

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF MUSLIM GEN-Z SPIRITUALITY THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA AND MOSQUE COMMUNITIES

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates how Muslim Generation Z (born 1997–2012) constructs their spirituality through the dual dynamics of social media engagement and mosque community participation in the contemporary digital era. Employing a systematic literature review methodology guided by the PRISMA framework and incorporating thematic analysis of 48 peer-reviewed articles published between 2018 and 2026, the study maps the emerging landscape of digital Islamic piety and examines how online platforms particularly Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter/X intersect with physical community institutions such as mosque youth organizations (*remaja masjid*) in shaping Gen-Z Muslim spiritual identity. The findings reveal three primary mechanisms through which Gen-Z Muslim spirituality is constructed: (1) algorithmic exposure and voluntary content consumption on social media platforms, which democratize religious authority and generate new forms of "formless" or disembodied spirituality; (2) participatory engagement within mosque communities that anchors digital religious experiences in embodied, communal practices; and (3) the hybridization of online and offline religious spaces that produces a distinctive Gen-Z Islamic identity characterized by pragmatism, aesthetic sensibility, and selective religious commitment. The study further identifies critical tensions within this construction process, including the risk of performative piety (*riya'*), the challenge of religious misinformation, and the erosion of traditional ulama authority. Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing scholarship on digital religion and Muslim youth identity by proposing a "dual-axis spirituality" framework that conceptualizes Gen-Z Muslim religiosity as simultaneously vertical (the individual's relationship with God) and horizontal (social and communal expression). The findings carry significant implications for Islamic education, mosque administrators, and *da'wah* practitioners seeking to engage Gen-Z Muslims effectively in an increasingly digitalized world.

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## A. INTRODUCTION

The intersection of generational identity, digital technology, and religious practice constitutes one of the most compelling sociological phenomena of the early twenty-first century. Generation Z those born between 1997 and 2012 is the first cohort to have grown up entirely in the smartphone era, for whom digital platforms are not supplementary tools but fundamental infrastructure for social life, self-expression, and meaning-making (Douglass et al., 2022). Within predominantly Muslim societies, and particularly in Indonesia the world's largest Muslim-majority country this generational shift has produced profound transformations in how young Muslims understand, practice, and communicate their faith.

The relationship between media and religious practice is not entirely new. Radio broadcasts of Friday sermons, televised Quranic recitations, and cassette-distributed religious lectures have historically extended the reach of Islamic teaching beyond the physical boundaries of the mosque (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2019). However, the advent of social media platforms introduces a qualitatively different dynamic: one characterized by interactivity, user-generated content, algorithmic curation, and the collapse of distinctions between producer and consumer of religious knowledge. Where previous media technologies positioned young Muslims as passive receivers of religious content, social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter/X configure them as active participants in the construction and dissemination of Islamic discourse (Muthohirin, 2025; Zaid et al., 2022).

Generation Z Muslims occupy a particularly complex position within this evolving religious mediascape. On one hand, they demonstrate high levels of digital literacy and enthusiastic engagement with Islamic content online, actively following influencers, participating in religious challenges, and sharing hijrah (religious transformation) narratives (Arifin, 2022; Maryani et al., 2024). On the other hand, research suggests that this digital religiosity is frequently characterized by what Hidayat et al., (2023) term 'formless spirituality' a pattern of Islamic engagement that lacks the doctrinal depth, communal embeddedness, and sustained practice traditionally associated with Islamic piety. This paradox heightened religious visibility alongside potentially diminished religious substance constitutes the central problematic of the present study.

Meanwhile, the mosque, as the primary institution of Islamic community life, faces unprecedented challenges in capturing and maintaining the engagement of Gen-Z Muslims. Youth mosque organizations (*remaja masjid*) have historically served as critical sites for the cultivation of Islamic knowledge, communal solidarity, and religious identity formation (Jarnawi et al., 2025; Mahardika et al., 2025). Yet research from multiple Muslim-majority countries suggests declining rates of mosque attendance among young people, even as digital Islamic content consumption rises sharply (Fauzi & Pribadi, 2024; Khan et al., 2024). This divergence between online religious enthusiasm and offline institutional disengagement raises urgent questions about the future of Muslim community life and the capacity of traditional religious institutions to meet the spiritual needs of a digitally native generation.

This study addresses this complex landscape through a comprehensive systematic literature review that synthesizes current empirical research on Muslim Gen-Z spirituality, social media, and mosque communities. The central research questions guiding this inquiry are: (1) How does social media shape the spiritual identity and religious practices of Muslim Gen-Z? (2) What role do mosque communities play in the spiritual formation of Muslim Gen-Z in the digital era? (3) How do online and offline religious spaces interact to produce distinctive patterns of Muslim Gen-Z spirituality? and (4) What tensions and challenges characterize the construction of Muslim Gen-Z spirituality at the interface of digital and communal religious life?

By addressing these questions, this study makes several significant contributions. First, it synthesizes a rapidly growing interdisciplinary literature that has not yet been subjected to systematic review, providing a consolidated evidence base for scholars, practitioners, and

policymakers. Second, it proposes the 'dual-axis spirituality' theoretical framework that accounts for the distinctive ways in which Gen-Z Muslims navigate the intersection of algorithmic digital environments and embodied community spaces. Third, it identifies enabling conditions and practical implications for mosque administrators, Islamic educators, and da'wah communicators seeking to engage Gen-Z Muslims more effectively in the digital era. The study situates these contributions within the broader global conversation about digital religion, Muslim youth identity, and the transformation of religious authority in the twenty-first century.

## B. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Digital Religion and the Transformation of Islamic Authority

The concept of 'digital religion' provides the primary theoretical lens for understanding how social media mediates Muslim spiritual formation. Digital religion theory argues that digital media do not merely transmit existing religious content but actively reshape the social structures, authority relations, and experiential dimensions of religious life (Rohmawati et al., 2025; Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2019). In the context of Islam, this transformation has been particularly dramatic, given the historically decentralized nature of Islamic religious authority and the absence of an ecclesiastical hierarchy comparable to that found in Catholic Christianity.

Social media platforms have accelerated what scholars describe as the 'democratization' of Islamic religious authority (Zaid et al., 2022). Influencers, online preachers, and content creators now compete with and often displace traditional ulama (Islamic scholars) as primary sources of religious guidance for young Muslims. Halim (2018) documented this phenomenon in Indonesia, demonstrating how young Islamic preachers on Facebook built substantial followings by combining religious content with aesthetically sophisticated digital presentation. Beta (2019) similarly analyzed how Indonesian young Muslim women's groups leveraged social media to blend commerce, piety, and political messaging in ways that positioned them as influential religious figures without formal scholarly credentials. More recently, Inanoglu (2025) examined how Muslim college students in the United States described TikTok as a primary vehicle for their religious development, constructing what she terms 'moral careers' through algorithmically curated Islamic content.

The concept of 'mediatization' the process by which media logic increasingly shapes the structure and content of religious practice is particularly relevant in this context (Rohmawati et al., 2025). When Gen-Z Muslims organize their religious learning around the specific affordances of Instagram (visual aesthetics, stories, reels), TikTok (short-form video, algorithmic recommendation), or YouTube (longer-form lectures, documentary content), the formal properties of these platforms inevitably shape the religious knowledge that is produced, consumed, and retained. Virga et al., (2025) documented this mediatization in their analysis of the 'Yuk Ngaji' Instagram account, demonstrating how the platform's visual logic transformed religious learning materials into aesthetically curated content optimized for engagement rather than depth.

### 2. Muslim Gen-Z Identity, Hijrah, and the Digital Spiritual Self

Within the Indonesian context, the 'hijrah' movement has become a defining phenomenon of Muslim Gen-Z spirituality. The term originally referred to the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina but is now widely used to describe a personal journey of Islamic religious renewal (Arifin, 2022; Zahara et al., 2020). The hijrah movement exemplifies the complex interplay between social media and religious identity formation: it emerges in online communities but materializes in offline practices such as changes in dress, social behavior, and mosque attendance. Maryani et al. (2024) analyzed the hijrah movement's digital communication strategies, revealing that Instagram served as the central vehicle for circulating the movement's aesthetic vision of pious Muslim identity.

The hijrah phenomenon also illuminates the hybrid nature of Gen-Z Muslim identity more broadly. Juliansyahzen (2021) characterized young Indonesian Muslims as 'hybrid young Muslims' who simultaneously navigate multiple *manhaj* (methodological approaches) to Islamic practice, drawing eclectically from traditionalist, modernist, and Salafi orientations as mediated through social media exposure. Nurfitriana (2023) similarly described a process of 'hybridization' in Muslim millennial religious identity, where digital media enables the mixing of local Islamic traditions with transnational Islamic movements in ways that produce novel and unstable configurations of religious commitment. This identity fluidity, while enabling creative religious expression, also raises concerns about doctrinal incoherence and vulnerability to religious extremism (Muthohirin, 2025).

Widayat et al. (2025) conducted a dialectical analysis of religious moderation among Gen-Z Indonesian Muslims, identifying significant tension between the ideal of *wasatiyyah* (moderate Islam) promoted by state religious institutions and the more polarized religious content circulating on social media platforms. Their research suggests that while many Gen-Z Muslims embrace the discourse of religious moderation rhetorically, their actual religious practices and attitudes are frequently shaped by more rigid interpretations encountered online. Said et al., (2022) further documented how the COVID-19 pandemic amplified these tensions, with pandemic-era religious misinformation producing complex effects on Gen-Z Muslims' trust in both religious institutions and empirical knowledge.

### 3. The Mosque as Site of Gen-Z Spiritual Formation

While scholarship on digital religion has proliferated rapidly, the mosque as a site of Gen-Z spiritual formation has received comparatively less systematic attention a gap that is particularly significant given the mosque's historical centrality to Islamic community life. Mahardika et al. (2025) examined the communication models adopted by mosque youth organizations in Indonesia, finding that effective youth engagement required sophisticated adaptation of digital communication strategies within the institutional framework of mosque community activities. Hanifah & Fauji (2025) analyzed the branding strategies employed by Al Akbar Mosque in Surabaya to attract and retain Gen-Z followers, proposing that 'intuitional branding' foregrounding spiritual authenticity and community belonging was particularly effective for this demographic.

Jarnawi et al. (2025) examined mosque youth communities in Aceh Besar Regency, focusing specifically on social media literacy programs designed to help young Muslims navigate digital environments critically and resist radicalization. Their work highlights the proactive role that mosque communities can play in mediating Gen-Z Muslims' digital religious experiences rather than simply ceding that space to unregulated online actors. Syafrida et al., (2025) similarly documented programs in which mosque adolescents were trained in digital marketing skills, enabling them to become producers of Islamic content rather than mere consumers. Khan et al. (2024) provide a comparative perspective from Pakistan, documenting the paradoxical relationship between mosque institutions and social media use: while Pakistani mosques frequently employed social media to extend their reach, they simultaneously expressed deep ambivalence about the authority challenges that these platforms posed to traditional mosque-centered Islamic pedagogy.

### 4. Theoretical Synthesis: The Dual-Axis Spirituality Framework

Drawing on this interdisciplinary literature, the present study proposes the concept of 'dual-axis spirituality' as an analytical framework for understanding Muslim Gen-Z religious formation. This framework conceptualizes Gen-Z Muslim spirituality as oriented along two axes: a vertical axis representing the individual's relationship with God (expressed through prayer, Quranic study, *dhikr*, and other devotional practices), and a horizontal axis representing the social and communal dimensions of religious identity (expressed through community membership, public religious performance, and social media self-presentation as a Muslim).

Traditional models of Islamic piety emphasize the primacy of the vertical axis, with communal practices mosque attendance, religious study circles, communal celebration of Islamic occasions serving as supports for individual devotion. Social media, however, tends to foreground the horizontal axis, rewarding the performance and visibility of religious identity over its private cultivation. The result, for many Gen-Z Muslims, is a spirituality that is simultaneously more visible and more fragile than that of previous generations: highly articulate in its digital expression but potentially disconnected from the sustained devotional practices that would deepen its roots. The dual-axis framework enables a more nuanced analysis of the varying configurations of Gen-Z Muslim spirituality than either a straightforwardly optimistic account of digital religion or a straightforwardly pessimistic one.

### C. METHOD

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework adapted for social science research. The SLR was chosen as the most appropriate methodology for the study's objectives given the rapidly expanding and interdisciplinary nature of the literature on Muslim Gen-Z spirituality, digital religion, and mosque communities, and the absence of a prior systematic synthesis in this specific field.

#### 1. Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted across five major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and BASE (Bielefeld Academic Search Engine). The search was conducted in both English and Indonesian, given the preponderance of Indonesia-focused research in the literature. Primary search strings included combinations of the following terms: 'Muslim Generation Z,' 'Muslim Gen-Z,' 'Islamic youth,' 'digital religion,' 'social media Islam,' 'mosque youth,' 'remaja masjid,' 'Islamic spirituality,' 'hijrah movement,' 'Muslim identity,' 'digital da'wah,' and 'online Islamic learning.' Reference lists of identified articles were also manually reviewed to identify additional relevant sources not captured by the initial database search.

#### 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included if they: (1) were published in peer-reviewed academic journals or conference proceedings between 2018 and 2024; (2) addressed the relationship between digital or social media and Muslim youth religiosity or spirituality; (3) engaged substantively with mosque communities or other Islamic institutional contexts; and/or (4) examined the identity formation processes of Muslim Gen-Z or millennial populations. Articles were excluded if they: (1) did not address a Muslim population; (2) were purely theological or normative in orientation without empirical engagement; (3) were not available in English or Indonesian; or (4) did not substantively address questions of spirituality, religious identity, or digital religious practice.

#### 3. Data Analysis

Following selection, a thematic synthesis methodology was employed to identify patterns, tensions, and themes across the corpus. Each article was systematically coded according to: (a) the primary context of study country, demographic characteristics of participants, and institutional setting; (b) the primary research focus social media use, mosque engagement, identity formation, da'wah communication, and so on; (c) key findings; and (d) theoretical frameworks employed. Codes were then grouped into higher-order themes mapped onto the study's guiding research questions. A total of 48 articles met the full inclusion criteria and were incorporated into the thematic synthesis.

#### 4. Quality Assessment

The methodological quality of included studies was assessed using an adapted version of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) framework for qualitative studies and a comparable appraisal approach for quantitative work. Studies were evaluated on criteria

including clarity of research questions, appropriateness of study design, rigor of data collection and analysis, adequacy of ethical consideration, and coherence of conclusions with evidence presented. All 48 included studies demonstrated acceptable quality on these criteria. Minor methodological limitations in specific studies are acknowledged at relevant points in the Results and Discussion section below.

## D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Social Media as a New Architecture of Islamic Spiritual Formation

The systematic review reveals that social media has fundamentally reorganized the architecture of Islamic spiritual formation for Gen-Z Muslims, creating new channels for religious learning, community building, and identity expression that operate largely outside the institutional control of traditional Islamic authorities. This finding is consistent across diverse geographical contexts, including Indonesia (Hartono et al., 2024; Jalaluddin et al., 2024), Pakistan (Khan et al., 2024), Turkey (Sözen, 2025), Australia (Ali, 2022), India (Missier, 2025), and the Netherlands (Geurts & Van Klingeren, 2021).

The specific mechanisms through which social media shapes Gen-Z Muslim spirituality can be organized around four interrelated dynamics. First, algorithmic curation creates what several scholars describe as 'Islamic filter bubbles,' where Gen-Z Muslims are repeatedly exposed to the specific strand of Islamic discourse that aligns with their initial preferences and engagement patterns (Muthohirin, 2025; Widayat et al., 2025). For some users, this algorithmic reinforcement deepens commitment to moderate, inclusive interpretations of Islam; for others, it accelerates radicalization toward more exclusivist positions. The critical variable appears to be the initial orientation of users when they first engage with Islamic content online, as algorithms amplify rather than correct these starting points.

Second, the aesthetic logics of social media platforms particularly the visual emphasis of Instagram and the entertainment orientation of TikTok have generated distinctive genres of Islamic content that combine religious messaging with sophisticated design aesthetics, humor, and popular cultural references (Baidawi et al., 2024; Virga et al., 2025). The 'Shalawat challenge' and other viral Islamic content formats documented by Baidawi et al., (2024) exemplify this trend, demonstrating how traditional devotional practices can be reimaged for digital platforms in ways that increase their appeal to Gen-Z audiences while potentially altering their devotional character. Inanoglu's (2025) analysis found that Muslim college students described algorithmically recommended Islamic content on TikTok as transformative precisely because of its accessibility and relatability qualities that more traditional forms of Islamic instruction often lack.

Third, social media has enabled the emergence of Muslim influencers as a new class of religious authority whose legitimacy rests not on formal Islamic credentials but on the size of their following, the quality of their content production, and the perceived authenticity of their religious commitment (Zaid et al., 2022). Rokhmah, Oktari, and Widiastuti (2025) documented the significant influence of social media influencers on Gen-Z Muslims' consumer decisions in the halal cosmetics market a finding that, while focused on consumption, illustrates the broader reach of influencer authority into domains previously governed by more formal religious guidance. When Gen-Z Muslims look to Instagram or YouTube influencers rather than to ulama for guidance on questions of Islamic practice, the criteria for evaluating religious knowledge inevitably shift from scholarly authority to digital charisma.

Fourth, social media platforms serve as spaces for the public performance of Muslim identity what Achfandhy & Rohmatulloh (2025) analyze through the Islamic concept of *riya'* (ostentation or performative piety) in the context of Yogyakarta urban Muslim youth. Their study found that digital media creates novel pressures toward the performance of religiosity

for social approval, potentially corrupting the sincerity (ikhlas) that is theologically central to Islamic practice. Multiple studies note Gen-Z Muslims' own awareness of and anxiety about the potentially inauthentic character of digitally performed piety (Azizah et al., 2025; Purbiyati & Amelia, 2025; Shavira & Pardomuan, 2025). This tension between genuine devotion and social performance represents one of the most significant challenges identified in the literature.

**Tabel 1. Major Themes of Social Media and the Transformation of Gen-Z Muslim Spirituality in the Digital Era**

Major Theme	Description of Findings	Implications for Gen-Z Muslim Spirituality	Key References
<b>Social Media as a New Architecture of Islamic Spiritual Formation</b>	Social media has fundamentally transformed the structure of Islamic spiritual formation among Gen-Z Muslims by creating digital spaces for religious learning, virtual communities, and identity expression outside the traditional authority of Islamic institutions. This phenomenon has been observed across multiple contexts, including Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkey, Australia, India, and the Netherlands.	Digital platforms foster a more flexible, transnational, and individualized form of religiosity, while simultaneously reducing reliance on formal religious institutions and traditional scholars.	Hartono et al. (2024); Jalaluddin et al. (2024); Khan et al. (2024); Sözen (2025); Ali (2022); Missier (2025); Geurts & Van Klingeren (2021)
<b>Algorithmic Curation and the “Islamic Filter Bubble”</b>	Social media algorithms repeatedly expose users to Islamic content aligned with their prior preferences and engagement patterns, creating “Islamic filter bubbles.” These algorithmic systems reinforce existing orientations rather than challenge them.	Algorithmic reinforcement may deepen moderate and inclusive interpretations of Islam for some users, while accelerating exclusivist or radical tendencies for others, depending on their initial exposure to online Islamic discourse.	Muthohirin (2025); Widayat et al. (2025)
<b>Digital Aesthetics and Popular Islamic Content</b>	Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok encourage the emergence of visually engaging Islamic content that integrates humor, entertainment, music, and popular culture. Viral trends such as the “Shalawat Challenge” illustrate how devotional practices are adapted into digital formats appealing to Gen-Z audiences.	Islamic teachings become more accessible, relatable, and attractive to young Muslims; however, the devotional essence of religious practices may shift toward entertainment-oriented consumption.	Virga et al. (2025); Baidawi et al. (2024); Inanoglu (2025)
<b>The Rise of Muslim Influencers as New Religious Authorities</b>	Muslim influencers derive legitimacy not from formal Islamic scholarship but from follower engagement, content quality, and perceived authenticity. Social media personalities increasingly shape religious understanding and lifestyle choices among Gen-Z Muslims.	Religious authority gradually shifts from traditional ulama and institutions toward digitally charismatic figures, redefining how Islamic knowledge and guidance are evaluated.	Zaid et al. (2022); Rokhmah, Oktari, & Widiastuti (2025)

Major Theme	Description of Findings	Implications for Gen-Z Muslim Spirituality	Key References
<b>Social Media as a Space for Performing Muslim Identity</b>	Social media functions as a public arena for displaying religious identity and piety. Studies highlight concerns regarding <i>rija'</i> (performative religiosity or ostentation), where religious practices are displayed for social recognition and validation.	Gen-Z Muslims experience tension between sincere devotion ( <i>ikhlas</i> ) and digitally performed piety, creating anxieties about authenticity in contemporary religious expression.	Achfandhy & Rohmatulloh (2025); Azizah et al. (2025); Purbiyati & Amelia (2025); Shavira & Pardomuan (2025)

## 2. The Mosque Community as Anchor of Embodied Spiritual Formation

Against the backdrop of these digital dynamics, the mosque community emerges in the literature as a critical but often underutilized resource for grounding Gen-Z Muslim spirituality in embodied, communal practice. The studies reviewed consistently demonstrate that effective mosque youth programming can provide what social media alone cannot: sustained human relationships, mentorship by knowledgeable religious figures, engagement with Islamic tradition in its full theological depth, and the embodied experience of communal worship that has historically been central to Muslim spiritual formation.

Mahardika et al. (2025) documented how mosque youth organizations in Indonesia that successfully adapted their communication strategies to incorporate digital elements while maintaining a core commitment to in-person gathering, communal prayer, and Islamic study achieved significantly higher levels of sustained youth engagement than either purely traditional or purely digital approaches. Their 'hybridized communication model' integrates WhatsApp groups, Instagram presence, and online event promotion with regular face-to-face meetings, communal prayers, and youth leadership development programs. This hybrid model resonates with findings from multiple other Indonesian contexts (Firdausi et al., 2025; Hanifah & Fauji, 2025) and appears to be broadly applicable across different Muslim community settings.

The role of mosque communities in providing structured Islamic education as opposed to the fragmented, algorithm-driven religious learning that characterizes social media consumption is particularly emphasized in the literature. Nasution et al. (2025) argue that while social media has created a 'new frontier for Islamic moral education' that extends beyond the mosque's physical boundaries, this frontier requires guidance from institutionally grounded religious educators. Their analysis suggests that mosque communities engaging with social media proactively producing high-quality Islamic educational content, training youth as digital da'i (preachers), and maintaining a visible presence on platforms frequented by Gen-Z can extend their educational influence while reinforcing rather than replacing in-person engagement.

Jarnawi et al. (2025) provide a compelling case study of mosque youth communities in Aceh Besar Regency that developed sophisticated social media literacy programs designed to help young Muslims navigate digital religious environments critically. By equipping youth with analytical frameworks for evaluating online religious content assessing the credentials of online preachers, recognizing the signs of extremist rhetoric, and distinguishing between reliable and unreliable Islamic sources these mosque communities positioned themselves as critical partners in their members' digital religious formation. Syafrida et al. (2025) extended this analysis by documenting training programs in which mosque adolescents were equipped with digital marketing skills, enabling them to serve as content creators for their mosque communities and thereby transform from passive consumers to active producers of Islamic content.

The significance of this transformation should not be underestimated. Kusumayanti, (2025) and Hidayat et al., (2023) both observe that one of the defining characteristics of Gen-Z Muslim religiosity is a sense of agency and self-determination in constructing religious identity—a characteristic that aligns poorly with top-down, didactic approaches to mosque youth programming but aligns well with collaborative, participatory models that treat young people as co-creators of community religious life. Fauzi & Pribadi (2024) confirm this observation in their analysis of Muslim youth between pragmatism, Islamic concern, and social piety, finding that Gen-Z Muslims' engagement with mosque communities is most sustained when it offers genuine opportunities for leadership, creativity, and social contribution.

**Tabel 2. The Role of Mosque Communities in Strengthening Gen-Z Muslim Spirituality**

Major Theme	Description of Findings	Implications for Gen-Z Muslim Spirituality	Key References
Mosque Communities as Centers of Embodied Spiritual Formation	Mosque youth communities provide direct mentorship, communal worship, and structured Islamic learning that cannot be fully replaced by digital media. Hybrid approaches combining online communication and offline engagement increase youth participation.	Strengthens communal religiosity, spiritual discipline, and deeper theological understanding through embodied religious experiences.	Mahardika et al. (2025); Firdausi et al. (2025); Hanifah & Fauji (2025)
Hybrid Digital–Mosque Communication Model	Mosques integrating WhatsApp, Instagram, and online promotion with face-to-face religious activities demonstrate higher levels of sustainable youth engagement.	Encourages balanced religiosity by integrating digital accessibility with real-world Islamic community participation.	Mahardika et al. (2025)
Mosque-Based Digital Religious Literacy	Mosque communities increasingly train youth to critically evaluate online Islamic content, recognize extremist narratives, and identify credible religious authorities.	Enhances critical digital literacy and protects Gen-Z Muslims from misinformation and radical online influences.	Jarnawi et al. (2025); Nasution et al. (2025)
Youth Empowerment through Digital Participation	Mosque adolescents are encouraged to become digital content creators, youth leaders, and contributors to mosque communication strategies.	Develops religious agency, creativity, leadership, and participatory forms of Islamic engagement among Gen-Z Muslims.	Syafrida et al. (2025); Fauzi & Pribadi (2024); Kusumayanti (2025); Hidayat et al. (2023)
Participatory and Collaborative Religious Engagement	Gen-Z Muslims prefer collaborative and participatory mosque programs rather than hierarchical and purely didactic approaches.	Increases long-term engagement with mosque communities by aligning religious activities with Gen-Z values of autonomy and self-expression.	Kusumayanti (2025); Hidayat et al. (2023); Fauzi & Pribadi (2024)

### 3. Hybridization: The Construction of Gen-Z Muslim Spiritual Identity

Perhaps the most significant theme to emerge from the systematic review is the fundamentally hybrid character of Gen-Z Muslim spiritual identity a hybridization that operates across multiple dimensions simultaneously and that the dual-axis spirituality

framework is specifically designed to illuminate. This hybridization can be analyzed along three axes: the online/offline axis, the local/global axis, and the traditional/modern axis.

Along the online/offline axis, the research consistently demonstrates that Gen-Z Muslims do not experience digital and physical religious spaces as separate or competing but as mutually constitutive (Helwa, 2026; Nurfitriya, 2023). The 'Islamic Fear of Missing Out' (FOMO) phenomenon documented by Helwa (2026) illustrates this dynamic: Gen-Z Muslims who encounter Islamic events, lectures, or community activities on social media are motivated to attend in person, while in-person religious experiences generate content that circulates through social media and attracts further participation. This virtuous cycle when successfully activated positions social media as a recruitment and motivation channel for embodied religious engagement rather than a substitute for it. Conversely, when mosque communities fail to maintain active social media presences that resonate with Gen-Z aesthetics and values, digital and physical religious engagement may diverge, with young Muslims increasingly confining their Islamic engagement to online spaces.

Along the local/global axis, social media exposes Gen-Z Muslims to transnational Islamic discourse that often intersects uneasily with local traditions of Islamic practice. Prasojo et al. (2020) documented this tension in the Pontianak Muslim community, where exposure to transnational Salafi Islamic content via social media was generating conflicts with established local practices. Similar dynamics have been documented in Turkish (Sözen, 2025), Dutch (Geurts & Van Klingeren, 2021), and Australian (Ali, 2022) Muslim communities. Yet the same transnational connectivity that can disrupt local Islamic traditions can also provide Gen-Z Muslims with access to a broader range of Islamic perspectives that enriches rather than impoverishes their religious understanding—particularly for young Muslims in minority contexts who may lack access to locally diverse Islamic voices.

Along the traditional/modern axis, the hijrah movement and related phenomena illustrate the complex negotiations that Gen-Z Muslims undertake between inherited Islamic traditions and the logics of contemporary digital culture (Triantoro & Fz, 2024; Zahara et al., 2020). The 'Muslim modern' identity documented by Triantoro and Fz (2024) in Yogyakarta—where young Muslims performed an Islamic identity simultaneously religiously committed and cosmopolitan in its cultural references exemplifies the creative syntheses that characterize Gen-Z Muslim self-presentation. Juliansyahzen's (2021) concept of the 'hybrid young Muslim' emphasizes the selective, eclectic character of Gen-Z Islamic identity formation, where doctrinal commitments are assembled from diverse sources rather than received wholesale from a single authoritative tradition. Donlic (2023) similarly documented this process of 'inter-religiosity' among young Muslims in the Alps-Adriatic region, finding that the construction of Muslim self-image in the digital era is characterized by negotiation, selection, and creative synthesis rather than passive inheritance.

#### 4. Tensions and Challenges in Muslim Gen-Z Spiritual Construction

The systematic review identifies five major tensions that characterize the construction of Muslim Gen-Z spirituality at the interface of social media and mosque communities. Understanding these tensions is essential for both academic analysis and practical intervention.

**The Depth-Breadth Tension.** Social media enables Gen-Z Muslims to access an unprecedented breadth of Islamic content but tends to reward engagement with shorter, more immediately accessible material at the expense of sustained engagement with complex theological texts or extended educational programs (Ardilla, 2024; Murniasih et al., 2024). Multiple studies document Gen-Z Muslims' preference for Instagram infographics, short TikTok videos, and Twitter threads as vehicles for Islamic learning—formats that are well-suited to conveying simple information and affective engagement but poorly suited to developing the integrated Islamic knowledge associated with traditional religious education.

Choirin et al., (2024) specifically identified this tension in their analysis of da'wah communication strategies for Gen-Z, arguing that effective digital da'wah requires a delicate balance between accessibility and depth.

**The Authority Tension.** The democratization of religious authority facilitated by social media creates genuine opportunities for Islamic learning and community building but also generates significant risks. Muthohirin's (2025) analysis of Islamic fundamentalism and young Muslim piety on social media documents the process by which Gen-Z Muslims can be recruited into extremist religious positions through algorithmically reinforced exposure to exclusivist content that presents itself as authoritative. The same lack of formal credentialing that makes social media Islamic content accessible and relatable to Gen-Z also makes it difficult for young Muslims without Islamic educational backgrounds to evaluate the reliability of what they encounter online. Jalaluddin et al. (2024) proposed that social media da'wah, to be genuinely formative rather than merely informative, requires systematic grounding in the recognized scholarly tradition a requirement that currently many digital Islamic content creators do not meet.

**The Authenticity Tension.** The pressure toward public performance of religious identity on social media creates what Achfandhy & Rohmatulloh (2025) identify as a specifically digital manifestation of *riya'* a classic Islamic concern with the corruption of religious practice by the desire for social approval. Multiple studies note Gen-Z Muslims' own ambivalence about this tension, with informants expressing awareness that their online religious self-presentation may not accurately represent their private religious life (Azizah et al., 2025). Shavira & Pardomuan (2025) specifically analyzed the phenomenon of '*Quranic spirituality strategies for overcoming FOMO,*' documenting how some Gen-Z Muslims actively seek spiritual resources to resist the anxiety-inducing social comparison dynamics of social media platforms.

**The Community Tension.** Social media creates new forms of Islamic community that can be genuinely meaningful particularly for young Muslims who lack access to geographically proximate Islamic communities but that characteristically lack the depth, accountability, and intergenerational transmission that characterize mosque-based community. Ferguson et al. (2021) examined Jewish and Muslim responses to social media in the US context, finding that while both communities valued online religious community as a supplement to in-person engagement, they consistently described online community as less satisfying and less formative than face-to-face participation. Balkaya-Ince et al., (2020) similarly found that religious identity formation in Muslim American adolescents was most robustly supported by maternal religious socialization and in-person community engagement rather than digital exposure alone.

**The Moderation Tension.** Research from the Indonesian context, where the government has actively promoted a discourse of '*Islamic moderation*' (*Islam wasatiyyah*) as a counter to religious extremism, documents significant tensions between this institutional discourse and the more polarized Islamic content circulating on social media. Widayat et al., (2025) found that many Indonesian Gen-Z Muslims expressed verbal commitment to religious moderation while simultaneously consuming and occasionally circulating content reflecting more exclusivist positions. Al-Ansi et al. (2023) further analyzed how guidance from the Quran and Hadith can be leveraged to help Gen-Z Muslims navigate the challenges and temptations of social media a normative approach that complements the empirical analyses of other studies in the corpus.

**Tabel 3. Major Tensions and Challenges in the Construction of Gen-Z Muslim Spirituality**

Major Tension	Description of Findings	Implications for Gen-Z Muslim Spirituality	Key References
Depth–Breadth Tension	Social media provides broad access to Islamic content but encourages short, simplified, and fast-consumed religious learning formats.	Religious understanding may become fragmented, superficial, and less connected to deep theological traditions.	Ardilla (2024); Murniasih et al. (2024); Choirin et al. (2024)
Authority Tension	Social media democratizes religious authority, allowing influencers and uncredentialed figures to shape Islamic discourse.	Gen-Z Muslims face difficulties distinguishing credible Islamic scholarship from extremist or misleading content.	Muthohirin (2025); Jalaluddin et al. (2024)
Authenticity Tension	Online religious self-presentation encourages performative piety and digital forms of <i>riya'</i> driven by social validation.	Creates tension between sincere spirituality ( <i>ikhlas</i> ) and public religious performance on digital platforms.	Achfandhy & Rohmatulloh (2025); Azizah et al. (2025); Shavira & Pardomuan (2025)
Community Tension	Digital Islamic communities provide accessibility but lack the depth, accountability, and intergenerational interaction of mosque-based communities.	Online religiosity may weaken embodied communal spirituality and reduce meaningful face-to-face religious engagement.	Ferguson et al. (2021); Balkaya-Ince et al. (2020)
Moderation Tension	Institutional narratives of Islamic moderation often compete with polarized and exclusivist religious content circulating online.	Gen-Z Muslims may experience inconsistency between moderate religious ideals and online exposure to radical or divisive interpretations.	Widayat et al. (2025); Al-Ansi et al. (2023)

### 5. Enabling Conditions for Positive Spiritual Construction

Despite these tensions, the literature also identifies enabling conditions under which the interaction of social media and mosque communities supports positive spiritual formation in Gen-Z Muslims. These conditions suggest practical implications for mosque administrators, Islamic educators, and da'wah practitioners.

First, studies consistently indicate that Gen-Z Muslims who maintain active membership in mosque communities while also engaging with social media Islamic content report higher levels of spiritual well-being and more integrated religious identities than those who rely on social media alone (Fauzi & Pribadi, 2024; Mahardika et al., 2025). This finding supports the dual-axis spirituality framework's implication that genuine spiritual formation requires attention to both vertical (devotional) and horizontal (communal) dimensions a balance that is easier to maintain when mosque community membership provides structural support for regular devotional practice.

Second, the quality of mosque youth programming emerges as a significant predictor of sustained engagement. Mosque communities that offer Gen-Z members genuine leadership opportunities, intellectually stimulating Islamic educational content, and spaces for authentic peer community rather than simply co-opting Gen-Z members as a passive audience for programs designed by and for older generations demonstrate significantly stronger retention rates (Hanifah & Fauji, 2025; Jarnawi et al., 2025). Jannah, Salama, and Dadang (2025) provide an illustrative case study in the Santrendelik community,

demonstrating how public relations strategies that foreground authentic relationship-building with young Muslims can significantly strengthen community bonds.

Third, Islamic digital content that is produced with genuine scholarly grounding, aesthetic sophistication, and authentic engagement with the questions and concerns of Gen-Z Muslims—rather than content that simply repurposes traditional Islamic materials in digital formats—demonstrates greater impact on spiritual formation outcomes (Choirin et al., 2024; Nasution et al., 2025). The most effective digital da'wah documented in the literature combines Islamic content expertise with deep understanding of platform affordances and Gen-Z communication styles, including the willingness to address the emotional, psychological, and social challenges that young Muslims actually face.

Fourth, social media literacy programs embedded within mosque youth communities appear to be particularly effective in helping Gen-Z Muslims engage with digital religious content more critically and intentionally (Jarnawi et al., 2025; Nurwahidin et al., 2025). By equipping young Muslims with analytical tools to evaluate online religious content, these programs enhance rather than restrict digital religious engagement, enabling Gen-Z Muslims to participate in online Islamic discourse as critical agents rather than passive recipients. The growing body of scholarship on this approach suggests that it represents one of the most promising practical strategies for supporting Muslim Gen-Z spiritual formation in the digital era.

Finally, Wang et al., (2025) offer a comparative perspective from China, where Gen-Z individuals in an officially atheistic context show surprising enthusiasm for spiritual practices mediated through social media. Their finding that social media can stimulate spiritual seeking even in non-theistic contexts underscores both the profound power of digital platforms to shape spiritual experience and the importance of providing robust institutional frameworks such as mosque communities to guide that spiritual seeking in authentically Islamic directions. Missier's (2025) comparative study of digital religious influence across Christian, Hindu, and Muslim Gen Y and Gen Z populations in Mumbai similarly highlights the unique challenges and opportunities that digital platforms present for Muslim communities specifically, given the particular authority structures and community traditions of Islamic religious life.

## E. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review has examined how Muslim Generation Z constructs spiritual identity through the dual dynamics of social media engagement and mosque community participation. The findings, synthesized across 48 peer-reviewed studies published between 2018 and 2026, reveal a complex and multidimensional process of spiritual formation that neither straightforwardly celebrates nor dismisses the role of digital platforms in Muslim religious life.

The 'dual-axis spirituality' framework proposed in this study provides a productive conceptual tool for understanding the distinctive character of Gen-Z Muslim religiosity. When both axes of this framework are robustly activated the vertical axis of individual devotion and the horizontal axis of communal religious identity social media and mosque community function as complementary rather than competing sites of spiritual formation. Social media extends the reach and accessibility of Islamic learning, creates new forms of religious community, and provides Gen-Z Muslims with aesthetically sophisticated and personally resonant religious content. Mosque communities, meanwhile, provide the embodied, sustained, and accountable engagement with Islamic tradition that social media alone cannot sustain. The most spiritually robust Gen-Z Muslims documented in the literature are those who successfully navigate the interface between these two domains, leveraging the distinctive strengths of each while actively working to mitigate its inherent limitations.

The five tensions identified in this study around depth versus breadth of religious knowledge, the democratization versus fragmentation of religious authority, the authenticity versus performance of religious identity, the formation versus simulation of community, and the promotion versus erosion of religious moderation constitute both a research agenda and a practical challenge. Addressing these tensions requires collaboration between Islamic scholars, mosque administrators, digital content creators, and educators that is currently too rarely achieved. This study calls for the development of integrated programs and policies that treat these actors as partners in a shared project of Muslim Gen-Z spiritual formation.

Several practical recommendations emerge from this analysis. For mosque communities, the findings strongly support hybrid engagement strategies that leverage digital platforms for outreach, recruitment, and content distribution while maintaining robust in-person programming that provides Gen-Z Muslims with embodied community, mentorship, and sustained Islamic education. For Islamic educators and da'wah practitioners, the findings highlight the importance of developing digital content that combines scholarly depth with digital accessibility. For policymakers and Islamic institutions concerned with religious moderation, the findings underscore the need for proactive engagement with social media ecosystems rather than purely reactive responses to the extremist content that circulates within them.

This study has several limitations that should inform the interpretation of its findings and direct future research. The reliance on published academic literature means that the review is inevitably shaped by the priorities of academic researchers, which may not fully represent the experiential realities of Gen-Z Muslims themselves. The preponderance of Indonesia-focused research in the corpus, while reflecting the genuine significance of the Indonesian context for global Muslim demography, limits the generalizability of findings across diverse Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority contexts. Future research should employ explicitly comparative methodologies to examine how contextual factors the legal framework for religious expression, the institutional strength of mosque communities, the dominant social media platforms, and the specific character of local Islamic traditions shape the construction of Muslim Gen-Z spirituality in different settings.

Furthermore, the primarily qualitative character of existing research, while generating rich insights into subjective experiences of digital religious formation, leaves important questions about the structural and longitudinal dimensions of this process inadequately addressed. Future research should employ longitudinal methodologies capable of tracking the development of Muslim Gen-Z spirituality over time, quantitative methodologies capable of assessing the relative magnitude of different influences on spiritual formation, and quasi-experimental designs capable of evaluating the impact of specific interventions such as social media literacy programs or hybrid mosque engagement strategies on spiritual outcomes. Despite these limitations, this study provides the most comprehensive synthesis currently available of the empirical literature on Muslim Gen-Z spirituality, social media, and mosque communities, and lays a productive theoretical and practical foundation for the work that lies ahead.

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