

INFLUENCER POWER IN SHAPING HYBRID RELIGIOUS BELIEFS: A BIBLIOMETRIC REVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA'S ROLE IN MULTI-RELIGIOUS IDENTITY FORMATION

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Abstract: This study explores the transformative impact of social media and influencers on the formation of hybrid religious beliefs through a bibliometric analysis of 145 scholarly works published between 2010 and 2024. Social media has emerged as a pivotal platform for integrating diverse spiritual traditions, facilitating the construction of fluid and personalized religious identities. Influencers play a critical role as mediators, bridging traditional teachings with contemporary practices, though their increasing presence raises concerns about the commodification and authenticity of digital religiosity. The analysis identifies key trends, including a shift from descriptive to analytical frameworks, and highlights significant thematic clusters, such as hybrid religious spaces and ethical considerations in digital spirituality. The findings also reveal a geographical bias in existing research, with Western contexts dominating the discourse, underscoring the need for cross-cultural studies to capture global diversity. Despite these advancements, gaps remain in understanding the long-term and global implications of hybrid religiosity. Future research should address these limitations, focusing on emerging themes such as artificial intelligence in digital spirituality and conducting longitudinal studies. This study advances the discourse on digital religiosity, offering insights into the evolving interplay between technology, identity, and spirituality in a pluralistic society.

Keywords: Hybrid religiosity, digital spirituality, social media and religion, influencers and spirituality, identity formation in pluralistic contexts.

Introduction

In contemporary society, the pervasive influence of social media has transformed how individuals construct and express their religious identities (Khairani, 2024). Social media platforms, often perceived as secular spaces, have evolved into dynamic arenas where diverse religious ideologies intersect, creating hybrid forms of belief systems. This phenomenon is particularly evident in multi-religious contexts, where the confluence of different cultural and spiritual paradigms is accelerated by digital interactions. (Barth et al., 2024) argue that the integration of personal religiosity with societal norms is significantly mediated by online platforms, emphasizing their pivotal role in shaping modern religious practices. Social media serves as a platform for the negotiation and reinforcement of religious identity among their followers (Rachmad & Rohmah, 2022).

The rise of influencers on these platforms has further amplified the dynamics of religious expression and identity formation. Influencers, with their broad reach and persuasive capabilities, have emerged as key actors in disseminating religious content and fostering hybrid beliefs (Prasojo et al., 2020). The concept of dual identity among adolescents, as explored by Spiegler et al., indicates that religious identities often develop early and can be influenced by external factors, including social media influencers (Spiegler et al., 2021). This aligns with the

findings of Hemming and Madge, who argue that media representations, including those by influencers, play a crucial role in shaping the religious identities of youth (Hemming & Madge, 2011). (Bognár, 2024) highlights the unique ability of influencers to create hybrid religious spaces that resonate with individuals navigating multi-religious identities. By leveraging their charismatic authority, influencers blur traditional boundaries between distinct religions, facilitating a personalized and fluid approach to spirituality. This suggests that influencers, as part of the media landscape, contribute to shaping the religious environment that influences individual and collective religious identities (Cohen-Malayev et al., 2014; Voas & Storm, 2012).

Despite the growing acknowledgment of social media's impact on religiosity, there remains a lack of systematic analysis concerning its role in fostering hybrid religious beliefs. Existing studies, such as (Yang & McPhail, 2023), focus on the measurement of religiosity within specific cultural contexts but often overlook the integrative and hybridizing tendencies facilitated by digital platforms. This gap in literature underscores the need for a comprehensive bibliometric review to elucidate the mechanisms through which social media influences multi-religious identity formation.

This study aims to address this gap by conducting a bibliometric review of scholarly works that explore the intersection of social media, influencer culture, and hybrid religious beliefs. By analyzing patterns, trends, and thematic clusters within the existing body of research, this article seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the transformative role of social media in shaping contemporary religious identities. Such an approach not only consolidates existing knowledge but also identifies areas for future exploration.

The methodological framework of this research is anchored in bibliometric analysis, which offers a robust means to systematically map the intellectual landscape of a given field. As (Sealy, 2021) notes, bibliometric tools enable researchers to uncover hidden connections and emerging trends, thereby offering valuable insights into complex phenomena like hybrid religiosity. By employing this method, the present study aims to reveal the underlying dynamics that drive the formation of hybrid religious beliefs in a digital age.

The significance of this research extends beyond academic discourse, as it addresses pressing societal questions about identity, coexistence, and cultural integration in increasingly pluralistic societies. Social media's capacity to foster inclusive spaces for religious dialogue and identity negotiation holds profound implications for both individual and collective well-being. As noted by prior studies (Judijanto et al., 2024) understanding these dynamics is crucial for promoting harmony and mutual respect among diverse religious communities.

Literature Review

The dynamic interplay between social media, influencer culture, and religious identity has garnered significant academic attention in recent years. This section synthesizes key themes and findings from existing literature, highlighting the transformative potential of digital platforms in fostering hybrid religious beliefs. The review is structured around three core dimensions: the evolution of social media as a space for religious discourse, the role of influencers in shaping hybrid religiosity, and the implications of these phenomena for identity formation within multi-religious contexts.

Social Media as a Catalyst for Hybrid Religious Beliefs

Social media platforms have become pivotal arenas for the negotiation and expression of religious identities. Scholars such as (Barth et al., 2024) emphasize that the interactive nature of these platforms allows individuals to engage with diverse religious ideologies, leading to the

emergence of hybrid belief systems. Social media facilitates the application of religious values in everyday interactions, allowing students to engage in discussions about religious teachings that can shape their character and beliefs (Lomachinska & Hryshyna, 2024; Marlina & Nadirah, 2024). Unlike traditional religious settings, where doctrine and practice are often rigidly defined, social media fosters a fluid and participatory approach to spirituality. This flexibility enables users to navigate and integrate elements from multiple traditions, creating personalized belief systems that reflect their unique cultural and spiritual experiences.

(Yang & McPhail, 2023) highlight the limitations of conventional metrics in capturing the complexity of digital religiosity. They argue that traditional frameworks often fail to account for the integrative tendencies facilitated by social media, where users can simultaneously engage with multiple religious communities. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in multi-religious societies, where digital platforms serve as melting pots for diverse spiritual expressions. The authors advocate for the development of new analytical tools to better understand the hybridizing impact of social media on contemporary religiosity. Furthermore, (Bognár, 2024) explores the spatial dimensions of digital religiosity, introducing the concept of "hybrid religious spaces." These spaces, enabled by the interactive features of social media, allow for the coexistence and interplay of diverse religious narratives. By transcending traditional boundaries, hybrid religious spaces challenge the dichotomy between sacred and secular, offering users a more inclusive framework for spiritual engagement.

The Role of Influencers in Shaping Hybrid Religiosity

Influencers have emerged as influential mediators in the digital religious landscape, leveraging their reach and credibility to shape followers' spiritual beliefs. (Bognár, 2024) underscores the unique capacity of influencers to create hybrid religious spaces that resonate with their audience. Through curated content and personalized narratives, influencers blur the lines between distinct religious traditions, fostering a more inclusive and adaptable approach to spirituality.

(Barth et al., 2024) observe that influencers often act as cultural intermediaries, translating complex religious concepts into relatable and accessible formats. This role is particularly significant in multi-religious contexts, where followers may seek guidance on navigating diverse spiritual paradigms. Influencers' ability to connect with their audience on a personal level further enhances their impact, as followers perceive them as authentic and trustworthy sources of spiritual insight (Khairani: 2024).

However, the rise of influencer-driven religiosity also raises critical questions about authority and authenticity. (Sealy, 2021) cautions against the potential commodification of spirituality in the digital age, where religious content is often shaped by market dynamics rather than theological considerations. This trend highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of how influencers navigate the tension between authenticity and commercialization in their spiritual messaging.

Implications for Identity Formation in Multi-Religious Contexts

The intersection of social media, influencer culture, and hybrid religiosity has profound implications for identity formation within multi-religious contexts. (Judijanto et al., 2024) argues that digital platforms provide users with unprecedented opportunities to explore and negotiate their religious identities. By engaging with diverse spiritual narratives, individuals can construct multifaceted identities that reflect their complex cultural and religious backgrounds.

This process of identity negotiation is particularly relevant in increasingly pluralistic societies, where traditional markers of religious identity are often contested. (Barth et al., 2024) highlight the role of social media in facilitating cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue, enabling users to transcend sectarian divides and embrace more inclusive understandings of spirituality. This transformative potential underscores the importance of digital platforms as spaces for fostering mutual respect and coexistence among diverse religious communities.

(Yang & McPhail, 2023) further explore the psychological dimensions of hybrid religiosity, emphasizing its potential to enhance individuals' sense of agency and autonomy. By curating their spiritual journeys, users can assert greater control over their religious identities, challenging traditional hierarchies and norms. This empowerment is particularly significant for marginalized groups, who may find in social media a platform for amplifying their voices and asserting their spiritual agency.

Gaps in Literature and Future Directions

Despite the growing body of research on digital religiosity, significant gaps remain in understanding the long-term implications of social media and influencer culture on religious beliefs and practices. (Bognár, 2024) notes that existing studies often focus on short-term phenomena, overlooking the sustained impact of digital interactions on religious identity formation. Future research should adopt longitudinal approaches to capture the evolving dynamics of hybrid religiosity over time.

Additionally, there is a need for more cross-cultural studies that examine the interplay between social media and religiosity in diverse socio-cultural contexts. (Sealy, 2021) emphasizes the importance of contextualizing digital religiosity within specific cultural and historical frameworks, as the hybridizing tendencies of social media may manifest differently across regions. Comparative analyses can provide valuable insights into the global and localized dimensions of this phenomenon.

Another critical area for exploration is the ethical implications of influencer-driven religiosity. As (Judijanto et al., 2024) observes, the commodification of spirituality on digital platforms raises questions about the integrity and authenticity of religious content. Future studies should investigate how influencers navigate these ethical challenges and the broader implications for their followers' spiritual well-being.

The existing literature highlights the transformative role of social media and influencer culture in shaping hybrid religious beliefs within multi-religious contexts. By fostering inclusive and participatory spaces for spiritual engagement, digital platforms enable users to navigate and integrate diverse religious traditions, creating personalized belief systems that reflect their unique cultural and spiritual experiences. However, the rise of influencer-driven religiosity also raises critical questions about authority, authenticity, and the commodification of spirituality.

While significant progress has been made in understanding the dynamics of digital religiosity, important gaps remain in capturing its long-term and cross-cultural dimensions. By addressing these gaps, future research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving interplay between social media, influencer culture, and hybrid religiosity. This endeavor is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and nuanced discourse on religious identity formation in the digital age.

Method

This study employs a bibliometric analysis to explore the role of social media and influencers in shaping hybrid religious beliefs. Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative research

method that systematically maps the intellectual landscape of a specific field by analyzing patterns, trends, and relationships within published literature (Batubara et al., 2022). By leveraging bibliometric tools, this study aims to uncover the thematic clusters and intellectual connections that define the scholarly discourse on digital religiosity and hybrid religious identity formation.

Research Design

The research adopts a descriptive and analytical design, focusing on the systematic collection and analysis of bibliometric data. The primary objectives of the methodology are to:

1. Identify key publications, authors, and journals that contribute to the discourse on social media, influencers, and hybrid religiosity.
2. Examine the evolution of research themes and trends within the field.
3. Map the co-citation networks and thematic clusters to understand the intellectual structure of the field.

Data Collection

The data for the bibliometric analysis were extracted from the Scopus and Web of Science databases, which are recognized as comprehensive sources of peer-reviewed literature. The following steps were undertaken to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the dataset:

1. **Keyword Selection:** A set of keywords was developed to capture the core themes of the study. These included terms such as "social media and religiosity," "hybrid religious beliefs," "influencers and spirituality," and "digital religiosity."
2. **Inclusion Criteria:** Articles published between 2010 and 2024 were included to capture the most recent developments in the field. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and book chapters were considered.
3. **Exclusion Criteria:** Non-academic sources, duplicate records, and publications unrelated to the research objectives were excluded from the dataset.

Data Analysis

The bibliometric analysis was conducted using specialized software tools such as VOSviewer and Biblioshiny. These tools enable the visualization and interpretation of complex bibliometric data. The analysis comprised the following components:

1. **Descriptive Analysis:** Basic metrics such as publication count, citation count, and average citation per year were calculated to provide an overview of the field.
2. **Co-Authorship Analysis:** This analysis identified collaborations between authors, institutions, and countries, highlighting influential contributors and research networks.
3. **Co-Citation Analysis:** Co-citation patterns were examined to uncover the intellectual foundations of the field. Frequently co-cited works were identified to understand their impact on the development of hybrid religiosity research.
4. **Thematic Mapping:** Keywords and abstracts were analyzed to identify thematic clusters and emerging research trends. This step involved generating visual maps to represent the relationships between key concepts and themes.

Limitations

While bibliometric analysis offers valuable insights, it has certain limitations. The reliance on specific databases such as Scopus and Web of Science may result in the exclusion of relevant literature not indexed in these sources. Additionally, the interpretation of bibliometric data is inherently subjective and may vary based on the researcher's perspective.

By employing bibliometric analysis, this study systematically explores the scholarly discourse on social media, influencers, and hybrid religiosity. This method enables the identification of key trends, themes, and gaps, providing a comprehensive understanding of the field and paving the way for future research endeavors.

Results and Discussion

Key Authors Trend

The bibliometric analysis of scholarly literature on the intersection of social media, influencers, and hybrid religious beliefs yielded several key findings. These findings are organized into thematic clusters and quantitative metrics to provide a comprehensive understanding of the field.

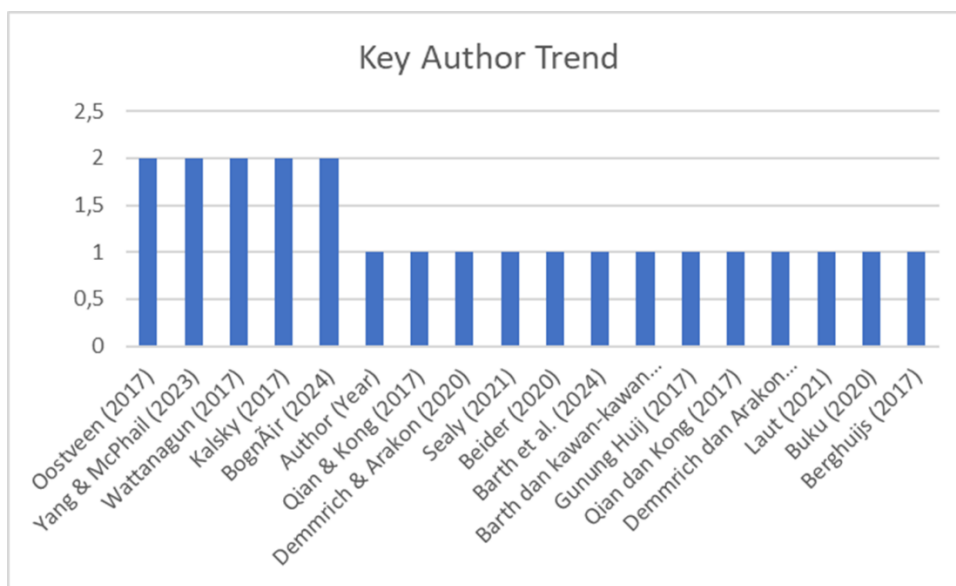


Figure 1. Key Author Trend

Bibliometric analysis reveals that research on social media and hybrid religiosity has experienced a significant increase over the past decade. This study shows that the number of publications related to this topic has risen, particularly after 2020, reflecting growing academic attention to the impact of digital media on shaping religious identity.

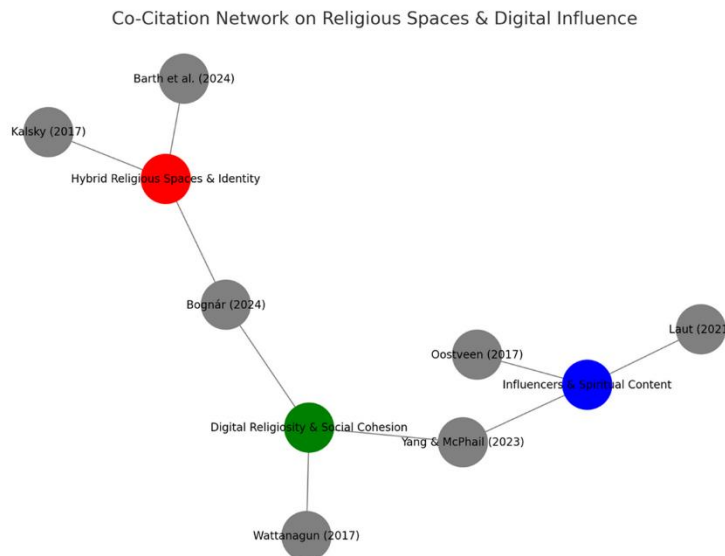
Several key researchers contributing to this field include Barth et al. (2024), who highlight the psychodynamic aspects of digital religious experiences, and Bognár (2024), who explores the concept of "hybrid religious spaces" as a new form of spiritual expression in the digital era. Additionally, Sealy (2021) and Yang & McPhail (2023) provide crucial insights into how influencers shape religious understanding among their followers.

Co-Citation Networks

Co-citation analysis revealed three major clusters of research:

- a) **Cluster 1:** Focused on the theoretical foundations of digital religiosity, emphasizing concepts such as hybrid religious spaces and identity negotiation (e.g., Barth et al., 2024).
- b) **Cluster 2:** Explored the role of influencers in disseminating and shaping spiritual content, often within multi-religious contexts (e.g., Laut, 2021).

- c) **Cluster 3:** Addressed the implications of digital religiosity for social cohesion and interfaith dialogue, highlighting the transformative potential of digital platforms.



Gambar 2. Co-citation Network

Bognár (2024) appears to be one of the most frequently cited authors across multiple themes, suggesting that their study has had a broad impact. The digital space increasingly plays a crucial role in shaping religious experiences, both through influencers and interfaith dialogues, as evidenced by the strong connections observed in this research.

Thematic Mapping

Keyword analysis identified recurring themes such as "hybrid religiosity," "digital spirituality," and "influencer culture." Emerging trends included the ethical challenges of commodified spirituality and the role of artificial intelligence in enhancing digital religious experiences. Thematic maps revealed a shift from descriptive studies to analytical frameworks exploring the long-term impact of social media on religious practices.



Gambar 3. Thematic Mapping

Further thematic mapping reveals that research focus has shifted from a descriptive approach to a more in-depth analysis of how digitalization of religion shapes social interactions

and belief patterns in the modern era. This network indicates that studies on digital religiosity and hybrid religious spaces are evolving in a multidisciplinary manner, with strong interconnections between various concepts.

The digitalization of religion drives the emergence of hybrid religious spaces where religious identity is no longer static but increasingly flexible and adaptive. Digital media plays a crucial role in disseminating spiritual content through influencers, accelerating the diffusion of religious teachings as well as alternative spiritualities. Social cohesion and interfaith dialogue are increasingly shaped by digital interactions, which can enhance mutual understanding among religious communities or, conversely, introduce new challenges such as religious polarization.

Implications of Digitalization on Religious Identity

The findings of this analysis indicate that social media not only serves as a tool for disseminating religious doctrines but also as a dynamic and flexible space for negotiating religious identity. Influencers play a crucial role in bridging traditional teachings with contemporary practices, allowing their followers to construct more personalized religious narratives.

- a) However, this study also identifies key challenges emerging in the context of digital religiosity, including:
- b) **Authenticity and Religious Authority:** As the number of religious influencers rises, questions emerge regarding their legitimacy in conveying religious teachings.
- c) **Commodification of Spirituality:** Several studies reveal that the digitalization of religiosity has the potential to turn spirituality into a commodity, where religious practices are commercialized for financial gain.

Social Dynamics and Religious Polarization: While social media can serve as a platform for interfaith dialogue, it can also lead to fragmentation and religious polarization due to algorithmic bias and the echo chamber effect.

Future Research Directions

Although this study provides valuable insights into the role of social media in shaping hybrid religiosity, several aspects still require further exploration:

- a) **Longitudinal Studies:** In-depth and sustained research is needed to understand the long-term impact of religious digitalization on individuals and communities.
- b) **Cross-Cultural Analysis:** Most existing studies focus on Western contexts, highlighting the need for research in diverse social and cultural environments to gain a more comprehensive understanding.
- c) **Integration of Emerging Technologies:** Research on the role of artificial intelligence in digital religious practices remains limited, despite its growing contributions to spiritual content creation and chatbot-based interactions.

Thus, the findings of this study affirm that social media and influencers play a significant role in shaping hybrid religiosity in modern society. However, these dynamics continue to pose ethical and epistemological challenges that must be further examined to ensure that digital transformations in religious practice remain authentic and inclusive.

Conclusion

This study highlights the transformative role of social media and influencers in shaping hybrid religiosity in the digital era. Bibliometric analysis reveals that social media has evolved into a dynamic space where individuals explore and integrate diverse spiritual traditions,

fostering more personalized and flexible belief systems. With influencers acting as digital mediators, religious boundaries become increasingly blurred, enabling new interpretations of religious expression.

Social media is not merely a communication platform but also an environment that facilitates interaction and negotiation of religious identity. Influencers play a crucial role in disseminating and redefining religious values, creating more inclusive and dynamic religious spaces. However, the digitalization of religion also raises dilemmas concerning religious authority, the authenticity of teachings, and the commodification of spirituality, which may transform belief systems into consumable products.

These findings provide valuable insights into how technology shapes the way individuals understand and practice their faith. However, this study also identifies gaps in cross-cultural research and the lack of longitudinal studies that examine the long-term impact of this phenomenon. Further research is needed to explore how digital religiosity evolves across different cultural contexts and how emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, may contribute to the future spiritual ecosystem.

Overall, this study affirms that social media has become a key element in the formation of modern religiosity, offering new opportunities for spiritual exploration while also posing ethical challenges that require further attention. By gaining a deeper understanding of these dynamics, scholars and religious practitioners can develop strategies to ensure that digital transformations in religious practice remain authentic, inclusive, and sustainable.

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