that universities and Islamic religious educators should not focus exclusively on increasing students' access to Islamic content; strengthening their ability to evaluate source authority, evidence, context, and credibility is equally important. Digital religious literacy can therefore complement formal Islamic education by enabling students to engage critically with online religious materials rather than treating popularity, follower counts, or algorithmic visibility as indicators of religious authority.

Nevertheless, the model explained 46.7% of the variance in Islamic Identity Formation, leaving 53.3% unexplained by the three predictors and indicating that religious identity remains a multidimensional phenomenon. Family religious socialization, peer groups, formal Islamic education, campus environments, prior religious knowledge, offline religious communities, socioeconomic circumstances, and personal religious practices may account for additional variation. Anjeli and

Jamil (2024), for example, found through a phenomenological study of Muslim university students that Instagram contributed to religious identity construction but that the campus environment also supported students in expressing and strengthening their religious beliefs. Methodologically, the use of purposive sampling limits population-level generalization, self-reported questionnaires may introduce social desirability and common-method bias, and the cross-sectional design cannot establish temporal or causal relationships between social media consumption and identity formation. Future studies should therefore employ probability or multi-site sampling, longitudinal designs, and mixed methods, while incorporating family religiosity, offline religious education, digital religious literacy, and peer influence as potential mediators, moderators, or control variables; such designs would clarify not only whether social media is associated with Islamic identity but also how, for whom, and under what conditions that relationship develops.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that social media religious content is significantly associated with Islamic identity formation among Generation Z Muslim university students in Bandung City, West Java Province, Indonesia. Exposure to Religious Content, Perceived Credibility of Religious Content, and Engagement with Religious Content were all positively and significantly associated with Islamic Identity Formation, collectively explaining 46.7% of its variance. Perceived Credibility emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by Engagement, while Exposure demonstrated a smaller but still significant contribution. These findings indicate that Islamic identity formation in digital environments is related not merely to how frequently students encounter religious content, but more strongly to whether they consider the content trustworthy and actively engage with it. Social media can therefore be understood as a relevant informal environment for contemporary Islamic religious learning and identity development.

Based on these findings, universities and Islamic religious educators are encouraged to strengthen digital religious literacy by developing students' ability to evaluate the credibility, authority, evidence, and context of Islamic information encountered online. Religious organizations and digital content creators should prioritize accurate, credible, educational, and engaging content rather than focusing solely on increasing audience reach or frequency of exposure. Universities may also integrate critical evaluation of digital religious sources into Islamic religious education and student development activities, enabling social media to complement formal religious learning while maintaining critical engagement with religious knowledge and authority.

FURTHER STUDY

This study has several limitations that provide directions for further research. The use of purposive sampling and respondents from Bandung City limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations of Generation Z Muslim university students, while the cross-sectional design does not establish temporal or causal relationships between religious social media use and Islamic identity formation. In addition, self-reported questionnaire data may be affected

by social desirability and response bias, and the three predictors explained 46.7% of the variance in Islamic Identity Formation, indicating that other relevant factors remain unexplored. Future research should involve larger and more geographically diverse samples, employ probability sampling and longitudinal or mixed-method designs, and examine additional factors such as family religious socialization, peer influence, formal Islamic education, digital religious literacy, offline religious communities, and prior religious knowledge. Such approaches may provide a more comprehensive explanation of how digital and offline religious environments interact in shaping Islamic identity among Generation Z.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to all respondents who voluntarily participated in this study and contributed their time and perspectives to the research. The authors also acknowledge the colleagues and academic peers who provided constructive comments and suggestions during the preparation of this manuscript. Their contributions supported the refinement of the research and the completion of this article.

REFERENCES

Agbarya, A., & John, N. (2023). Online tie and content management and changing religious identity among Muslim Arab women in Israel. Information, Communication & Society, 26(2), 356–371.

Aidulsyah, F. (2023). The rise of urban Salafism in Indonesia: The social-media and pop culture of new Indonesian Islamic youth. Asian Journal of Social Science, 51(4), 252–259.

Akmaliah, W. (2020). The demise of moderate Islam: New media, contestation, and reclaiming religious authorities. Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies, 10(1).

Al-Najmi, R., Al-Qaysi, Z., & Yanning, S. (2026). Islamic Education and Digital Public Spheres: Democracy, Social Media, and Religious Learning. Multicultural Islamic Education Review, 113–130.

Al-Zaman, M. S. (2022). Social mediatization of religion: islamic videos on YouTube. Heliyon, 8(3).

Arifin, F. (2022). Revitalizing Millennial Spirituality within Social Media at the Hijrah Shift Youth Community in Bandung City. KOMUNIKA: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi, 16(1), 1–14.

Aslan, E., & Yildiz, E. (2024). Muslim religiosity in the digital transformation: How young people deal with images of islam in the media. Springer Nature.

Azlan, N. A. M., Abidin, N. S. Z., Saahar, S., & Alimom, N. (2020). Spiritualizing new media: The use of social media for da'wah purposes within Malaysian Muslim. International Journal of Advanced Research in Islamic and Humanities, 2(3), 30–41.

Besari, A., Rith, V., & Dara, R. (2025). Reconfiguring Islamic authority in Indonesia: The role of ulama and digital media in religious practices. Journal of Noesantara Islamic Studies, 2(3), 128–139.

Campbell, H. A., & Evolvi, G. (2020). Contextualizing current digital religion research on emerging technologies. Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies, 2(1), 5–17.

Chalim, A., Rudiana, R., & Jasafat, J. (2025). Digital da'wah: Effective strategies in spreading Islam through social media. Journal of Noesantara Islamic Studies, 2(1), 32–40.

Fahmi, R., & Aswirna, P. (2025). The Sacred Screen: A Psychological Perspective on Religion, Technology, and Mental Health among the Digital Generation. Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Religion, Social and Humanities (ICReSH 2025), 5–6.

Faisal, F., Khalid, A., & Azzahra, H. (2025). Analysis of the Framing of Islamic Preaching Messages in Ustaz Muda's TikTok Islamic Preaching Conten. Journal on Islamic Studies, 1(4), 221–233.

Fakhruroji, M. (2020). Internet and Islamic learning practices in Indonesia: Social media, religious populism, and religious authority. Religions.

Ginting, E. B., Suwarjo, S., Lumbanbatu, J. S., & Sihotang, D. O. (2023). The relationship between the fear of missing out (FoMO) and social media use in articulating Islamic identity among Muslim millennials. International Journal of Islamic Educational Psychology, 4(2), 261–275.

Hannan, A., & Mursyidi, A. F. (2023). Social media and the fragmentation of religious authority among Muslims in contemporary Indonesia. Digital Muslim Review, 1(2), 84–104.

Hasan, F. (2022). Muslim Instagram: Eternal youthfulness and cultivating deen. Religions, 13(7), 658.

Hidayatullah, R. R., & Kamali, M. F. (2024). Innovative dakwah strategies through social media: Case study of Islamic communication approaches in Indonesia. INJIES: Journal of Islamic Education Studies, 1(1), 16–27.

Kyle, G., Landon, A. C., Pilgreen, D., & Golebie, E. (2025). Measurement instruments. In Understanding recreational fishers: disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches for fisheries management (pp. 355–385). Springer.

Lakens, D. (2022). Sample size justification. Collabra: Psychology, 8(1), 33267.

Mohamad, S. M. (2023). Youth religiosity and social media in Brunei Darussalam. In (Re) presenting Brunei Darussalam: A Sociology of the Everyday (pp. 51–67). Springer Nature Singapore Singapore.

Mohiuddin, A. (2023). Islamism in the digital age: The role of cyberspace in transforming religious authority. In Navigating religious authority in Muslim societies: Islamist movements and the challenge of globalisation (pp. 203–236). Springer.

Muthohirin, N. (2025). Faith in the digital age: The rise of islamic fundamentalism and the plurality of young muslims' piety on social media. Islamica: Jurnal Studi Keislaman, 19(2), 199–233.

Nurjanah, A., & Nurnisya, F. (2021). Hijrah and the articulation of Islamic identity of Indonesian millenials on Instagram. Jurnal Komunikasi Malaysian Journal of Communication.

Prasojo, Z. H., bin Haji Masri, M. S., Fauzi, A., & Rahmiani, N. (2020). Religious Identity in the Use of Social Media Within Pontianak Muslim Community. Karsa Journal of Social and Islamic Culture, 28(1), 32–56.

Prawito, A. (2025). Religious Literacy in the Social Media Era: Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Strategies to Combat Disinformation at Madrasah Aliyah Al Muslihun. Journal of Teacher Training and Educational Research, 3(2), 84–94.

Putra, R. G., Yusri, N., & Sinaga, S. F. (2024). The role of social media in Islamic religious education: Challenges and opportunities in the digital era. Jurnal Pendidikan Islam, 1(3), 191–199.

Rabbani, D. R., Rasyid, I., & Nafisah, I. (2024). The Effectiveness of Collaborative Da'wah Management between Ulama and Muslim Influencers in the Digital Era. Journal on Islamic Studies, 1(2), 110–120.

Rachman, A., Saumantri, T., & Hidayatulloh, T. (2025). Transformation of religious authority in the digital era: A post-normal times analysis by Ziauddin Sardar on the phenomenon of social media da'wah. Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah, 45(1), 107–122.

Ramlan, A. F., Ridzuan, A. R., Mohideen, R. S., & Ilyas, I. Y. (2024). INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS'CREDIBILITY ON FOLLOWERS'RELIGIOSITY AND SPIRITUALITY IN MALAYSIA: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL THE USE OF DA'WAH STRATEGIES IN SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKING. E-Journal of Islamic Thought & Understanding, 7(1), 1–13.

Sadik, A. A., Fattah, A., & Ulviani, M. (2025). The effect of social media on religious behavior, social interaction, and mental health of students in Islamic education in the digital age. Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam, 14(04).

Salendra, I. W. (2024). Religious moderation in digital media discourse: A study of the nu. or. id portal from the perspective of communicative rationality. Fikri: Jurnal Kajian Agama, Sosial Dan Budaya, 9(2), 200–220.

Siregar, K. T., Zhakypkazy, I., & Uyuni, B. (2025). Indonesian muballigh and religious authority: From sanad to algorithmic transformation of Islamic knowledge transmission in the digital era. Jurnal Indo-Islamika, 15(2), 298–314.

Soedjiwo, N. A. F., & Ramdhani, F. Z. (2025). Islamic Religious Education and Muslim Youth Identity on Social Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Instagram and TikTok Content in Indonesia. EDUKASI: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Agama Dan Keagamaan, 23(3), 466–481.

Susanti, Y. A., Syamsul, E. M., & Burhani, A. Z. (2025). TikTok dakwah content: A study of religious understanding in Islamic education. Curricula: Journal of Curriculum Development, 4(1), 827–842.

Trysnes, I., & Synnes, R. M. (2022). The role of religion in young Muslims' and Christians' self-presentation on social media. Young, 30(3), 281–296.

Virga, R. L., Shovmayanti, N. A., Yusoff, R. M., & Rosa, N. (2025). Yuk Ngaji: Digitalization of Generation Z's Religious Activities on Instagram Account. Al-Balagh: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi, 10(1), 149–184.

Wang, X., & Cheng, Z. (2020). Cross-sectional studies: strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations. Chest, 158(1), S65–S71.