



MUSLIM DIASPORAS IN NETWORKED SOCIETIES: IDENTITY, BELONGING, AND DIGITAL PLURALISM

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Article Info

Received: February 3, 2026

Revised: May 7, 2026

Accepted: July 10, 2026

Online Version: August 25, 2026

Abstract

Muslim diasporas increasingly negotiate identity and belonging within networked societies shaped by transnational mobility, digital communication, and religious pluralism. This study aimed to examine how digital participation influences identity construction, social belonging, religious authority, and encounters with diversity among Muslim communities living in non-Muslim-majority contexts. A qualitative comparative design supported by multi-sited digital ethnography was employed with 48 participants from the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States, and Australia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation of eight digital communities, and analysis of publicly accessible online materials, then examined using thematic, cross-case, and exploratory statistical analyses. The findings revealed that participants developed layered identities combining Islamic commitment, national citizenship, ethnic heritage, professional roles, and digital affiliations. Intensive digital participation strengthened transnational solidarity and community support, while exposure to plural religious perspectives encouraged reflective identity formation. Online discrimination, fragmented authority, and ideological polarization also prompted strategic visibility, audience separation, and self-censorship. The study concludes that digital pluralism functions simultaneously as a resource for inclusion and a source of social tension. Muslim diasporic belonging should therefore be understood as a relational process shaped by personal agency, platform structures, community networks, and wider political conditions across generations, locations, and changing social circumstances globally.

Keywords: Digital pluralism, Identity, Muslim Diasporas



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Journal Homepage <https://research.adra.ac.id/index.php/ijonis> ISSN: (P: 3048-1147) - (E: 3048-2658)

How to cite: Ramdhani, R., Tan, E., & Lee, A. (2026). Muslim Diasporas in Networked Societies: Identity, Belonging, and Digital Pluralism. *International Journal of Noesantara Islamic Studies*, 3(4), 303–321. <https://doi.org/10.70177/ijonis.v3i4.4331>

Published by: Yayasan Adra Karima Hubbi

INTRODUCTION

Muslim diasporas have become increasingly significant actors within contemporary networked societies shaped by transnational migration, digital communication, and intensified cultural exchange. Muslim individuals and communities living outside Muslim-majority countries maintain social, religious, political, and emotional connections that extend across national boundaries (Novrita et al., 2025; Widiastuti et al., 2024). Digital platforms enable these connections to operate continuously through online religious learning, family communication, community organization, cultural production, and participation in international debates. The study of Muslim diasporas therefore requires an analytical perspective that moves beyond geographical displacement and examines how digital networks restructure relationships among identity, community, religion, and citizenship (Amit, 2025; Riaz et al., 2023).

Diasporic identity is not a fixed inheritance transferred unchanged from a country of origin to a host society. It is continuously negotiated through interactions with family traditions, religious institutions, national cultures, ethnic communities, educational environments, media representations, and personal experiences (Çağlayan & Taner Derman, 2025; Muthohirin, 2025). Muslim migrants and their descendants may identify simultaneously with Islam, a particular ethnic background, a country of residence, a transnational Muslim community, and several digital subcultures. These overlapping affiliations can generate creativity and cultural flexibility, but they may also produce uncertainty when different communities impose competing expectations regarding religious authenticity, social integration, gender roles, political participation, and cultural loyalty (Kabbara & Zucchella, 2023; Khan, 2023).

Networked societies have transformed the spaces in which such negotiations occur. Social media, messaging applications, video-sharing platforms, podcasts, online forums, and digital religious services allow Muslim users to construct communities beyond physical mosques, family networks, and neighbourhood associations. These platforms provide access to diverse interpretations of Islam, including scholarly, popular, reformist, conservative, feminist, artistic, and activist perspectives (Alharbi & Albawardi, 2025; Nisha et al., 2025). Digital connectivity consequently creates opportunities for religious learning and intercultural dialogue while exposing users to misinformation, ideological polarization, online discrimination, and commercialized forms of religious authority. This background places digital pluralism at the centre of contemporary discussions about Muslim identity and belonging (Jammes, 2023; Wahid, 2024).

The central research problem concerns the ways Muslim diasporic identities are formed, maintained, challenged, and transformed within digitally connected societies. Earlier models often interpreted diaspora through a binary relationship between the country of origin and the country of settlement. Such a framework is increasingly inadequate because Muslim users now participate in multiple digital communities that are not bound to either location (Abbara et al., 2025; Raman, 2024). Their religious and cultural references may come from globally circulating sermons, influencers, political movements, online study circles, entertainment content, and peer networks. The resulting identity formation is multidirectional and cannot be explained only through assimilation, integration, or cultural preservation (Ray & Dey, 2025; Toyibah & Riyani, 2025).

A second problem arises from the tension between digital inclusion and digital exclusion. Online platforms provide diasporic Muslims with spaces to express religious identities, challenge stereotypes, share experiences of discrimination, and establish supportive communities. The same platforms can amplify Islamophobic narratives, racialized surveillance, algorithmic bias, hate speech, and hostile political campaigns (Althalathini & Abdul-Rahman, 2025; Dueppen & Gallagher, 2024). Muslim users may respond through strategic self-presentation, selective visibility, anonymous participation, humour, activism, or withdrawal from public discussion. These responses reveal that digital belonging is shaped not only by

personal choice but also by technological structures, platform governance, and unequal power relations (Chtatou, 2023; Mahmood et al., 2024).

Religious pluralism within Muslim diaspora communities constitutes another significant problem. Digital media expose users to a broad range of Islamic interpretations that may differ from the teachings of families, local mosques, ethnic associations, or national religious institutions (Scharf da Silva, 2023). Young Muslims may consult online scholars, content creators, or peer communities when dealing with questions of worship, relationships, gender, mental well-being, citizenship, or social justice. Such practices can democratize access to religious knowledge, yet they can also fragment authority and blur distinctions between expertise, popularity, and persuasive communication. Research must therefore examine how diasporic Muslims evaluate competing religious claims and construct meaningful forms of belonging amid digital plurality (Baydeniz, 2025; Ewertowski, 2024).

The primary objective of this study is to analyse how Muslim diasporic individuals construct and negotiate identity within networked societies. The research seeks to identify the religious, cultural, ethnic, national, and transnational elements involved in this process. Particular attention will be given to how digital communication enables individuals to combine, reinterpret, or distance themselves from inherited identities (Trotta, 2023; Yusuf et al., 2023). The study will examine identity as an evolving social practice rather than a stable category, allowing the analysis to capture variation across generations, migration histories, social classes, genders, and levels of religious involvement (Semyonov et al., 2024).

A second objective is to investigate how digital platforms influence experiences of belonging among Muslim diaspora communities. The study will explore whether online participation strengthens attachment to local communities, countries of origin, global Muslim networks, or newly formed transnational publics (Lee et al., 2025; Rezk, 2024). It will also consider how online interactions affect feelings of acceptance, exclusion, solidarity, recognition, and cultural intimacy. Such an objective recognizes that belonging is both emotional and political because individuals seek not only interpersonal connection but also acknowledgement as legitimate members of national and digital communities (Pierre, 2023).

The study further aims to examine how Muslim users respond to digital pluralism and negotiate competing religious, cultural, and ideological perspectives. The analysis will focus on how participants assess religious authority, manage disagreement, encounter diversity, and establish boundaries between acceptable difference and perceived deviation. The expected outcome is an explanatory framework connecting digital practices with identity formation, social belonging, religious authority, and pluralistic engagement. This framework should clarify the conditions under which networked environments encourage dialogue and hybrid identity formation or contribute to fragmentation, polarization, and exclusion.

Existing diaspora scholarship has provided extensive analysis of migration, transnationalism, integration, citizenship, ethnicity, and religious identity. Research on Muslim communities has also examined discrimination, Islamophobia, mosque participation, intergenerational differences, gender relations, and political engagement. Many studies remain centred on physical institutions, national integration policies, or relationships between migrants and host societies (Bamberger, 2025; Mahmut, 2025). Digital communication is sometimes treated as an additional context rather than a constitutive environment that actively shapes identity, authority, and belonging. This limitation leaves insufficient understanding of how online and offline experiences interact in everyday diasporic life.

Digital religion studies have demonstrated that online media transform religious communication, community formation, and access to sacred knowledge. Research has examined online sermons, religious influencers, virtual communities, digital rituals, and social-media activism. The specific experiences of Muslim diasporas are often addressed through isolated themes such as youth identity, online radicalization, modest fashion, Islamic feminism, or anti-Islamophobia campaigns. A comprehensive account connecting digital religious

participation with transnational belonging, national citizenship, ethnic identity, and intra-Muslim pluralism remains underdeveloped. The fragmented state of the literature limits the ability to understand these dimensions as parts of a single social process (Chonka, 2024; Szücs et al., 2025).

Methodological gaps are also visible in the tendency to analyse online content without sufficiently connecting it to users' lived experiences. Platform posts, hashtags, videos, and public comments reveal important discursive patterns, but they do not always explain why individuals follow particular accounts, trust certain authorities, conceal aspects of identity, or move between different communities. Survey-based studies can identify broad trends but may overlook emotional ambivalence and situational identity shifts. Research combining digital ethnography, in-depth interviews, and comparative analysis is therefore needed to connect observable online practices with personal narratives, social conditions, and institutional environments.

The novelty of this study lies in treating Muslim diaspora identity, belonging, and digital pluralism as interdependent dimensions of networked social life. The proposed approach does not regard digital platforms merely as communication tools used by pre-existing communities. Digital spaces are conceptualized as social environments in which identities are performed, communities are imagined, religious claims are evaluated, and boundaries of belonging are continually reconstructed. This perspective enables the study to explain how technological infrastructures participate in shaping Muslim diasporic experiences rather than simply transmitting cultural or religious content.

A second contribution involves the development of a relational framework linking local, national, transnational, and digital forms of belonging. Muslim diasporic individuals may experience attachment to a neighbourhood, a mosque, a national society, an ancestral homeland, a linguistic community, a political movement, or a global religious network. These affiliations do not always reinforce one another and may generate conflict, selective identification, or hybrid forms of membership. Analysing their interaction offers a more precise account of diasporic life than models based on a simple opposition between integration and cultural retention.

The importance of this research is reinforced by the growing role of digital platforms in public debates about migration, Islam, citizenship, multiculturalism, and social cohesion. Misunderstanding digital Muslim communities can lead scholars and policymakers to interpret religious visibility as isolation, transnational connection as disloyalty, or internal disagreement as evidence of communal fragmentation. A more balanced analysis can demonstrate how digital networks create both opportunities and risks for pluralistic societies. The study is expected to contribute to diaspora studies, digital religion, sociology of Islam, media studies, and citizenship research while offering practical insights for educators, community organizations, religious institutions, and policymakers seeking more inclusive forms of digital and social participation.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative comparative research design supported by multi-sited digital ethnography. The design was selected to investigate how Muslim diaspora communities construct religious, cultural, national, and transnational identities across interconnected online and offline settings. Qualitative inquiry enabled the researchers to examine participants' experiences, interpretations, emotional attachments, and identity negotiations in greater depth. The comparative dimension allowed similarities and differences to be identified across several national contexts, generational groups, ethnic backgrounds, and patterns of digital participation (Gamlen & Chakma, 2025; Nagel, 2023).

Digital ethnography was used to observe how identity, belonging, and religious pluralism were expressed through social media platforms, online discussion groups, video-sharing channels, messaging applications, and digital religious communities. The study treated digital platforms not merely as communication technologies but as social environments in which religious authority, cultural boundaries, political positions, and communal relationships were continuously negotiated. The principal units of analysis included individual narratives, online interactions, community practices, religious discussions, and patterns of participation across digital and physical spaces.

Research Target/Subject

The research population comprised adult Muslims living as migrants or descendants of migrants in non-Muslim-majority societies. Participants included first-generation migrants, second-generation Muslims, international students, professionals, community activists, religious educators, and digital content creators. Eligibility criteria required participants to be at least 18 years old, self-identify as Muslim, have lived in a diaspora setting for at least two years, and regularly use digital platforms for religious, social, cultural, or community-related purposes.

The sample consisted of 48 participants drawn from Muslim diaspora communities in the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States, and Australia. Twelve participants were recruited from each national context using purposive and maximum-variation sampling. Selection considered age, gender, migration generation, ethnic background, educational level, religious involvement, and intensity of digital-media use (Verstappen, 2024). Eight digital communities were also selected for observation, including public social-media pages, online study groups, community forums, and channels discussing Muslim identity, religious knowledge, citizenship, discrimination, and intercultural relations. Recruitment continued until thematic saturation was reached and additional interviews no longer produced substantially new analytical categories.

Research Procedure

Data collection began after ethical approval and permission from relevant community administrators had been obtained. Participants received written information explaining the research objectives, voluntary participation, confidentiality procedures, potential risks, and their right to withdraw without penalty. Informed consent was obtained before each interview and before the use of identifiable digital content. Publicly accessible online materials were analysed with careful attention to contextual integrity, while content from closed or private groups was included only after permission had been granted by administrators and participating members.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face or through secure video-conferencing platforms. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participant's permission. Digital ethnographic observation was conducted over a period of four months, during which the researchers documented recurring discussions, interaction patterns, identity performances, religious debates, and responses to social or political events. Field notes were prepared after each observation session to record contextual details, analytical reflections, and possible relationships between digital practices and participants' interview narratives (Altıntaş, 2025; Kim & Kim, 2025).

Data analysis followed a reflexive thematic analysis procedure. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and digital documents were read repeatedly before initial codes were generated. Codes were grouped into broader themes concerning hybrid identity, layered belonging, digital religious authority, intra-Muslim diversity, online discrimination, strategic visibility, and transnational solidarity. Comparative analysis was then conducted across countries, generations, ethnic backgrounds, and levels of digital participation. The analysis

examined both recurring patterns and contradictory experiences to avoid treating Muslim diaspora communities as socially or religiously homogeneous.

Research trustworthiness was strengthened through data-source triangulation, methodological triangulation, member reflection, peer debriefing, and a documented audit trail. Interview findings were compared with digital observations and publicly available community materials. Selected participants were invited to comment on preliminary interpretations without being positioned as final arbiters of the analysis. Reflexive notes were maintained to examine how the researchers' assumptions, social positions, and familiarity with Muslim communities could influence data collection and interpretation. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study, and identifying information was removed from transcripts, field notes, and reported digital materials.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

The primary research instrument was the researcher, who conducted interviews, observed digital interactions, documented contextual information, and interpreted the collected evidence. A semi-structured interview guide was developed around five central themes: identity construction, experiences of belonging, transnational relationships, digital religious participation, and engagement with religious and cultural pluralism. Interview questions explored how participants defined their identities, selected online communities, evaluated religious authorities, responded to discrimination, managed competing cultural expectations, and connected digital participation with everyday social life.

A digital observation protocol, demographic questionnaire, and document-analysis matrix were used as supporting instruments. The observation protocol recorded platform characteristics, recurring discussion themes, forms of self-presentation, expressions of solidarity, disagreements, authority claims, and interactions across religious or ideological boundaries. The demographic questionnaire collected information about age, gender, educational background, migration history, national context, and patterns of digital-media use. The document-analysis matrix guided the examination of public posts, community guidelines, digital campaigns, videos, podcasts, and other relevant online materials. Three experts in diaspora studies, digital religion, and qualitative methodology reviewed the instruments to improve conceptual relevance, linguistic clarity, and alignment with the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research dataset consisted of 48 semi-structured interviews, observations of eight digital communities, 1,284 publicly accessible posts and discussion entries, 112 videos or podcast episodes, and 96 hours of digital ethnographic fieldwork. Participants were equally distributed across the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States, and Australia, with 12 individuals recruited from each national context. Twenty-two participants were first-generation migrants, while 26 were second-generation or later-generation Muslims. The sample included 24 women and 24 men, with ages ranging from 19 to 57 years. Twenty-nine participants were classified as highly active digital users, while 19 demonstrated moderate levels of digital participation.

Messaging applications were used by 41 participants, representing 85.4% of the sample, while video-sharing platforms were used by 36 participants or 75.0%. Thirty-five participants regularly accessed text- and image-based social media, 27 joined online religious study groups, and 24 listened to Islamic podcasts. Multiple responses were permitted because participants generally used several platforms for different purposes. Messaging applications were commonly used for family communication and closed community interaction, while public social media supported identity expression, religious discussion, civic participation, and engagement with broader audiences.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics and Patterns of Digital Participation

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
National context	United Kingdom	12	25.0%
	Germany	12	25.0%
	United States	12	25.0%
	Australia	12	25.0%
Migration generation	First generation	22	45.8%
	Second or later generation	26	54.2%
Gender	Women	24	50.0%
	Men	24	50.0%
Digital participation	High	29	60.4%
	Moderate	19	39.6%
Messaging applications	Regular users	41	85.4%
Video-sharing platforms	Regular users	36	75.0%
Social networking platforms	Regular users	35	72.9%
Online religious study groups	Regular participants	27	56.3%
Islamic podcasts	Regular listeners	24	50.0%

The distribution of digital practices indicates that Muslim diasporic participation did not occur through a single platform. Participants moved across interconnected media environments according to their communicative, religious, cultural, and emotional needs. Closed messaging groups provided relatively secure spaces for family communication, mutual assistance, and religious reminders. Public platforms offered greater opportunities for cultural expression and social activism, but they also exposed participants to hostile comments, surveillance, and misrepresentation. Digital belonging therefore developed through a combination of private security and public visibility.

Generational differences appeared in the ways participants used digital media, although the distinction was not absolute. First-generation participants relied more frequently on messaging applications and content produced in the languages of their countries of origin. Second-generation participants were generally more active on public platforms and more likely to combine Islamic, national, ethnic, professional, and popular-cultural references in their online self-presentation. Several first-generation participants also engaged extensively with plural digital networks, while some second-generation users preferred ethnically specific or doctrinally homogeneous communities. Migration generation consequently influenced digital practice without completely determining it.

Thematic analysis identified layered identity as the most prominent pattern, appearing in the narratives of 37 participants or 77.1% of the sample. Thirty-eight participants encountered substantial intra-Muslim religious diversity through digital media, while 35 described a diversification of religious authority. Digital participation strengthened feelings of belonging for 34 participants and supported transnational solidarity for 31. Experiences of online discrimination were reported by 25 participants, while 27 used strategic visibility, selective disclosure, or self-censorship to manage the risks associated with public Muslim identification.

Digital pluralism generated both intellectual openness and emotional discomfort. Participants gained access to Islamic interpretations that differed from those promoted by their families, ethnic communities, or local mosques. Several participants considered such diversity valuable because it allowed them to compare religious arguments, explore neglected questions, and recognize differences within global Muslim communities. Other participants reported confusion, polarization fatigue, and difficulty distinguishing qualified scholarship from religious content shaped by popularity, commercial incentives, or political ideology. Pluralism therefore expanded religious choice while increasing the burden of individual evaluation.

Table 2. Frequency of Major Themes Identified in Participant Narratives

Major Theme	Frequency (n = 48)	Percentage
Exposure to intra-Muslim digital pluralism	38	79.2%
Layered or hybrid identity	37	77.1%
Diversification of religious authority	35	72.9%
Strengthened digital belonging	34	70.8%
Transnational Muslim solidarity	31	64.6%
Strategic visibility or self-censorship	27	56.3%
Experience of online discrimination	25	52.1%
Polarization fatigue	21	43.8%
Withdrawal from contentious discussions	18	37.5%

Exploratory chi-square tests were conducted by transforming selected thematic codes into binary variables. Migration generation demonstrated a statistically significant association with layered identity, $\chi^2(1, N = 48) = 4.16$, $p = .041$, Cramér's $V = .294$. Layered identity was identified among 23 of the 26 second- or later-generation participants, compared with 14 of the 22 first-generation participants. The moderate effect size indicates that later-generation participants were more likely to articulate explicitly combined religious, national, ethnic, and digital identities.

Digital participation intensity was significantly associated with strengthened feelings of belonging, $\chi^2(1, N = 48) = 5.04$, $p = .025$, Cramér's $V = .324$. Strengthened belonging was reported by 24 of the 29 highly active digital participants and 10 of the 19 moderately active participants. Online discrimination was also significantly associated with strategic visibility or self-censorship, $\chi^2(1, N = 48) = 8.27$, $p = .004$, Cramér's $V = .415$. Nineteen of the 25 participants who experienced discrimination adjusted how openly they displayed their religious identity, compared with eight of the 23 participants who did not report comparable hostility.

Table 3. Exploratory Inferential Relationships Among Selected Variables

Variables Examined	Statistical Result	Significance	Effect Size	Interpretation	
Migration generation and layered identity	$\chi^2 = 4.16$	$p = .041$	$V = .294$	Significant association	moderate
Digital participation and strengthened belonging	$\chi^2 = 5.04$	$p = .025$	$V = .324$	Significant association	moderate
Online discrimination and strategic visibility	$\chi^2 = 8.27$	$p = .004$	$V = .415$	Significant association	moderate-to-strong
Digital pluralism and layered identity	$\chi^2 = 5.25$	$p = .022$	$V = .331$	Significant association	moderate

Relational analysis showed that exposure to digital pluralism was closely connected with layered identity formation. Thirty-two of the 38 participants who regularly encountered diverse Islamic perspectives expressed a layered identity, compared with five of the 10 participants whose digital networks were relatively homogeneous. Participants exposed to plural religious content were more likely to describe identity as contextual, negotiated, and internally diverse. Such exposure did not necessarily weaken religious commitment. Several participants reported that comparison among interpretations encouraged a more reflective and personally articulated relationship with Islam.

Experiences of belonging were connected to both supportive interaction and recognition within digital communities. Participants who received emotional support, religious guidance, professional information, or assistance in responding to discrimination generally described stronger digital belonging. Hostile encounters produced a more complicated relationship. Some

participants withdrew from public discussion, while others strengthened their identification with Muslim communities through counter-speech and collective activism. Digital hostility could therefore weaken attachment to public platforms while intensifying solidarity with particular religious or diasporic networks.

Case A involved a second-generation British Muslim woman of Pakistani heritage who participated in public social media discussions, women-led study circles, and private family messaging groups. Her public identity combined Islamic commitment, British citizenship, professional interests, and South Asian cultural references. Digital platforms enabled her to discuss religious questions that were rarely addressed in her local community. Repeated exposure to Islamophobic comments led her to restrict personal information and separate professional, religious, and family audiences across different accounts. Her experience represented the simultaneous expansion and regulation of digital visibility (Jong Haines, 2025; K.C. & Whetstone, 2024).

Case B concerned a first-generation Syrian Muslim man living in Germany who depended heavily on Arabic-language messaging groups, online sermons, and transnational family networks. Digital communication helped him maintain emotional and religious connections with relatives dispersed across several countries. Limited participation in German-language digital spaces restricted his engagement with local civic debates and Muslim organizations outside Arabic-speaking networks. Case C involved a Somali-Australian content creator who used videos and podcasts to discuss Muslim identity, racism, mental health, and citizenship. Public visibility exposed her to harassment, yet it also enabled her to build alliances with Muslim and non-Muslim social-justice communities.

Table 4. Comparative Characteristics of Selected Participant Cases

Case	Diasporic background	Principal digital spaces	Form of belonging	Main opportunity	Main tension
Case A	Second-generation British Pakistani Muslim	Public media, messaging groups, online study circles	Layered religious, national, professional, and ethnic belonging	Access to diverse religious discussions	Islamophobic responses and audience management
Case B	First-generation Syrian Muslim in Germany	Arabic messaging groups, online sermons, family networks	Strong transnational and linguistic belonging	Maintenance of dispersed family and religious ties	Limited participation in local digital publics
Case C	Somali-Australian Muslim content creator	Video platforms, podcasts, activist networks	Muslim, Australian, African diasporic, and civic belonging	Public education and intercommunity alliances	Harassment and pressure to represent Muslims collectively

The three cases demonstrate that digital connectivity did not eliminate the importance of locality, language, migration history, or social position. Case A used platform separation to manage multiple audiences, showing that layered identity required active boundary management. Case B experienced strong transnational belonging but remained less connected to the civic and linguistic networks of his country of residence. Case C transformed public visibility into social advocacy, although such visibility created emotional burdens and expectations that she should speak on behalf of diverse Muslim populations.

Case comparison also reveals that digital inclusion cannot be measured solely by the frequency of internet use. Case B was highly connected to family and religious networks but

less integrated into local public communication. Case C possessed broad public visibility but faced greater exposure to hostility and representational pressure. Case A benefited from diverse religious access while selectively concealing personal information. Meaningful digital inclusion therefore involves access, safety, recognition, interpretive agency, and the ability to participate without abandoning complex dimensions of identity.

The combined evidence indicates that networked societies have transformed Muslim diasporic identity from a primarily bilateral relationship between homeland and host country into a multidirectional process. Participants constructed belonging through interactions among family histories, national citizenship, ethnic traditions, global Muslim discourses, local communities, and platform-based networks. Digital environments did not produce a single form of Muslim identity. They expanded the range of available identifications while requiring users to negotiate contradictory expectations and unequal conditions of visibility.

The findings also show that digital pluralism is neither inherently emancipatory nor necessarily fragmenting. Diverse online environments can broaden religious knowledge, support transnational solidarity, and provide recognition unavailable in local settings. The same environments can reproduce exclusion, commercialize religious authority, intensify polarization, and encourage self-censorship. Muslim diasporic belonging should consequently be understood as a relational achievement shaped by personal agency, community support, platform governance, social inequality, and the wider political treatment of Muslim visibility.

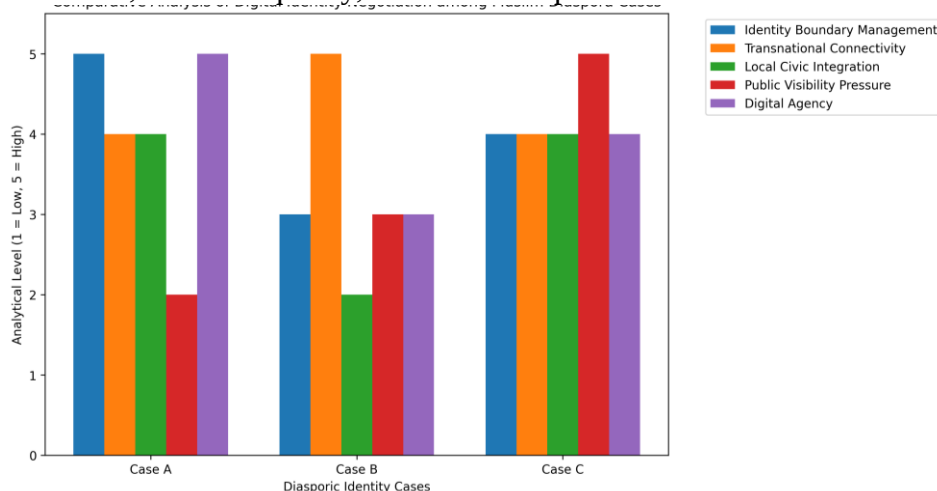


Figure 1. Comparative Analysis of Digital Identity Negotiation among Muslim Diaspora Cases

The findings demonstrate that Muslim diasporic identity in networked societies is constructed through multiple and overlapping affiliations rather than through a singular attachment to religion, ethnicity, homeland, or country of residence. Layered identity emerged as one of the most prominent themes across the four national contexts. Participants combined Islamic commitment with national citizenship, family heritage, professional identity, linguistic affiliation, gender, and membership in digital communities. Second- and later-generation participants articulated these combinations more explicitly than first-generation participants, although considerable variation remained within each generational category. This pattern confirms that migration generation influences identity negotiation without functioning as a deterministic explanation of how individuals understand themselves.

Digital participation strengthened belonging for most participants by providing access to religious knowledge, emotional support, community information, cultural expression, and transnational relationships. Messaging applications sustained close family and community ties, while public social-media platforms enabled civic participation, identity expression, and contact with wider audiences (Aharoni & Lissitsa, 2025; Rohatgi et al., 2025). The significant association between intensive digital participation and strengthened belonging suggests that

networked communication can function as a social infrastructure for Muslim diaspora communities. Digital connection did not replace local relationships or physical institutions; it extended the settings through which participants created continuity between religious practice, social care, cultural memory, and everyday life.

Exposure to digital pluralism broadened participants' encounters with Islamic interpretations, religious authorities, political perspectives, and cultural expressions. Such exposure encouraged several participants to compare arguments, reconsider inherited assumptions, and develop more reflective religious positions. Other participants experienced confusion, polarization fatigue, or uncertainty when evaluating competing claims. The diversification of religious authority was therefore accompanied by an expansion of individual interpretive responsibility. Participants could access more religious information than earlier generations, yet they also had to determine which scholars, influencers, peers, and institutions deserved their trust.

Online discrimination complicated the relationship between digital participation and public belonging. More than half of the participants reported hostile comments, stereotyping, or other forms of anti-Muslim treatment, while many adopted strategic visibility, audience separation, selective disclosure, or self-censorship. The statistical relationship between discrimination and visibility management indicates that online identity expression was shaped by perceived social risk rather than personal preference alone. Public Muslim identification could produce solidarity and collective activism, but it could also expose participants to harassment and pressure to defend or represent an internally diverse religious population.

The role of digital platforms in maintaining transnational religious life corresponds with research on Indonesian Muslim migrants in South Korea. Putri found that social media and messaging applications enabled migrants to sustain worship, education, charity, emotional care, and collective belonging beyond formal religious institutions. The present study supports that conclusion across a wider range of national settings, showing that digital platforms connect family relations, religious practices, community assistance, and civic participation. The current findings add that transnational connectivity can coexist with attachment to the country of residence rather than necessarily competing with national belonging.

The prominence of layered identity is consistent with research among second-generation Arab Muslims in Italy, where inherited cultural references are selectively combined with the social realities of the country in which individuals were born or raised. Legal citizenship alone does not guarantee cultural recognition or an unquestioned sense of inclusion. The present study reaches a similar conclusion but identifies digital networks as an additional arena of identity construction. Participants did not merely combine parental heritage with national culture; they also drew on transnational religious discourses, popular culture, professional communities, activist networks, and digitally mediated peer groups (Amin et al., 2025; Suryani et al., 2023).

The identity performances observed among female participants and digital content creators also resemble findings from research on Muslim women's use of TikTok in Germany. Hotait and El Sayed found that Muslim creators combined religious and secular discourses, engaged both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences, and negotiated identity beyond conventional markers such as the hijab. The present study similarly shows that public digital expression involves audience-sensitive identity work. Its findings differ by emphasizing the costs of this process, including self-monitoring, representational pressure, harassment, and the separation of professional, familial, and religious audiences.

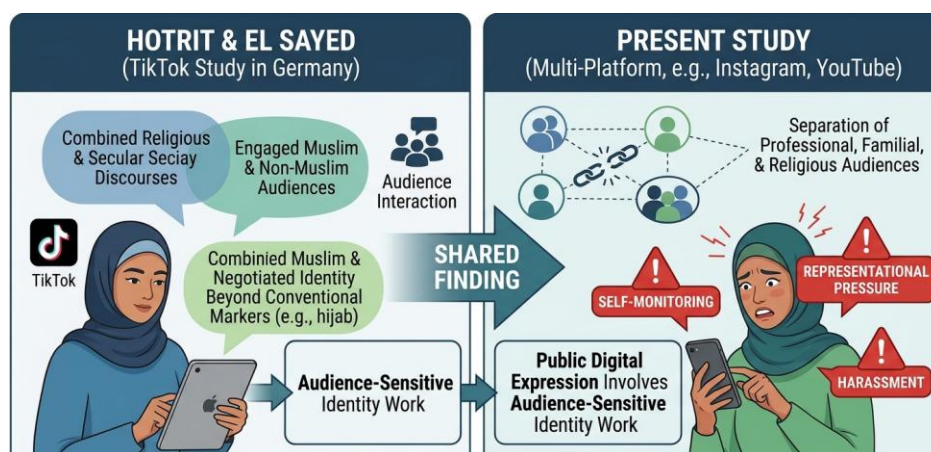


Figure 2. Comparison of Digital Identity Research Finding

The mixed consequences of digital pluralism correspond with research on religious encounters in social media. Ul Haq and Kwok found that online platforms expand exposure to difference but can also reinforce in-group boundaries, selective engagement, and polarization. The present findings support this dual interpretation while showing that pluralism operates within Islam as well as between religious communities. Participants encountered doctrinal, cultural, gendered, and political differences among Muslims, producing both intellectual openness and epistemic enclosure. Some users became bridge-builders, whereas others withdrew into more homogeneous networks after experiencing conflict or interpretive uncertainty.

The findings signal a transition from territorially centred diaspora to networked diaspora. Conventional understandings of diaspora often emphasize movement between a homeland and a host country, together with memories, loyalties, and cultural practices linking those locations. Participants in this study inhabited a more complex social field shaped by local neighbourhoods, national institutions, ancestral cultures, global Muslim publics, and platform-based communities. Digital networks did not eliminate geography, but they altered the number, speed, and intensity of relationships through which diasporic belonging could be produced. Digital diaspora should consequently be understood as a transformation of diasporic affiliation rather than the disappearance of territorial attachment.

Layered identity represents a sign of social competence rather than evidence of confusion or incomplete integration. Participants adjusted language, cultural references, religious expressions, and levels of visibility across different contexts. Such adjustments allowed them to communicate with relatives, colleagues, religious communities, and broader national publics without reducing themselves to a single identity category. The capacity to move among these contexts demonstrates interpretive flexibility and relational awareness. Social tension arose when institutions or audiences demanded exclusive loyalty, treated Muslim identity as incompatible with national citizenship, or interpreted cultural complexity as a lack of commitment.

The diversification of religious authority signals a broader restructuring of Muslim knowledge production. Religious credibility was no longer derived only from formal qualifications, established institutions, or proximity to local scholars. Accessibility, communication style, shared experience, emotional resonance, peer recommendation, and algorithmic visibility also influenced whom participants trusted. Recent research describes this environment as one of “liquid authority,” in which credibility emerges through relational proximity and platform visibility alongside conventional expertise. Such fluidity can expand access to religious learning but may weaken clear distinctions between scholarship, testimony, entertainment, and commercial influence.

Strategic visibility signals that digital citizenship remains unequally distributed. Participants technically possessed access to public platforms, yet their capacity to speak openly was constrained by harassment, stereotyping, professional concerns, family expectations, and fears of being misinterpreted (Novrita et al., 2025; Riaz et al., 2023). Digital inclusion cannot therefore be assessed only through internet access or frequency of platform use. Meaningful inclusion also requires safety, recognition, contextual understanding, and freedom from the expectation that every visible Muslim must explain the actions or beliefs of an entire global population.

The theoretical implication concerns the need to move beyond binary models of diaspora identity. A homeland–host-country framework cannot fully explain identities shaped by transnational communication, digital religious authority, online activism, and participation in global cultural networks. The findings support a relational model in which belonging emerges through interactions among people, institutions, discourses, technologies, and political environments. Muslim diasporic identity should not be treated as a fixed possession carried across borders but as an ongoing process of identification, recognition, contestation, and adaptation.

The conceptual implication also challenges any strict separation between online and offline religion. Participants' digital activities influenced prayer practices, interpretations of Islamic teachings, community involvement, friendship networks, emotional well-being, and responses to discrimination. Physical experiences simultaneously shaped which platforms they used, which accounts they trusted, and how openly they expressed religion online. Religious belonging was produced through repeated practices across connected settings rather than within a self-contained virtual world. Research on digital belonging similarly emphasizes the relationship among belief, practice, group identification, and recurring mediated activity.

The educational implication concerns the importance of critical digital religious literacy. Muslim users need more than technical competence in accessing online content. They require the ability to distinguish formal expertise from popularity, evaluate evidence, recognize commercial incentives, understand algorithmic amplification, verify decontextualized religious claims, and engage respectfully with disagreement. Mosques, Islamic schools, universities, community organizations, and families should treat these competencies as part of contemporary religious education. A purely restrictive response to digital media would be insufficient because online platforms already constitute important spaces of learning and community formation.

The policy implication concerns platform governance and public inclusion. Governments and technology companies should recognize anti-Muslim hostility as a barrier to equal participation rather than merely an unpleasant feature of online communication. Moderation systems require stronger contextual and multilingual capacity to detect coded hatred, stereotypes, fabricated claims, and coordinated harassment. Community consultation should include Muslim women, young adults, migrants, converts, ethnic minorities, and users with different levels of religious involvement. Policies based on a homogeneous image of Muslim communities may reproduce the representational problems they are intended to solve.

The prevalence of layered identity can be explained by the social environments inhabited by Muslim diaspora communities. Participants were regularly exposed to family traditions, national institutions, ethnic associations, workplaces, universities, religious organizations, and global media. Each environment offered different categories of identification and different expectations of acceptable behaviour. Digital platforms intensified this multiplicity by bringing formerly separated audiences and cultural references into immediate contact. Identity negotiation consequently became a routine practice rather than an occasional response to migration-related conflict.

Generational differences can be explained by variation in migration experience and socialization. First-generation participants often possessed direct memories of their countries of

origin, maintained stronger linguistic ties, and used digital media to preserve dispersed relationships. Second-generation participants were more likely to have been educated within the country of residence and to understand national belonging as an ordinary entitlement rather than an achievement granted through integration. Their layered identities reflected both inherited family cultures and direct participation in national social life. Research among second-generation Muslims in Italy similarly indicates that heritage is actively interpreted rather than passively transmitted.

The diversification of authority can be explained by the communicative characteristics of digital platforms. Searchability gives users immediate access to multiple interpretations, while recommendation systems repeatedly expose them to visible or engaging speakers. Informality allows influencers and peers to discuss topics that may be absent from local religious institutions. Relatable language and shared personal experience can make digital actors appear more responsive than distant institutional authorities. Research on everyday Muslim influencers shows that trust and relational closeness can produce religious influence even when content creators lack formal scholarly credentials.

The relationship between discrimination and strategic visibility can be explained by participants' awareness of audience hostility and contextual collapse. A religious statement intended for Muslim peers could be viewed by employers, strangers, family members, or hostile political groups. Participants consequently altered language, restricted account access, removed personal information, or separated audiences across different platforms. Muslim women and visibly identifiable users often experienced additional pressure because religious identity intersected with gender and racialized perceptions. Digital self-censorship should therefore be interpreted as a rational response to unequal risk rather than a lack of confidence in religious identity.

The next community-level step should involve creating digital spaces that combine religious learning, emotional support, pluralistic dialogue, and protection from harassment. Muslim organizations should avoid reproducing narrow ethnic, generational, or doctrinal boundaries when designing online programs. Moderated forums, multilingual educational resources, mentoring networks, and collaborative digital projects could connect established institutions with users whose religious lives are shaped by podcasts, messaging groups, and social-media creators. Community initiatives should preserve meaningful disagreement without allowing personal attacks or unverified claims to dominate discussion.

The next religious-institutional step should involve reconsidering how authority is communicated and shared. Scholars and religious organizations need not imitate influencer culture uncritically, but they must recognize that accessibility, responsiveness, visual communication, and emotional relevance affect whether audiences engage with religious guidance. Partnerships among qualified scholars, educators, youth leaders, mental-health professionals, and responsible content creators could make reliable knowledge more accessible. Transparent disclosure of qualifications, sources, sponsorships, and interpretive differences would help users assess credibility without assuming that institutional status alone guarantees effective communication.

The next policy and platform step should focus on substantive digital equality. Platform providers should improve reporting procedures, explain moderation decisions, address repeated harassment across multiple accounts, and provide stronger controls for audience management. Public institutions should support independent research on anti-Muslim content without treating Muslim digital participation primarily as a security problem. Digital policies should distinguish legitimate debate about religion from dehumanization, collective blame, and targeted hostility. Inclusive governance requires Muslim users to be recognized as citizens, creators, professionals, and members of diverse communities rather than only as subjects of integration or surveillance.

The next research step should involve larger, longitudinal, and more socially differentiated studies. Future investigations should compare specific platforms, national policy environments, migration categories, languages, socioeconomic positions, and forms of religious affiliation. Longitudinal research could determine whether digital participation produces lasting belonging or only temporary connection during migration and crisis. Network analysis could examine how authority and misinformation circulate, while participatory research could involve diaspora communities in defining relevant concepts and ethical procedures. The strong reliance of existing scholarship on documentary and platform-content analysis also supports the need for more interviews, surveys, ethnography, and integrated mixed-method research.

CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study is that Muslim diasporic identity in networked societies is neither singular nor permanently tied to a binary relationship between the country of origin and the country of residence. Participants constructed layered forms of belonging through the interaction of religious commitment, national citizenship, ethnic heritage, professional life, family relationships, and participation in digital communities. Digital platforms strengthened transnational solidarity, access to religious knowledge, and social support, while simultaneously exposing Muslim users to fragmented authority, ideological polarization, online discrimination, and pressures to regulate their public visibility. Digital pluralism therefore functioned as both a resource for identity development and a source of social and interpretive tension.

The principal contribution of this research lies in its conceptualization of Muslim diasporic belonging as a relational and networked process rather than a fixed cultural condition. The study integrates diaspora studies, digital religion, identity theory, and media sociology by demonstrating how online and offline environments jointly shape religious authority, social recognition, and cultural affiliation. Its methodological value derives from the combination of multi-sited digital ethnography, semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis, cross-case comparison, and exploratory statistical assessment. This integrated approach captures both the personal meanings attached to digital participation and the broader patterns connecting migration generation, online discrimination, plural religious exposure, and strategic identity presentation.

The limitations of this study include its purposively selected sample, restricted national coverage, short period of digital observation, and reliance on participants' self-reported experiences. The findings cannot represent the full diversity of Muslim diasporas across different legal systems, linguistic communities, socioeconomic conditions, migration histories, and Islamic traditions. The exploratory statistical relationships also indicate association rather than causation. Future research should employ larger cross-national samples, longitudinal designs, platform-specific comparisons, and mixed-method approaches to examine changes in digital belonging over time. Further investigation should address algorithmic bias, digital surveillance, gendered Islamophobia, multilingual religious authority, misinformation, and the long-term effects of online participation on civic inclusion and interreligious engagement.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used Google Gemini to assist in improving grammar, language quality, and overall readability of the text. After using this tool, the author(s) carefully reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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