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Islamic learning through social media among muslim youth: a systematic review of religious engagement, identity, and participation (2011–2026)

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ABSTRACT

Social media now sits alongside the mosque, family, and classroom as an ordinary setting in which Muslim youth encounter religious knowledge, yet evidence on Islamic learning remains fragmented across disciplines. This review addresses that fragmentation. Following PRISMA 2020 and the SPIDER framework, a Scopus search using TITLE-ABS-KEY(Islam AND "social media" AND ("Generation Z" OR youth)) identified 62 records published between 2011 and 2026. Screening based on document type, language, and topical relevance was documented through an auditable decision matrix, with an independent rule-based re-screening yielding 95.2% agreement (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.88$). Eighteen empirical journal articles were retained and appraised using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT 2018), with no study excluded on quality grounds. Two research questions examined how social media facilitates Islamic learning and religious engagement (RQ1) and the reported patterns of religious understanding, identity, and participation (RQ2). The synthesis shows that digital Islamic learning involves an ecology of access, interactive and multimodal instruction, and peer validation, making source credibility a core competence. Religious understanding, identity, and participation emerge as interconnected processes through which young Muslims engage with digital audiences. The review further suggests that digital spaces complement and reconfigure rather than displace established religious authority, which increasingly operates through interactive credibility and peer trust. Because the evidence is predominantly qualitative and concentrated in Indonesia, findings remain context-bounded. Key methodological gaps include validated measures of digital piety, controlled online–offline comparisons, and longitudinal research, providing directions for future studies.



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Introduction

The spread of networked digital media has reshaped how people encounter, learn, and practise religion. For Muslim youth in particular, platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter/X, and WhatsApp now sit alongside the mosque, the family, and the classroom as ordinary settings in which religious knowledge circulates and religious life is lived. Early work on the digitisation of the religious sphere already observed that mediated preaching offered young audiences a form of religious expression they experienced as modern and

relevant to their everyday lives (El Naggar, 2014). More recent scholarship treats social media not as a peripheral add-on but as a constitutive environment for contemporary youth religiosity (Mohamad, 2023; Shabdan, 2026). Muslim youth are frequently described as digital natives whose religious sensibilities develop in continuous contact with online content. Studies of lived religiosity among young Bruneian Muslims show that they question markers of piety, manage self-disclosure carefully, and negotiate intergenerational expectations through their everyday social media engagements (Mohamad, 2023). Parallel work on teenagers' social media use in the same region documents both the opportunities and the tensions that accompany heavy platform use in a Muslim-majority setting (Abdullah & Chan, 2016). Across these accounts, young people appear less as passive recipients than as active interpreters of the religious material they encounter.

Social media has also become a space for Islamic learning in a direct, pedagogical sense. Short messages, visual posts, and video content are used to convey religious instruction to young audiences, and empirical analyses of Islamic messaging on Twitter show measurable patterns of engagement between preachers and youthful followers (Hidayatullah & Hamzah, 2017). In Indonesia, the WhatsApp-based One Day One Juz movement mobilised well over a hundred thousand participants around the shared discipline of Qur'an reading, illustrating how a messaging application can host a semi-virtual devotional community (Nisa, 2018a). Instagram has similarly been used by young Muslim women to educate one another in becoming virtuous Muslims through visual da'wah (Nisa, 2018b).

Digital Islamic communication is closely tied to religious engagement and participation. Research on revolutionary youth in Iran traces how an online visual culture of selfies, shrines, and clerical imagery draws young people into religious and civic participation (Taherifard, 2022). In post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, social media has become an important source of religious knowledge that contributes to religious expression, experience, and identity formation among Muslim youth both online and offline (Shabdan, 2026). Such studies indicate that engagement is not confined to consumption; it extends into community formation and, at times, into offline religious activity. Questions of religious understanding recur throughout this literature. Among Gen Z activists in Solo, most young people reported obtaining their religious sources from social media and the internet, with consequences for how they understood moderate Islam (Fauzi & Pribadi, 2024). In Banda Aceh, a marked shift toward acquiring religious knowledge through digital media was associated with greater tolerance and a weaker association between religion and violence (Ahmad et al., 2025). Studies of Salafi youth in rural Sambas show how new media carry particular methodologies of Qur'anic interpretation into rural religious life (Syarif et al., 2023). These findings suggest that digital learning shapes not only how much young Muslims know but how they interpret what they learn.

Religious identity is a second persistent theme. Work on transnational immigrant Muslim youth shows how a young woman used social media to support her identity formation and to advance more just framings of Islam across school and online communities (Deroo & Mohamud, 2022). Analyses of "Muslim Instagram" describe a translocal visual space in which young Muslims sustain a sense of youthfulness while cultivating *deen* (Hasan, 2022), and studies of Muslim hipster or "Mipsterz" subcultures trace the sartorial self-fashioning of modest identities across digital diasporas (Demerdash, 2024). Earlier work on hijabista and hijabster cultures anticipated these negotiations of young Muslim women's identity through mass and social media (Williams & Kamaludeen, 2017), while ethnographic research on Korean Muslim youth shows Facebook being used to build acceptance and to rework identity online (Sheikh, 2020).

Religious participation completes this cluster of concerns. The ODOJ movement demonstrates how a digital platform can organise collective devotional practice at scale (Nisa, 2018a), and research on Indonesia's urban hijrah movement shows WhatsApp functioning as a symbolic environment in which religious identity and communal participation are continuously negotiated through daily messages and shared rituals (Abdurrahman et al., 2026). Studies of digital Islamist activism likewise describe how memes and videos attract attention while group rides, study circles, workshops, and charity cultivate sustained participation among youth (Herdiansah, 2026). Reading of sacred texts among diaspora youth further reminds us that online and offline religious practices often play complementary rather than competing roles (Ådna, 2019).

Despite this rich body of work, the evidence remains fragmented. Studies are spread across religious studies, media and communication, education, anthropology, and information science, and they employ divergent vocabularies for what is essentially a shared object of inquiry. Single-platform case studies predominate, and comparative synthesis across platforms and national contexts is rare. A prior systematic review of Generation Z's social media use from the perspective of digital and Islamic ethics signalled the value of consolidating this literature, but concentrated on ethics and digital literacy rather than on Islamic learning and religious engagement as such (Faizah et al., 2024). Concerns about the credibility of online Islamic information have been raised repeatedly, yet largely in isolation from the learning and identity literatures (Kadir et al., 2017). The gap this review addresses is therefore one of integration. What is missing is a

systematic, evidence-based synthesis that connects the learning, engagement, understanding, identity, and participation strands into a coherent account of the religious life of Muslim youth in digital environments. Assembling that account matters both for scholarship, which needs a clearer map of what has been established and what remains underexplored, and for educators and religious practitioners seeking to understand where young Muslims actually encounter religious knowledge.

Stated precisely, the gap is not a shortage of studies but the absence of an integrative account. Prior work has documented platform use, the negotiation of piety, and identity performance in particular settings, yet it has not explained how learning, engagement, and the dimensions of understanding, identity, and participation relate to one another as facets of a single phenomenon, nor whether the patterns reported in one national context recur in others. What remains contested is whether digital media weaken or merely reconfigure religious authority, and whether young Muslims are best understood as consumers or as producers of religious knowledge. The objective of this review is therefore to synthesise the empirical evidence in order to map these relationships and to specify, on the basis of that map, where the evidence is strong, where it is contested, and where it is missing. The review draws exclusively on a Scopus dataset assembled through a transparent, reproducible search, applies the SPIDER framework and PRISMA 2020 reporting, and organises the findings around two research questions. A systematic review design is appropriate because the object of inquiry is a dispersed, cross-disciplinary literature whose consolidation rather than the generation of new primary data is precisely what the field lacks (Snyder, 2019). Its contribution lies in bringing that literature into one analytical frame while maintaining a respectful, analytically neutral stance toward Islam and Muslim religious life.

To keep the synthesis consistent across heterogeneous studies, the review adopts working definitions of its central constructs. Muslim youth denotes adolescents and young adults commonly framed as Generation Z or young-adult Muslims who self-identify as Muslim; Islamic learning denotes the acquisition and construction of Islamic knowledge and practice through engagement with religious content; religious engagement denotes participatory involvement with religious content, actors, or communities online and offline; religious understanding, religious identity, and religious participation denote, respectively, how young Muslims interpret religious content, how they express and negotiate a Muslim self, and how they take part in religious activities and communities. These definitions guided coding and are applied consistently throughout. The review is guided by two questions. RQ1: How do digital spaces and social media facilitate Islamic learning and religious engagement among Muslim youth? RQ2: What patterns of religious understanding, identity, and participation are reported among Muslim youth in relation to their engagement with Islamic content on social media?

Method

Research Design

This study is a systematic literature review, a method suited to consolidating a dispersed body of evidence and clarifying what is known and what remains open on a defined question (Snyder, 2019). The review followed a structured protocol: a documented search, explicit eligibility criteria, transparent screening, appraisal of study quality, systematic data extraction, and a thematic synthesis of findings. Because the included studies employ qualitative, quantitative, and mixed designs, the synthesis is narrative and thematic rather than statistical, integrating findings across heterogeneous designs while preserving their context (Popay et al., 2006; Thomas & Harden, 2008).

PRISMA 2020

Reporting follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 statement (Page et al., 2021). The four PRISMA phases identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion structure the study-selection process reported in Section 3.1. All counts reported in the flow are derived from the actual dataset and screening decisions; no numbers were estimated or imputed.

SPIDER Framework

Eligibility and synthesis were guided by the SPIDER framework, which was designed for qualitative and mixed-methods evidence syntheses and is better suited than PICO to questions about experience and engagement (Cooke et al., 2012). SPIDER was applied as follows: Sample Muslim youth, Generation Z, young Muslims, Muslim adolescents, and young adult Muslims; Phenomenon of Interest digital spaces, social media, Islamic learning, Islamic content, digital Islamic communication, and religious engagement; Design qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, survey, interview, ethnography, content analysis, and digital observation; Evaluation Islamic learning, religious engagement, religious understanding, religious identity, religious participation, and related dimensions of religious life; and Research type empirical qualitative,

quantitative, and mixed-method studies. SPIDER informed the research questions, eligibility criteria, screening, extraction, and coding, but was not forced into the database search string.

Research Questions

Two research questions guided the review. RQ1 asks how digital spaces and social media facilitate Islamic learning and religious engagement among Muslim youth. RQ2 asks what patterns of religious understanding, identity, and participation are reported among Muslim youth in relation to their engagement with Islamic content on social media. Every major component of the review is traceable to one or both questions.

Information Source

Scopus was used as the single information source. Scopus offers broad, curated coverage of peer-reviewed literature across the social sciences and humanities, including the regional journals in which much research on Muslim youth and digital religion appears. Reliance on a single database is acknowledged as a limitation in Section 6. The export used for this review was retrieved in August 2026 and constitutes the primary evidence base.

Search Strategy

The search was executed in Scopus using a title–abstract–keyword query combining the core concepts of the review:

TITLE-ABS-KEY(Islam AND "social media" AND ("Generation Z" OR youth))

This string returned 62 records spanning 2011 to 2026, exported with full bibliographic metadata (authors, year, title, source, abstract, author and index keywords, document type, language, and DOI). No date filter was applied, so the temporal span reflects the coverage of the retrieved evidence rather than an imposed window. Grey literature and unpublished sources were not searched, and the search was neither silently replaced nor supplemented with additional strings; the reported dataset is exactly the set retrieved by this query. The full search string and the eligibility checklist are provided in Appendices B and C to support replication.

Eligibility Criteria

Studies were included when they (1) concerned Muslim youth, Generation Z, young Muslims, Muslim adolescents, or young adult Muslims; (2) examined social media or digital spaces; (3) substantively addressed at least one of Islamic learning, Islamic content, religious engagement, understanding, identity, or participation; (4) provided empirical or substantive scholarly evidence relevant to RQ1 or RQ2; (5) were written in English; and (6) were classified as journal articles with sufficient bibliographic information. Studies were excluded when they focused primarily on terrorism, violent extremism, radicalisation, political extremism, political campaigns, or Islamophobia; when they addressed general youth or social-media behaviour without substantive religious relevance; when they concerned non-Muslim populations or topics unrelated to the review; or when they were dissertations, theses, book chapters, conference proceedings, editorials, books, or reviews. Terms such as Islamism, Salafism, hijrah, piety, and religious authority did not trigger automatic exclusion; their substantive relevance to RQ1 and RQ2 was assessed first.

Table 1. <Eligibility checklist>

SPIDER element / criterion	Include if	Exclude if
Sample	Muslim youth, Generation Z, young Muslims, adolescents, or young-adult Muslims	Non-Muslim population; no youth/young-adult focus

SPIDER element / criterion	Include if	Exclude if
Phenomenon of Interest	Social media or digital spaces used for Islamic learning, content, communication, or religious engagement	Digital media peripheral; general (non-religious) social-media behaviour
Design	Empirical qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods study	No empirical or substantive scholarly evidence
Evaluation	Addresses Islamic learning, engagement, understanding, identity, or participation	None of these dimensions substantively addressed
Research type	Peer-reviewed journal article	Book, book chapter, conference paper, review, thesis, editorial
Language	English	Non-English (Indonesian, Malay, Spanish, etc.)
Topical exclusions	(Assessed for relevance first: Islamism, Salafism, hijrah, piety, authority are not auto-excluded)	Primary focus on terrorism, radicalisation, violent/political extremism, political campaigns, or Islamophobia
Bibliographic completeness	Sufficient metadata for identification (authors, year, title, source)	Insufficient bibliographic information

Study Selection and Screening Reproducibility

An internal screening matrix was built covering author, year, title, abstract, keywords, source, DOI, context, population, platform, design, RQ relevance, and the inclusion decision with reasons (Appendix Table A1). Relevance was assessed on the combination of title, abstract, and keywords rather than title alone. Because uniform full texts were not available within the dataset export, eligibility was determined at the level of abstract and metadata, and full-text confirmation is recommended before any confirmatory re-analysis.

The review was conducted by a single author, which places a premium on transparency and on procedures that allow others to reproduce the decisions. Two safeguards were used. First, every one of the 62 records is reported with its decision and reason in the auditable matrix (Appendix Table A1), so that any reader can independently verify or contest a decision. Second, to estimate the reproducibility of the screening, all 62 records were re-screened with an independent, pre-specified rule-based classifier that operationalised the eligibility criteria (document type, language, and the presence of inclusion versus exclusion terms in the title, abstract, and keywords) and the two sets of decisions were compared. Agreement was high: 95.2% observed agreement with a Cohen's kappa of 0.88, which indicates near-perfect agreement on the Landis and Koch benchmarks. The three discordant records Taherifard (2022), Herdiansah (2026), and Demerdash (2024) were borderline cases in which the rule-based classifier was more conservative and the manual decision to include followed a closer reading of the full record; each is retained with its rationale in Appendix Table A1. Formal dual-independent screening by a second reviewer, with kappa computed on human raters, is recommended for any confirmatory extension of this review and is noted among the limitations.

Table 2. <Full screening matrix>

No.	Study	Year	Basic eligibility	RQ1	RQ2	Decision	Reason
1	Monod et al.	2026	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Terrorism / radicalisation (Jihadist recruiters)
2	Rahman & Mufti	2021	Article; English	Y	Y	Include	Meets all inclusion criteria
3	Mohamad	2023	Book chapter	–	–	Exclude	Document type: book chapter (cited as context)
4	Kilo	2011	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Political analysis (Syria / Arab Spring)
5	Fauzi & Pribadi	2024	Article; English	Y	Y	Include	Meets all inclusion criteria
6	El-Farahaty	2019	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Political satire; not religious learning
7	Miftakhuddin	2020	Article; Indonesian	–	–	Exclude	Language: Indonesian

No.	Study	Year	Basic eligibility	RQ1	RQ2	Decision	Reason
8	Taherifard	2022	Article; English	Y	Y	Include	Meets all inclusion criteria
9	Zafri et al.	2023	Article; Malay	–	–	Exclude	Language: Malay
10	Deroo & Mohamud	2022	Article; English	Y	Y	Include	Meets all inclusion criteria
11	Cornet	2021	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Islamist cinema / political-cultural production
12	El Feki et al.	2015	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Sexuality / relationships focus
13	Zainal Abidin et al.	2025	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Classical text analysis; social media not the phenomenon
14	Ahmad et al.	2025	Article; English	Y	Y	Include	Meets all inclusion criteria
15	Faizah et al.	2024	Conference paper	–	–	Exclude	Document type: conference paper (cited as context)
16	Herdiansah	2026	Article; English	Y	Y	Include	Meets all inclusion criteria
17	Afolabi	2023	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Political protest (#EndSARS)
18	Salleh et al.	2020	Review	–	–	Exclude	Document type: review; terrorism focus
19	Kadir et al.	2017	Conference paper	–	–	Exclude	Document type: conference paper (cited as context)
20	Jules & Barton	2018	Book	–	–	Exclude	Document type: book
21	Nisa	2018	Article; English	Y	Y	Include	Meets all inclusion criteria
22	Yusoff et al.	2025	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	General social-media harm / wellbeing; not Islamic focus
23	Anoraga & Sakai	2023	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Civic nationalism / political focus
24	Sraieb-Koepp	2017	Book chapter	–	–	Exclude	Document type: book chapter; CVE
25	Allison et al.	2024	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Off-topic (rattlesnake perception)
26	Williams & Kamaludeen	2017	Review	–	–	Exclude	Document type: review (cited as context)
27	Chakim	2022	Article; English	Y	Y	Include	Meets all inclusion criteria
28	Mazza et al.	2018	Review	–	–	Exclude	Document type: review; ISIS propaganda
29	Nisa	2018	Review	–	–	Exclude	Document type: review (cited as context)
30	Abdullah & Chan	2016	Conference paper	–	–	Exclude	Document type: conference paper (cited as context)
31	Dwifatma	2026	Article; English	Y	Y	Include	Meets all inclusion criteria
32	Shabdan	2026	Article; English	Y	Y	Include	Meets all inclusion criteria
33	Hidayatullah & Hamzah	2017	Conference paper	–	–	Exclude	Document type: conference paper (cited as context)
34	Demerdash	2024	Article; English	–	Y	Include	Meets inclusion criteria (RQ2)
35	Kramer	2021	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Media-ethics philosophical critique
36	Fangen & Lichtenberg	2021	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Far-right politics; non-Muslim focus

No.	Study	Year	Basic eligibility	RQ1	RQ2	Decision	Reason
37	Ainz-Galende	2026	Article; Spanish	–	–	Exclude	Language: Spanish
38	Wahid & Wardatun	2023	Article; English	Y	Y	Include	Meets all inclusion criteria
39	Hillewaert	2022	Book chapter	–	–	Exclude	Document type: book chapter
40	Kusumawati	2026	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Islamism–nationalism political identity; digital peripheral
41	El Naggar	2014	Article; English	Y	Y	Include	Meets all inclusion criteria
42	Espartinez & Adaikkalam	2025	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Interreligious dialogue (leaders); not youth / social media
43	Kasmani	2022	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Political communication / humour
44	Dall'agnola & Thibault	2021	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Divorce / marriage attitudes & ICT
45	Pedersen et al.	2018	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Radicalisation / political violence
46	Ådna	2019	Book chapter	–	–	Exclude	Document type: book chapter (cited as context)
47	El Naggar	2024	Book	–	–	Exclude	Document type: book (cited as context)
48	Marsidi	2021	Book chapter	–	–	Exclude	Document type: book chapter
49	Kadir et al.	2019	Article; Malay	–	–	Exclude	Language: Malay
50	Günther & Pfeifer	2021	Book	–	–	Exclude	Document type: book; jihadism
51	Sheikh	2020	Review	–	–	Exclude	Document type: review (cited as context)
52	Arpinar et al.	2016	Conference paper	–	–	Exclude	Document type: conference paper; extremism
53	Rijal	2022	Article; English	Y	Y	Include	Meets all inclusion criteria
54	Siddiq	2024	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Terrorism news coverage / perceptions
55	Hervik	2015	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Islamophobia / multiculturalism
56	Amit et al.	2020	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Radicalisation / terrorism
57	Ahmad & Ibrahim	2022	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Radicalism-focused ethnography; social media peripheral
58	Jafar et al.	2025	Article; English	Y	Y	Include	Meets all inclusion criteria
59	Syarif et al.	2023	Article; English	Y	Y	Include	Meets all inclusion criteria
60	Hasan	2022	Article; English	–	Y	Include	Meets inclusion criteria (RQ2)
61	Abdurrahman et al.	2026	Article; English	Y	Y	Include	Meets all inclusion criteria
62	Arshad-Ayaz et al.	2024	Article; English	N	N	Exclude	Islamophobia / hate speech

Quality Appraisal

Given the methodological heterogeneity of the included studies, quality was appraised using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) version 2018, which provides design-appropriate criteria for qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research within a single instrument (Hong et al., 2018). MMAT is appropriate here because it allows studies of different designs to be appraised on comparable dimensions

clarity of research question, appropriateness of design, adequacy of data collection, and coherence between data and interpretation without imposing criteria drawn from a single tradition. Appraisal was conducted at the level of the information available in the dataset; where the abstract and metadata did not permit a judgement, the criterion is marked "NR" (not reported) and full-text appraisal is recommended.

Data Extraction

For each included study, the following were extracted: authors and year; country or context; sample; platform or digital space; research design; and evidence relating to Islamic learning, religious engagement, religious understanding, religious identity, and religious participation, together with the main findings and the research question addressed. Where a characteristic was not reported, it was recorded as "NR" rather than inferred. The extracted characteristics are summarised in Table 2.

Table 3. <Data extraction>

Field	Description / coding note
Author(s) and year	Full author list and publication year
Country / context	National or cultural setting of the study
Sample	Study population and, where reported, size and characteristics
Platform / digital space	Social-media platform(s) or digital environment examined
Research design	Design and data-collection method(s)
Islamic learning (L)	Evidence on acquisition/construction of religious knowledge or practice
Religious engagement (E)	Evidence on participatory involvement with religious content/communities
Religious understanding (U)	Evidence on interpretation of religious content
Religious identity (I)	Evidence on expression/negotiation of a Muslim self
Religious participation (P)	Evidence on taking part in religious activities/communities
Main findings	Key reported findings relevant to RQ1 and/or RQ2
RQ addressed	RQ1, RQ2, or both
MMAT appraisal (Q1–Q5)	Rating on each of the five qualitative criteria (Y / CT / N)

Data Synthesis

Findings were synthesised thematically following Thomas and Harden's (2008) three-stage procedure and Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidance. In the first stage, the findings extracted from each study (the "main findings" and dimension fields of the extraction template) were coded line by line, staying close to the authors' own language; this produced an initial set of descriptive codes such as "social media as knowledge source," "peer validation," "source unreliability," "visual da'wah," "identity negotiation," and "online–offline continuity." In the second stage, these codes were grouped into descriptive themes by grouping codes that recurred across studies. In the third stage, descriptive themes were developed into the analytical themes reported in Section 3, organised under the two research questions. Provisional categories drawn from the review's conceptual framework were used only as a heuristic starting point and were retained solely where the included studies supported them; the six RQ1 themes and the RQ2 dimensions are those that survived this test. Because the corpus is finite and fully enumerated, thematic sufficiency rather than open-ended saturation was the stopping criterion: coding continued until every included study had been assigned to at least one theme and no included finding remained uncoded, and each reported theme is supported by at least two included studies. Coding was performed by the single author; to limit idiosyncrasy, an audit trail linking every theme to its supporting studies is preserved in Tables 3 and 4, and the code-to-study mapping is therefore open to inspection. The synthesis proceeds from evidence to interpretation to integration and is expressed in cautious language (facilitates, supports, enables, is associated with, contributes to); the resulting framework is presented as a map of co-occurring patterns, not a causal model.

Results and Discussions

PRISMA Study Selection

The Scopus search identified 62 records. No duplicates were present in the single-database export, so 62 records proceeded to screening. At the screening stage, 22 records were excluded for not meeting the basic eligibility criteria of document type and language: 18 were not journal articles (3 books, 5 book chapters, 5 conference papers, and 5 review documents) and 4 were not in English (Indonesian, Spanish, and two in Malay). The remaining 40 English-language journal articles were assessed for topical eligibility against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Of these, 22 were excluded with reasons: 5 focused primarily on terrorism, radicalisation, or political violence; 3 addressed Islamophobia, hate speech, or far-right politics; 7 concerned political communication, protest, nationalism, or political-cultural production rather than Islamic learning or religious engagement; 3 addressed general social-media behaviour, wellbeing, or relationships without substantive Islamic focus; and 4 were unrelated to the religious life of Muslim youth in digital spaces. This left 18 studies for inclusion in the synthesis. The full selection is documented in Appendix Table A1.

Screening was reproducible: an independent rule-based re-screen of all 62 records agreed with the documented decisions on 59 records (95.2%; Cohen's kappa = 0.88), with the three borderline inclusions resolved by closer reading (Section 2.8). Figure 1 presents the PRISMA 2020 flow with the count at each decision point.

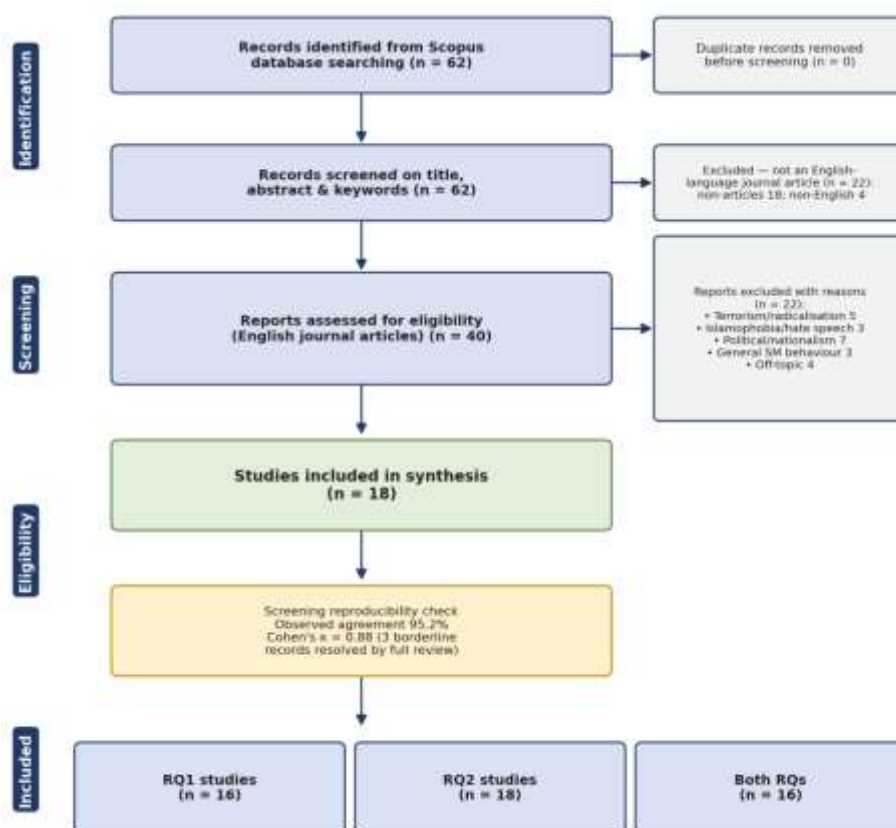


Figure 1. <PRISMA 2020 flow diagram of study selection, with a screening-reproducibility check.>

Characteristics of Included Studies

The 18 included studies span 2014 to 2026, with a clear concentration in the most recent years, indicating a rapidly growing field; several 2026-dated items are forthcoming articles already indexed in Scopus with assigned DOIs and are cited as advance online publications. Geographically, the evidence is dominated by Indonesian settings, which account for the majority of studies (Rahman & Mufti, 2021; Fauzi & Pribadi, 2024; Nisa, 2018a; Chakim, 2022; Dwifatma, 2026; Wahid & Wardatun, 2023; Rijal, 2022; Jafar et al., 2025; Syarif et al., 2023; Herdiansah, 2026; Abdurrahman et al., 2026). The remainder examine Iran (Taherifard, 2022), Kyrgyzstan (Shabdan, 2026), transnational immigrant and diaspora contexts in North America (Deroo & Mohamud, 2022; Demerdash, 2024), and global or translocal digital spaces (Hasan, 2022; El Nagggar, 2014). Platforms are varied: Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter/X, TikTok, and cross-platform environments all appear, with Instagram and WhatsApp especially prominent.

Methodologically, the field is overwhelmingly qualitative. All 18 included studies use qualitative or interpretive designs digital and virtual ethnography, netnography, visual and multimodal content analysis, phenomenology, case study, interviews, and focus groups. No purely quantitative or mixed-methods study met the full inclusion criteria, a pattern with direct implications for the future research agenda (Section 5). Samples range from single-case portraits (Deroo & Mohamud, 2022) to community studies involving dozens of participants (Wahid & Wardatun, 2023) and large corpora of visual material (Hasan, 2022). Table 1 summarises the characteristics and indicates which dimensions of religious life each study addresses; the coverage marks are used later to structure the thematic synthesis.

Table 4. <Characteristics of included studies (N = 18)>

No.	Author (Year)	Context	Platform	Sample	Design	L	E	U	I	P	RQ
1	Rahman & Mufti (2021)	Bandung, Indonesia	Twitter, Facebook, YouTube	Hijrah youth community	Qual. (socio-phenomenological)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1, 2
2	Fauzi & Pribadi (2024)	Solo, Indonesia	Social media internet	Gen Z da'wah activists	Qual. (exploratory)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1, 2
3	Taherifard (2022)	Iran	Instagram	Revolutionary Shia youth	Qual. (visual netnography)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1, 2
4	Deroo & Mohamud (2022)	USA (transnational)	Social media	Immigrant Muslim youth (case)	Qual. (case study)	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	1, 2
5	Ahmad et al. (2025)	Banda Aceh, Indonesia	Social media, YouTube	Muslim youth	Qual. (interviews + FGD)	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	1, 2
6	Herdiansah (2026)	Indonesia	Digital popular culture	Muslim youth communities	Qual. (digital obs. + narrative)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1, 2
7	Nisa (2018a)	Indonesia	WhatsApp	ODOJ youth (middle-class)	Qual. (ethnographic)	✓	✓	–	✓	✓	1, 2
8	Chakim (2022)	Indonesia	Instagram	Young content creators	Qual. (ethnomedia / multimodal)	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	1, 2
9	Dwifatma (2026)	Indonesia	YouTube	Muslim youth (creators / audience)	Qual. (media textual analysis)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1, 2
10	Shabdan (2026)	Kyrgyzstan	Social media (multi)	Muslim youth	Qual. (virtual ethnography)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1, 2
11	Demerdash (2024)	Transnational diaspora	Fashion blogs, social media	Muslim hipster (Mipsterz) youth	Qual. (visual cultural)	–	✓	–	✓	–	2
12	Wahid & Wardatun (2023)	Bima, Indonesia	Digital resources; peer networks	47 young Muslim activists	Qual. (interviews)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1, 2
13	El Naggar (2014)	General Muslim contexts	/ Internet, blogs, social networks	Muslim youth audiences	Qual. (media discourse)	✓	✓	–	✓	–	1, 2
14	Rijal (2022)	Indonesia	YouTube, websites, social media	Muslim youth / audiences	Qual. (digital ethnography)	–	✓	✓	–	✓	1, 2

No.	Author (Year)	Context	Platform	Sample	Design	L	E	U	I	P	RQ
15	Jafar et al. (2025)	Indonesia	Instagram, TikTok, Twitter/X	Indonesian Muslim youth	Qual. ethnography (digital + literary)	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	1, 2
16	Syarif et al. (2023)	Sambas, Indonesia	New media social media	Salafi youth	Qual. (phenomenological)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1, 2
17	Hasan (2022)	Global translocal	/ Instagram	Muslim youth (global)	Qual. (visual content analysis)	✓	✓	-	✓	-	2
18	Abdurrahman et al. (2026)	Bandung, Indonesia	WhatsApp	Salafi-influenced youth networks	Qual. ethnography (digital + interviews)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1, 2

Quality Appraisal

Because all included studies use qualitative or interpretive designs, the qualitative category of the MMAT was applied, focusing on whether the research question was clearly stated, whether the design and data sources were appropriate to that question, whether findings were adequately derived from the data, and whether the interpretation was coherent (Hong et al., 2018). Appraisal was carried out on the information available in the dataset. On this basis the included studies generally described appropriate qualitative designs and identifiable data sources, and their findings were consistent with the stated methods; several report rich, well-specified fieldwork (Nisa, 2018a; Wahid & Wardatun, 2023; Shabdan, 2026; Abdurrahman et al., 2026), while a few single-case or corpus studies offer depth at the cost of breadth (Deroo & Mohamud, 2022; Hasan, 2022). No study was excluded on quality grounds; where the available information did not permit a firm judgement on a criterion, this is noted, and full-text appraisal is recommended before any confirmatory synthesis.

To make the appraisal explicit rather than global, each study was rated against the five MMAT qualitative criteria: (Q1) is the qualitative approach appropriate to the question; (Q2) are the data-collection methods adequate; (Q3) are the findings adequately derived from the data; (Q4) is the interpretation sufficiently substantiated; and (Q5) is there coherence among data sources, collection, analysis, and interpretation (Hong et al., 2018). Each criterion was scored Y (yes), CT (can't tell, where abstract-level information was insufficient), or N (no). Ratings are transparency judgements at the abstract and metadata level, not a basis for excluding studies; the "Y count" (out of 5) summarises each row. Table 2 reports the matrix.

Table 5. <Quality appraisal of included studies against the five MMAT (2018) qualitative criteria>

Study	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Y count	Overall
Rahman & Mufti (2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	High
Fauzi & Pribadi (2024)	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	4/5	Adequate
Taherifard (2022)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	High
Deroo & Mohamud (2022)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	High (single case)
Ahmad et al. (2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	High
Herdiansah (2026)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	High
Nisa (2018a)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	High
Chakim (2022)	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	4/5	Adequate
Dwifatma (2026)	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y	4/5	Adequate
Shabdan (2026)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	High
Demerdash (2024)	Y	CT	Y	Y	Y	4/5	Adequate
Wahid & Wardatun (2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	High
El Naggat (2014)	Y	Y	CT	Y	Y	4/5	Adequate

Study	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Y count	Overall
Rijal (2022)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	High
Jafar et al. (2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	High
Syarif et al. (2023)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	High
Hasan (2022)	Y	Y	Y	CT	Y	4/5	Adequate
Abdurrahman et al. (2026)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5/5	High

RQ1: Digital Spaces, Islamic Learning, and Religious Engagement

The synthesis for RQ1 identified six recurring patterns in how digital spaces facilitate Islamic learning and religious engagement among Muslim youth. The patterns are presented as analytical themes grounded in the included studies; they overlap in practice, and most studies contribute to more than one.

Theme 1. Access to Islamic Knowledge

A consistent finding is that social media has become a primary point of access to religious knowledge for young Muslims. Among Gen Z activists in Solo, the majority reported that they obtained their religious sources from social media and the internet rather than from traditional institutions (Fauzi & Pribadi, 2024). In Banda Aceh, young Muslims described a pronounced shift toward acquiring religious knowledge through digital media, which the authors linked to a diminished association of religion with violence and to stronger tolerance (Ahmad et al., 2025). In Kyrgyzstan, social media likewise functions as an important source of religious knowledge for youth (Shabdan, 2026), and among Salafi youth in Sambas, new media carry particular interpretive methodologies into rural religious life (Syarif et al., 2023). The reach of this access is not neutral: it reorganises where authority over knowledge is located, a point developed under Theme 5. Read together, these studies establish access as the entry point of the digital religious experience the condition that makes the subsequent patterns possible (Rahman & Mufti, 2021).

Theme 2. Digital Da'wah as Pedagogy

A second pattern concerns purposeful religious instruction da'wah delivered through digital channels. The ODOJ movement used WhatsApp to organise a shared discipline of daily Qur'an reading, effectively turning a messaging application into a devotional and pedagogical infrastructure for tens of thousands of young participants (Nisa, 2018a). Televangelism, delivered through the internet and social networks, was experienced by Muslim youth audiences as a modern and relevant form of religious instruction and expression (El Naggat, 2014). On Instagram, young creators produce interrelated items of religious content that construct doctrine and model religious practice for their peers (Chakim, 2022), and complementary early evidence shows Islamic messaging on Twitter generating consistent engagement between preachers and young followers (Hidayatullah & Hamzah, 2017). In Indonesia's urban hijrah movement, WhatsApp groups sustain thematic da'wah as part of everyday communication (Abdurrahman et al., 2026). Across these cases, teaching is reframed as an ongoing, distributed activity woven into the platforms young people already inhabit.

Theme 3. Interactive and Multimodal Learning

Learning in these environments is markedly visual, interactive, and multimodal. The online visual culture of revolutionary youth in Iran is built from selfies, shrine images, and shared photographs that carry religious meaning and invite participation (Taherifard, 2022). Islamic YouTube web series created by youth communities use narrative and interactive engagement with audiences to negotiate and preserve religious values collectively (Dwifatma, 2026). "Muslim Instagram" operates as a translocal visual space in which images do pedagogical and identity work simultaneously (Hasan, 2022), and multimodal content on Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter/X functions as a form of popular digital religious literature (Jafar et al., 2025). Female-led visual da'wah on Instagram had already been shown to educate young women in pious self-cultivation through images and captions (Nisa, 2018b). The recurring point is that the modality of learning—short, visual, shareable, and responsive shapes the character of what is learned.

Theme 4. Peer-Based and Community Learning

Much digital religious learning is peer-driven and community-based rather than top-down. Among young activists in Bima, religious knowledge is produced and evaluated through peer-group-based intellectualism, discussion, and student organisations (Wahid & Wardatun, 2023). Digital Islamist communities in Indonesia convert online attention into sustained offline participation through group rides, study circles, workshops, and charity (Herdiansah, 2026). The ODOJ community illustrates the same dynamic in a devotional register,

mobilising peers around a shared reading practice (Nisa, 2018a), and hijrah WhatsApp groups cultivate peer-led trust and affective belonging (Abdurrahman et al., 2026). The mosque-and-social-media base of hijrah youth communities similarly blends peer networks with institutional anchors (Rahman & Mufti, 2021). Learning here is a social accomplishment of the group, not merely an individual transaction with content.

Theme 5. Credibility, Trust, and the Evaluation of Sources

Because access is abundant, the evaluation of sources becomes a central concern. Young activists in Bima explicitly judged that "digital resources are not reliable" and privileged peer-validated knowledge over unmediated online material (Wahid & Wardatun, 2023). In the hijrah movement, authority is cultivated less through formal credentials than through interactive consistency, humility, and perceived sincerity in an interactive model of trust (Abdurrahman et al., 2026). Studies of Gen Z activists note that limited grounding in Islamic teaching can accompany heavy reliance on social-media sources (Fauzi & Pribadi, 2024), and work on Salafi youth documents contestation over interpretive authority in new-media settings (Syarif et al., 2023). Earlier information-science work had already sought to model the credibility of Islamic information on social media precisely because young users depend on it so heavily (Kadir et al., 2017). The literature thus frames source evaluation not as a peripheral skill but as a core competence of digital religious life.

Theme 6. Religious Engagement and Participation

The preceding patterns feed into sustained religious engagement that frequently crosses the online–offline boundary. In Kyrgyzstan, social media supports forms of religious engagement, expression, and experience that young people carry between virtual and physical settings (Shabdan, 2026). Digital Islamist activism shows attention converting into durable participation and collective identity (Herdiansah, 2026), and the ODOJ case shows a digital platform organising a large participatory devotional community (Nisa, 2018a). Hijrah WhatsApp groups structure affective participation around daily messages and shared rituals (Abdurrahman et al., 2026), and hijrah youth communities channel online activity into mosque-based religious activities (Rahman & Mufti, 2021). Engagement, in short, is the pattern in which digital learning becomes lived practice. Table 3 consolidates the six themes and their supporting studies.

Table 6. <Thematic synthesis of findings for RQ1>

Theme	Description	Supporting studies	Main synthesis
Access to Islamic knowledge	Social media is a primary entry point to religious knowledge for youth	Fauzi & Pribadi (2024); Ahmad et al. (2025); Shabdan (2026); Syarif et al. (2023); Rahman & Mufti (2021)	Access reorganises where and how young Muslims first encounter religious knowledge
Digital da'wah as pedagogy	Purposeful religious instruction delivered through platforms	Nisa (2018a); El Naggar (2014); Chakim (2022); Abdurrahman et al. (2026); Hidayatullah & Hamzah (2017)	Teaching becomes distributed and continuous within everyday platforms
Interactive & multimodal learning	Visual, interactive, shareable content shapes learning	Taherifard (2022); Dwifatma (2026); Hasan (2022); Jafar et al. (2025); Nisa (2018b)	The modality of content shapes the character of religious learning
Peer-based & community learning	Knowledge produced and validated within peer networks	Wahid & Wardatun (2023); Herdiansah (2026); Nisa (2018a); Abdurrahman et al. (2026); Rahman & Mufti (2021)	Learning is a social accomplishment of youth communities
Credibility, trust & source evaluation	Assessing reliability and authority of online content	Wahid & Wardatun (2023); Abdurrahman et al. (2026); Fauzi & Pribadi (2024); Syarif et al. (2023); Kadir et al. (2017)	Source evaluation is a core competence of digital religious life
Religious engagement & participation	Learning translates into sustained, often online–offline practice	Shabdan (2026); Herdiansah (2026); Nisa (2018a); Abdurrahman et al. (2026); Rahman & Mufti (2021)	Engagement is where digital learning becomes lived practice

RQ2: Religious Understanding, Identity, and Participation

The synthesis for RQ2 organised the reported patterns into three interlocking dimensions—religious understanding, religious identity, and religious participation together with three cross-cutting patterns that the evidence supports: digital piety, religious authority, and religious expression.

Religious Understanding

The reviewed studies describe digital engagement as reshaping how young Muslims interpret, rather than merely how much they know. In Solo, reliance on online sources was associated with particular, sometimes uneven, understandings of moderate Islam (Fauzi & Pribadi, 2024). In Banda Aceh, digitally mediated knowledge acquisition accompanied more tolerant readings of contemporary religious issues (Ahmad et al., 2025). Studies of Salafi youth show new media transmitting specific methodologies of Qur'anic interpretation and generating ideological contestation (Syarif et al., 2023), while Instagram-based religious content is shown to construct doctrine and mediate religious understanding among youth (Chakim, 2022). Peer-group intellectualism in Bima demonstrates that understanding is actively debated and typed rather than passively absorbed (Wahid & Wardatun, 2023). The synthesis suggests that digital spaces widen access to interpretation while distributing interpretive authority more broadly.

Religious Identity

Identity is the most frequently reported dimension. Social media supported a transnational immigrant youth's identity formation and her efforts to advance more just framings of Islam (Deroo & Mohamud, 2022). "Muslim Instagram" sustains a translocal identity that couples youthfulness with the cultivation of deen (Hasan, 2022), and Mipsterz visual culture shows young Muslims fashioning modest yet contemporary identities across digital diasporas (Demerdash, 2024). Anthropological readings of Indonesian popular media trace how digital religiosity and gender shape young Muslims' religious identity (Jafar et al., 2025), and hijrah WhatsApp networks show communal identity continuously negotiated through shared practice (Abdurrahman et al., 2026). Earlier accounts of hijabista and hijabster cultures (Williams & Kamaludeen, 2017) and of Korean Muslim youth reworking identity on Facebook (Sheikh, 2020) confirm that these negotiations are neither new nor confined to one setting. Across contexts, identity emerges as something young Muslims actively assemble in dialogue with digital audiences.

Religious Participation

Participation extends from online interaction into organised religious activity. The ODOJ movement organised large-scale devotional participation through WhatsApp (Nisa, 2018a); digital Islamist communities converted attention into study circles, workshops, and charity (Herdiansah, 2026); and hijrah networks structured affective participation around daily religious messaging and ritual (Abdurrahman et al., 2026). In Kyrgyzstan, engagement moved fluidly between online and offline religious settings (Shabdan, 2026), and hijrah youth communities directed online activity toward mosque-based practice (Rahman & Mufti, 2021). The evidence consistently describes digital and offline participation as continuous rather than opposed.

Cross-Cutting Patterns: Digital Piety, Authority, and Expression

Three further patterns cut across the dimensions. Digital piety appears where young Muslims perform and cultivate religiosity through platforms social piety among da'wah activists (Fauzi & Pribadi, 2024), the cultivation of deen on Instagram (Hasan, 2022), pious asceticism in YouTube web series (Dwifatma, 2026), and the pious self-fashioning of Mipsterz (Demerdash, 2024). Religious authority is reconfigured rather than dissolved: it is cultivated through interactive consistency and sincerity in hijrah networks (Abdurrahman et al., 2026), contested among Salafi youth (Syarif et al., 2023), and subjected to peer evaluation where digital sources are judged unreliable (Wahid & Wardatun, 2023). Religious expression is prominent in visual and performative content Iranian youth visual culture (Taherifard, 2022), self-representation on Muslim Instagram (Hasan, 2022), performative displays of piety across platforms (Jafar et al., 2025), and the public contestation of Islamic popular culture such as the disputed Aisha song (Rijal, 2022). Table 4 summarises the RQ2 dimensions and patterns.

Table 7. <Thematic synthesis of findings for RQ2>

Dimension / pattern	Reported pattern	Supporting studies	Synthesis
Religious understanding	Digital access reshapes interpretation	Fauzi & Pribadi (2024); Ahmad et al. (2025); Syarif et al.	Youth interpret actively; authority over

Dimension pattern /	Reported pattern	Supporting studies	Synthesis
Religious identity	distributes authority	al. (2023); Chakim (2022); Wahid & Wardatun (2023)	meaning is broadened
	Identity assembled in dialogue with digital audiences	Deroo & Mohamud (2022); Hasan (2022); Demerdash (2024); Jafar et al. (2025); Abdurrahman et al. (2026); Williams & Kamaludeen (2017); Sheikh (2020)	Identity is actively negotiated, translocal, and gendered
Religious participation	Online interaction extends into organised religious activity	Nisa (2018a); Herdiansah (2026); Abdurrahman et al. (2026); Shabdan (2026); Rahman & Mufti (2021)	Digital and offline participation are continuous
Digital piety	Religiosity performed and cultivated through platforms	Fauzi & Pribadi (2024); Hasan (2022); Dwifatma (2026); Demerdash (2024)	Piety is enacted publicly and aesthetically online
Religious authority	Authority reconfigured around interaction, sincerity, and peer trust	Abdurrahman et al. (2026); Syarif et al. (2023); Wahid & Wardatun (2023)	Authority is reconfigured, not simply eroded
Religious expression	Visual and performative expression of faith	Taherifard (2022); Hasan (2022); Jafar et al. (2025); Rijal (2022)	Expression is central to youth digital religiosity

Convergence, Divergence, and Theoretical Tensions across the Corpus

Read as a body rather than a list, the 18 studies converge on three claims. They agree, first, that social media is a primary site of access to religious knowledge for young Muslims (Fauzi & Pribadi, 2024; Ahmad et al., 2025; Shabdan, 2026); second, that learning in these spaces is peer-mediated rather than purely top-down (Wahid & Wardatun, 2023; Herdiansah, 2026; Abdurrahman et al., 2026); and third, that digital and offline religious life are continuous rather than opposed (Rahman & Mufti, 2021; Nisa, 2018a; Shabdan, 2026). This convergence is notable because it holds across markedly different theoretical vocabularies lived religion, digital religion, social-movement theory, computer-mediated communication, and visual culture which suggests the pattern is a property of the phenomenon and not an artefact of any one framework.

The studies diverge, however, on how they theorise the relationship between platform affordances and religious practice. One group treats affordances as pedagogical infrastructure, asking how features such as messaging, hashtags, or video organise learning and devotion (Nisa, 2018a; Chakim, 2022; Dwifatma, 2026). A second treats them as identity resources, asking how visual and performative affordances let young Muslims fashion and display a religious self (Hasan, 2022; Demerdash, 2024; Jafar et al., 2025). A third treats them as authority environments, asking how interaction reshapes who is trusted to speak for Islam (Abdurrahman et al., 2026; Syarif et al., 2023). These are complementary rather than contradictory lenses, but the corpus has not yet integrated them, and the present review's framework (Section 3.7) is offered as one way to do so.

Two genuine tensions remain unresolved. The first concerns the trustworthiness of digital sources: some studies find young Muslims embracing social media as a credible primary source (Fauzi & Pribadi, 2024; Shabdan, 2026), while others document explicit distrust of "unreliable" digital resources and a turn to peer validation (Wahid & Wardatun, 2023). The second concerns the direction of religious change: digitally mediated learning is associated with greater tolerance and a weaker link between religion and violence in one setting (Ahmad et al., 2025), yet with normative rigidity or contestation in others (Syarif et al., 2023; Herdiansah, 2026). Rather than a defect, this divergence marks the field's live theoretical question under what conditions digital learning broadens or narrows religious understanding which the predominantly qualitative, single-context evidence base cannot yet settle and which Section 5 translates into a research agenda.

Integrated Synthesis Framework

Reading the RQ1 and RQ2 findings together reveals a recurring sequence in the literature. Digital spaces provide access to Islamic content; access supports Islamic learning that is interactive, multimodal, and peer-based; learning feeds religious engagement; and engagement is expressed through three interlocking dimensions religious understanding, identity, and participation which together constitute the religious life of

Muslim youth in digital environments. The sequence is best read as an analytical map of patterns that co-occur across studies, not as a causal chain: the reviewed evidence is predominantly qualitative and interpretive, and no included study establishes that digital media cause religious change. The value of the framework is integrative, showing how strands usually studied in isolation connect into a single account.

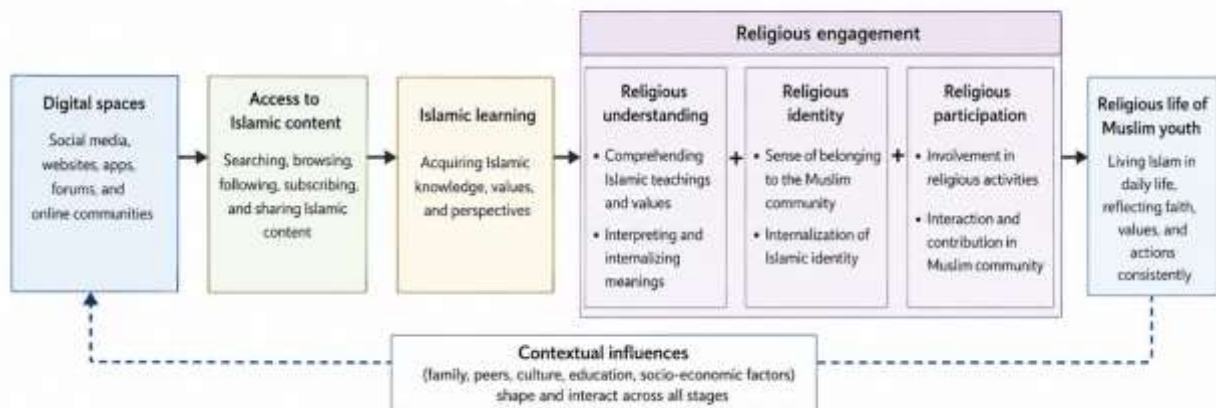


Figure 2. <Integrated synthesis framework (analytical, non-causal)>

Digital Spaces as Islamic Learning Environments

The synthesis supports treating social media as a genuine learning environment for Muslim youth rather than a mere channel for content. What the reviewed studies describe is not the transfer of fixed knowledge but an ecology of access, interaction, and peer validation in which learning is continuous and embedded in everyday platform use (Fauzi & Pribadi, 2024; Nisa, 2018a; Chakim, 2022). This resonates with the observation that mediated religious content is experienced by youth as modern and relevant to daily life (El Naggar, 2014; El Naggar, 2024). The distinctive feature is modality: because content is short, visual, and shareable, the learning it supports is iterative and social (Hasan, 2022; Dwifatma, 2026; Jafar et al., 2025). Recognising digital spaces as learning environments reframes them as sites of religious education worth understanding on their own terms.

From Digital Learning to Religious Engagement

A second contribution is to clarify how learning becomes engagement. The studies converge on a movement from access, through interactive and peer-based learning, to participation that regularly crosses into offline settings (Shabdan, 2026; Herdiansah, 2026; Rahman & Mufti, 2021). The ODOJ case is instructive: a simple reading discipline coordinated through WhatsApp produced a large participatory community (Nisa, 2018a), while hijrah WhatsApp groups show engagement sustained through affective, everyday interaction (Abdurrahman et al., 2026). Where studies diverge is in the register of engagement devotional, activist, aesthetic, or intellectual suggesting that the same digital affordances can support quite different modes of religious life depending on context.

Religious Understanding, Identity, and Participation

The three RQ2 dimensions are analytically distinct but empirically entangled. Understanding is reshaped as interpretation is distributed across peers and creators (Wahid & Wardatun, 2023; Syarif et al., 2023); identity is assembled in dialogue with digital audiences and is frequently translocal and gendered (Deroo & Mohamud, 2022; Demerdash, 2024; Jafar et al., 2025); and participation extends online interaction into organised practice (Herdiansah, 2026; Nisa, 2018a). The recurrence of these dimensions across very different national settings—Indonesia, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, and diaspora contexts—suggests a degree of convergence, even as the content of each dimension varies with local religious and political conditions (Taherifard, 2022; Shabdan, 2026; Sheikh, 2020).

Digital and Offline Religious Life

A clear message of the synthesis is continuity rather than displacement. The reviewed studies repeatedly show digital and offline religious life reinforcing one another: online mobilisation feeds mosque-based activity (Rahman & Mufti, 2021), digital attention becomes offline study circles and charity (Herdiansah, 2026), and

diaspora youth integrate online resources with community gatherings and text-based learning (Ādna, 2019). This counters any assumption that digital religion signals religious decline; the more accurate reading is one of complementarity, in which platforms extend and reconfigure existing religious practice. Concerns about the reliability of online content (Wahid & Wardatun, 2023; Kadir et al., 2017) are best understood within this complementary frame, as part of how young Muslims calibrate digital and offline sources.

Theoretically, this review contributes an integrative framework that connects learning, religious engagement, and three dimensions of religious life religious understanding, religious identity, and religious participation within a single analytical sequence. This framework brings together bodies of literature that have often been examined separately, particularly digital religion, Islamic education, media studies, and youth studies, by focusing on how young Muslims encounter, interpret, learn from, and engage with Islamic content in digital spaces. The synthesis suggests that digital environments function not only as channels for accessing religious information but also as spaces in which Islamic learning, religious understanding, identity formation, and participation can become interconnected. The framework should nevertheless be understood as analytical rather than causal, as the reviewed evidence does not establish a deterministic relationship between digital exposure and religious outcomes.

The synthesis also provides a more nuanced understanding of religious authority in digital environments. Rather than indicating that digital media necessarily erode or replace traditional religious authority, the reviewed studies suggest that authority is being reconfigured through forms of credibility that are particularly relevant in interactive and peer-oriented digital spaces, including perceived sincerity, accessibility, responsiveness, and peer trust (Abdurrahman et al., 2026; Syarif et al., 2023). Young Muslims may therefore evaluate religious voices not only through formal credentials but also through the perceived authenticity of communication and the quality of interaction surrounding religious content. This interpretation offers a more precise explanation of digital religious authority than general claims concerning the decline of traditional authority and remains consistent with the predominantly qualitative evidence base.

For religious educators and Islamic educational institutions, the findings suggest that digital spaces should not be viewed solely as potential sources of distraction or misinformation but also as important environments in which young Muslims already encounter, discuss, and learn about religion. Islamic educational engagement may become more relevant when learning materials are presented through visual, interactive, accessible, and peer-oriented formats that correspond with contemporary patterns of digital use. At the same time, effective digital religious education should not simply reproduce conventional teaching materials in online formats but should combine accessibility with credible guidance, contextual explanation, and opportunities for meaningful interaction. The evaluation of online religious sources is particularly important because credibility judgements are central to how young Muslims navigate digital religious information (Wahid & Wardatun, 2023; Kadir et al., 2017). Religious educators and institutions can therefore strengthen digital religious literacy by helping young people assess the credibility of religious sources, distinguish scholarly interpretation from unsupported opinion, and recognise how digital visibility and algorithmic distribution can influence what religious information becomes prominent. For religious content creators and community leaders, the evidence further indicates that formal credentials alone may not be sufficient to establish authority in digital environments. Sustained interaction, perceived sincerity, responsiveness, and the ability to build trust appear to be important elements in developing meaningful relationships with young audiences (Abdurrahman et al., 2026). These implications should, however, be interpreted cautiously because the reviewed studies are predominantly qualitative and do not establish the effectiveness of particular interventions.

The future research agenda emerging from this review is grounded in the patterns and gaps identified within the evidence base rather than in a generic projection of emerging technologies. The literature is strongly concentrated in Indonesia, relies predominantly on qualitative approaches, and frequently examines religious engagement within a single digital platform or specific contextual setting. These characteristics indicate the need for research that can examine variation across platforms, contexts, populations, and time. Existing studies frequently focus on WhatsApp (Nisa, 2018a; Abdurrahman et al., 2026), Instagram (Hasan, 2022; Chakim, 2022), or YouTube (Dwifatma, 2026), providing valuable insights into individual platforms but offering limited understanding of how different platform affordances shape Islamic learning. Comparative studies involving TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and other platforms could clarify whether differences in interaction, content format, recommendation systems, visibility, and peer communication are associated with different forms of religious learning and engagement. Such research would also better reflect the multi-platform nature of young Muslims' everyday digital practices (Jafar et al., 2025).

The predominantly cross-sectional nature of the existing literature also creates a need for longitudinal research. Most studies capture particular states of learning, engagement, or identity rather than examining how these dimensions develop over time. Longitudinal research could investigate how repeated exposure to

Islamic content, interaction with online religious communities, and participation in digital discussions relate to changes in religious understanding, identity, and participation. Such research would help distinguish temporary digital engagement from more sustained forms of religious development. The two-year case examined by Deroo and Mohamud (2022) demonstrates the value of a temporal perspective and remains relatively uncommon within the reviewed literature.

The relationship between online and offline religious life also deserves more deliberate investigation. The synthesis repeatedly indicates that digital and offline religious practices are not necessarily separate domains but can operate as interconnected dimensions of young Muslims' religious lives (Herdiansah, 2026; Rahman & Mufti, 2021; Ådna, 2019). However, relatively few studies have been specifically designed to trace how online Islamic learning connects with offline religious activity. Future research could therefore examine how digital learning relates to mosque attendance, participation in religious organisations, study groups, community activities, family religious practices, and other forms of offline engagement. Research designed explicitly around this digital–offline relationship would provide a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary Muslim youth religiosity.

The evaluation of religious sources and the reconfiguration of authority represent another important area for future research. Questions of credibility, trust, and authority recur across the reviewed literature, particularly in studies examining how young Muslims select and respond to religious content (Wahid & Wardatun, 2023; Abdurrahman et al., 2026; Kadir et al., 2017). Nevertheless, these issues are often treated as secondary themes rather than as central objects of investigation. Future studies could therefore examine more specifically how young Muslims evaluate religious influencers, scholars, educators, community leaders, and peer-generated content, including the ways perceived expertise, sincerity, communication style, responsiveness, social endorsement, and peer recommendations contribute to the construction of digital religious credibility.

The absence of quantitative and mixed-methods studies within the included corpus is itself an important finding. Qualitative research has provided valuable insights into access, peer learning, identity negotiation, and digital religious experiences, but the field currently has limited capacity to determine how widespread these patterns are or how different dimensions of digital religious engagement are associated across larger populations. Future research would benefit from developing and validating instruments for constructs such as digital religious engagement, digital Islamic learning, religious identity, and online religious participation. Validated measures would allow researchers to compare findings across populations and contexts and would provide a stronger basis for cumulative empirical research. Comparative and quasi-experimental designs could also clarify the distinctive contribution of digital media to Islamic learning because the existing literature contains little controlled comparison between online and offline religious learning among the same population. Mixed-methods research would be particularly valuable because quantitative evidence could identify broader patterns while qualitative inquiry could explain how and why those patterns emerge.

The geographical concentration of the evidence provides another important direction. The reviewed corpus is heavily dominated by Indonesian studies, while research from Iran, Kyrgyzstan, and Muslim diaspora contexts appears only intermittently (Taherifard, 2022; Shabdan, 2026; Sheikh, 2020). This concentration makes it difficult to determine whether the patterns identified in the synthesis represent broader characteristics of Muslim youth religious life or are strongly shaped by Indonesian social, cultural, educational, and technological conditions. Cross-national and cross-cultural studies could therefore examine how national context, religious institutions, educational traditions, family structures, digital infrastructure, and local cultures influence the relationship between digital spaces and religious life.

Future research should also give greater attention to Muslim youth as producers of religious knowledge rather than treating them primarily as consumers. Several studies already show that young Muslims create, distribute, interpret, and communicate Islamic content through digital media (Chakim, 2022; Dwifatma, 2026; Nisa, 2018b), yet the producer perspective remains less developed than research on content consumption. Examining young Muslims as content creators, peer educators, religious communicators, and participants in digital knowledge production could broaden the conceptualisation of Islamic learning by demonstrating that digital religious life involves not only receiving religious knowledge but also negotiating, producing, and circulating it within peer networks.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. The review relied on a single database, Scopus, meaning that relevant studies indexed elsewhere, particularly in regional and non-indexed journals, may not have been captured. The search strategy was transparent and reproducible but necessarily limited the retrieved corpus, and alternative terminology for Muslim youth, Islamic learning, digital religion, or specific platforms could potentially produce a different set of studies. Eligibility and quality appraisal were

also conducted primarily through titles, abstracts, and bibliographic metadata rather than a uniformly applied full-text assessment, meaning that the characteristics and methodological quality of the included studies should be verified against complete texts before any confirmatory re-analysis. The restriction to English-language journal articles further excluded potentially relevant research published in Indonesian, Malay, Spanish, and other languages, as well as books, book chapters, conference papers, and reviews that may contain substantive discussions of digital Islamic learning and Muslim youth. The evidence base is also methodologically and geographically uneven, being overwhelmingly qualitative and strongly concentrated in Indonesia, while quantitative, mixed-methods, longitudinal, comparative, and cross-national studies remain limited. This imbalance restricts the generalisability of the findings beyond the contexts represented in the review. Finally, key concepts such as “Muslim youth,” “Islamic learning,” “digital religious engagement,” and “religious identity” are not defined consistently across the reviewed studies. The present synthesis therefore harmonises these concepts analytically without claiming to eliminate their conceptual differences. These limitations temper the strength and generalisability of the conclusions, but they do not undermine the central patterns identified across multiple independent studies.

Conclusions

This systematic review synthesised 18 empirical studies, drawn from a Scopus dataset of 62 records, on how digital spaces shape the religious life of Muslim youth. In answer to RQ1, the evidence shows that social media facilitates Islamic learning and religious engagement through six recurring patterns: it provides access to religious knowledge, hosts purposeful da'wah as a form of distributed pedagogy, supports interactive and multimodal learning, enables peer-based and community learning, foregrounds the evaluation of source credibility and authority, and channels learning into sustained engagement that regularly crosses the online–offline boundary. In answer to RQ2, the literature reports consistent patterns across three interlocking dimensions: religious understanding is reshaped as interpretation is distributed more widely; religious identity is actively assembled in dialogue with digital audiences and is frequently translocal and gendered; and religious participation extends online interaction into organised religious activity, alongside cross-cutting patterns of digital piety, reconfigured religious authority, and religious expression.

These claims are deliberately bounded. Because the evidence is overwhelmingly qualitative and concentrated in Indonesia, the synthesis speaks most confidently about Southeast Asian especially Indonesian Muslim youth, with corroborating but thinner evidence from Iran, Kyrgyzstan, and diaspora settings. The patterns are described as recurring not because they have been shown to generalise across all Muslim youth, but because independent studies using different frameworks report them within these contexts; recurrence within well-documented settings is itself informative, and it is on that basis, rather than any universal or causal claim, that the conclusion rests. Where studies diverge on whether digital sources are trusted, and on whether digital learning broadens or narrows understanding the review reports the divergence as an open question rather than resolving it.

The value of stating these boundaries is that they identify exactly what future research must supply. The most consequential limitations in the reviewed studies are the absence of validated instruments for constructs such as digital piety and religious engagement, the lack of controlled comparisons between online and offline religious learning, and the near-total absence of longitudinal tracking. Addressing them will require developing and validating measures of digital religiosity, designing studies that compare online and offline learning within the same populations, following cohorts over time, and extending the evidence base beyond Indonesia through cross-national collaboration together with taking seriously the growing role of young Muslims as producers, and not only consumers, of Islamic knowledge online. Pursued together, these steps would move the field from a rich but context-bound map of patterns toward claims that can be tested for prevalence, direction, and transferability.

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