



The Virtual Ummah Model as an Arena of Contestation and New Authority Formation for Muslim Gen Z

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A B S T R A C T

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This research aims to develop a theoretical framework for the Virtual Ummah to understand the mechanisms underlying the formation of digital religious communities among Generation Z Muslims on Instagram and TikTok. The scope of the research includes a thematic synthesis of five primary studies from 2020–2025, encompassing quantitative studies, virtual ethnography, qualitative studies, and systematic reviews on da'wah practices and social contestation. The method used is a systematic literature synthesis with the stages of finding extraction, thematic coding based on framework indicators, and cross-study synchronization to reveal patterns, mechanisms, and contradictions in the formation of socio-religious bonds. The synthesis results show that the Virtual Ummah formation is hybrid and polarized, meaning there is a shift in religious authority from traditional institutions to da'wah influencers who utilize platform affordances such as comment features, duets, stitches, and the use of text and audio to create digital religious practices such as online murojaah, digital waqf organization, and social media-based communal rituals. The analysis also reveals the dynamics of contestation between moderate and non-moderate groups, as well as the potential

for the spread of misinformation due to the lack of formal verification mechanisms. The main conclusion is that the Virtual Ummah is an adaptive religious community model that offers peer-to-peer learning opportunities and 24/7 spiritual accessibility. Still, it also presents serious challenges related to polarization and disinformation. Therefore, further studies should use primary data to delve deeper into motivations, experiences, and power dynamics.

Introduction

The digital era has fundamentally transformed the way religious practices are understood and practiced, giving rise to a field of study known as “digital religion.” This concept no longer views the internet merely as a tool, but rather as a space where online and offline religious practices are closely intertwined (Evolvi, 2022). In the context of Islam in Indonesia, this process of mediatization and hypermediation has transformed the way Muslims understand and practice their religion. Digital media has now become a primary arena in which Muslim individuals, communities, and institutions negotiate with tradition and authority, creating new forms of devotional expression (Aida et al., 2024).

This phenomenon is particularly evident among Generation Z (Gen Z) Muslims in Indonesia. As digital natives with a very high internet penetration rate, reaching 87.02% in 2024 (Wildan et al., 2025), this generation shows a clear preference for accessing religious knowledge through devices rather than through traditional lectures at places of worship. Visual social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have become extremely popular. Content creators utilize these platforms’ unique features, such as “Add Text & Add Sound” or the “Impersonate” method (role-playing), to present Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials in innovative and effective ways, which have proven successful in attracting Gen Z’s interest (Putri & Astutik, 2021).

The significance of this shift extends beyond mere learning methods; it has created a new ecosystem for community and identity formation. Within this ecosystem, da’wah influencers and content creators play a central role. They not only promote Islamic values and halal lifestyle trends, but also actively shape new, digitally distinct religious practices, such as online muroja’ah (religious study), online Quranic waqf (endowment), and online Umrah pilgrimages

(Aida et al., 2024). This activity of disseminating ideas, forming networks of followers, and mobilizing movements is what researchers have begun to conceptualize as a “Virtual Ummah,” a new Muslim community whose identity is formed and strengthened in the digital space (Zuhri et al., 2020).

A literature review shows that previous research has successfully mapped the landscape and key actors in the digital space of Gen Z Muslims. A study by Wildan et al. (2025) clearly identified the existence of “social contestation” that divides this digital space into two main categories: moderate movements focused on tolerance and inclusivity, and non-moderate movements concentrated on exclusive religious discourse, often using hashtags such as #Khilafah. This finding aligns with research by Zuhri et al. (2020) who linked the “virtual Islamist” faction with puritanical figures who see social media as a means to reunite the ummah in the form of a Virtual Ummah. On the other hand, research also shows that this digital space is not only filled with ideological contestation, but also lifestyle promotion, where influencers have been shown to play a key role in shaping halal consumption trends (Siregar et al., 2025).

While this content mapping is important, a comprehensive scoping review by Larsson and Willander (2025) revealed significant methodological weaknesses in this field. They found that the majority of research (82%) was “corpus studies,” that is, descriptive analyses limited to digital documents such as posts or web pages. Consequently, this strong focus on “descriptive documentary studies” has neglected the collection of new empirical data from users themselves. Larsson and Willander (2025) concluded that without engaging users through interviews or surveys, we cannot answer fundamental questions about why, when, and how individuals actually engage with content.

A research gap thus becomes apparent: existing literature tends to focus on content (what is posted) and actors (who post), but fails to explain the specific mechanisms of community formation. Studies such as Putri and Astutik (2021) demonstrate how da’wah content is delivered, but not how that delivery creates communal bonds. The concept of the Virtual Ummah (Zuhri et al., 2020) has been introduced, but it is often used only to explain the outcome, namely the existence of a network, rather than the process by which the network is formed. Therefore, this study argues that there is an urgent need to shift from descriptive content analysis to developing a framework that explains the mechanisms that

transform passive digital participation into active socio-religious cohesion.

To address this gap, this study offers a novel methodological approach. Rather than conducting yet another descriptive corpus study, an approach whose dominance (82%) has been criticized for failing to capture user motivations, this study proposes a methodological synthesis to build an analytical model. This approach uniquely integrates key findings from various existing study types, including systematic reviews of trends, qualitative virtual ethnographic studies of practices and features, qualitative studies of social contestation, and quantitative analyses of datasets on misinformation. By bridging these previously isolated findings, this study can build a more comprehensive framework for moving from the “what” to the “how” of digital communities.

Based on the synthesis approach, the main objective of this study is to develop and propose a theoretical framework of the Virtual Ummah as an analytical model to understand the mechanisms of digital religious community formation. This study focuses on how “hybrid spaces” and “(hyper)mediated spaces” are created and maintained by Gen Z Muslims on Instagram and TikTok. This framework will specifically dissect the mechanisms of socio-religious bond formation through an analysis of three key elements, namely (1) the role of influencers as new religious authorities, (2) the creation and dissemination of new religious practices that are uniquely digital, and (3) the role of platform affordances in facilitating interactions.

Research Methods and Theoretical Approach

This research method adopts a Systematic Literature Synthesis approach to explore the formation of the Virtual Ummah by analyzing key findings on Gen Z Muslim engagement on TikTok and Instagram. Unlike quantitative Secondary Data Analysis (SDA), which reanalyzes raw data, this approach focuses on a thematic synthesis of existing primary studies (Thomas & Harden, 2023). This approach allows researchers to leverage findings from studies with diverse methodologies (qualitative, quantitative, and literature reviews) to build a new, more comprehensive analytical perspective (Johnston, 2019).

The data synthesized in this study consists of five primary studies spanning the period 2020–2025. These studies were selected because they collectively encompass a variety of research methodologies on the same phenomenon,

including: (1) a quantitative dataset on misinformation engagement (Al-Zaman et al., 2023), (2) a qualitative virtual ethnographic study on learning methods on TikTok (Putri et al., 2021), (3) a systematic review of Islamic lifestyle trends (Siregar et al., 2025), (4) a qualitative study on Gen Z social contestation (Wildan et al., 2025), and (5) a scoping review of research methodologies in this area (Larsson, 2024).

Theoretical Framework and Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the theoretical framework of the Virtual Ummah, defined as a cross-geographic digital religious community. This concept is developed from the theory of imagined communities, which emphasizes social cohesion through shared representations (Anderson, 2006), and the digital religion framework, which examines the integration of religion into digital media (Campbell & Tsuria, 2022). The Virtual Ummah in this study was identified through four main indicators synthesized from the literature: (1) reciprocal religious support, (2) cross-platform expression of Islamic identity, (3) shared collective religious experiences, and (4) digital solidarity mechanisms (Rohmawati, 2024).

The data analysis followed the thematic synthesis method (Thomas & Harden, 2023), comprising three main steps. First, data extraction, in which key findings, concepts, and themes from the five studies were systematically extracted. Second, thematic coding, in which the extracted findings were grouped based on the four indicators of the theoretical framework (Virtual Ummah). Third, cross-study synthesis, in which the analytical results from the various studies were combined to reveal patterns, mechanisms, and contradictions in community formation that reinforce (or challenge) the Virtual Ummah framework.

Table 1. Summary of Analyzed Studies

The following table summarizes the five main studies synthesized in this research, including their methodological focus, sample size (n), and key variables/findings.

Table 1. Study Data Analyzed

No.	Study (Source)	Methodology	n (Study Sample)	Synthesized Variables/Key Findings
1	Al-Zaman et al. (2023)	Dataset Analysis (Quantitative)	7,350 comments on Facebook	Type of misinformation topic (Radical, Political, Religious); User reaction (Negative, Positive); Rating (Believe, Deny).
2	Putri et al. (2021)	Virtual Ethnography (Qualitative)	18 TikTok Islamic preaching creator accounts	Preaching methods (Impersonate/Role Play, Tutorial); Features used (Add Text, Add Sound, Duet, Stitch).
3	Siregar et al. (2025)	Systematic Literature Review (SLR)	35 studies	The role of influencers in promoting Islamic values, Halal lifestyle trends, and the formation of religious identity.
4	Wildan et al. (2025).	Qualitative Study (Interview & Observation)	Members of student organizations (KAMMI, KMNU, IMM)	Movement category (Moderate vs. Non-Moderate); Contestation theme (Tolerance vs. #Khilafah/#Hijrah).
5	Larsson (2024)	Scoping Review (Methodological)	359 studies	Dominant methodology type (Corpus study 82%); Research gap (Lack of interview/survey studies).

Discussion and Results 1

Formation Patterns, Contestation, and Mechanisms of Virtual Communities

A thematic synthesis of the analyzed studies reveals that the formation of the Virtual Ummah on social media does not constitute a single, harmonious community. Instead, it is a polarized and contested arena. Qualitative findings by Wildan et al. (2025) clearly identify the existence of “social contestation” that

divides the digital space of Gen Z Muslims into two main movement categories. The first category is the “moderate” movement that focuses its digital activism on issues of tolerance, inclusivity, and interfaith dialogue. The second category is the “non-moderate” movement, which focuses on disseminating “exclusive religious discourse” and actively uses specific hashtags such as #Khilafah and #Hijrah to mobilize (Wildan et al., 2025).

This contestation does not occur in a vacuum; it is actively mediated by key actors who now function as “new religious authorities” in the digital space. Islamic influencers, representing both sides of the ideological spectrum, leverage their popularity and personal branding to promote their values. Non-moderate movements, for example, intensively disseminate “exclusive religious discourse” and use specific hashtags for mobilization, aiming to strengthen the boundaries of their communal identity. In contrast, moderate movements employ content strategies to promote tolerance and inclusivity and counter these exclusive narratives. These competing narratives mediated by influencers fundamentally shape the polarized characteristics of the Virtual Ummah. Thus, digital platforms become a vital arena for the struggle for influence, where legitimacy no longer relies on formal scholarly credentials but rather on the ability to package emotionally and aesthetically appealing content.

This pattern of polarization is reinforced by the findings of Zuhri et al. (2020), who identified a “virtual Islamist” faction supported by “puritanical Muslim figures.” This faction strategically views social media as a primary means of reuniting the Muslim community in the form of a “Virtual Ummah” or virtual community identity. Thus, the formation of the Virtual Ummah cannot be understood as a neutral public space. It is more accurately described as a dynamic digital ecosystem in which various groups with conflicting ideologies actively compete to define a collective identity and the dominant narrative of Islam in Indonesia’s digital space.

Shifting Authority and Innovation in Religious Practice

The main characteristic of this Virtual Ummah formation is a fundamental shift in religious authority. The processes of mediatization and hypermediation, as analyzed by Rohmawati et al. (2024), show that social media actively “challenge traditional authority” based on institutions. In this new ecosystem, da’wah influencers

and content creators take on the role of “new religious authorities” (Aida et al., 2024) or “virtual authorities” (Zuhri et al., 2020). The legitimacy of these new authorities no longer relies on scientific credentials or formal institutions, but rather on their popularity, personal branding, and ability to package emotionally and aesthetically appealing content.

This legitimacy, based on personal branding, fundamentally changes the dynamics of the relationship between audiences (Gen Z) and religious authority figures. Unlike traditional authority figures, who often feel distant, hierarchical, and top-down, influencer preachers build closeness through emotionally and aesthetically relevant content. They not only promote Islamic values but also actively shape and exemplify “Islamic lifestyle trends,” positioning themselves as both aspirational and accessible figures. A synthesis of virtual ethnographic studies (Putri & Astutik, 2021) suggests that their effectiveness lies in their mastery of platform affordances, such as the use of “impersonation” (role-playing) methods that prove far more appealing to Gen Z. This newfound virtual authority, based more on popularity and audience engagement than on scholarly credentials, in turn gives them an implicit “mandate” from their followers to innovate.

The most significant impact of this shift in authority is the emergence of innovation and the commodification of religious practices. These new authorities are not simply disseminating existing teachings but are actively creating new, digitally distinct religious practices to respond to the needs of their audiences (Aida et al., 2024). A synthesis of digital ethnographic studies by Aida et al. (2024) identified a variety of new practices negotiated between online and offline spaces. These practices include phenomena such as online muroja’ah (Quran memorization via video call), online Qur’an waqf (donations organized and documented by influencers), and even online Umrah pilgrimages, the process of which is broadcast on social media.

Platform Engagement and Affirmation Mechanism

Technically, this community formation is made possible through creative exploitation of social media platform affordances (features). A virtual ethnography by Putri and Astutik (2021) specifically identified the most effective technical mechanisms for da’wah engagement with Gen Z on TikTok. They found that the most popular features were not long-form lecture content but rather “Add Text

& Add Sound,” “Duet,” and “Stitch.” These features allow creators to use delivery methods more relevant to Gen Z, with the “Impersonate or Role Play” method (playing the role of an Islamic historical figure) proving far more effective in conveying Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material than conventional methods (Putri & Astutik, 2021).

It is important to note that the platform’s support is not merely a messaging tool but a key facilitator of communal interaction. The “Duet” and “Stitch” features, in particular, fundamentally shift the model of religious communication from a one-way monologue (typical of traditional sermons) to a participatory dialogue. By “stitching” or “dueting” with an influencer’s content, a Gen Z user actively positions themselves in a conversation, expresses their Islamic identity, and contributes to the community’s “shared practices.” This participatory mechanism facilitates peer-to-peer learning and fosters socio-religious bonds. Thus, this support is a tool that transforms individual content consumption into active socio-religious cohesion.

The effective use of platform affordances creates a “hybrid space” between online and offline religious activities, as Rohmawati et al. (2024) call it. In this hybrid space, influencers serve not only as religious teachers but also as key figures in shaping their followers’ identities and consumption behaviors. A systematic review by Siregar et al. (2025) confirms these findings, concluding that influencers are key actors promoting Islamic values, a driving force in shaping Islamic lifestyle trends, and an encouragement of halal consumption behavior among young Muslims.

Discussion and Results 2

Characteristics of the Virtual Community Model

The Virtual Ummah model demonstrates the unique characteristics of digital religious communities, in which religious identities are not merely consumed but actively constructed through “shared practices” in online spaces. As discussed and found in findings 1, innovative practices such as online muroja’ah and online badal umrah (Aida et al., 2024) function as new “digital rituals” that create and strengthen communal bonds. Interactions within these communities tend to be horizontal, facilitating peer-to-peer learning and mentoring among Gen Z users, a stark departure from traditional top-down religious authority structures (Putri & Astutik, 2021).

The horizontal nature of these interactions fundamentally distinguishes the Virtual Ummah model from traditional religious authority structures. Within this ecosystem, every Gen Z user is empowered to shift from passive consumers to active participants in the production of religious discourse, enabled by peer-to-peer learning mechanisms. This “shared practice” often takes the form of “mutual religious support,” where community members share personal experiences and strengthen their “expressions of Islamic identity.” Comment columns, for example, transform from mere feedback tools into dynamic spaces for informal theological discussion, facilitated by the platform’s affordances. This intensive digital interaction then fosters a “sense of community” and “digital solidarity” that transcends geographical boundaries. Thus, social cohesion is no longer solely dependent on physical proximity but is built through digitally mediated interactions and shared representations.

This model operates in what Rohmawati et al. (2024) call a “hybrid space,” where online and offline religious activities are closely intertwined and inseparable. Platform affordances play a crucial role in shaping these social bonds; features such as “comments,” “duets,” and “stitch” (Putri & Astutik, 2021) serve as key facilitators. These features facilitate the formation of social bonds based on shared religious values, creating a sense of togetherness that transcends account boundaries (Siregar et al., 2025). Thus, the Virtual Ummah serves as a model of community that is adaptive and responsive to the spiritual needs of the younger generation, shaped by the constant interaction between technology and religious practice.

Uniqueness of the Model: Comparison with Traditional Communities

Compared to traditional religious communities (such as majelis taklim), the Virtual Ummah model has significant differences that set it apart. The first difference is “24/7 accessibility” that transcends the constraints of physical location and fixed schedules (Rohmawati et al., 2024). A more fundamental difference lies in the authority structure. Traditional models rely on hierarchical and institutionalized authority. At the same time, the Virtual Ummah actively “challenges traditional authority” through the emergence of “popular religious figures in the virtual world” (Rohmawati et al., 2024), or, as we identified in discussion and results 1, da’i influencers (Aida et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the implications of this shift in authority go beyond a mere change in figures. In the traditional majelis taklim model, institutionalized authority often serves as a doctrinal gatekeeper, ensuring a degree of ideological uniformity within the community. In contrast, in the Virtual Ummah, where legitimacy depends on popularity and personal branding, the authority landscape has become highly fragmented. Each influencer preacher effectively builds their own “audience” of followers, often disconnected from the audiences of other influencers with differing views. This creates a highly competitive marketplace of religious ideas, where, instead of a single, centralized, authoritative voice, Gen Z faces a plurality of “virtual authorities” vying for attention and loyalty. This fragmentation of authority is a key prerequisite for the Virtual Ummah functioning as an arena of contestation rather than a unified space.

The second difference lies in diversity. It would be wrong to assume that the Virtual Ummah creates a “broader” and “homogeneous” dialogue space (Wildan et al., 2025). In fact, the discussion and results 1 show the opposite: unlike traditional communities, which tend to be ideologically homogeneous, the uniqueness of the Virtual Ummah lies in its role as an arena for “social contestation” (Wildan et al., 2025). This is a digital public space where the “moderate” faction, namely those focused on tolerance, directly clashes with the “non-moderate” faction, namely those promoting exclusive discourse and the #Khilafah. Therefore, the Virtual Ummah is not a uniformly inclusive space, but rather a battleground of narratives.

Contributions and Theoretical Implications of the Model

Theoretically, the Virtual Ummah model extends Anderson’s (2006) concept of “imagined community” into a digital context. Social cohesion is no longer based solely on shared representations in print media but is instead built through intensive, ongoing “social media interactions” (Siregar et al., 2025). Campbell and Tsuria’s (2022) digital religion framework provides a foundation for explaining how religious practices migrate to online platforms, simultaneously redefining traditional religious authority and institutions.

In more detail, the digital religion framework allows us to view the Virtual Ummah not as a static community, but as an ongoing process. The migration of religious practices to online platforms not only involves transferring existing

rituals but also the creation of “new religious practices” that are uniquely digital, such as online muroja’ah and online umrah pilgrimages. This creation process is closely linked to the “redefinition of authority,” where influencer preachers use platforms to legitimize and popularize these ritual innovations. Unlike Anderson’s “imagined community,” which is held together by the relatively passive consumption of print media, the Virtual Ummah is actively constructed through “intensive and ongoing social media interactions.” This performative interaction is what makes analyzing technical mechanisms so crucial to understanding how this digital social cohesion is realized.

This model also contributes to the development of media affordance theory by identifying specific ways platforms facilitate the formation of religious communities. The research findings suggest that affordances such as commenting and sharing are not simply technical tools. These features serve as “enablers of spiritual connection,” facilitating the formation of religious social capital in digital spaces. Furthermore, the Virtual Ummah framework addresses a methodological gap identified by Larsson (2024), who found that 82% of research in this area is dominated by descriptive “corpus studies” that fail to answer the “why.” The Virtual Ummah model is an important methodological contribution to capturing the complexity of community dynamics.

Discussion and Results 3

New Model of Da’wah and Learning.

The identified Virtual Ummah model offers significant positive implications as an effective and adaptive digital da’wah model. Unlike traditional religious learning, which is often passive, this model encourages active participation through peer-to-peer learning mechanisms. A virtual ethnography by Putri and Astutik (2021) found that interactive features such as comment columns and “Reply with Video” became primary avenues for Gen Z users to ask questions and correct each other’s understanding. This ability to share collective experiences, as noted by Rohmawati et al. (2024), strengthens solidarity and “strengthens religious communities” in the digital realm.

Furthermore, this model expands accessibility to religious guidance, offering what Rohmawati et al. (2024) call “24/7 accessibility” that transcends the constraints

of physical location and fixed schedules. The most important implication lies in the adoption of innovative delivery methods that align with Gen Z's learning styles. In line with the findings in the discussion and result 1, Putri and Astutik's (2021) study confirmed that the most preferred da'wah method was not conventional lectures, but rather visual and interactive methods such as "Impersonation or Role Play." The success of this method, facilitated by platform support, demonstrates an effective, contextually adapted da'wah for the digital generation.

Misinformation and Communal Polarization

On the challenges side, the main risk of the Virtual Ummah model is its role as a medium for the spread of "religious misinformation." The study on the Al-Zaman et al. (2023) dataset specifically provides data on how religious misinformation on social media (in this case, Facebook) is exploited to "fuel violence and interfaith tensions." The lack of a verified central authority within the Virtual Ummah and the shift of authority to influencers (Aida et al., 2024) make content verification reliant on informal peer-review mechanisms, thereby maintaining the potential for disinformation.

Another significant challenge is not only external (misinformation) but also internal (polarization). As identified in discussion and results 1 and discussion and results 2, the Virtual Ummah is not a uniform, inclusive space, but rather an arena of "social contestation." There is a real risk that platform algorithms and filter bubbles will exacerbate ideological divisions. These platforms can create "echo chambers" that reinforce the views of exclusive "non-moderate" factions (Wildan et al., 2025), isolate them from moderate factions, and ultimately erode the potential for cross-group dialogue that was previously possible in physical spaces (Zuhri et al., 2020).

Research Limitations and Further Research Directions

A major limitation of this study is that it adopted a Systematic Literature Synthesis methodology, whose findings are heavily dependent on the quality, focus, and interpretation of the selected primary studies. This approach does not allow for the collection of new primary data or direct observation of real-time

interaction dynamics. Consequently, the nuances of users' personal motivations, deep cultural contexts, and specific power dynamics within these communities may not be fully captured. However, reliance on existing primary studies is not a weakness but rather a deliberate design choice that enables cross-methodological synthesis. Only through such a synthesis can a comprehensive analytical framework be built to explain mechanisms beyond content, thus addressing the gap identified by Larsson (2024).

Future research directions should directly address this methodological gap, as identified and confirmed by our findings. A scoping review by Larsson (2024) explicitly concluded that 82% of current research in the field of "Muslims and social media" is dominated by "corpus studies" (descriptive content analysis). Larsson (2024) argued that to understand "why, how, and when" individuals engage, these descriptive studies must be complemented. Therefore, future studies are strongly encouraged to utilize digital ethnographic research, in-depth interviews, and surveys to uncover deeper motivations, experiences, and power dynamics within the Virtual Ummah.

Closing

This research confirms that the formation of the Virtual Ummah on TikTok and Instagram is not a single, monolithic community, but rather a complex "hybrid space" defined by "social contestation." The most important fact revealed by this literature synthesis is a fundamental shift in religious authority, from traditional institutions to "da'i influencers" and content creators. These new authorities not only popularize Islamic lifestyle trends but also actively create "new religious practices" that are uniquely digital, such as online muroja'ah and online badal umrah. It is also found that the mechanism of this community formation relies heavily on the creative exploitation of platform affordances, where visual methods such as "Impersonation" (role-playing) prove more effective for Gen Z than conventional da'wah methods.

In practice, the Virtual Ummah framework proposed in this study can serve as a model for da'wah practitioners to understand the digital landscape, with dual implications. On the one hand, it is an effective peer-to-peer learning model and a supporting ecosystem that "strengthens religious communities." On the other hand, it has a high risk of spreading "religious misinformation" that can trigger

interfaith tensions, as well as internal ideological “polarization.” Academically, the main contribution of this study is its methodology; through its “Systematic Literature Synthesis,” it addresses the methodological gap identified by Larsson (2024), who found that 82% of research in this field is trapped in descriptive “corpus studies.”

Based on these findings, this study strongly recommends that future research move away from currently dominant methodologies. In line with Larsson’s (2024) explicit recommendation, future studies should move beyond descriptive “corpus studies.” There is an urgent need for primary data-driven studies that utilize digital ethnographic research, in-depth interviews, and surveys. Only through these methods can researchers uncover deeper motivations, experiences, and power dynamics, and answer the questions of “why” and “how” Virtual Ummah members actually engage with their content and communities.

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