

Muslim Digital Identities in Indonesia and Thailand

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Social Media, Authority, and Cultural Belonging

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Abstract

This study examines the role of social media in shaping Muslim identities in Indonesia and Thailand, highlighting how national contexts mediate digital religious practices. Drawing on digital ethnography, surveys, and interviews, the research shows that online platforms function as key arenas where Muslims negotiate faith, authority, and identity. In Indonesia, a Muslim-majority society, social media is often intertwined with politics: it amplifies religious movements, mobilizes mass campaigns such as the 212 Action, and empowers digital preachers who redefine religious authority. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok shape public perceptions of piety by blending Islamic values with popular culture and commercial interests. In contrast, Thai Muslims—situated as a minority within a Buddhist-majority society—use digital platforms more subtly for cultural preservation, solidarity, and resistance against marginalisation. Online spaces enable them to assert belonging, challenge stereotypes, and sustain religious life otherwise constrained offline. Across both contexts, social media emerges not only as a medium of expression but also as a site of tension, fragmentation, and negotiation, underscoring its transformative power in the construction of Muslim digital identities in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Muslim identity, social media, Digital age, Religious Discourse



Introduction

The growing integration of digital technologies into everyday life has significantly reshaped how individuals and communities form, express, and negotiate their identities. For Muslim communities across Southeast Asia, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have become central spaces for religious expression and identity performance. These digital environments not only provide new modes of spiritual engagement but also serve as arenas where cultural and political narratives are contested, debated, and redefined.

A number of studies have examined the relationship between social media and Muslim identity, particularly in Indonesia. Research demonstrates how urban millennial Muslims use digital platforms to express religiosity, navigate lifestyle changes, and participate in the popular hijrah movement, which combines piety with contemporary aesthetics and self-branding (Hartono, Mutia, and Trisakti 2025). Other scholars highlight the emergence of digital preachers and the transformation of religious authority online, showing how media reshapes communal practice and hierarchies (Rohmawati and Hakiem 2025). Social media has also been documented as a tool for political mobilization in religious contexts, most prominently during the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election when Islamic identity was politicized (Arsyad 2019).

Prior research consistently indicates that social media plays a central role in politicizing religious identity (Lim 2017). In Indonesia, Facebook and Twitter were instrumental in mobilizing religious sentiment during the Jakarta election, illustrating how digital platforms operate as powerful political tools (Arsyad 2019). At the same time, studies reveal how Islamophobic hate speech in Indonesian online spaces exposes deep-rooted religious tensions, further exacerbated by algorithm-driven interactions (Kastolani 2020). While these works underline the influence of social media in shaping political discourse and communal conflict, they overwhelmingly focus on Indonesia and offer little comparative insight into how minority Muslim populations, such as those in Thailand, navigate similar digital terrains.

Social media likewise functions as a platform for religious self-expression and pious branding. Akmaliah (2019) examined how influencers such as Ria Ricis construct Islamic identity through visual culture on Instagram and YouTube, blending religiosity with lifestyle branding. These studies enrich our understanding of personalised faith in digital contexts but often focus on celebrity figures or gendered experiences, leaving aside how such practices unfold in politically constrained environments, particularly among Muslim minorities.

Beyond individuals, Islamic organizations and institutions also assert religious identity in digital spaces. Maemonah et al. (2023) investigated how Islamic schools in Indonesia utilise digital platforms to promote distinct ideological orientations, while Zaeni and Taubah (2023) analysed how transnational Islamic movements shape religious identity formation across Indonesia, Brunei, and Thailand. Such findings suggest that digital identity is

not merely local but deeply embedded in institutional and regional dynamics. Yet, little research has systematically compared how national political structures—especially in contexts where Muslims are a minority—condition these processes and frame the possibilities of digital religious expression.

In sum, existing studies provide valuable insights into how social media mediates religious identity through political, personal, and institutional channels. Yet, most remain confined to single-country contexts, primarily Indonesia, and rarely extend to comparative analyses across Muslim-majority and minority societies. This study seeks to address that gap by comparing the experiences of Muslims in Indonesia and Thailand, offering a more nuanced understanding of how different social and political conditions shape digital religious identity formation.

Although these works contribute important perspectives, they are largely grounded in single-country analyses and predominantly focus on Muslim-majority contexts. Comparative research that explores how religious identity is constructed and negotiated through digital media in societies with differing demographic and political circumstances remains scarce (Jati 2015).

This absence of a comparative lens leaves a significant gap in the literature. Most studies either concentrate on Muslim-majority environments or examine digital religious practices in broad terms, without considering how minority status and local socio-political structures condition online behaviour. In particular, issues of power dynamics, marginalization, and state regulation are often overlooked in analysing digital religious expression.

Within Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Thailand present compelling contrasts. Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim population, sustains a vibrant digital religious ecosystem in which Islamic values, politics, and social movements converge online. Thailand, by contrast, is a Buddhist-majority nation where Muslims constitute a minority concentrated in the southern provinces. In this context, digital platforms serve not only as spaces for expressing faith but also as tools to resist marginalization, preserve cultural identity, and negotiate minority status. Despite these distinctive dynamics, limited research has systematically examined how such differing contexts shape the digital perception and articulation of Muslim identities. A comparative analysis of Indonesia and Thailand is therefore both timely and necessary.

This study addresses the identified gap by examining how Muslims in Indonesia and Thailand use social media to construct, express, and negotiate their religious identities. It specifically poses three research questions: (1) How do Indonesian and Thai Muslims use social media to build and communicate religious identity? (2) How do socio-political factors in each country shape online religious discourse? (3) What broader cultural and political implications emerge from these digital practices?

This study draws on two key theoretical perspectives to analyse the intersection of Islam and digital media: mediatization theory and the concept of networked religion. Mediatization theory (Hjarvard 2011; Lundby 2014) emphasises that media are not merely channels of communication but also shape and transform the logics of religion and society. In this

view, digital platforms do not simply transmit religious content; they actively structure how religion is experienced, negotiated, and contested in everyday life. Complementing this, Campbell's (2013) notion of networked religion highlights the distinctive features of religiosity in digital environments, including the creation of networked communities, shifting authority, convergent practices across online and offline spaces, and the construction of storied identities. These frameworks provide useful analytical tools for comparing how Muslims in Indonesia and Thailand engage with social media in their religious lives. In Indonesia, a Muslim-majority context, mediatization and networked religion illuminate how social media amplifies religious populism, fragments traditional authority, and merges faith with economic interests. In Thailand, where Muslims are a minority, these frameworks help explain how digital platforms enable community building, cultural preservation, and solidarity across national and transnational boundaries. Together, these perspectives allow for a nuanced understanding of how socio-political contexts shape digital religious identities.

The research employs a qualitative design grounded in digital ethnography, which is particularly suited for investigating online religious expression. Digital ethnography enables in-depth observation of behaviour, discourse, and interactions in natural digital settings, making it ideal for exploring the lived religious practices of Muslims in media-saturated environments. This approach aligns with the study's aim to capture the nuanced, everyday practices of digital identity-making in different socio-political contexts.

Data collection involved three primary methods: social media content analysis, online surveys, and semi-structured interviews. The content analysis examined posts, hashtags, and video materials from public accounts on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, chosen for their popularity among Muslim users in both countries. Surveys were distributed through online networks and community groups, targeting Muslim users aged 18–45 who actively engage with religious content online. In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 participants—15 from Indonesia and 15 from Thailand—selected through purposive and snowball sampling to capture a mix of everyday users, religious influencers, and community organizers.

This study also acknowledges its limitations. Access to private or encrypted online spaces (e.g., WhatsApp groups) was excluded due to ethical considerations. Furthermore, as the participant sample depends on internet access and active platform use, the findings may disproportionately reflect the perspectives of more digitally literate or urban participants, while underrepresenting rural or less-connected voices.

The Role of Social Media in Shaping Identities

Social media plays a crucial role in shaping identities in both Indonesia and Thailand, influencing religious, cultural, and political dynamics. While there are similarities in how these platforms are utilised, the distinct socio-political contexts of each country produce different manifestations of these processes. Recognising these differences is essential for

developing strategies and policies that encourage positive identity formation and promote inclusive dialogue in diverse societies.

In contemporary contexts, social media has become pivotal in shaping and negotiating identities. In both Indonesia and Thailand, digital platforms affect religious and cultural identities as well as the political landscape, reflecting broader patterns of social transformation. This study explores the significant roles that social media performs in the two countries, with attention to both similarities and distinctive features of their digital environments.

In Indonesia, social media has become a powerful tool for mobilising religious identity politics. A notable example is the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, during which Facebook and Twitter were heavily employed to promote sectarian and racialised discourses. This period saw increased political polarisation, with social media amplifying divisions through targeted campaigns and discussions (Lim 2017). The election highlighted how platforms can be manipulated to spread misinformation and exacerbate social tensions, illustrating the darker dimensions of digital communication. Beyond politics, social media also facilitates the negotiation of dual identities, particularly among Chinese-Muslims. Platforms such as Instagram offer spaces for individuals to articulate complex identities within a predominantly Muslim society. By sharing personal stories and cultural expressions, users participate in ongoing dialogues about belonging and difference, navigating their dual positions in a challenging multicultural environment. Another pressing issue is the proliferation of Islamophobic hate speech, which reflects the contestation and politicisation of religious identities online. Discriminatory narratives are frequently amplified on social media, deepening societal conflicts (Kastolani 2020). These developments underscore the need for stronger regulatory frameworks to curb hate speech and encourage inclusive digital interaction. The spread of such negative content not only reinforces existing divides but also generates new fractures, complicating the already intricate interplay of religion, identity, and politics.

In Thailand, digital media also exerts significant influence on religious communities, especially Muslims. Comparative insights with Indonesia reveal both parallels and differences in how identities are shaped online. While both societies experience politicisation of religious identity, Thailand's distinctive socio-political environment leads to different outcomes (Liamputtong 2014). The strong influence of the monarchy and military on political discourse creates a backdrop unlike that in Indonesia, shaping how online debates unfold. Furthermore, the role of social media in local governance diverges across the two contexts. In cities such as Phuket, platforms are primarily used for information dissemination rather than fostering active citizen-government interaction. By contrast, certain Indonesian municipalities employ social media to engage communities and involve citizens more directly in governance processes. These variations highlight differing levels of digital engagement and public participation across ASEAN societies, illustrating the diverse ways in which social media is embedded in political and social structures.

The role of social media in Indonesia and Thailand underscores both shared patterns

and distinctive features of each country's digital landscape. In Indonesia, young people actively create meaning and narratives through social media platforms, using them to reflect identity and social belonging. Recent cultural disputes between Indonesia and Malaysia, for instance, have been amplified online, highlighting ongoing debates over cultural ownership and national identity. Despite this vibrant engagement, the Indonesian government generally utilises social media as a tool of information dissemination rather than two-way interaction, a practice that limits its effectiveness in fostering genuine dialogue with the public (Idris 2018).

Social media also functions as a space for articulating postcolonial identity in Indonesia, offering channels of resistance to dominant discourses. Insights from social identity and self-verification theories suggest that global identity shapes online behaviour, with variations observed across different countries including Austria, Indonesia, and Thailand (Makri, Papadas, and Schlegelmilch 2021). Digital technologies thus permeate everyday life in Indonesia, influencing politics, commerce, and cultural expression. Platforms also play a pivotal role in election campaigns throughout Southeast Asia, frequently disrupting or subverting mainstream media discourses (Jurriens and Tapsell 2017).

Beyond politics, social media significantly impacts consumer culture. The influence of digital platforms on the beauty industry differs across China, Thailand, and Indonesia, as influencers in each context tailor their content to local cultural norms and preferences, shaping both consumer behaviour and perceptions of beauty (Her and Chun 2021). Among Indonesian youth, social media is also a tool for cultural promotion: by sharing heritage-related content, they contribute to tourism development and foster national pride, thereby linking digital practices to broader economic benefits (Loisa et al. 2023). Such practices demonstrate how cultural and educational contexts shape the ways students and young people integrate social media into their lives. Moreover, platforms influence the development of youth identity and self-concept, providing spaces for exploration, creativity, and social interaction. The continuous feedback loop enabled by online engagement plays a crucial role in shaping self-perceptions and societal roles, making social media integral to the identity formation process (Mansur 2014).

The political sphere further illustrates the power of social media in shaping opinion and mobilising communities. During the 2019 Indonesian presidential election, social media became a primary arena for campaign battles, allowing candidates to reach voters directly and establish immediate, personalised communication (Lim 2017). This shift bypassed traditional media channels and redefined political engagement.

In Thailand, social media has also been harnessed to organise protests and social movements, particularly among youth advocating for democratic reforms. The transnational Milk Tea Alliance, spanning Thailand and other Asian countries, demonstrates how digital platforms can unite diverse groups around common political aspirations (Chan 2020). Such activism highlights social media's potential to transcend national boundaries, foster regional solidarity, and reshape the political landscape beyond conventional state structures.

While social media provides numerous opportunities for identity expression and political engagement, it also presents serious challenges. The spread of misinformation and fake news remains a pressing concern in both Indonesia and Thailand, as platforms are often exploited to circulate false or manipulated information for political or ideological purposes (Djelantik 2019). Such practices threaten democratic processes and contribute to social unrest. At the same time, the digital divide continues to be a significant barrier, with unequal access to internet services and digital technologies across socio-economic groups. In rural regions of both Indonesia and Thailand, limited connectivity and low levels of digital literacy restrict individuals from fully participating in the digital economy and public discourse (Her and Chun 2021). Addressing these disparities is essential to ensure that the benefits of digital transformation are distributed more equitably.

Looking ahead, the role of social media in shaping identity in Indonesia and Thailand will continue to evolve alongside technological innovations. As digital tools become more integrated into daily life, modes of engagement and self-expression are likely to diversify. Emerging technologies such as virtual reality and augmented reality could introduce new spaces for identity construction and social interaction (Wang, Liu, and Hwang 2017). In parallel, as both countries expand their digital infrastructures and regulatory frameworks, the governance of online spaces will increasingly depend on policies that promote digital literacy, safeguard user privacy, and ensure responsible technology use (Yunus and Wahyuningtyas 2021). These measures will be critical for mitigating risks while maximising the potential of social media as a tool for constructive dialogue and social change.

Ultimately, social media plays a pivotal role in shaping identities in Indonesia and Thailand, influencing not only religious and cultural dynamics but also broader political landscapes. While similarities exist in how these platforms are used, the distinct socio-political conditions of each country lead to divergent outcomes. Recognising these contextual differences is vital for crafting strategies and policies that encourage inclusive dialogue and positive identity formation. As digital technologies continue to advance, social media will remain a powerful arena for negotiation, contestation, and expression, shaping the trajectory of social interaction and public discourse in both national and regional contexts.

Social Media and Islamic Popular Culture

In the contemporary era, social media has become a central platform for expressing digital piety and engaging in diverse Islamic practices. In contexts such as Indonesia and Thailand, platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube play significant roles in shaping how Muslims interact with their faith, circulate religious content, and connect with a wider global community. This digital articulation of religiosity has transformed the way religious practices are performed and perceived, blending online and offline expressions of devotion and reshaping the contours of Islamic authority and identity.

In Indonesia, social media has emerged as a crucial medium for Muslims to share Qur'anic verses, religious reflections, and participate in online study groups. This phe-

nomenon, often termed digital piety, has altered traditional forms of practice by enabling flexible and personalised modes of faith engagement. As Choiri et al. (2024) observe, the integration of social media into religious life allows individuals to access and engage with Islamic content at their convenience, overcoming temporal and spatial limitations embedded in conventional religious practices.

Platforms also create spaces for both public and private expressions of faith. Instagram, for instance, is replete with posts featuring Qur'anic passages, hadith, and Islamic aphorisms widely shared among users. Such posts serve not only as reminders of religious values but also foster communal bonds through interactive features such as likes, comments, and reposts. Likewise, Facebook groups dedicated to Islamic teaching provide avenues for deeper discussions, creating communities of support that reinforce shared faith and belonging.

Influencers have emerged as key figures in promoting Islamic values while simultaneously capitalising on religious identity. A notable case is Ria Ricis, who utilises Instagram and YouTube to perform her Islamic identity while monetising her digital presence. Her content—ranging from wearing the veil and endorsing Islamic lifestyle products to sharing personal reflections on faith—resonates with large audiences who admire the blend of religiosity and modernity she embodies (Akmaliah 2019). The prominence of such figures illustrates the intersection between religious expression and economic interest in the digital era. By leveraging Islamic identity as cultural capital, influencers build brands attractive to both devout followers and commercial sponsors. This dual role highlights how the religious and economic spheres are increasingly intertwined within the digital landscape.

At the same time, social media has facilitated the rise of religious populism, which challenges traditional sources of authority. Various Islamic movements and groups use online platforms to disseminate teachings, gather followers, and expand influence, thereby contributing to the fragmentation of religious authority. This trend—termed digital religious populism—creates pluralised spaces of religious debate that reshape the authority structure in Indonesia (Fakhruroji 2019). The decentralisation of authority means that anyone with a substantial following can exert influence over religious discourse. While this democratization allows for a broader and more inclusive dialogue, it also raises questions regarding authenticity, accuracy, and regulation of the religious teachings shared online.

In Thailand, social media has a significant impact on Muslim communities by providing spaces for expressing religious identity and engaging in Islamic practices. Digital platforms allow Thai Muslims to share religious content, discuss Islamic teachings, and connect with global Muslim networks. Such engagement fosters a sense of community and shared identity, helping to strengthen religious life in a minority setting (Lengauer 2018). Social media also supports the integration of Islamic principles into daily routines. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook are widely used to promote modest fashion and lifestyle choices aligned with Islamic values. These visual practices both affirm religious norms and enable Thai Muslims to express their identity in culturally relevant ways, connecting them with a broader community of believers worldwide.

Another area where social media exerts strong influence is in promoting Muslim-friend-

ly tourism. Indonesian Muslim tourists visiting Thailand often rely on digital resources to find halal food, accommodation, and other religiously appropriate services. This form of cross-cultural exchange is mediated through online platforms, which increase destination awareness and enhance tourist satisfaction (Nasution et al. 2023). By sharing their travel experiences on Instagram and YouTube, these tourists create a growing repository of information for future travellers. Travel vlogs and posts that highlight halal restaurants, prayer facilities, and Muslim-friendly amenities not only facilitate trip planning but also cultivate solidarity and shared experiences among Muslim travellers.

While both Indonesia and Thailand employ social media to shape Islamic popular culture, the outcomes are conditioned by their different socio-political contexts. In Indonesia, platforms often function as battlegrounds for religious populism and arenas for the economic commodification of Islamic identity. Influencers such as Ria Ricis illustrate how religious values are promoted alongside commercial interests, blending faith with branding. In Thailand, by contrast, the focus is less on commercialisation and more on cultural exchange and community building among Muslim minorities. Social media becomes a medium for resisting marginalisation, preserving identity, and nurturing solidarity (Lengauer 2018; Slama 2018).

The divergence reflects deeper structural contrasts. In Indonesia, the large Muslim population and strong institutional presence produce a complex interplay between traditional and modern expressions of Islam, where authority and commerce are constantly negotiated. In Thailand, Muslims as a minority primarily use digital spaces for cultural preservation and religious affirmation, underscoring the importance of maintaining identity within a predominantly Buddhist society.

In addition to facilitating personal expressions of faith, social media has also become an important medium for religious education in Indonesia. Various Islamic scholars and institutions have adopted platforms such as YouTube and Instagram to deliver online lectures, sermons, and interactive Q&A sessions. This mode of engagement has expanded access to religious learning, particularly for individuals unable to attend traditional schools or public lectures. A prominent example is Ustadz Abdul Somad, who regularly uses YouTube to broadcast his sermons to millions of viewers. His digital presence not only extends his audience but also enables real-time interaction, allowing followers to pose questions and receive immediate responses during live sessions. This interactive dimension enriches the learning process and makes religious education more accessible and engaging for broader audiences.

Despite its many advantages, the use of social media for Islamic education and practice is not without challenges and controversies. One major concern is the proliferation of misinformation and radical ideologies. The open nature of digital platforms allows individuals or groups with extremist agendas to disseminate content that may mislead or radicalise users, prompting both religious leaders and state authorities to strengthen monitoring efforts (Fakhrurroji 2019). Another concern relates to the commercialisation of religious content. While monetisation provides economic benefits for influencers, it risks diluting religious

messages when the pursuit of sponsorships and advertising revenue overshadows spiritual and educational objectives. This tension between maintaining religious integrity and pursuing financial gain illustrates the complex entanglement of faith and commerce in digital spaces.

Social media has also reshaped gender dynamics within Muslim communities in both Indonesia and Thailand. Women, in particular, have found in these platforms new spaces to articulate faith, share experiences, and build networks with Muslim women globally. Such visibility is empowering, enabling women to participate more actively in religious discourse and activism, often challenging traditional gender restrictions. Female influencers such as Wardah Maulina exemplify this trend by using Instagram to share content on modest fashion, family life, and personal reflections on faith. In doing so, they present alternative narratives of what it means to be a Muslim woman in the modern era. Their presence contributes to broader, more inclusive understandings of Islamic identity and practice.

The concept of the global Ummah, or the worldwide community of Muslims, has also been significantly reinforced by social media. Platforms like Twitter and WhatsApp allow Muslims from diverse countries and cultures to share experiences, exchange knowledge, and extend mutual support. This digital connectivity fosters a sense of solidarity that transcends geographical and national boundaries. In Thailand, for example, Muslims utilise social media to connect with fellow believers across Southeast Asia, participating in regional discussions on Islamic issues and sharing religious content. Such interactions help build a more cohesive and interconnected Muslim community, bridging cultural and national differences through shared religious values and practices (Lengauer 2016).

Looking ahead, the role of social media in shaping Islamic practices and culture is likely to evolve further in response to technological innovation. As digital tools develop and new platforms emerge, the ways in which Muslims engage with faith and community life will continue to transform. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), for instance, hold potential for immersive religious experiences, such as virtual pilgrimages or interactive Qur'anic study sessions. Similarly, the increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in content curation and recommendation systems may personalise religious engagement even further, offering tailored material aligned with individual interests and needs. Yet, these advancements also present challenges, particularly in ensuring that religious content remains authentic, credible, and protected from distortion or misinformation.

In both Indonesia and Thailand, social media has already become central to the formation of Islamic popular culture. Platforms function simultaneously as arenas for religious expression, sites of economic enterprise, and channels for cultural exchange. Influencers such as Ria Ricis in Indonesia exemplify how Islamic values can be promoted alongside economic benefits, merging piety with commercial branding. In Thailand, social media is more prominently used to facilitate cultural exchange and to embed Islamic practices into everyday life, thereby strengthening minority identity in a predominantly Buddhist society.

Recognising these dynamics is crucial for appreciating the ongoing transformation of

Islamic popular culture in the digital age (Lengauer 2018; Slama 2018). Overall, social media has redefined the ways Islamic practices are performed and understood across the two countries. By enabling digital piety, elevating religious influencers, fuelling digital populism, and supporting Muslim-friendly tourism, platforms have become integral to the cultural and religious lives of Southeast Asian Muslims. These developments illustrate the fluid interplay between tradition and modernity, devotion and commerce, as well as local and global identities within the contemporary Islamic world.

Transnational Influences

Transnational Islamic movements exert significant influence on the perception and formation of Muslim identities (Maksum and Daulay 2023). Comparative studies focusing on Indonesia and Thailand demonstrate how these movements shape religious, political, and social developments. Factors such as migration, digital communication, and broader political dynamics contribute to the interconnectedness of Muslim communities across national borders.

These movements often function as bridges connecting Muslims in different contexts, facilitating the circulation of ideas, practices, and cultural norms. They can reshape local religious landscapes by introducing new interpretations of Islamic teachings or by reinforcing long-standing traditions. In Indonesia, for example, exposure to Middle Eastern scholars and transnational networks has encouraged the adoption of more conservative practices, occasionally generating tension with local customs and established interpretations.

In Thailand, transnational influences are also visible, particularly among Muslim communities in the southern provinces. These groups maintain historical and cultural ties with neighbouring Muslim-majority countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia. Migration, trade, and educational exchanges strengthen these relationships, nurturing a shared identity and reinforcing regional solidarity.

Social media further amplifies these dynamics by enabling the rapid mobilisation of religious movements. In Indonesia, the “Defending Islam Action 212” provides a striking example of how digital platforms can organise large-scale mobilisation. Sparked by accusations of blasphemy against Jakarta’s governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), the movement demonstrated how online activity could translate into mass offline participation. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook were used to disseminate information, coordinate rallies, and unify participants across diverse regions. This case illustrates the transformative power of social media in religious activism, highlighting the fluid interaction between digital and physical spheres.

Another critical dimension of transnational and digital religiosity is the concept of online piety. The phenomenon of *riy’*, or displaying piety for social recognition, has gained new salience in the digital age. Studies of online Qur’an reading circles and charitable initiatives (*sedekah*) show how Muslims negotiate the tension between public performance of faith and theological prohibitions against ostentation (Slama 2018). These practices un-

underscore how social media enables new modes of religious devotion, while simultaneously raising concerns about authenticity and sincerity.

Digital platforms thus serve as arenas where Muslims publicise acts such as Qur'an recitation, prayer, or charity. While these displays can inspire others and strengthen communal ties, they also provoke questions about motivation—whether acts are undertaken for genuine devotion or for social validation. This tension reflects broader debates over how digital visibility transforms the meaning of piety, reshaping religious authority and everyday practice in both majority and minority Muslim contexts.

The infusion of digital media into everyday expressions of Islamic piety has affected not only perceptions of religious authority but also popular understandings of gender roles. The visual culture of Instagram among young Muslim women in Indonesia demonstrates how social media influences religious practice and identity formation (Fakhrurroji 2019). This trend underscores the wider implications of digital technologies for religious life and the renegotiation of cultural and gender norms in contemporary Muslim societies.

Female Muslim influencers on Instagram frequently post content that blends modest fashion, beauty tips, and religious advice. This hybrid form of expression enables them to reach wide audiences while promoting Islamic values. At the same time, it disrupts conventional gender roles by offering women a public platform to articulate their perspectives and exert influence in ways that were historically constrained.

Despite a growing body of research on social media's impact on identity perception, a significant gap persists in comparative studies of Muslim identity in Indonesia and Thailand. Existing scholarship tends to examine each country separately, leaving limited understanding of how socio-political differences shape religious expression across contexts. This study addresses that gap by analysing how social media platforms influence Muslim identity formation in both majority and minority settings.

The comparative analysis reveals both convergences and divergences. In Indonesia, social media is often used to negotiate—and at times contest—religious authority, with movements such as the 212 Action illustrating how digital platforms can shape public opinion and mobilise collective action. In Thailand, by contrast, social media functions more as a medium of community building and cultural preservation. Thai Muslims employ digital platforms to share religious content, maintain identity in a Buddhist-majority society, and connect with wider global networks. This digital engagement fosters belonging and solidarity, enabling minority communities to navigate their social position.

Taken together, transnational Islamic movements and digital media exert profound influence on Muslim identities in both contexts. Social media facilitates the articulation of piety, enables the mobilisation of religious movements, and reshapes gender dynamics and visual culture. Yet, the distinct socio-political settings of Indonesia and Thailand generate different manifestations of these processes. Appreciating these differences is essential for understanding the evolving landscape of Islamic identity in the digital age. The interplay between tradition and modernity, local and global influences, and online and offline practices highlights the complexity of Muslim identity today. Future research should expand

this comparative lens to explore further how digital technologies shape religious life across diverse cultural and political environments.

Transnational Islamic movements and social media exert profound influence on Muslim identities in both Indonesia and Thailand. While there are similarities in how these dynamics unfold, the distinct socio-political contexts of each country generate different outcomes. In Indonesia, transnational Islamic movements frequently introduce new interpretations of Islamic teachings or reinforce existing traditions. At times, this process has created tensions with local customs and interpretations, as seen in the adoption of more conservative practices influenced by Middle Eastern scholars (Zaeni and Taubah 2023).

Social media also plays a pivotal role in mobilising large-scale religious activism. The “Defending Islam Action 212” movement illustrates how platforms such as Twitter and Facebook can be used to disseminate information, coordinate rallies, and unify participants across diverse regions. This mobilisation underscores the capacity of digital media to shape public opinion and collective action (Al-Khalidi 2021). At the same time, online religiosity in Indonesia raises questions of authenticity and sincerity. The phenomenon of *riyā’*—publicly displaying piety despite theological discouragement—remains a recurring concern as Muslims navigate the tension between devotion and social validation (Slama 2018).

In Thailand, transnational Islamic movements are shaped by deep historical and cultural ties with neighbouring Muslim-majority countries, especially Malaysia and Indonesia. These ties are reinforced by migration, trade, and educational exchanges, which sustain a sense of solidarity and shared identity among Thai Muslims (Zaeni and Taubah 2023). Within this context, social media becomes a crucial tool for community building and cultural preservation. Thai Muslims rely on platforms to connect with global Muslim communities, share religious content, and sustain their identity within a predominantly Buddhist society. This digital engagement fosters belonging and solidarity, which are vital for navigating minority status (Kittirach and Tandikul 2019).

Similar to Indonesia, Thai Muslims also engage in online piety, where the dynamics of *riyā’* remain relevant. As in Indonesia, believers must balance the theological discouragement of ostentation with the performative nature of public devotion online. Yet, the implications differ: in Indonesia, digital piety often intersects with political mobilisation and authority contestation, while in Thailand it functions more as a means of sustaining cultural identity and communal resilience.

Taken together, these cases highlight the importance of socio-political context in shaping how transnational movements and digital platforms influence religious life. In Indonesia, external religious influences and social media activism often produce contestation and polarisation. In Thailand, by contrast, transnational connections strengthen cultural continuity and solidarity, while social media provides a lifeline for minority expression and identity preservation. Both contexts, however, face similar challenges regarding authenticity in online piety and the negotiation between genuine devotion and social validation.

Understanding these similarities and differences is essential for appreciating the evolu-

ing landscape of Islamic identity and practice in the digital age. The comparative experiences of Indonesia and Thailand demonstrate how transnationalism, digital technologies, and local socio-political conditions intersect to shape contemporary Muslim identities in complex and context-specific ways.

Conclusion

This comparative study of Indonesia and Thailand demonstrates how social media reshapes Islamic identities within two distinct socio-political contexts. In Indonesia, where Muslims form the majority, digital platforms amplify religious populism, fragment traditional authority, and intertwine religious discourse with political mobilisation and commercial interests. The “Defending Islam Action 212” movement and the rise of digital influencers exemplify how mediatized communication transforms authority and enables new forms of religious populism. In Thailand, by contrast, Muslims as a minority employ social media to build communities, preserve culture, and sustain solidarity across borders. Platforms provide a vital lifeline for articulating minority identity, connecting Thai Muslims to regional and global Muslim networks, and enabling them to navigate marginalisation within a Buddhist-majority environment.

By applying the frameworks of mediatization (Hjarvard 2011; Lundby 2014) and networked religion (Campbell 2013), this study shows that social media is not merely a neutral channel for religious content but an active force shaping how religiosity is practised, negotiated, and legitimised in digital environments. The findings highlight how authority, identity, and community are reconfigured differently in majority and minority contexts, thus extending existing theories of digital religion.

Ultimately, social media emerges as both a challenge and an opportunity: it democratises religious authority while risking fragmentation; it fosters solidarity but also raises questions of authenticity in online piety. The interplay between tradition and modernity, local and global influences, and online and offline practices underscores the complexity of contemporary Muslim identities. This comparative analysis contributes to broader debates in digital religion studies by showing how socio-political contexts condition the impact of mediatization and networked religion, offering insights into the evolving landscape of Islam in the digital age.

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