

Muslim Women's Religious Self-Representation on Social Media: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

This systematic literature review examines how Muslim women's religious self-representation is conceptualized across social media studies. Employing the SPIDER framework and PRISMA 2020 guidelines, the study synthesized 35 Scopus-indexed peer-reviewed articles published between 2016 and June 2026. Data were analyzed through thematic synthesis and structured coding covering visual religious identity (VRI), self-presentation, platform context, and theoretical framing. The analysis identified five thematic clusters: (1) hijab, modest fashion, and visual aesthetics; (2) religious identity negotiation and digital self-presentation; (3) influencers, branding, activism, and self-representation; (4) platform and community studies; and (5) contextual and cross-platform studies. Findings demonstrate that Muslim women's visual religious identity is not a fixed expression of religiosity, but a contextual representational practice negotiated through visual signs, platform affordances, audience expectations, and moral evaluation. Although self-presentation appeared in 32 of 35 studies, VRI was explicitly central in only 17 studies, revealing a significant conceptual gap. The review further identifies an underexplored area concerning dual-account practices and post-pesantren Muslim women's digital identity. These findings extend Hall's theory of representation into platformed digital religion contexts and suggest directions for future empirical research.

Keywords: *Visual Religious Identity; Muslim Women; Self-Representation; Social Media; Systematic Literature Review*

1. Introduction

Social media has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of religious identity expression for Muslim women globally. As digital platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and blogs, have become primary sites of public life, they have simultaneously become critical arenas in which Muslim women construct, negotiate, and contest their religious identities in visually mediated forms. The intersection of religion, gender, and digital visibility carries significant social, political, and scholarly weight: how Muslim women represent themselves online shapes not only their individual subjectivity but also broader public discourses on Islam, gender equality, modesty, and belonging. Yet despite the rapid proliferation of scholarship in this area, the specific relationship between visual religious identity and self-presentation remains insufficiently theorized and systematically mapped.

The importance of studying Muslim women's digital self-representation extends beyond academic interest. Muslim women constitute a significant and growing proportion of social media users and content creators worldwide, yet they occupy a uniquely contested position in digital public culture: celebrated as modest fashion icons and pious influencers in some contexts, subjected to moral scrutiny, cyberbullying, and stereotyping in others. Understanding how visual religious identity functions in these contradictory conditions matters for scholars of communication, media, and cultural studies, as well as for educators, platform designers, and community practitioners concerned with equitable digital participation.

Existing scholarship on Muslim women and social media spans several distinct but overlapping thematic strands. Studies on hijab and modest fashion reveal that bodily and sartorial visual choices are not merely religious markers but are entangled with consumer culture, class positioning, and visual platform aesthetics. Baulch & Pramiyanti (2018) demonstrate that Indonesian hijabers use Instagram to perform middle-class religious identity and *dakwah*, while Feizollah et al. (2025) show that global hijab discourse on the same platform encompasses fashion, community, and religious sentiment simultaneously. Fakhruroji & Rojiati (2017) further illustrate that Islamic fashion trends in urban Indonesia are inseparable from identity construction among Muslimah. Critically, however, these studies treat visual identity as a property of individual fashion choices rather than as a relational representational process.

A second strand examines self-presentation and online piety. Husein & Slama (2018) show that religious display on social media in Indonesia can generate Islamic anxieties about ostentation (*riyā'*), while Trysnes (2022) analyzes how young Muslim women in Norway strategically manage

frontstage and backstage self-presentation to navigate religious identity in minority contexts. Kamran (2023) adds nuance by revealing how working-class Pakistani women on TikTok practice 'digital purdah', a form of concealment that enables participation while managing respectability and gendered surveillance. These studies, individually insightful, nonetheless remain platform- and context-specific, limiting their synthesizability.

A third strand addresses Muslim women's influencer culture, activism, and creative labor. Warren (2018, 2019) highlights the intersection of faith, gender, and creative labor in British Muslim women's digital media work. Dwifatma & Beta (2024) Examine how face-veiled Muslim women in Indonesia use Instagram for political self-representation and moderate Islamic identity claims. Hotait & El Sayed (2025) and Sayed & Hotait (2024) offer important platform-specific evidence from German Muslim female TikTok creators, showing that religious identity performance extends beyond hijab to encompass humor, language, and lived religion. Across these contributions, self-presentation emerges as a multidimensional practice, yet the theoretical integration between visual religious identity and self-presentation remains underdeveloped.

Theoretically, this review is anchored in Hall (1997) theory of representation. Hall argues that meaning is produced through cultural codes, signs, and social relations rather than reflecting a pre-existing reality. From this perspective, hijab, veil, modest fashion, bodily visibility, and video performance should not be read as transparent expressions of Muslim women's religiosity. Instead, they function as visual signs whose meanings are produced, contested, and renegotiated through platform structures, audience interpretations, and broader cultural codes. This theoretical lens enables the review to move beyond cataloging what Muslim women display online toward analyzing how those displays produce, reinforce, or destabilize religious meaning in digitally mediated contexts.

Despite the growing body of literature, three interconnected gaps remain. First, existing studies discuss hijab, modest fashion, online piety, influencer culture, digital activism, and platform visibility in relative isolation, without systematic synthesis through the dual lens of visual religious identity and self-presentation. Second, the vast majority of studies focus on single platforms or single geographic contexts, limiting the potential for cross-platform and comparative insight. Third, and most critically for future empirical research, no existing study directly examines how Muslim women negotiate religious self-representation across dual-account practices, specifically the separation of primary (public) and secondary (intimate or anonymous) social media accounts. This gap is

particularly significant for female alumni of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), whose post-institutional digital identity may involve navigating pesantren-derived religious habitus alongside broader visual platform culture, yet who remain entirely absent from the reviewed literature.

This systematic literature review aims to map and critically synthesize existing empirical studies on Muslim women's visual religious identity and self-presentation on social media. The review is guided by three research questions: (1) How has Muslim women's visual religious identity been conceptualized in social media studies? (2) How do self-presentation practices, platform affordances, and audience dynamics shape Muslim women's religious identity online? (3) What theoretical and methodological gaps remain regarding dual-account practices and under-examined subject positions such as post-pesantren Muslim women?

2. Method

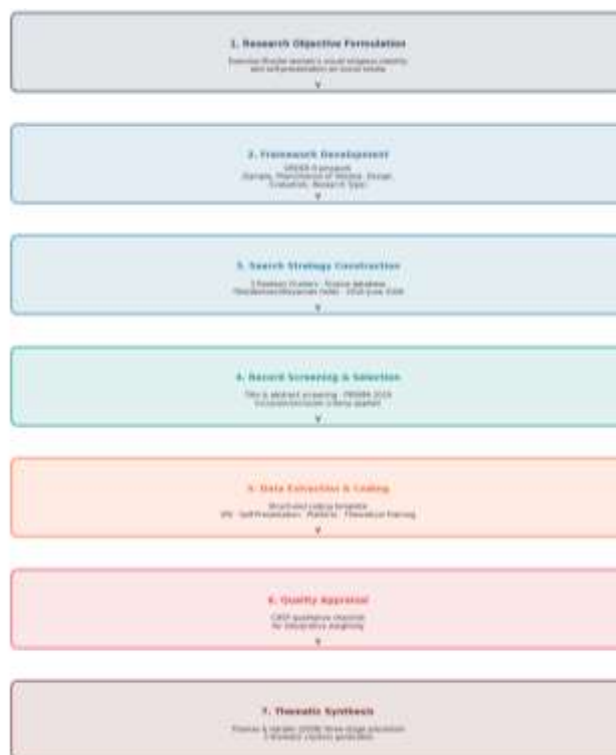


Figure 1. Methodological workflow illustrating research-objective formulation, SPIDER framework development, search-strategy construction, PRISMA 2020 screening, quality appraisal, and thematic synthesis. Source: Author (2026)

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize existing studies on Muslim women's visual religious identity and self-presentation on social media. The PRISMA 2020 reporting guideline Page et al. (2021) was adopted to ensure transparency across identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and synthesis stages. Figure 1 presents the full methodological workflow from research objective formulation to thematic synthesis.

2.1 Review Framework

To guide the review focus, this study adopted the SPIDER framework (Cooke et al., 2012) consisting of Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, and Research type. SPIDER was selected in preference to PICO because this review examines identity construction, representation, meaning-making, and self-presentation, which are phenomena better suited to qualitative and mixed-methods evidence synthesis than to intervention-outcome frameworks. Unlike PICO, which centers on population-intervention-comparator-outcome logic appropriate for clinical or experimental research, SPIDER accommodates the interpretive and context-sensitive nature of social media and identity research. Table 1 presents the SPIDER framework as applied in this review.

Table 1. SPIDER Framework

Component	Description
S-Sample	Muslim women, including Muslimah, hijabers, veiled women, Islamic women, and Muslim female content creators, as social media users and/or producers of digital content.
PI – Phenomenon of Interest	The construction, negotiation, and performance of visual religious identity, encompassing self-representation, self-presentation, hijab and modest-fashion styling, digital piety, and religious expression within digital visual culture.
D – Design	Qualitative and mixed-methods designs, including digital ethnography, netnography, critical discourse analysis, visual and content analysis, case study, in-depth interviews, and thematic analysis.

Component	Description
E – Evaluation	How visual religious identity is represented, negotiated, performed, and/or commodified; the meanings, strategies, and tensions involved; and the role of platform logics, including algorithms, visibility structures, audience dynamics, and platform affordances, in shaping religious meaning-making.
R – Research type	Empirical qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies published as peer-reviewed journal articles.

Source: Author (2026)

2.2 Search Strategy

Systematic searches were conducted exclusively in the Scopus database, selected for its broad coverage of peer-reviewed interdisciplinary literature across communication, media studies, cultural studies, social sciences, and Islamic studies. The search was conducted in June 2026 using three thematic Boolean search clusters applied to Title, Abstract, and Keyword fields. To address potential overlap across clusters and to minimize duplicate inflation, each cluster was designed with a distinct conceptual emphasis: Cluster 1 foregrounds Muslim women's identity and self-representation paired with social media platform terms; Cluster 2 centers on identity construction, negotiation, and digital religion more broadly; Cluster 3 focuses on influencer, platform, and content creator terms combined with Muslim and hijab identifiers. This differentiation reduces the risk of systematic selection bias while ensuring comprehensive coverage. The search was restricted to English-language peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2016 and June 2026, indexed within the Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities subject areas. Table 2 presents the three search clusters and their Boolean components.

Table 2. Search Cluster and Boolean Components

Search Cluster	Boolean Components
Cluster 1: Muslim Women and Self-Representation	("muslim wom*" OR muslimah* OR "islamic wom*" OR "veiled wom*") AND ("self-representation" OR "self-presentation" OR "identity representation" OR "religious identity" OR "digital identity" OR "online identity") AND ("social media" OR instagram OR tiktok OR youtube OR facebook OR twitter OR blog* OR "digital platform*" OR "online platform*")

Search Cluster	Boolean Components
Cluster 2: Identity Construction and Digital Religion	("muslim wom*" OR muslimah* OR "islamic wom*" OR "muslim female*" OR "muslim girl*") AND (representation OR "identity construction" OR "identity negotiation" OR "identity performance" OR "religious expression" OR "digital religion" OR "online religion" OR "mediatized religion") AND ("social media" OR "digital media" OR "online space*" OR "digital space*")
Cluster 3: Influencer, Platform, and Content Creator	("muslim wom*" OR muslimah* OR islam* OR hijab*) AND ("meaning-making" OR "symbolic representation" OR "cultural representation" OR "religious practice" OR "religious performance" OR "identity discourse") AND (instagram OR tiktok OR youtube OR facebook OR twitter OR influencer* OR "content creator*" OR "digital platform*")

Source: Author (2026)

2.3 Eligibility Criteria and Screening

Eligibility criteria were predefined to ensure conceptual relevance and methodological consistency. Table 3 presents the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied throughout the review

Table 3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Conference proceedings, theses, editorials, commentaries, and non-peer-reviewed publications
Publication Period	2016 – June 2026	Articles published before 2016 or not yet indexed at the time of search
Language	English-language publications	Non-English publications
Research Context	Studies on Muslim women's identity practices on social media platforms	Offline-only studies or studies not centered on Muslim women

Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Thematic Focus	Visual religious identity, self-presentation, hijab, modest fashion, piety, or religious expression	Studies without identity construction or representation focus
Methodological Scope	Empirical qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods studies	Purely conceptual papers without empirical grounding
Accessibility	Full text accessible	Retracted articles or inaccessible full texts

Source: Author (2026)

The initial search identified 555 records from Scopus across three clusters (Cluster 1: 155; Cluster 2: 200; Cluster 3: 200). After removing 74 duplicate records through systematic deduplication, where identical DOIs and title-author pairs were flagged, and conflicts resolved by retaining the record from the highest-citation source, 481 unique records were screened based on titles and abstracts. At this stage, 441 records were excluded for failing to meet eligibility criteria, with the primary exclusion reasons being: absence of focus on Muslim women's identity construction, no social media dimension, dominant focus on topics outside the review scope (e.g., radicalization, general marketing, public health), and non-empirical methodological design. Forty records were assessed for full-text eligibility, of which five were excluded due to focus mismatch after detailed review. The final synthesis included 35 articles. Figure 2 presents the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram.

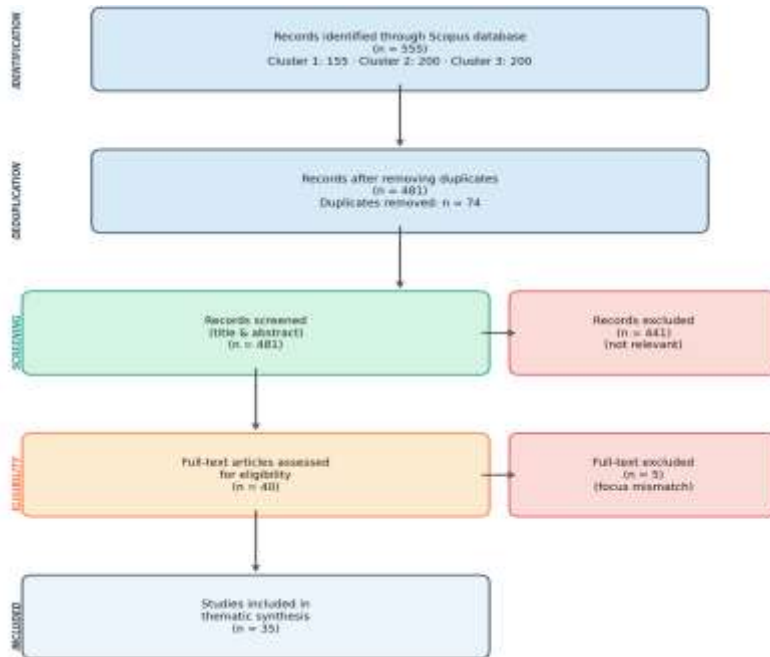


Figure 2. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram illustrating the identification, deduplication, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion stages of the systematic review. Source: Author (2026)

2.4 Data Extraction, Coding, and Quality Appraisal

Data extraction was conducted using a structured coding template capturing bibliographic, methodological, theoretical, and thematic information. The coding framework employed four categories: Visual Religious Identity (VRI), coded as Central, Significant, or Peripheral; Self-Presentation (SP), coded as Present, Partial, or Absent; Platform Context (single- or multi-platform); and Theoretical Framing (present or absent). Table 4 presents the operational definitions for each coding category.

Table 4. Coding Framework

Variable	Coding Category	Operational Definition
Visual Religious Identity	Central	VRI is explicitly stated as the primary analytical focus; the study's central argument or finding directly concerns how Muslim women construct or perform visual religious identity.

Variable	Coding Category	Operational Definition
	Significant	VRI is a prominent theme examined in depth, but the study's primary focus is another dimension (e.g., platform use, activism, consumer behavior).
	Peripheral	VRI appears as context, background, or illustrative element, but is not systematically analyzed.
Self-Presentation	Present	The study explicitly examines how Muslim women manage, negotiate, or perform identity on social media, including audience management and selective visibility.
	Partial	Self-presentation themes are discussed but not analytically foregrounded.
Platform Context	Single-platform / Multi-platform	Whether the study focuses on one social media platform or compares/discusses multiple platforms.
Theoretical Framing	Present / Absent	Whether the study employs an explicit theoretical framework related to identity, representation, or self-presentation.

Source: Author (2026)

To ensure analytical consistency and reduce subjective interpretation, two researchers conducted initial coding independently on a pilot set of ten articles before full coding commenced. Disagreements were resolved through consensus discussion, and coding categories were refined accordingly. An audit trail was maintained throughout. The full corpus was rechecked through reflexive coding. Methodological quality was appraised using the CASP qualitative checklist (CASP, 2018) as a means of interpretive weighting during synthesis rather than as an exclusion criterion. Table 5 provides a summary of quality appraisal

findings, indicating the overall methodological strength across the five thematic clusters.

Table 5. Quality Appraisal Summary (CASP)

Thematic Cluster	n Studies	High Quality	Moderate Quality	Limitations Noted
Cluster A: Hijab, Modest Fashion & Visual Aesthetics	6	4	2	Dominant Indonesia/Instagram focus; limited platform diversity
Cluster B: Religious Identity Negotiation & Self-Presentation	8	6	2	Context-specific findings; limited cross-platform synthesis
Cluster C: Influencers, Activism & Self-Representation	7	5	2	Predominantly qualitative; risk of subjective interpretation
Cluster D: Platform & Community Studies	8	5	3	TikTok studies concentrated in Germany; limited geographic scope
Cluster E: Contextual & Cross-Platform Studies	6	3	3	VRI is often peripheral; weaker theoretical integration

Source: Author's quality appraisal (2026).

Thematic synthesis followed Thomas & Harden (2008) three-stage procedure: line-by-line coding of extracted findings, development of descriptive themes, and generation of analytical themes. This process produced five thematic clusters. The English-language and single-database restriction introduces a language and publication bias, and predominantly qualitative designs limit generalizability, factors weighted during interpretive synthesis.

3. Results

3.1 Characteristics of Included Studies

The final synthesis included 35 studies published between 2016 and 2026. As highlighted by Reviewer 2, a key finding is that VRI was coded as Central in only 17 of 35 studies (49%), while self-presentation appeared explicitly in 32 of 35 studies (91%). This asymmetry reveals a significant conceptual gap: visual religious identity remains theoretically undercentered despite being empirically ubiquitous across the literature. Table 6 presents the full characteristics of included studies across five thematic clusters, organized by coding results.

Table 6. Characteristics of Included Studies (n=35)

No	Author (s) & Year	Geographical Context	Method / Approach	VR I	SP (Self-Presentations)	Platform	Thematic Focus
Cluster A: Hijab, Modest Fashion, and Visual Aesthetics							
1	Baulch & Pramianti (2018)	Indonesia	Netnography / content analysis	Direct	Present	Instagram	Hijabers' dakwah and middle-class identity construction on Instagram
2	Feizollah et al. (2025)	Multi-country (Global)	Mixed methods (NLP, topic modeling, sentiment analysis)	Direct	Present	Instagram	Multi-layered discourse on hijab: fashion, religion, community narratives
3	Fakhrurroji & Rojiati (2017)	Indonesia	Qualitative / case study	Direct	Present	Social media	Urban Muslimah identity construction and

No	Author (s) & Year	Geographical Context	Method / Approach	VR I	SP (Self-Pre s.)	Platform	Thematic Focus
						(multi)	Islamic fashion trends
4	Mensa & Yang (2025)	GCC / Non-GCC	Quantitative content analysis	Partial	Present	Instagram	Body image, sexual objectification, and modesty among fashion influencers
5	Becheri et al. (2023)	Brazil	Qualitative / netnography	Partial	Present	Instagram	Instagram's sociotechnical role in the modest fashion market
6	Arafat & Khamis (2025)	Multi-country	Qualitative multimodal thematic analysis	Partial	Present	TikTok	Pro and anti-hijab feminist activism: virality, affordances, and digital social movements

Cluster B: Religious Identity Negotiation and Digital Self-Presentation

No	Author (s) & Year	Geographical Context	Method / Approach	VR I	SP (Self-Pre s.)	Platform	Thematic Focus
7	Husein & Slama (2018)	Indonesia	Ethnography / digital ethnography	Partial	Present	Facebook, WhatsApp, BBM	Online piety, Islamic anxieties, and the tensions of digital religious self-expression
8	Trysnes & Synnes (2022)	Norway	Qualitative interviews	Direct	Present	Social media (multi)	Religion, self-presentation, feeling rules, and backstage / frontstage identity performance
9	Kamran (2023)	Pakistan	Ethnography / interviews	Direct	Present	TikTok	Working-class women, digital purdah, and gender transgressions on TikTok
1	Evolvi (2017)	Italy	Netnography / discourse analysis	Direct	Present	Blog	Hybrid Muslim identity construction in diasporic

No	Author (s) & Year	Geographical Context	Method / Approach	VR I	SP (Self-Pre s.)	Platform	Thematic Focus
1	Dwifatma & Beta (2024)	Indonesia	Qualitative / discourse analysis	Direct	Present	Social media (multi)	digital spaces Mediated political subjectivity and face-veiled Muslim women's identity in Indonesia
1	Hidayat et al. (2021)	Indonesia	Netnography	Partial	Present	Facebook	Hijrah community ideology, religiosity, and religious superficiality on social media
1	Mulyanto (2022)	Indonesia	Qualitative/digital ethnography	Direct	Present	Instagram	Ethno-religious identity construction of Indonesian Chinese-Muslims on Instagram
1	Beidollahkhan i & Ghoras	Iran	Mixed methods (hashtag +	Direct	Present	X (Twitter)	Digital resistance, authority, and

No	Author (s) & Year	Geographical Context	Method / Approach	VR I	SP (Self-Pre s.)	Platform	Thematic Focus
	hi (2025)		discourse analysis)				women's subjectivity in post-Mahsa Amini Iran
Cluster C: Influencers, Branding, Activism, and Self-Representation							
1	Warren (2019)	UK	Qualitative / interviews + discourse analysis	Direct	Present	YouTube, social media (multi)	British Muslim women's media/fashion as ruptural geopolitics and creative labor
1	Warren (2018)	UK	Qualitative / interviews	Direct	Present	Social media (multi)	Faith, creative labor, and Muslim women's digital media work in Britain
1	Muñoz Morcillo & Walzer Moskovic (2025)	Spain	Discourse analysis / netnography	Direct	Present	YouTube	Hijabis' microcelebrity construction and identity discourse on YouTube

No	Author (s) & Year	Geographical Context	Method / Approach	VR I	SP (Self-Pre s.)	Platform	Thematic Focus
1	Rosida & Azwar (2021)	Indonesia	Qualitative/cultural circuit analysis	Partial	Present	YouTube	Gender role construction and representation of Indonesian Muslim women on YouTube
1	Zebua & Khatibah (2024)	Indonesia	Qualitative / netnography	Partial	Present	Instagram	Islamic feminism, online community, and women's empowerment practices
2	Satiti (2019)	Indonesia	Virtual ethnography	Direct	Present	Facebook	Muslim women's subjectivity, feminist activism, and online identity expression
2	Febrian (2024)	Indonesia	Content analysis	Direct	Present	Instagram	Visual authority, religious influencers, and identity representation on Instagram

No	Author (s) & Year	Geographical Context	Method / Approach	VR I	SP (Self-Pre s.)	Platform	Thematic Focus
Cluster D: Platform and Community Studies and Visual Communication							
2	Appleford et al. (2025)	UK	Qualitative / focus groups	Direct	Present	Social media (multi)	Turbanisation, politics of respectability, and British Muslim women's fashion identity
2	Hotait & El Sayed (2025)	Germany	Qualitative video analysis (320 videos)	Direct	Present	TikTok	Religious identity performance, lived religion, and content creation beyond the hijab
2	El Sayed & Hotait (2024)	Germany	Qualitative / interviews + content analysis	Direct	Present	TikTok	TikTok as a third space for intersectionally marginalized Muslim female content creators
2	Kristensen (2023)	Denmark	Qualitative/digital ethnography	Indirect	Present	Social media	Danish Muslim counterpublics,

No	Author (s) & Year	Geographical Context	Method / Approach	VR I	SP (Self-Pre s.)	Platform	Thematic Focus
						(multi)	racialization, and hegemonic exclusion online
2	Khazraee & Novak (2018)	Iran	Qualitative / netnography	Partial	Present	Facebook	Social media affordances and collective identity construction in women's protest movements
2	Lövheim & Jensdotter (2024)	Sweden	Discourse analysis	Partial	Partial	Instagram	Banal religion, gender equality discourse, and veil bans in political social media debates
2	Zain et al. (2024)	Malaysia	Critical discourse analysis	Partial	Present	Instagram	Discriminatory representations of women in Hadith discourse

No	Author (s) & Year	Geographical Context	Method / Approach	VR I	SP (Self-Pre s.)	Platform	Thematic Focus
2	Salim et al. (2026)	Indonesia	Discourse-historical analysis	Partial	Partial	TikTok	on Instagram Sharia-based 'aurah norms and digital moral regulation by Muslim preachers on TikTok
Cluster E: Contextual and Cross-Platform Studies							
3	Costa (2016)	Turkey	Ethnography/interviews	Partial	Present	Social media (multi)	Gendered moral self-fashioning and premarital romance mediated through social media
3	Laan (2023)	Netherlands / Belgium	Virtual ethnography /interviews	Partial	Present	WhatsApp	Digital community, hijra migration, and religious identity among Dutch-Belgian Muslim women

No	Author (s) & Year	Geographical Context	Method / Approach	VR I	SP (Self-Pre s.)	Platform	Thematic Focus
3	Rusydiyah (2020)	Indonesia	Qualitative/ social media analysis	Indirec t	Present	Twitter	Indonesia n female Muslim activists' social education and digital literacy practices
3	Noor & Hamid (2021)	Malaysia	Critical discourse analysis	Partial	Partial	Social media (multi)	Cyberbullying, de-hijabbing discourse, and ideological struggles over hijab norms online
3	Karimova & Alexe (2021)	UAE	Content analysis + interviews	Indirec t	Present	Instagram	Female Emirati consumers' perception of paradoxical ethos in Muslim influencer culture on Instagram
3	Burkitbayev et al. (2026)	Kazakhstan	Critical discourse analysis	Indirec t	Present	Social media	Influencers negotiating traditional

No	Author (s) & Year	Geographical Context	Method / Approach	VRI	SP (Self-Pres.)	Platform	Thematic Focus
						(multi)	and Western values, including gender and religiosity

Source: Author's coding result (2026). Abbreviations: VRI = Visual Religious Identity; SP = Self-Presentation.

Table 7. Cross-Thematic Pattern of VRI and SP Coding Distribution

Cluster	n	VRI Central	SP Present	Single-Platform	Main Cross-Thematic Pattern
Cluster A: Hijab & Modest Fashion	6	3 (50%)	6 (100%)	4 (67%)	VRI articulated through hijab aesthetics, market visibility, and dakwah
Cluster B: Identity Negotiation	8	6 (75%)	8 (100%)	5 (63%)	Identity negotiated through piety, respectability, and audience management
Cluster C: Influencers & Activism	7	5 (71%)	7 (100%)	5 (71%)	Self-representation spans creative labor, religious authority, and political activism.
Cluster D: Platform & Community	8	3 (38%)	6 (75%)	6 (75%)	Platforms shape visibility, community formation, moral regulation, and contestation
Cluster E: Contextual Studies	6	0 (0%)	5 (83%)	3 (50%)	Moral, communal, and cross-platform dimensions shape digital identity

Total (n = 35)	35	17 (49%)	32 (91%)	23 (66%)	SP widely present; VRI central in fewer than half; strong single-platform bias
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Source: Author's coding result (2026).

3.2 Theme 1: Hijab, Modest Fashion, and Visual Religious Aesthetics (Cluster A)

The first cluster comprises six studies centering on the visual dimensions of hijab, veil, and modest fashion as primary expressions of Muslim women's religious identity. These studies consistently demonstrate that bodily and sartorial choices function not merely as private religious obligations but as socially visible, culturally contested, and platform-mediated representational acts. Baulch & Pramiyanti (2018) landmark study of Indonesian hijabers on Instagram reveals that veiled femininity is simultaneously embedded in dakwah imperatives and middle-class consumer identity, producing what they term a 'composite habitus.' Feizollah et al. (2025) large-scale NLP analysis of 100,000 Instagram hijab posts maps a multidimensional discourse encompassing fashion, spirituality, community belonging, and sentiment. Fakhruroji & Rojati (2017) illustrate how Islamic fashion trends in urban Indonesia are inseparable from Muslimah identity construction and digital platform aesthetics. Mensa & Yang (2025) and Becheri et al. (2023) extend these findings to show that modest fashion operates within global influencer markets, where religious signification intersects with brand visibility, body image discourse, and sociotechnical platform structures. Arafat et al. (2025) Add a critical dimension by examining TikTok-based pro- and anti-hijab feminist activism, revealing that hijab is not only a personal expression but a platform-amplified site of collective ideological struggle. Across these studies, visual religious identity is produced through the interaction of bodily signs, platform affordances, market logics, and audience interpretation, confirming the theoretical argument that meaning is contextually produced rather than fixed.

3.3 Theme 2: Religious Identity Negotiation and Digital Self-Presentation (Cluster B)

The second cluster, comprising eight studies, foregrounds how Muslim women manage, negotiate, and selectively perform religious identity in digitally mediated spaces. This cluster most directly engages with the intersection of VRI and self-presentation as an integrated analytical concern. Husein & Slama's (2018) digital ethnography in Indonesia demonstrates that online religious expression may generate

internal religious anxieties (riyā') rather than simply enabling piety display, revealing a form of moral tension inherent to self-presentation in Muslim contexts. Trysnes (2022) applies Goffman's frontstage and backstage model to show that young Muslim women with minority backgrounds in Norway carefully calibrate religious content to avoid social exclusion and religious misinterpretation. Kamran's Pakistani TikTok study is particularly significant in introducing the concept of 'digital purdah', a strategic form of concealment enabling women to participate in visually expressive digital culture while managing bodily visibility and respectability. In comparison, Evolvi (2017) demonstrates how hybrid Muslim identities in Italian diaspora contexts are negotiated through blogging, where religious and cultural belonging are co-constructed rather than inherited. Dwifatma & Beta (2024) and Beidollahkhani & Ghorashi (2025) extend the cluster's scope by connecting self-presentation to political subjectivity and digital resistance. Hidayat et al. (2021) and Mulyanto (2022) further illustrate the ethnoreligious dimensions of identity negotiation, particularly in Indonesian contexts where community belonging, class, and religious authenticity intersect. Across Cluster B, a consistent pattern emerges: self-presentation is not a straightforward display of religiosity, but a managed, context-sensitive, and often risk-aware practice.

3.4 Theme 3: Influencers, Branding, Activism, and Self-Representation (Cluster C)

Seven studies in Cluster C examine how Muslim women navigate the intersection of religious identity, creative labor, digital celebrity, and political activism. Warren (2018, 2019) demonstrates that British Muslim women in media and fashion engage in 'ruptural geopolitics', using creative digital labor to challenge dominant representations while simultaneously negotiating faith, gender, and professional belonging. Muñoz Morcillo & Walzer Moskovic (2025) show how Spanish hijabi content creators construct microcelebrity through identity discourse on YouTube, where religious visibility and charismatic authority are co-produced. Febrian (2024) extends this argument by examining how Indonesian religious influencers on Instagram construct visual authority that reshapes audience perceptions of Islamic knowledge and religious legitimacy. **Satiti (2019)** and Dwifatma & Beta (2024) further illustrate that Muslim women's online presence can function as a form of feminist activism, where visible religious identity becomes a site of political claim-making and subjectivity assertion. **Rosida and Azwar (2021)** and Zebua & Khatibah (2024) provide Indonesian case studies showing how gender roles and Islamic feminist practices are constructed through YouTube and Instagram engagement. What distinguishes this cluster is its demonstration that self-representation

is not reducible to individual identity management: it constitutes a form of collective cultural production with implications for religious authority, public representation, and political participation.

3.5 Theme 4: Platform and Community Studies and Visual Communication (Cluster D)

Cluster D comprises eight studies that foreground the role of platform-specific affordances, community dynamics, and digital communication structures in shaping Muslim women's visual religious identity. Hotait & El Sayed, (2025) and Sayed & Hotait (2024) provide the most systematic platform-level analysis, demonstrating through qualitative analysis of 320 TikTok videos that Muslim female content creators in Germany perform religious identity through a combination of hijab, humor, language, lived religion, and audience address, challenging the assumption that Muslimness on TikTok is reducible to visual markers alone. Their work establishes TikTok as a 'third space' (Sayed & Hotait, 2024) where intersectionally marginalized Muslim women negotiate empowerment and vulnerability simultaneously, critically, this platform-level analysis must be distinguished from Instagram-based studies (Clusters A and C), which tend to emphasize curated visual aesthetics and static image-based identity construction. By contrast, TikTok's short-video, sound-driven format enables a performative mode of religious self-expression that is more temporally fluid and algorithmically mediated. Lövheim & Jensdotter (2024) Examining Instagram debates on veiling in Sweden reveals how platform-amplified discourse connects hijab to national identity, gender equality, and coercion narratives. Salim et al. (2026) and Zain (2024) extend the cluster by showing how platform visibility enables moral regulation and discriminatory discourse. Khazraee & Novak, (2018) and Kristensen (2023) Complete the cluster by demonstrating that platforms also support counterpublic formation and collective resistance. Together, Cluster D confirms that platform form is neither neutral nor merely instrumental: it actively structures what forms of religious visibility are possible, amplified, contested, or suppressed.

3.6 Theme 5: Contextual and Cross-Platform Studies (Cluster E)

The five studies in Cluster E illuminate Muslim women's digital identity in broader moral, cultural, and cross-platform contexts. While VRI is coded as Peripheral in three of five studies, these works are theoretically significant because they expand the review's analytical frame beyond platform-specific or identity-specific analyses. Costa (2016) demonstrates how social media mediates gendered moral self-fashioning in premarital romantic contexts in southeastern Turkey, revealing how religious norms shape digital intimacy. Laan (2023) examines WhatsApp communities

among Dutch-Belgian Muslim women undertaking hijra migration, showing how digital community sustains religious identity across spatial transition. Rusydiyah (2020) addresses Indonesian Muslim women activists' digital literacy and social education on Twitter, while Noor & Hamid (2021) critically analyze cyberbullying and de-hijabbing discourse in Malaysia, illustrating how audience responses police religious norms through collective moral enforcement. Karimova & Alexe (2021) and Burkitbayev et al. (2026) complete the cluster by examining how influencer culture in the UAE and Kazakhstan negotiates traditional religious values against Western consumer culture. Collectively, Cluster E demonstrates that Muslim women's visual religious identity cannot be understood solely through platform interaction or individual self-presentation; it is also shaped by migration, moral community, political activism, and cross-cultural value negotiation.

4. Discussion

The findings from 35 reviewed studies, synthesized across five thematic clusters, collectively support a theoretically grounded conceptualization of Muslim women's visual religious identity as a contextual representational practice. Figure 3 illustrates the Contextual Representation Model developed from this synthesis, placing visual signs, platform affordances, and audience context as three intersecting determinants of how religious meaning is produced, mediated, and contested in digital spaces.

Figure 3. Contextual Representation Model of Muslim Women's Visual Religious Identity on Social Media

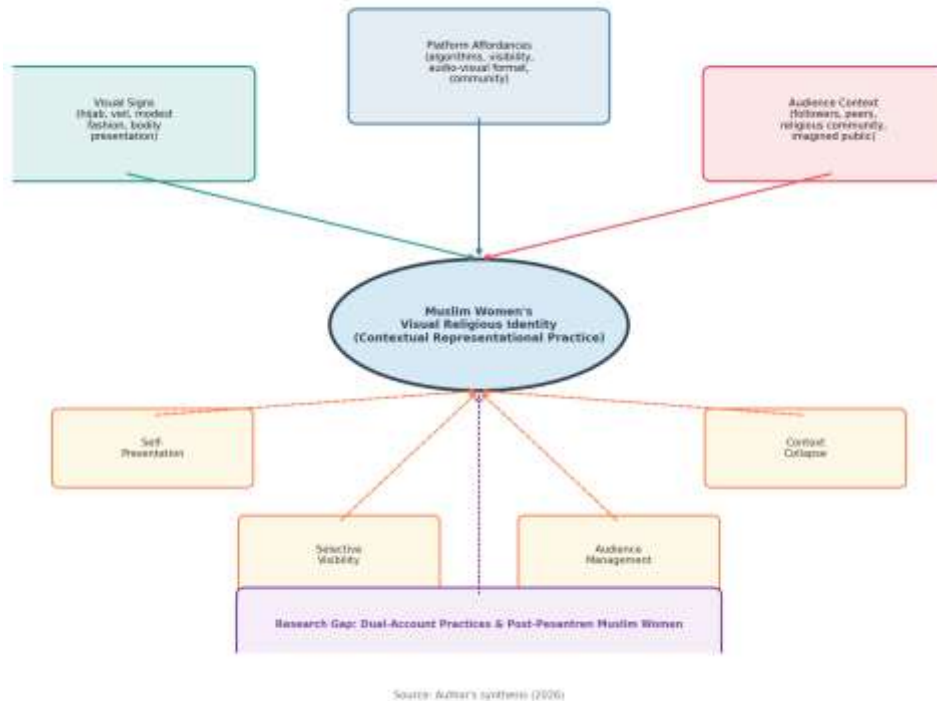


Figure 3. Contextual Representation Model of Muslim Women's Visual Religious Identity on Social Media. Source: Author's synthesis (2026)

4.1 Visual Religious Identity as Contextual Representation

The first research question asks how Muslim women's visual religious identity has been conceptualized in social media studies. The synthesis reveals that existing studies most commonly engage VRI through hijab, veil, modest fashion, bodily presentation, captions, and video performance. However, as Table 7 demonstrates, VRI is treated as the Central analytical concern in only 17 of 35 studies (49%), while self-presentation appears in 32 of 35 studies (91%). This asymmetry constitutes the review's most significant empirical finding: visual religious identity is empirically pervasive across the literature yet theoretically undercentered.

This finding directly supports and extends Hall's theory of representation. Hall argues that visual signs do not carry inherent or stable meanings: meanings are produced through cultural codes, audience relations, and representational contexts. Accordingly, the reviewed literature confirms that hijab, veil, and modest fashion do not function as transparent signs of religiosity. Rather, their meanings shift depending on platform (Instagram vs. TikTok vs. WhatsApp), geographic context

(Indonesia vs. Pakistan vs. Germany vs. Sweden), audience (followers, family, strangers, institutional actors), and the social position of Muslim women (influencer vs. working-class vs. diaspora minority). Studies in Cluster A show that the same visual sign, the hijab, can simultaneously signify piety, middle-class aspiration, dakwah, feminist politics, and consumer brand identity. Studies in Clusters B and D show that the meaning of the same religious sign can be contested and reinterpreted through audience responses, algorithmic visibility, and moral regulation.

In contrast to Hall's original work on mass media representation, however, this review demonstrates that platformed digital religion introduces a distinctive representational dynamic: Muslim women are simultaneously encoders and subjects of representation, managing audience reception, algorithmic visibility, and self-presentation in ways that mass media's unidirectional model does not capture. The Contextual Representation Model in Figure 3 extends Hall's framework by situating visual religious identity at the intersection of visual signs, platform affordances, and audience context, mediated by self-presentation, selective visibility, audience management, and context collapse

4.2 Visibility as Enabling and Exposing: Comparing Platforms

The second research question concerns how self-presentation, platform affordances, and audience dynamics shape Muslim women's religious identity online. A consistent cross-thematic pattern is the ambivalence of visibility: social media enables Muslim women's religious self-expression and agency while simultaneously exposing them to moral surveillance, cyberbullying, and stereotyping.

Critically, this ambivalence varies systematically by platform. On Instagram, which prioritizes curated still images and aesthetic consistency, Muslim women's religious self-representation tends toward visual curation, modest fashion aesthetics, and static identity performance (Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018; Febrian, 2024; Mulyanto, 2022). The platform's emphasis on visual coherence and follower-based influence models makes hijab and modest fashion particularly legible as markers of religious credibility and brand identity. On TikTok, by contrast, short-video format, sound integration, algorithmic virality, and comment-driven interaction create conditions for a more performative, fluid, and humor-inflected mode of religious identity expression (Hotait & El Sayed, 2025; Kamran, 2023; Sayed & Hotait, 2024). TikTok's affordances appear to enable Muslim women to express religious identity 'beyond the hijab' (Hotait & El Sayed, 2025), incorporating language, lived religion, and everyday interaction into their representational repertoire. On YouTube and blogs, longer-form content enables more sustained narrative self-

construction, religious argument, and community-building (Evolvi, 2017; Warren, 2019). On WhatsApp, semi-private community structures allow religious identity to circulate within bounded social networks rather than mass publics (Laan, 2023).

These platform-specific differences align with affordance theory's argument that platform design actively shapes what forms of expression are possible, visible, and rewarded. They also reveal that comparisons between studies must attend to platform context: findings from Instagram-based studies cannot be generalized to TikTok or WhatsApp contexts without qualification. Compared with previous reviews of Islamic social media (e.g., Farnaz, 2022), this review's synthesis is distinguished by its systematic cross-platform analysis and its explicit attention to platform affordances as co-producers of religious meaning, not merely as channels of transmission.

4.3 Theoretical and Methodological Gaps

The third research question addresses theoretical and methodological gaps in the literature. Three interconnected gaps are identified. First, no included study directly examines dual-account practices, the separation of primary (public or professional) and secondary (intimate, anonymous, or experimental) accounts. As implied by the self-presentation literature (Kamran, 2023; Trysnes, 2022) and by scholarship on finsta practices (Kang & Wei, 2020) Muslim women may negotiate different representational contexts across account spaces. For post-pesantren Muslim women, whose digital identity may be shaped by pesantren-derived habitus, modesty norms, and post-institutional social networks, this dual-account dynamic may be particularly significant. This is positioned as a future research direction, not a conclusion from the current synthesis, as no reviewed study provides direct evidence on this practice.

Second, the reviewed literature reflects a substantial geographic concentration bias: Indonesia accounts for 14 of 35 studies (40%), Germany accounts for 3 (9%), and the UK accounts for 3 (9%), while many Muslim-majority regions (Central Asia, the Middle East, South Asia beyond Pakistan) are minimally represented. This geographic concentration limits the generalizability of findings and may reflect the dominance of English-language publishing norms and the strong tradition of Islamic communication studies in Indonesian universities.

Third, the corpus is dominated by qualitative, platform-specific, single-case studies. Longitudinal designs, comparative cross-platform studies, and mixed-methods approaches that combine visual analysis with interviews and ethnography remain rare. Methodologically, future

research should develop such integrative designs to capture how Muslim women's visual religious identity shifts across time, platform transitions, and life stages, particularly the post-pesantren transition from the institutional religious environment to the broader digital public culture

4.4 Practical Implications

For researchers in communication and media studies, the findings suggest that future empirical work should adopt platform-comparative and account-comparative designs rather than single-platform case studies. For Islamic educators and pesantren administrators, the review indicates that Muslim women's digital identity is not a simple extension of offline religious behavior: it is a negotiated, contextual, and platform-shaped practice that may require dedicated digital literacy programming. For platform designers, the findings highlight that algorithmic visibility structures, community moderation tools, and privacy affordances have direct implications for how Muslim women manage religious self-expression and exposure to moral surveillance. For Muslim women content creators, the research signals the importance of understanding audience segmentation, context collapse risks, and the platform-specific conditions under which religious identity becomes visible, celebrated, or contested.

4.5 Limitations

This review is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the restriction to Scopus-indexed English-language articles introduces a language bias that may systematically exclude significant scholarship published in Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Turkish, Urdu, or other languages. Second, the single-database search strategy, while standard in many SLR designs, may miss relevant articles indexed in Web of Science, Google Scholar, or regional databases. Third, the use of thematic synthesis involves interpretive subjectivity that cannot be fully eliminated, even with consensus coding and audit trails. Fourth, publication bias may favor studies with clear, affirmative findings over studies reporting null results or negative findings on social media and religious identity. Fifth, the predominantly qualitative corpus limits the ability to assess statistical relationships or causal mechanisms. Future reviews should incorporate multi-database searches, non-English language sources, and grey literature to address these limitations.

5. Conclusion

This systematic literature review set out to examine three research questions concerning Muslim women's visual religious identity and self-

representation on social media. Addressing the first question, the synthesis demonstrates that existing scholarship has conceptualized visual religious identity primarily through hijab, veil, modest fashion, and bodily presentation, but that these visual signs function as contextually produced meanings rather than fixed or transparent expressions of religiosity. VRI is central in only 49% of reviewed studies, revealing a significant conceptual gap between its empirical prevalence and its theoretical centralization.

Addressing the second question, the review shows that self-presentation, platform affordances, and audience dynamics jointly shape Muslim women's religious identity online in ways that vary systematically by platform. Instagram foregrounds curated visual aesthetics and influences culture; TikTok enables fluid, performative, and humor-inflected identity expression beyond the hijab; blogs and WhatsApp support narrative self-construction and community-bounded religiosity. Across all platforms, visibility carries a double function: it enables agency, community, and public voice while simultaneously exposing Muslim women to moral evaluation, algorithmic regulation, and ideological contestation.

Addressing the third question, the most critical gap concerns dual-account practices and the complete absence from the literature of female pesantren alumni as research subjects. These absences represent a significant opportunity for future empirical research, particularly qualitative, ethnographic, and mixed-methods studies that examine how Muslim women negotiate visual religious identity across different account spaces, platform transitions, and post-institutional life contexts.

The review's key theoretical contribution is the Contextual Representation Model, which extends Hall's (1997) representational theory into platformed digital religion. This model frames Muslim women's visual religious identity as a dynamic practice produced through the intersection of visual signs, platform affordances, and audience context, mediated by self-presentation, selective visibility, audience management, and context collapse. This conceptualization is offered as a provisional framework to guide future empirical research rather than a definitive theoretical settlement. Future studies should test, refine, and expand the model through studies that capture the complexity of Muslim women's digital identity across the full spectrum of platforms, geographies, and social positions that remain inadequately represented in the current literature.

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