



The Negotiation of Millennial Muslim Identity in the Digital Sphere: A Study of Religious Practices and Cultural Consumption on Social Media

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Abstract

The expansion of social media has created new spaces in which Muslim identity is expressed, negotiated, and reshaped through the interaction between religious practices and contemporary cultural consumption. This study examines the negotiation of Muslim identity in Indonesia's digital sphere, with particular attention to creative da'wah, modest fashion, hybrid identity, and the relationship between cultural and economic capital. The study employed a qualitative case study design involving 28 Indonesian Muslim participants, comprising content creators and active followers of Islamic and culturally related content on Instagram and TikTok. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, digital observation, and documentation and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings indicate that digital platforms enable participants to communicate religious values through creative, accessible, and visually engaging content while simultaneously adapting Islamic expression to contemporary cultural preferences. Modest fashion emerged as a significant medium through which piety, aesthetics, self-expression, and economic opportunity intersected. The findings also reveal the development of hybrid and flexible identities, as participants selectively negotiated religious commitments across different social and digital contexts. Drawing on Bourdieu's perspective, the study shows that cultural resources and digital visibility can generate social recognition and, in some cases, be converted into economic opportunities, although this process also produces tensions between religious authenticity and market-oriented practices. The study contributes to understanding Muslim identity as a dynamic social process shaped by religious agency, cultural participation, and the conditions of digitally mediated life.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital media has reshaped the ways Muslims encounter, interpret, and express religious identity in everyday life (Khamis, 2024a; Zaid et al., 2022). Social media platforms are no longer merely channels for interpersonal communication, as they have become public arenas where religious messages, personal experiences, lifestyle preferences, and cultural affiliations are continuously displayed and negotiated (Haq & Kwok, 2024). This transformation creates an important paradox: digital platforms can broaden access to religious knowledge while simultaneously subjecting religious expression to the demands of visibility, engagement, popularity, and commercial value (Divon et al., 2026; Doğan, 2026; Khamis, 2024a). In Indonesia, this development is particularly significant because Islamic expression increasingly circulates through platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, where religious content exists alongside entertainment, fashion, and consumer-oriented practices. Studies on digital Islamic discourse indicate that online interaction has altered the conditions under which religious legitimacy is established and recognized, making audience engagement an increasingly important dimension of religious communication (AlMazaedh et al., 2026; Atallah, 2026; Wahid, 2025). Research on digital Islam has likewise shown that social media influencers can participate in reimagining religious authority and everyday Islamic practices, especially among digitally connected Muslims (Wahid & Abdulloh, 2026). The consequence is that religious identity is no longer expressed solely within conventional institutions or face-to-face

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communities but is also shaped through repeated interaction within networked environments. Understanding this shift is essential because the digital sphere has become one of the spaces in which contemporary Muslim identity is publicly articulated and socially evaluated.

The increasing visibility of Islamic expression online also reveals that religious identity is closely connected to broader processes of cultural participation. Muslim users may move within the same digital environment from watching short religious videos and participating in online discussions to following fashion trends, sharing personal stories, and engaging with commercial content. Such practices complicate the conventional separation between religiosity and popular culture because Islamic values are often expressed through cultural forms that are simultaneously modern, visual, and market-oriented. Recent studies suggest that young Muslims actively negotiate religious identity amid multiple influences, including religious moderation, popular culture, and competing social expectations (Waliyuddin, 2024a). Research on digital piety similarly demonstrates that mediated environments can reshape relationships between religious authority, family influence, and individual agency, thereby producing more negotiated forms of religious practice (Achfandhy & Nurul Mubin, 2026; Andok, 2024). Changes in religious belonging have also become increasingly visible in digital contexts where identities are discussed, affirmed, and revised through new forms of social interaction (Mattes et al., 2025; Novak et al., 2022). Rather than treating Muslim identity as a fixed attribute, these developments suggest that it should be understood as an ongoing social process. The digital sphere therefore provides a particularly important setting for examining how religious commitments are maintained while individuals remain engaged with rapidly changing cultural environments.

One of the clearest manifestations of this process can be observed in the growth of digital da'wah. Religious communication now appears through short videos, visual storytelling, podcasts, interactive discussions, captions, and other formats designed to attract audiences accustomed to fast-moving digital content. The transformation of da'wah has expanded opportunities for religious communication by making Islamic messages more accessible, flexible, and responsive to the communication preferences of younger users (Salwa, 2024). At the same time, the shift from conventional preaching to highly mediated communication raises questions concerning credibility, authenticity, personal branding, and the authority of digital religious actors (Andok, 2024; Kerim et al., 2025). Popular Islamic culture on social media further illustrates how religious messages are increasingly represented through visual creativity and forms of communication associated with contemporary youth culture (Golan, 2023). These developments allow creators to make religious content more relatable, yet they also create the possibility that substantive messages will be simplified in response to platform dynamics and audience preferences (Khusairi, 2025). Consequently, creative da'wah should not be viewed only as a technical innovation in religious communication but also as a practice through which Muslim identity is performed and negotiated. Its growing prominence makes digital religious practice an important entry point for understanding broader changes in contemporary Islamic expression.

Cultural consumption adds another layer of complexity to this transformation. Modest fashion, halal-oriented lifestyles, Islamic brands, and other forms of consumption provide visible means through which religious affiliation can be communicated in public and digital spaces. Research on popular culture and Islamic identity has shown that modest fashion involves an ongoing contestation of meaning rather than a simple choice between religious obedience and modern style (Ajala, 2022; Williams et al., 2022). Young Muslims may adapt elements of popular culture while selectively aligning them with religious values, creating expressions that are neither entirely traditional nor detached from contemporary trends (Waheed et al., 2025). Social media strengthens this process by turning clothing, lifestyle choices, and consumer practices into visible components of self-presentation that can be shared, evaluated, and reproduced by others. Cultural participation may therefore support self-expression and economic empowerment, while at the same time exposing religious symbols to processes of branding and commodification. This tension is particularly relevant when digital visibility generates opportunities for endorsements, business promotion, affiliate marketing, and other forms of monetization. For this reason, the relationship between religious practice and cultural consumption deserves sociological attention because it reveals how piety, identity, aesthetics, and economic interests may become intertwined within the same digital field.

The existing literature provides substantial evidence that digital media has transformed Muslim religious life, although its findings remain distributed across several related themes (Hashmi et al., 2021). Sulfikar & Yasmine (2025) examined how social media influencers contribute to changing religious authority and Islamic practices, while Whyte (2022) investigated the construction of religious legitimacy within the digital public sphere. Waliyuddin (2024) focused on how young Indonesian Muslims negotiate identity amid extremism, moderation, and popular culture, whereas Zhandossova et al (2025) addressed the digital religious landscape and the role of religious attitudes in contemporary online environments. Missier (2025) explored religious participation among millennial Muslim women in relation to social media interaction and motivation, and Abdurrahman et al. (2026) examined negotiated authority and digital piety in Indonesia. Further studies have investigated religious practices among Indonesian Muslim students Siregar et al. (2025), the changing negotiation of religious belonging in digital times NOVAK & MATTES (2025), and the construction of Muslim spirituality through social media and mosque communities (Jones-Ahmed, 2022). Together, these studies demonstrate that digital environments influence religious authority, participation, spirituality, and identity formation in multiple ways. However, they also indicate that the relationship among these dimensions requires a more integrated explanation, particularly when religious practices coexist with popular culture and consumption.

A second stream of research has examined the relationship between digital culture, popular Islamic expression, and emerging forms of Muslim identity. Bardey & Bendaoud (2026) highlighted the contestation of modest fashion among millennials and Generation Z, while Fikri et al. (2026) examined identity negotiation and hybrid identity among digitally connected Muslim students. Khamis (2024) explored the intersection of sacred space, culture, and Muslim identity in the digital era, whereas Hefner (2022) analyzed the negotiation between digital identity and religiosity through Islamic self-help content. Studies of social media have also examined its role in Qur'anic learning and other forms of digitally mediated religious engagement (Sule & Mainiyo, 2023). Meanwhile, Taufik (2025) demonstrated how digital participation can connect Islamic values with new forms of youth engagement and collective action. Research on digital religious communication has thus generated valuable knowledge about da'wah, spirituality, modest fashion, learning, and identity. Nevertheless, these phenomena are often investigated as separate domains, making it difficult to explain how religious practice and cultural consumption operate together within the everyday negotiation of identity. The literature consequently provides a strong foundation for the present study while simultaneously revealing the need for a framework capable of connecting these fragmented dimensions.

This study identifies a more specific gap in the limited integration of religious practice, cultural consumption, and forms of capital within analyses of Muslim identity in digital spaces. Previous research has largely explained how Islamic identity is represented, how religious authority is negotiated, or how popular Islamic culture is consumed, but less attention has been directed toward the processes linking these practices within a single sociological framework. Creative da'wah and modest fashion, for example, are frequently discussed as different phenomena even though both may represent efforts to reconcile religious values with the communicative and cultural demands of contemporary digital life. Existing research also provides limited explanation of how visibility, religious knowledge, aesthetic competence, social networks, and audience recognition can generate resources that extend beyond symbolic identity and enter economic practices (Taufik, 2025). Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital offer a useful analytical perspective because they allow identity to be understood as the outcome of socially situated practices rather than as a purely individual or fixed attribute. From this perspective, social media can be approached as a digital field in which actors mobilize cultural resources, develop networks, seek recognition, and encounter opportunities for economic conversion while responding to norms of religious authenticity. This framework is particularly relevant to the tension identified in the present topic, namely the effort to sustain spiritual commitments while participating in platform environments shaped by attention and market logic. Addressing this gap makes it possible to move beyond describing online Islamic expressions toward explaining the social mechanisms through which those expressions are negotiated and valued.

The need for such an analysis is reinforced by the empirical diversity of Muslim practices already visible in digital environments. Research has shown that digital spaces can facilitate

reflection on religious values while also creating ambivalence regarding authority, personal piety, and social expectations (Achfandhy & Rohmatulloh, 2024). The same environment may encourage creators to develop accessible forms of *da'wah*, enable users to express piety through contemporary aesthetics, and provide opportunities for entrepreneurial activity based on religiously meaningful products and identities. At the same time, these opportunities are accompanied by risks, including the simplification of religious messages, pressure to maintain a publicly acceptable identity, and the commodification of religious symbols. Recent work on popular Islamic culture similarly suggests that contemporary Muslim identity develops through selective adaptation rather than through a simple acceptance or rejection of modern cultural influences (Madandola et al., 2026). Identity negotiation must therefore be examined as a dynamic process involving adaptation, boundary-making, self-presentation, and responses to the expectations generated by particular social contexts (Yilmaz et al., 2026). This perspective is consistent with evidence in the present manuscript showing that creative religious communication, modest fashion, and hybrid identity are interconnected dimensions rather than isolated practices. The issue is consequently important not only for understanding online behavior but also for explaining wider transformations in how contemporary Muslim identity is lived, communicated, and socially recognized.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the dynamics of millennial Muslim identity negotiation in Indonesia's digital sphere, particularly on Instagram and TikTok, by examining the interaction between religious practices and cultural consumption. The study focuses on how creative *da'wah*, digital religious expression, modest fashion, and lifestyle practices contribute to the formation of contemporary Islamic self-expression. It also investigates how cultural and economic forms of capital become interconnected when religious identity is expressed within digital environments that create opportunities for visibility, recognition, and commercial activity. In addition, the study seeks to explain how hybrid and flexible forms of identity emerge from continuing negotiations between religious authenticity and the cultural pressures of digital modernity. Theoretically, the study contributes to the sociology of religion and digital media by applying Bourdieu's perspective to understand social media as a field in which religious habitus and different forms of capital interact. This approach extends existing discussions by integrating religious practice and cultural consumption into a single analysis of identity negotiation rather than treating them as separate phenomena. Practically, the findings are expected to offer insight for Muslim content creators, religious institutions, educators, and digital literacy initiatives seeking to develop creative and contextually relevant forms of religious engagement while remaining attentive to authenticity, ethics, and commodification. Ultimately, the study offers a sociological account of how Muslim identity is actively shaped through the opportunities and tensions that characterize contemporary digital life.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to explore the negotiation of Muslim identity in the digital sphere. The design was selected because the phenomenon under investigation involves subjective meanings, everyday experiences, and complex interactions between religious practices and cultural consumption that require in-depth contextual interpretation. The study focused on how participants understood, expressed, and negotiated their Muslim identity while engaging with digital religious content, creative *da'wah*, modest fashion, and contemporary lifestyle practices. Rather than measuring the frequency of predetermined variables, the qualitative design enabled the researcher to examine how and why particular identity practices emerged within participants' social and digital contexts. The study was guided by Pierre Bourdieu's sociological perspective, particularly the concepts of habitus, field, and capital, to interpret how religious dispositions and cultural resources were mobilized in digital environments. The case was defined as the process of identity negotiation among Indonesian Muslims who actively produced or consumed Islamic and culturally related content on social media. This approach also allowed the researcher to connect participants' subjective narratives with their observable activities and

interactions on digital platforms. The design was therefore appropriate for explaining the dynamic relationship between religious authenticity, cultural adaptation, and contemporary digital practices.

Research Context and Time

The study was situated within the Indonesian digital environment, with Instagram and TikTok serving as the primary platforms for examining participants' religious practices, cultural consumption, and identity-related interactions. These platforms were selected because participants actively used them to produce, consume, and engage with content related to Islam, fashion, lifestyle, and other contemporary cultural issues. The research was not confined to a single geographical location because the central phenomenon occurred through digitally mediated interactions across social media spaces. Participants represented diverse social and occupational backgrounds, enabling the study to capture varied experiences of identity negotiation. The research procedure followed a twelve-month cycle consisting of preparation, fieldwork, analysis, and reporting. The preparation stage included a literature review, proposal development, instrument preparation, and the completion of relevant research arrangements. Data collection was conducted through digital observation, in-depth interviews, and the collection of relevant digital documentation, followed by an iterative process of analysis and interpretation. This sequence enabled the researcher to examine the phenomenon systematically while allowing emerging findings to inform subsequent stages of the inquiry.

Population and Participants

The study population consisted of Indonesian Muslims who were actively engaged with social media and participated in the production or consumption of content related to Islamic issues and culture. Participants were selected through a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was used to identify individuals with direct experience relevant to the research objectives, whereas snowball sampling enabled the researcher to identify additional information-rich participants through recommendations from initial informants. The inclusion criteria specified that participants were Muslim, actively used Instagram and/or TikTok at least three times per week, and actively produced or consumed content related to religious and Islamic cultural issues. The final study involved 28 participants with diverse backgrounds who represented both content creators and active followers. Participants included 20 women and 8 men, with reported ages ranging from 22 to 35 years. Sampling continued until the collected data provided sufficient depth to address the research objectives and subsequent data did not produce substantial new insights relevant to the emerging patterns.

Research Instruments

The researcher served as the primary instrument and was supported by three complementary instruments: a semi-structured interview guide, a digital observation guide, and a documentation guide. The semi-structured interview guide consisted of open-ended questions developed in accordance with the research objectives and Bourdieu's theoretical framework while remaining sufficiently flexible to explore experiences that emerged during the interviews. The main areas explored included participants' involvement in producing or consuming religious content, motivations for displaying Muslim identity online, perceived pressures or expectations in digital self-presentation, strategies for balancing religious values with popular cultural trends, and the perceived effects of digital Islamic expression on offline social life. The digital observation guide was used to record relevant activities and interactions on Instagram and TikTok, with particular attention given to content types, communication styles, religious symbols, visual representations, and audience responses. The documentation guide was used to collect and organize relevant digital materials, including posts, photographs, videos, captions, comments, and hashtags. The use of these complementary instruments enabled the researcher to compare participants' narratives with observable digital practices and to develop a more comprehensive understanding of religious identity negotiation.

Trustworthiness

Because this study employed a qualitative design, the quality of the findings was established through procedures intended to strengthen trustworthiness rather than through statistical tests of validity and reliability. Source and methodological triangulation were conducted by comparing

information obtained from different participants and across interviews, digital observations, and documentary materials. Member checking was used to confirm the researcher's interpretations with participants and to ensure that the meanings attributed to their experiences were appropriately represented. Peer discussion was conducted to obtain critical perspectives on emerging findings and to reduce the possibility that interpretations were influenced solely by the researcher's assumptions. Negative case analysis was also applied by examining information that contradicted or did not fully correspond with dominant patterns emerging from the data. These procedures required interpretations to be continuously compared with the available evidence and refined when inconsistencies emerged. The combination of multiple data sources and verification strategies strengthened the credibility and dependability of the findings. Trustworthiness was therefore maintained through systematic comparison, confirmation, critical reflection, and verification throughout the research process.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was organized through several interconnected stages. First, the researcher reviewed relevant literature, refined the research focus, prepared the research instruments, and completed the necessary research arrangements. Second, potential participants were identified based on the established inclusion criteria and approached through relevant social media networks. Third, purposively selected participants were invited to participate, after which additional information-rich participants were identified through recommendations from initial informants using snowball sampling. Fourth, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, perspectives, and strategies for negotiating religious identity in digital contexts. Interviews were conducted online through Zoom or Google Meet or offline according to participants' preferences, and each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes. Fifth, digital observation was conducted on Instagram and TikTok to examine participants' activities, interactions, content practices, communication styles, visual representations, and audience engagement. Sixth, relevant digital documentation, including posts, photographs, videos, captions, comments, and hashtags, was collected and organized according to its relevance to the research focus. The resulting data were continuously organized during the fieldwork process to facilitate comparison across sources and identify issues requiring further clarification.

To provide a clearer overview of the sequence and integration of these methodological stages, the overall research procedure is presented in Figure 1. The flowchart illustrates how the study progressed from identifying the research problem and establishing the theoretical framework to developing instruments, selecting participants, collecting and organizing data, conducting thematic analysis, ensuring trustworthiness, and interpreting the findings through Bourdieu's perspective. In particular, it demonstrates the integration of multiple data sources and verification procedures used to develop a coherent explanation of Muslim identity negotiation in the digital sphere.

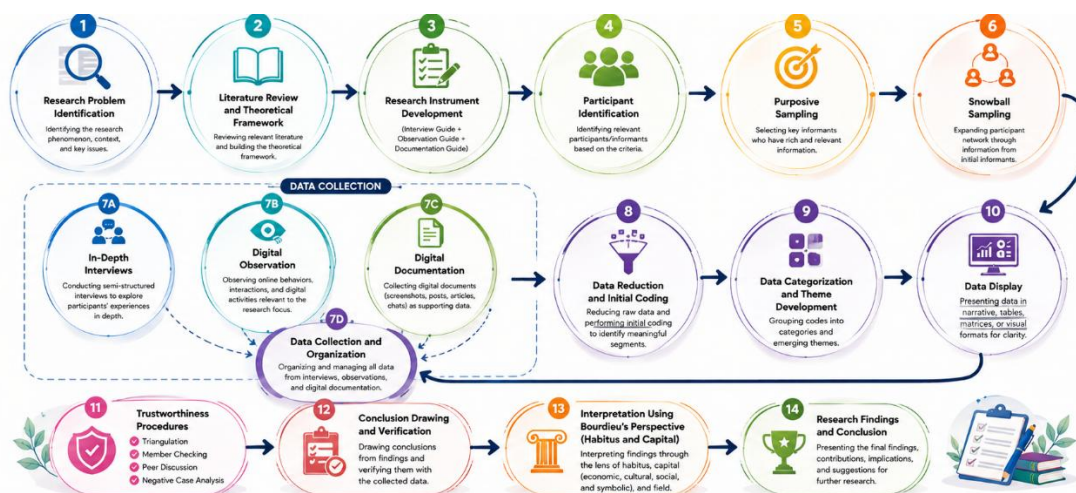


Figure 1. Qualitative Research Procedure

As illustrated in Figure 1, the research process was not treated as a strictly linear sequence because data collection, organization, analysis, and verification were conducted iteratively. Insights obtained during interviews and digital observations informed the subsequent coding and categorization processes, while emerging interpretations were repeatedly compared with different sources of evidence. The trustworthiness procedures were also applied throughout the analytical process rather than only after the findings had been developed. This iterative structure enabled the researcher to refine the interpretation continuously and to connect participants' narratives with observable digital practices. Consequently, the flowchart represents both the systematic stages of the study and the interconnected nature of qualitative inquiry used to explain the negotiation of Muslim identity within the digital field.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of the interconnected processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Analysis began with the organization of interview data, digital observation records, and documentary materials. During the data reduction stage, information relevant to the research objectives was selected, focused, and condensed, while meaningful statements, practices, and interactions were assigned initial codes. The coded data were subsequently compared across participants and data sources and grouped into broader categories based on similarities, relationships, and differences. Particular attention was directed toward patterns associated with creative da'wah, religious self-expression, modest fashion, cultural consumption, identity negotiation, hybrid identity, audience recognition, and the relationship between cultural and economic capital. The resulting categories were then developed into broader themes representing the principal patterns identified in the study. Data display was conducted through organized narratives, thematic descriptions, tables, and selected participant accounts to facilitate comparison and interpretation. Preliminary conclusions were developed throughout the analytical process and repeatedly checked against interview data, observation records, and documentary evidence. Finally, the themes were interpreted through Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital to explain how religious dispositions, cultural resources, social recognition, and economic opportunities were mobilized and negotiated within digital environments. This iterative analytical process produced the main findings used to explain the dynamics of Muslim identity negotiation in the contemporary digital sphere.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

A. Participant Characteristics

This study involved 28 participants consisting of 16 content creators and 12 active followers on the Instagram and TikTok platforms. All participants are domiciled in the Greater Jakarta area and several other big cities such as Bandung, Surabaya, and Medan. Here are the characteristics of the participants in a nutshell:

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participant Code	Age	Gender	Jobs	Main Platforms	Category
P-01	25	Women	Content Creator	Instagram & TikTok	Creator of Da'wah
P-02	28	Male	S2 Students	Instagram	Creator of Da'wah
P-03	31	Women	Owner Brand Fesyen	Instagram & TikTok	Fashion Creator
P-04	24	Women	Influencing	TikTok	Kreator Lifestyle
P-05	27	Male	Private Workers	Instagram	Creator of Da'wah
P-06	26	Women	Freelancer	Instagram & TikTok	Fashion Creator
P-07	33	Women	Entrepreneur	Instagram	Kreator Lifestyle
P-08	29	Male	Lecturer	Instagram	Creator of Da'wah
P-09	22	Women	Students	TikTok	Fashion Creator
P-10	30	Male	YouTuber	TikTok	Creator of Da'wah
P-11	27	Women	Content Creator	Instagram & TikTok	Kreator Lifestyle

P-12	34	Women	Housewives	Instagram	Fashion Creator
P-13	26	Male	Private Workers	TikTok	Creator of Da'wah
P-14	28	Women	Owner Brand Fesyen	Instagram & TikTok	Fashion Creator
P-15	32	Male	Entrepreneur	Instagram	Creator of Da'wah
P-16	25	Women	Content Creator	TikTok	Kreator Lifestyle
P-17	24	Women	Students	Instagram	Active Followers
P-18	29	Male	Private Workers	Instagram & TikTok	Active Followers
P-19	26	Women	Guru	Instagram	Active Followers
P-20	31	Male	PNS	TikTok	Active Followers
P-21	23	Women	Students	Instagram & TikTok	Active Followers
P-22	28	Women	Private Workers	Instagram	Active Followers
P-23	35	Male	Self-employed	TikTok	Active Followers
P-24	22	Women	Students	Instagram	Active Followers
P-25	30	Women	Private Workers	Instagram & TikTok	Active Followers
P-26	27	Male	Private Workers	TikTok	Active Followers
P-27	33	Women	Housewives	Instagram	Active Followers
P-28	26	Women	Content Creator	Instagram & TikTok	Active Followers

Source : processed data (2026)

Table 1 shows that the study participants were dominated by women (20 people or 71.4%) compared to men (8 people or 28.6%). The age range of participants was 22-35 years old, with an average age of 28 years, which corresponded to the criteria of the millennial generation. In terms of work, participants come from various backgrounds, ranging from students, private workers, to entrepreneurs and lecturers. The Instagram platform became the most used platform (18 participants), followed by TikTok (8 participants), and a combination of the two (12 participants). The participant category is divided into content creators (16 people) who produce religious, fashion, or lifestyle content, as well as active followers (12 people) who regularly consume and interact with these contents. This diversity of characteristics allows the study to capture a comprehensive perspective from the side of digital content producers and consumers.

B. Key Research Findings

Based on data analysis that has been carried out through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn, this study finds three main patterns in the negotiation of millennial Muslim identity in the digital space:

1. Creative Da'wah: Packaging Religious Messages in an Attractive Way

The first findings show that da'wah content creators have developed creative communication strategies in conveying religious messages. They pack religious content with an entertaining style, eye-catching visuals, and language that millennials can easily understand.

Table 2. Creative Da'wah Patterns on Social Media

Sub-Theme	Description	Sample Findings	Participant Code
Relaxed Language Style	Use of non-rigid and relatable everyday language	"I used to think a lot, why aren't prayers answered? It turns out..."	P-01, P-05, P-08
Eye-catching visuals	Use of aesthetic graphics, animations, and visual effects	Content is a short video with dynamic transitions and overlay text	P-02, P-10, P-13
Personal Narrative	Sharing personal experiences as a form of contextual da'wah	"I've been in your position before, I've been in a lot of trouble..."	P-01, P-08, P-10
Diverse Formats	Variety of content in the form of reels, carousels, podcasts, and live streaming	A combination of educational and entertainment content in one upload	P-02, P-13, P-15
High Interactivity	Open up discussion and Q&A with the audience	Q&A sessions via story or comment feature	P-01, P-05, P-10

Source: data processed (2026)

Da'wah creators realize that the millennial generation has a preference for light, visual, and non-patronizing content. P-01 explains:

"I learned from experience, if da'wah is in a rigid way, people are lazy to watch. So I started writing content that was like talking to a friend, but still had religious value. Sometimes I use memes or pop culture references to make it more relatable." (P-01, Interview, March 15, 2025)

The same thing was also expressed by P-08, a lecturer and creator of da'wah:

"On campus, I am used to academic language. But on social media, I realized that my audience was different. I have to adjust. Effective da'wah content is one that can enter the heart without making people feel patronized." (P-08, Interview, March 20, 2025).

Table 2 identifies five main sub-themes in the creative da'wah patterns implemented by content creators. The first sub-theme is the laid-back language style, where the creators use colloquial language that is familiar and easy for millennial audiences to understand, so that the religious message feels closer and less patronizing. Second, the use of attractive visuals is an important strategy to attract attention in the midst of a flood of digital information, by utilizing aesthetic graphics, animations, and visual effects. Third, personal narratives are an effective approach because creators share their personal experiences, making audiences feel emotionally connected. Fourth, diverse formats show that creators are not fixated on one type of content, but rather experiment with different formats such as reels, carousels, podcasts, and live streaming to reach a wider audience. Fifth, high interactivity is reflected in the creator's efforts to open a discussion space through question and answer sessions, so that da'wah is not one-way but becomes a participatory dialogue. These five patterns collectively show the transformation of da'wah from a rigid conventional model to a more contextual and engaging approach in the digital era.

2. Moderate Fashion: The Unity of Piety and Lifestyle

The second finding revealed that modest fashion has become a significant phenomenon among millennial Muslims. This phenomenon is not just a clothing trend, but also a form of identity expression that combines religious values with modern aesthetics.

Table 3. Moderate Fashion Patterns as an Expression of Identity

Sub-Theme	Description	Sample Findings	Participant Code
A Symbol of Righteousness	Clothing as a marker of a devout Muslim identity	The use of hijab, robe, and loose clothing as identity	P-03, P-06, P-09, P-12, P-14
Aesthetics Modern	The fusion of Islamic style with global fashion trends	Mix and match hijab with contemporary outfits, pastel colors	P-03, P-06, P-11, P-14
Halal Awareness	Choosing halal and ethical fashion products	Local brands that carry the concept of halal lifestyle	P-03, P-12, P-14
Economic Empowerment	Moderate fashion as an opportunity for creative endeavor	Many creators have opened their own fashion brands	P-03, P-07, P-12, P-14
Identity Contestation	The tension between the demands of fashion and the demands of religion	"Sometimes confused, want to follow the trend but afraid of being too much"	P-04, P-09, P-11, P-16

Source: data processed (2026)

Moderate fashion became a space where millennial Muslims expressed their religious identity without having to abandon the modern lifestyle. P-03, a fashion brand owner, explains:

"At first, I was confused, which ones are in accordance with sharia and which are just following the trend. But slowly I realized, wearing a hijab does not mean that it has to be old-fashioned. We can stay stylish and fashionable without violating religious rules." (P-03, Interview, March 18, 2025)

However, the findings also show tensions. P-16 reveals:

"I am sometimes insecure too. On the one hand, I really want to look beautiful and contemporary like other influencers. But on the other hand, I was afraid that I would be too excessive and stay away from religious values." (P-16, Interview, March 25, 2025)

Table 3 shows that moderate fashion is not just a fashion trend, but a complex cultural phenomenon with five main dimensions. First, as a symbol of piety, moderate fashion became a visual marker of religious identity, where the use of hijab, robes, and loose clothing showed a commitment

to Islamic values. Second, modern aesthetics show that fashion choices do not conflict with contemporary styles; The creators are able to combine sharia elements with global trends such as pastel colors and modern cuts. Third, halal awareness is reflected in the preference for fashion products that are not only fashionable but also ethical and in accordance with sharia. Fourth, this phenomenon has a significant economic dimension, where moderate fashion is a creative business opportunity that empowers many creators to build their own brands. Fifth, identity contestation arises as a dilemma in which participants feel oscillated between the desire to follow fashion trends and the fear of violating religious values. This fifth dimension shows that although moderate fashion offers a wide space of expression, it also presents psychological pressures that need to be consciously managed by the perpetrators.

3. Liquid and Flexible Hybrid Identity

The third finding suggests that millennial Muslims have the ability to manage fluid and flexible hybrid identities. They are able to navigate a variety of different social contexts with adaptive strategies.

Table 4. Hybrid Identity Patterns in the Digital Space

Sub-Theme	Description	Sample Findings	Participant Code
Negotiation Strategy	Ability to balance religious values and popular culture	Selecting appropriate content, selecting information	P-01, P-05, P-08, P-17, P-21
Digital Image Formation	Building personal branding as a modern Muslim	Content that shows the religious side and the lifestyle side	P-01, P-03, P-07, P-11
Code Switching	Contextual change of communication style	Formal language in da'wah content, relaxed in entertainment content	P-02, P-05, P-10, P-13
Passive Resistance	Reject negative narratives about Islam in creative ways	Educational content to fight Islamophobia and stereotypes	P-02, P-05, P-08, P-10
Digital Community	Creating a safe space for expression	Discussion groups, Muslim creator communities	P-01, P-05, P-11, P-17, P-21

Source: data processed (2026)

The hybrid identity is reflected in the participants' ability to become "modern Muslims" who hold to religious values but are also engaged in popular culture. P-01 explains:

"Sometimes people think that if I am active on social media and like current things, it means that I am less religious. But for me, social media is a means to show that Islam is beautiful and can be lived in a modern way." (P-01, Interview, March 15, 2025)

P-21, a student and active follower, added:

"I really like creative content. I used to think that people who wear hijab are rigid and monotonous. But now I see so many hijab creators who are cool, smart, and sociable. This makes me more comfortable with my identity as a Muslim." (P-21, Interview, March 28, 2025).

Table 4 reveals that millennial Muslim identities in the digital space are hybrid, fluid, and flexible, which is manifested through five strategies. First, the negotiation strategy demonstrates the ability of participants to actively balance religious values with popular culture through the selection of information and content consumed. Second, the formation of a digital image describes the conscious efforts of participants in building personal branding as a "modern Muslim" that integrates the religious side and the lifestyle side in one unit. Third, code switching refers to the ability of participants to change their communication style—for example, from formal to casual—according to the context and platform used, demonstrating high linguistic and social flexibility. Fourth, passive resistance can be seen from creators' efforts to counter negative narratives about Islam through informative and inspirational educational content, without having to be confrontational. Fifth, the digital community is a safe space for participants to express and share experiences, which functions as a support system in dealing with social pressure in cyberspace. These five strategies collectively show that the Muslim millennial generation is not passive consumers, but rather active agents capable of navigating the complexities of identity in the digital age.

C. Additional Findings: The Linkage of Cultural and Economic Capital

In addition to the three main patterns, this study also found an interesting phenomenon about the relationship between cultural capital and economic capital in identity practices in the digital space.

Table 5. The Relationship of Cultural and Economic Capital

Aspects	Description	Sample Findings	Participant Code
Commodification of Religion	Religious values become commodities that have a selling price	Halal product endorsement, brand collaboration	P-01, P-03, P-07, P-11
Capital Accumulation	Accumulation of followers as a form of social capital with economic value	Content monetization, brand deals, affiliate marketing	P-01, P-03, P-07, P-11, P-14
Ethical Challenges	The conflict between the mission of da'wah and economic needs	The dilemma between maintaining integrity and meeting content targets	P-01, P-05, P-08, P-13
Adaptation Strategy	How creators balance economic value and need	Transparency in the audience, selection of endorsed products	P-01, P-05, P-08

Source: data processed (2026)

P-05, a da'wah creator, revealed the dilemma he faced:

"At first, I was purely da'wah. But soon after, the offer of endorsement came. I was confused, is this selling religion? But I realized that I also needed to eat. The important thing is that I remain selective and do not endorse products that are contrary to Islamic values." (P-05, Interview, March 22, 2025)

Table 5 reveals the economic dimensions inherent in identity practices in the digital space, which include four important aspects. First, religious commodification shows that religious values and symbols have become commodities that have selling value, as can be seen from the rampant endorsement of halal products and collaborations with fashion brands. Second, capital accumulation describes how the accumulation of followers on social media functions as social capital which can then be converted into economic capital through content monetization, brand deals, and affiliate marketing. This phenomenon shows that digital popularity has a real exchange rate in the creative economy. Third, ethical challenges arise as a structural dilemma faced by creators, especially when they have to balance the mission of da'wah (spiritual values) with economic needs (content and revenue targets). Fourth, adaptation strategies become a creative response to the dilemma, where creators develop approaches such as transparency to the audience and strict selection of endorsed products to maintain integrity. These four aspects together show that the digital space is not only an arena of cultural expression but also a complex economic space with ethical dynamics that need to be managed carefully.

D. Cross-Theme Analysis and Synthesis of Findings

To make it easier to understand the relationships between themes, here is a synthesis table illustrating the relevance of the findings:

Table 6. Synthesis of Findings: Negotiating Millennial Muslim Identity

Dimensions	Religious Practices	Cultural Consumption	Identity Negotiation
Strategy	Creative da'wah	Moderate buttocks	Hybrid identity
Mechanism	Repackaging of religious messages	A combination of sharia and trends	Switching and adaptation codes
Positive Impact	Da'wah is more interesting, easy access to religious information	Self-expression, economic empowerment	Confidence as a modern Muslim
Negative Impact	Potential for simplification of religious messages	Commodification of religion, surface piety	Social pressure and identity instability
Social Implications	Digital da'wah transformation	The emergence of an Islamic-based creative economy	Redefining contemporary Muslim identity

Source: data processed (2026)

Table 6 presents a synthesis of findings that integrates three key dimensions of research: religious practices, cultural consumption, and identity negotiations. In the dimension of religious practice, the creative da'wah strategy is the main mechanism by which religious messages are repackaged in a more interesting and contextual format. The positive impact is that da'wah becomes more accessible and in demand, but the negative risk is the potential for simplification of religious messages that can reduce the depth of substance. In the dimension of cultural consumption, moderate fashion represents a combination of sharia demands and global trends, which bring a positive impact in the form of freedom of expression and economic empowerment, but also risks the commodification of religion and the emergence of superficial piety. In the identity negotiation dimension, hybrid identity is the main strategy implemented through code switching and contextual adaptation, which increases self-confidence as a modern Muslim but can also create social pressures and identity instability. Overall, this synthesis shows that identity negotiation in the digital space is a complex dialectical process, in which each dimension has an interrelated positive and negative side, and its social implications include the transformation of digital da'wah, the emergence of an Islamic-based creative economy, as well as a more dynamic and plural redefinition of contemporary Muslim identity.

E. Verification of Findings

To ensure the credibility of the findings, the study conducted several verification strategies: four verification strategies were used to ensure the credibility of the study's findings. First, source triangulation is carried out by comparing data obtained from content creators, active followers, and digital observation results. The results showed that the findings were consistent among the three data sources, which strengthened the validity of the conclusions. Second, member checks were carried out by confirming the results of the initial analysis to five participants representing various categories (P-01, P-03, P-05, P-08, P-11). All participants expressed agreement with the interpretation given by the researchers, which showed that the findings were in accordance with the reality they were experiencing. Third, negative case analysis identified two participants (P-04 and P-16) who showed a higher level of discomfort to digital distress. These findings actually enriched the analysis by revealing the negative side of identity negotiation that was not experienced by all participants. Fourth, discussions with colleagues with a background in the sociology of religion confirmed that the findings of this study are consistent with Pierre Bourdieu's habitus theory and the development of digital identity studies. The combination of these four verification strategies ensures that the research results have a high level of credibility and can be accounted for academically.

Overall, the results of the study show that millennial Muslims negotiate identities in the digital space through three main patterns: (1) creative da'wah, (2) moderate fashion, and (3) hybrid identity. These three patterns show that the Muslim millennial generation is not a passive object of the current of modernity, but an active agent who selects, adapts, and recreates religious values and popular culture. However, this process also presents challenges in the form of religious commodification, surface piety and social pressures that need to be watched out for.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that creative da'wah has transformed religious communication from a predominantly one-directional practice into a contextual and participatory form of digital engagement. The use of conversational language, visual storytelling, personal narratives, diverse content formats, and interactive features indicates that accessibility has become an important mechanism through which religious messages gain relevance among digitally connected Muslim audiences. From Bourdieu's perspective, this practice can be understood as the strategic mobilization of cultural capital within a digital field, where communicative competence, platform literacy, and aesthetic ability increase the capacity of religious actors to gain symbolic recognition. This interpretation is consistent with studies showing that digital media has reconfigured religious communication and authority by making visibility, audience engagement, and mediated interaction increasingly important (Andok, 2024; Kerim et al., 2025; Salwa, 2024; Sulfikar & Yasmine, 2025). It also supports evidence that younger religious audiences tend to encounter faith through formats embedded in broader digital and youth cultures rather than exclusively through conventional institutions (Golan, 2023; Sule & Mainiyo, 2023). However, the present findings extend this literature

by suggesting that creativity is not merely a technical adaptation to social media but a form of identity practice through which creators negotiate how Islamic values can remain meaningful under conditions shaped by speed, competition for attention, and audience expectations.

The effectiveness of creative da'wah nevertheless produces an important tension between communicative accessibility and religious depth. When religious messages are adapted to short-form videos, popular references, and highly visual formats, the process of translation may broaden participation but can also encourage simplification, particularly when platform visibility rewards content that is immediately understandable and emotionally engaging. This tension reinforces Khamis's (2024) argument concerning the paradoxes of contemporary Islamic discourse in the digital age, in which expanded access to religious expression coexists with new pressures generated by media logic. Similar concerns appear in Khusairi's (2025) discussion of creative strategies for religious outreach and in AlMazaedh et al.'s (2026) analysis of authority and mediation within platform societies, both of which highlight how digital infrastructures reshape the conditions under which religious communication is produced and recognized. The findings therefore support the view that platforms do not simply transmit pre-existing religious meanings; they influence which styles of communication become visible and socially effective. From a Bourdieusian perspective, the digital field establishes its own conditions of competition, meaning that actors possessing greater aesthetic and communicative capital may achieve wider recognition even when popularity does not necessarily correspond to greater religious expertise. The practical implication is that innovation in digital da'wah should be accompanied by greater attention to substantive accuracy and ethical responsibility so that accessibility does not gradually substitute for intellectual and religious depth.

A second major finding concerns the role of modest fashion as a site where piety, aesthetics, self-expression, and lifestyle are negotiated simultaneously. The findings challenge a binary understanding that positions religious commitment and contemporary fashion as mutually exclusive, because participants actively combined Islamic dress norms with modern styles to construct identities that were both visibly Muslim and culturally current. This pattern is consistent with Ajala's (2022) argument that Islamic fashion involves an ongoing reinterpretation of religious values rather than a simple opposition between obedience and modernity, as well as with Bardey and Bendaoud's (2026) identification of tensions surrounding modest fashion among contemporary Muslim consumers. Through Bourdieu's framework, aesthetic competence can be interpreted as a form of cultural capital that enables individuals to participate in fashion-oriented digital spaces while simultaneously signaling religious distinction. The present study adds an important contextual dimension by showing that this negotiation is intensified on Instagram and TikTok, where clothing is not only worn but also photographed, circulated, evaluated, and incorporated into a continuous process of public self-presentation. Consequently, modest fashion functions as a mediating practice through which religious habitus is neither abandoned nor mechanically preserved but selectively rearticulated in response to the cultural opportunities and symbolic demands of the digital field.

The findings also reveal that modest fashion is characterized by contestation rather than complete harmony, particularly when participants experience uncertainty about the boundary between aesthetic expression and excessive self-display. This result is theoretically significant because it shows that agency in identity negotiation does not eliminate normative pressure; instead, greater freedom to construct religious identity may simultaneously generate greater responsibility to justify one's choices before multiple audiences. The finding corresponds with Achfandhy and Rohmatulloh's (2024) study of piety and social pressure in digital environments and with Bardey and Bendaoud's (2026) discussion of cognitive tension in modest-fashion consumption. It also differs from studies that emphasize fashion primarily as a source of empowerment because the present evidence demonstrates that empowerment and anxiety can emerge from the same practice, depending on how participants interpret religious norms, beauty standards, and audience responses. In this sense, the digital field expands the range of available identity expressions while also increasing their visibility and, consequently, their susceptibility to judgment. This critical dimension suggests that contemporary Muslim identity should not be interpreted simply as becoming more flexible; rather, flexibility itself is negotiated under unequal conditions of recognition, where platform metrics, peer expectations, and religious authenticity may impose competing standards of legitimacy.

The emergence of hybrid and flexible identity constitutes the third central finding and indicates that participants were active agents who selectively managed the relationship between

religious commitments and contemporary popular culture. Their use of contextual adaptation, code switching, digital self-presentation, passive resistance, and online communities suggests that identity is better understood as an ongoing social practice than as a fixed set of attributes. This interpretation strongly supports Bourdieu's concept of habitus by demonstrating that religious dispositions guide action without producing identical responses across every social setting, allowing individuals to adapt their practices to the opportunities and constraints of different fields. The finding is broadly consistent with Novak and Mattes (2025), who conceptualize religious belonging in digital times as a changing process of negotiation, and with Fikri et al. (2026), who identify hybrid identity among digitally connected Muslim students. It also resonates with Mattes et al. (2025) and Waliyuddin (2024), whose studies demonstrate that young people negotiate religious belonging amid multiple social, cultural, and ideological influences. The contribution of the present study lies in showing that hybrid identity is not merely a mixture of "religious" and "modern" elements but a practical mechanism through which individuals maintain continuity in religious commitments while responding to changing communicative and cultural contexts.

Importantly, hybrid identity should not be romanticized as evidence of unlimited individual freedom because the findings also reveal the presence of social pressure and potential identity instability. The existence of discomfort among some participants indicates that contextual adaptation can become psychologically demanding when individuals repeatedly manage competing expectations regarding piety, popularity, appearance, and belonging. This observation complements studies on digital religious environments that emphasize ambivalence surrounding authority, personal piety, and social expectations (Hefner, 2022; Achfandhy & Nurul Mubin, 2026), while also supporting Novak et al.'s (2022) finding that digitally mediated religious interaction can produce distinct social environments or "bubbles" that influence how belonging is experienced. An alternative explanation is that the apparent flexibility of identity may partly result from platform-specific self-presentation rather than from a fundamental transformation of personal religious commitment, since users may display different aspects of themselves according to audience composition and communication norms. Therefore, the present findings should not be generalized as evidence that all millennial Muslims experience identity negotiation in the same way, particularly because the participants were active users and creators on major social media platforms. Nevertheless, the findings advance the literature by demonstrating that the central analytical question is not whether digital Muslims are religious or modern, but how they continuously manage the boundaries between these categories when both are publicly evaluated within the same mediated environment.

A further finding concerns the conversion of cultural and social resources into economic opportunities, particularly through endorsements, brand collaborations, monetization, and affiliate practices. This pattern provides the clearest empirical support for Bourdieu's proposition that different forms of capital may be accumulated and converted under particular field conditions: religious knowledge, aesthetic competence, digital visibility, and follower networks can generate symbolic and social recognition that subsequently acquires economic value. The result is consistent with Taufik (2025), who shows that digital participation can connect Islamic values with new forms of youth engagement, and with broader research demonstrating that religious expression increasingly operates within environments structured by visibility and commercial possibilities (Hashmi et al., 2021; Khamis, 2024). However, the present study extends previous discussions by linking this conversion process directly to identity negotiation, showing that economic practices are not external to Muslim self-expression but can become embedded within the very practices through which piety and cultural identity are communicated. The implication is that Instagram and TikTok should be understood not only as communication platforms but also as economic fields in which symbolic recognition may be transformed into material resources. This conceptual integration helps address a gap in earlier studies that frequently examined religious authority, digital piety, modest fashion, or consumption separately rather than explaining how these processes interact through the circulation and conversion of capital.

At the same time, the commercialization of religiously meaningful identity generates an ethical contradiction that cannot be resolved simply by treating monetization as either inherently legitimate or inherently exploitative. Participants' strategies of selecting appropriate products and maintaining transparency suggest that creators themselves recognize a boundary between economically sustaining religious work and allowing market logic to determine the meaning of

religious expression. This finding supports recent scholarship on the mediation and transformation of religious authority in digital contexts, particularly research showing that religious influence is increasingly entangled with new actors, networks, and communication infrastructures (Abdurrahman et al., 2026; Atallah, 2026; Sulfikar & Yasmine, 2025). Yet the present study provides a more critical explanation by demonstrating that commodification is structurally connected to the platform environment: once visibility becomes a valuable resource, religious identity can be subjected to the same pressures of branding, consistency, and monetization that affect other forms of digital content. The resulting tension between authenticity and commercial success therefore reflects a conflict between different logics operating within the same field rather than merely an individual moral failure. This insight has practical relevance for content creators, religious institutions, and Islamic creative industries because ethical guidelines should address transparency, product suitability, and the preservation of substantive values without assuming that economic participation necessarily invalidates religious commitment.

Taken together, the findings position this study within the global literature as an integrated explanation of digitally mediated Muslim identity rather than a separate analysis of online da'wah, fashion, religiosity, or consumption. The evidence suggests that creative da'wah, modest fashion, hybrid identity, and capital conversion are interconnected mechanisms within a broader process in which religious habitus encounters the cultural, technological, and economic conditions of the digital field. This integrated perspective supports previous research on digital religion and identity negotiation (Haq & Kwok, 2024; Missier, 2025; Zhandossova et al., 2025) while extending it by explaining how cultural participation and economic opportunity become constitutive elements of religious identity rather than peripheral consequences of online activity. The principal theoretical contribution is therefore a contextual extension of Bourdieu's framework: in digitally mediated life, capital conversion is increasingly shaped by platform visibility, while religious authenticity itself becomes a contested source of symbolic legitimacy. The findings also suggest that contemporary Muslim identity is neither a stable inheritance nor an unrestricted individual construction, but a dynamic outcome of agency exercised within fields structured by religious norms, audience recognition, algorithms, cultural trends, and market incentives. Although the qualitative design and the concentration on active Instagram and TikTok users limit broad generalization, the study provides a stronger conceptual basis for future comparative research across generations, regions, platforms, and forms of Islamic practice, particularly to examine how differing digital field conditions shape the relationship between piety, cultural consumption, and economic capital.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the negotiation of Muslim identity in Indonesia's digital sphere is an active and dynamic process through which religious commitments are continuously reconciled with the cultural and economic conditions of contemporary social media. The findings show that creative da'wah enables religious messages to be reformulated through accessible, interactive, and visually engaging forms, while modest fashion functions as a space where piety, modern aesthetics, self-expression, and economic empowerment intersect. These practices contribute to the emergence of hybrid and flexible identities, as participants selectively adapt to different social and digital contexts without necessarily abandoning their religious commitments. Viewed through Bourdieu's perspective, Instagram and TikTok operate as social fields in which habitus, cultural resources, social recognition, and economic opportunities interact, allowing Islamic identity to acquire both symbolic and commercial value. At the same time, the conversion of visibility and cultural capital into economic benefits generates an important tension between spiritual authenticity and market-oriented logic, creating ethical challenges related to commercialization and the commodification of religious symbols. The study therefore suggests that digital Muslim identity should not be understood as a fixed opposition between religiosity and modern culture, but as a continuing process of negotiation shaped by agency, platform conditions, cultural participation, and social expectations. Theoretically, these

findings contribute to the sociology of religion and digital media by demonstrating the usefulness of Bourdieu's framework for explaining the relationship between religious practice, cultural consumption, and capital in digitally mediated life. Practically, the study highlights the need for digital religious communication and Islamic creative industries to pursue innovation and economic opportunity while maintaining ethical responsibility, substantive religious values, and critical awareness of the pressures created by platform visibility and marketization.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Ahmad Iwan Zunaih Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, validation, visualization, writing original draft preparation, writing review and editing, supervision, and project administration. The author developed the research concept and theoretical framework, designed the qualitative research procedures, conducted participant interviews and digital observations, organized and analyzed the data, interpreted the findings using Bourdieu's perspective, prepared the manuscript, and approved the final version for publication. The author is solely responsible for the accuracy, integrity, and overall content of the study.

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