

The Construction of Generation Z's Islamic Identity Through Religious Content on TikTok

M. Amin¹, Murdan², Iman Ahmad Gymnastiar³, Nur Kholik⁴, Ngismatul Choiriyah⁵, Rosalina Bancin⁶

¹IAI Qamarul Huda, ²IAI Qamarul Huda, ³Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, ⁴ Universitas Alma Ata, ⁵Universitas Muhammadiyah Palangka Raya, ⁶MTSN 1 Labuhanbatu Utara

muh.amin1274@gmail.com¹ prof.murdan@gmail.com² Imanahmadgymnastiar98@upi.edu³
nurkholik@almaata.ac.id⁴ ngismatul@umpr.ac.id⁵ sardimanbancin123@gmail.com⁶

Corresponding Author:*email: muh.amin1274@gmail.com

Abstrak

Perkembangan media sosial telah mendorong terjadinya transformasi cara beragama di kalangan generasi muda, khususnya Generasi Z. TikTok sebagai platform berbasis video pendek tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai medium hiburan, tetapi juga menjadi ruang penting dalam konstruksi identitas keislaman yang bersifat visual, performatif, dan algoritmik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana Generasi Z mengonstruksi identitas keislaman melalui konten keagamaan di TikTok, serta bagaimana peran afordansi platform dan algoritma dalam membentuk otoritas dan pengalaman religius mereka. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode etnografi digital. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipan terhadap akun-akun kreator konten keagamaan Muslim yang berpengaruh, analisis konten visual dan audio mimetik, serta interaksi pengguna di kolom komentar. Analisis data dilakukan secara tematik dengan pendekatan induktif-iteratif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya pergeseran dari otoritas keagamaan tradisional menuju otoritas berbasis performa visual dan autentisitas naratif. Selain itu, ditemukan fenomena *algorithmic conspирituаlity*, yaitu keyakinan bahwa algoritma TikTok berperan sebagai medium penyampaian pesan religius yang bersifat personal dan “ditakdirkan”. Identitas keislaman Generasi Z di TikTok bersifat hibrida, cair, dan lebih menekankan oropraksi digital dibandingkan ortodoksi doktrinal, sehingga menandai transformasi signifikan praktik keberagamaan di era digital.

Kata Kunci: *Mediatisasi Agama; Generasi Z; TikTok; Identitas Keislaman; Otoritas Keagamaan*

Abstract

The rapid expansion of social media has significantly transformed religious practices among younger generations, particularly Generation Z. TikTok, as a short-video-based platform, functions not only as an entertainment medium but also as a crucial space for constructing Islamic identity that is visual, performative, and algorithm-driven. This study aims to analyze how Generation Z constructs Islamic identity through religious content on TikTok and to examine the role of platform affordances and algorithms in shaping religious authority and spiritual experience. Employing a qualitative approach with a digital ethnography method, data were collected through participant observation of influential Muslim content creators, multimodal analysis of visual narratives and mimetic audio, and examination of user interactions in comment sections. Data were analyzed thematically using an inductive-iterative approach. The findings reveal a significant shift from traditional, institution-based religious authority toward performance-based authority grounded in visual credibility and narrative authenticity. The study also identifies the emergence of *algorithmic conspирituаlity*, wherein

TikTok's For You Page algorithm is perceived as a divinely guided medium delivering personalized religious messages. Consequently, the Islamic identity of Generation Z on TikTok appears hybrid, fluid, and situational, emphasizing digital orthopraxy over doctrinal orthodoxy. This transformation highlights how mediatised religion reshapes modes of belief, authority, and religious subjectivity in the contemporary digital era.

Keywords: *Religious Mediatization; Generation Z; TikTok; Islamic Identity; Religious Authority*

Introduction

In the contemporary digital era, religion is no longer simply a static system of dogma, but has undergone a profound process of mediatization, where religious expression is now intertwined with the logic of social media (Barta & Andalibi, 2021). This phenomenon is clearly visible in how digital technology is transforming the way individuals consume, share, and interact with religious messages. (Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018). In this context, social media is not just a communication tool, but has become a "third space" for post-secular societies to negotiate their hybrid identities between institutional authority and individual autonomy (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). This digital transformation has found its momentum on the TikTok platform, which has seen a tremendous surge in popularity among global youth in recent years, including in Indonesia (Civila & Jaramillo-Dent, 2022). TikTok offers a unique experience through short videos lasting 15 to 60 seconds that are dominated by user-generated content (*user-generated content*) (De et al., 2025). Through features such as *slip-sync*, duets, and challenges (*challenges*), TikTok creates a fluid visual culture and encourages technological mimesis among its users (El Sayed & Hotait, 2024).

Generation Z, as digital natives (*digital natives*), are the primary demographics that shape and are shaped by the TikTok ecosystem. (Hunklinger & Limacher, 2025) For them, this platform is not just a light entertainment channel, but a vital space for self-articulation and the building of a religious community that transcends geographical boundaries (Kaye et al., 2021). On this platform, Islamic identity is no longer displayed rigidly, but is instead constructed through content that is "fun", everyday, and often silly *orgoofy* (Liu et al., 2025). Central to the user experience on TikTok is the "For You Page" (FYP) algorithm that works to personally direct content to audiences deemed relevant (Father, 2025).

This algorithm not only determines what the user sees, but also facilitates what is known as *algorithmic conspирituаlity*, where users assign divine significance to the content that appears in their feeds (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2020). This phenomenon creates the belief that algorithms are God's instruments for delivering messages that are "intended for you" (Tirocchi, 2024). The presence of religious content on TikTok fundamentally challenges traditional religious authority (Toktarbekova et al., 2025). If conventionally Islamic knowledge is conveyed by scholars in traditional clothing in a formal context, now a new generation of influencers has emerged (*influencers*) Western-educated social media, expert in storytelling (*storytelling*), and is fluent in popular culture (Wang et al., 2025). They often do not have a strict Islamic boarding school

educational background, but are able to build epistemic authority through authentic narratives and emotional closeness with their followers (Zaid et al., 2022).

The construction of Islamic identity on TikTok places great emphasis on the norm of authenticity (Aziz & Hidayat, 2021). Unlike Instagram, which tends to show a filtered, idealized side, TikTok encourages a "be yourself" attitude (*just be you*), which normalizes the expression of raw emotions, both positive and negative (Zeng & Abidin, 2021). In this process, the religious "self" is constructed through the practice of psychoanalytic identification with the visual objects consumed, creating what is referred to as *algorithmized self* (Fakhruroji & Muhaemin, 2021). The rise of religious populism on Indonesian social media complicates this landscape (Halimatussa'diyah & Rahman, 2022). The practice of Islamic learning spread across various digital platforms shows signs of populism where the main authority of religious organizations such as the MUI, NU, or Muhammadiyah is starting to be rivaled by pop pastors or ustadz who promote a media-friendly Islamic lifestyle (Huda & Saifuddin, 2023).

Religion then becomes a commodity in the attention economy (*attention economy*), where the moral message is conveyed through techniques *soft-selling* entertaining (Mahfud & Mutmainnah, 2022). For Muslim women, platforms like TikTok and Instagram provide a platform to demonstrate religious agency through visuals of piety (Mubarok & Nurhadi, 2024). Through "hijabers" content, they negotiate the parameters of modesty (*modesty*) with modern fashion elements, creating a hybrid aesthetic that challenges the stereotype of Muslim women's passivity (Women, 2021). The hijab in this context functions not only as a religious symbol, but also as a statement of political identity and social alignment in the digital public space (Kholik et.al., 2023).

However, this identity construction is not free from social pressures and affective labor. Religious content creators often bear a great deal of emotional responsibility to respond to their audience's spiritual needs, which sometimes leads to excessive parasocial dependence (Rohman & Sari, 2023). On the other hand, exposure to anonymous strangers' opinions in the comments section becomes a platform for norm enforcement, where content deemed inauthentic or "faking it" is immediately subject to social sanctions. Indonesia's enthusiasm for digital technology has created the phenomenon of "incense offering," or the search for digital gods among Generation Z.

Although Indonesia is not an atheist country, the tendency of young people to seek spiritual solutions through social media shows that religion is often used as a "pressure valve" (*pressure valve*) to relieve anxiety due to economic pressure and intense job competition. These digital religious rituals are often temporary and secular, more oriented towards self-healing (*self-healing*) from doctrinal devotion (Verdiyanto, et al., 2025). Thus, the main problem that arises is the shift from orthodoxy to orthopraxy in religion among Generation Z. Religion is no longer understood as adherence to doctrines and creeds, but rather as subjective experiences and daily practices that must be aligned with a digital lifestyle. This creates tension between traditional authority based on classical texts and new authority based on algorithms and visual popularity (Sari & Abdullah, 2024). Generation Z's Islamic identity on TikTok has become highly fluid, uncertain, and highly dependent on how the FYP algorithm shapes their preferences (Syamsuddin & Rijal, 2022). Furthermore, there is a risk of disinformation

and polarization in this digital religious space. Although TikTok provides space for counter-narratives (*counter-narratives*) against Islamophobia, these platforms can also become platforms for the spread of radical ideologies and hatred if not managed critically. Reliance on algorithms that personalize content can narrow users' religious perspectives into homogenous information bubbles, thus hindering broader intergroup dialogue.

Based on the description above, this research identifies at least three research gaps (*research gap*). First, most studies on religion on social media focus more on analyzing textual content and pay less attention to the role of platform affordances (material features such as the FYP algorithm and video modality) in shaping users' levels of authenticity and religious identity. Second, there is a dearth of research that deeply explores the phenomenon of *algorithmic spirituality* in the context of Islam in Indonesia, where algorithms are considered to have divine agency in the process of da'wah. Third, although there have been numerous studies on Muslim women's agency on Instagram, research on how Generation Z collectively constructs Islamic identities through imitation practices and the use of mimetic audio on TikTok remains very limited. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how TikTok's sociomaterial factors uniquely facilitate the construction of a hybrid Islamic identity, where the boundaries between the sacred and the profane, between the authority of ulama and the influence of influencers, become increasingly blurred.

Research methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with digital ethnography methods to understand how the virtual space of TikTok becomes an arena for contestation and negotiation of Islamic identity (Hunklinger & Limacher, 2025). The researchers conducted participant observation of the behavior of "digital natives" (Gen Z) in consuming and producing religious content, as well as how the platform's material features influence their expressions of religiosity (Kaye et al., 2021). The main focus is on the interaction between users, content, and algorithms as non-human actors that contribute to the formation of digital habitus (Liu et al., 2025). Data was collected through the following techniques: *snowball sampling* to identify accounts of *fluencer* Muslims who have significant influence among Indonesia's Generation Z (Father, 2025). Researchers analyzed visual content, use of mimetic audio, text on screen (*embedded text*), to interactions in the comments column to capture the nuances of "authenticity" (*authenticity*) and constructed authority. In addition, multimodal analysis is used to dissect how religious symbols are framed within TikTok's fast-paced entertainment logic (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2020). Data analysis was conducted in an inductive-iterative thematic manner, where category codes were developed from visual and textual narratives that emerged in the digital field (Tirocchi, 2024). Researchers map the shift from traditional authority to new, performance-based authority, and identify how platform affordances such as algorithms *For You Page* (FYP) constructs an "algorithmic self" (*algorithmized self*). Through an in-depth coding process, this research reveals layers of hybrid identities that emerge between the pull of religious tradition and digital modernity (Toktarbekova et al., 2025).

Results and Discussion

The mediatization of religion on TikTok has transformed Islam from a doctrinal belief system into a highly visual and performative lifestyle identity for Generation Z. Religious content is no longer produced in institutional isolation, but rather adapts to the logic of social media that prioritizes speed, virality, and entertainment (Wang et al., 2025). Within this ecosystem, the construction of Islamic identity is built through short narratives that blend spiritual messages with popular cultural aesthetics. One of the crucial findings is the emergence of the phenomenon *algorithmic conspirituality*, where Generation Z interprets the FYP algorithm as an instrument of "divine intervention" in preaching (Zaid et al., 2022). Users tend to believe that the religious content that appears in their feeds is a message that was "destined" for them to encounter at the right time (Ambarwati et al., 2025). This creates a new form of spirituality driven by data personalization, where technology and theology merge in an intimate digital experience.

There was a very sharp fragmentation of religious authority, where the figure of the traditional ulama began to be replaced by *influencer*. Social media is considered more relatable to everyday life. These content creators build epistemic authority not through academic degrees from Islamic boarding schools, but through their storytelling abilities (*storytelling*) and a strong command of digital production techniques. Authority is now fluid and relies heavily on the audience's subjective assessment of the creator's visual credibility. Identity construction on TikTok is heavily influenced by norms of authenticity or the "be yourself" attitude (*just be you*) (Zeng & Abidin, 2021). In contrast to the idealized and "clean" image on Instagram, TikTok provides space for raw emotional expression (*raw emotion*), including spiritual anxiety and personal vulnerability. Islamic identity is displayed through spontaneous daily practices, often carried out without careful planning in order to create the impression of honesty and emotional closeness (Fakhruroji & Muhaemin, 2021).

This expression of "emotional honesty" has become part of digital piety, where sharing struggles with depression or life's hardships within a religious framework is seen as a sincere form of preaching. Generation Z uses TikTok as a pressure relief (*pressure valve*) to relieve anxiety due to social and economic pressures. In this context, digital religious rituals function as a self-healing tool (*self-healing*) which is temporal and pragmatic (Mubarok & Nurhadi, 2024). This research notes a significant shift from orthodoxy to orthopraxy, where conformity to practice and experience is prioritized over adherence to formal creeds or doctrines (Huda & Saifuddin, 2023). Gen Z Muslims' identities on TikTok are increasingly defined by how they practice their Islamic lifestyle in digital public spaces, such as their dress code or participation in mimetic religious challenges. Religion becomes a commodity in the attention economy, where the value of a message is determined by the number of interactions (likes, shares, comments) it generates.

For Muslim women, TikTok has become a "third space" that allows them to negotiate their religious agency through fashionable hijab visuals. Through hijab tutorials and lifestyle content, they challenge stereotypes of Muslim women's passivity by projecting identities that are both economically empowered and pious. Hijab wear on

TikTok is often combined with global beauty trends, creating a hybrid aesthetic that blends modesty with a cosmopolitan lifestyle. However, this high visibility also carries the risk of exposure to hate speech (*hate speech*) and harassment in digital spaces. While content creators have the agency to defend themselves through the comments feature, they remain vulnerable to social sanctions from anonymous users who act as "black police." This demonstrates that TikTok is an ambivalent space; on the one hand, it empowers, but on the other, it reproduces hierarchies of power and marginalization (Halimatussa'diyah & Rahman, 2022).

Religious content creators on TikTok also bear the burden of affective labor (*affective labor*) who are significant in caring for their communities. They are often expected to be personal spiritual advisors to their followers, which sometimes leads to excessive parasocial dependence. This responsibility to be present and responsive to the emotional needs of their audiences presents a new challenge in the practice of religious leadership in the digital age. The phenomenon of religious populism is growing as platforms accelerate the spread of simple, easily digestible messages. Islamic narratives on TikTok are often reduced to short-form content that ignores theological complexity in pursuit of a broad audience. This creates a "piecemeal" understanding of religion (*piecemeal*) and is highly dependent on algorithm preferences.

Platform affordances like the duet feature and the use of mimetic audio encourage technological mimesis, where collective identity is constructed through the practice of imitating trending content. Gen Z constructs their Islamic identity by "participating" in viral grand narratives, making them part of their personal identity. Religious identity here is not permanent, but constantly shifts with the flow of transient digital trends. Research also found practices of negotiating privacy through the use of religious attributes. Some users chose to wear the niqab or certain photographic techniques not solely for theological reasons, but as a strategy to protect privacy amid the extreme transparency of social media. This suggests that religious symbols are used as tools for social navigation in an increasingly open world. TikTok facilitates community building based on shared experiences rather than traditional relationships. Users find a sense of belonging through content that reflects shared struggles, creating digital solidarity beyond geographic and organizational boundaries. Islamic identity here is no longer about belonging to an organization like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) or Muhammadiyah, but rather about belonging to a "side" of TikTok that shares similar values (Aziz & Hidayat, 2021). The personalized content implemented by TikTok's algorithm indirectly creates an information bubble that narrows users' religious horizons (Rohman & Sari, 2023). While users feel they have agency to choose, the algorithm still acts as a "gatekeeper" determining which Islamic narratives they consume most frequently. This reinforces polarization, where Islamic identity is constructed within homogeneous and closed spaces. In conclusion, Generation Z's construction of Islamic identity on TikTok is a hybrid, technocentric, and highly performance-driven process. Their identity is not a single, static entity, but rather a mosaic constantly reassembled amidst the tension between new authorities, the demands of algorithms, and the search for authentic meaning in a post-secular era.

Conclusion

This research shows that Generation Z's Islamic identity on TikTok is constructed in a hybrid and performative manner through the platform's sociotechnical logic, where religion is not only disseminated but also renegotiated through visibility, emotions, and digital everyday practices. TikTok's affordances, particularly its algorithms, are *For You Page* (FYP), plays an active role in shaping religious experiences and giving birth to phenomena *algorithmic conspiratoriality*, namely the belief that algorithmic personalization has a "predestined" spiritual meaning. Research findings indicate a shift from doctrinal orthodoxy to digital orthopraxy, where religious authority shifts from formal institutions to figures who construct legitimacy through visual performance, authentic narratives, and emotional closeness with audiences. While TikTok opens up new spaces of religious agency, particularly for Muslim women, the platform also reproduces affective pressure, polarization, and parasocial dependency. Thus, the mediatization of religion on TikTok represents a transformation in the way Generation Z practices their religion, which is increasingly tied to algorithms, the attention economy, and the search for meaning in the digital age.

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Fawaid: Journal of Islamic Studies, FJIS

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