

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Contours of Conviction: Quantifying Identity Stability among Muslim Youth in Response to Contemporary Islamic Thought

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the stability of religious identity among Muslim youth in Palimbang, Sultan Kudarat, and its relationship with exposure to contemporary Islamic thought. Religious identity stability, encompassing belief, practice, and affiliation, was analyzed in the context of increasing exposure to contemporary Islamic interpretations and digital religious discourse. Employing a descriptive–correlational design, the study surveyed 220 Muslim youth aged 18 to 30 years using a structured, expert-validated questionnaire measuring religious identity stability and exposure to contemporary Islamic thought. Descriptive statistics revealed high levels of stability across belief ($M = 4.09$), practice ($M = 3.91$), and affiliation ($M = 4.14$), suggesting that religiosity among Muslim youth in Palimbang remains both firm and adaptive. Respondents reported openness to contemporary interpretive perspectives ($M = 3.87$) and perceived that contemporary Islamic thought strengthened their understanding of Islam ($M = 4.20$). A moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.483$, $p < .001$) was found between exposure to contemporary Islamic thought and religious identity stability, indicating that engagement with contemporary Islamic discourse, particularly through digital scholarship and contemporary Islamic learning platforms, reinforces faith commitment. These findings highlight that Muslim youth exhibit adaptive stability, maintaining coherence of belief and practice while integrating reflective engagement with contemporary Islamic scholarship. This suggests that exposure to contemporary Islamic interpretations and digital Islamic discourse fosters cognitive maturity, critical reasoning, and faith resilience. The study contributes to understanding how contemporary Islamic engagement sustains religious identity within rural Muslim communities, offering implications for religious education and youth development initiatives in the Philippine context.

Keywords: *Contemporary Islamic Thought, Faith Resilience, Islamic Studies, Muslim Youth, Religious Stability*

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, increasing scholarly attention has been devoted to how Muslim youth negotiate and sustain their religious identity amid the influences of modernity, globalization, social media, and evolving Islamic discourse. Religious identity stability refers to the extent to which individuals maintain consistency in their beliefs, religious practices, and communal affiliation (King and Boyatzis, 2015). Understanding this stability among Muslim youth is important not only for sociological and religious scholarship but also for broader concerns such as social cohesion, intergenerational transmission of faith, and community resilience in contexts marked by pluralism and rapid social change (Bano and Kalmbach, 2011). Empirical studies suggest that religious identity tends to demonstrate moderate to high stability even when patterns of participation fluctuate. Empirical studies suggest that religious identity among youth tends to remain relatively stable even when levels of participation fluctuate (Fadil and Fernando, 2015). A longitudinal

study across Asia, Latin America, and Europe found that although participation in religious activities may decline during adolescence, religious identity often remains stable and closely linked to family and ethnic identity (Hardy et al., 2011), similarly, research among Muslim youth shows that internalized religious identity contributes to psychological well-being and sociocultural adaptation, reflecting the resilient yet dynamic nature of youth religiosity (Mansouri and Vergani, 2018; Mohammad and Banse, 2023).

In the Philippines, particularly in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), the interaction between traditional Islamic education and contemporary sociopolitical realities shapes how Muslim youth understand and express their religious identity. The Bangsamoro Youth Commission (BYC, 2024) highlights the importance of examining youth religiosity in marginalized Muslim communities undergoing social change. Efforts to modernize madrasah education under the Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education aim to integrate Islamic and secular

learning while strengthening religious commitment and civic engagement (MBHTE-BARMM, 2024; Maulana, 2024). However, persistent challenges such as limited resources, pedagogical constraints, and uneven teacher preparation continue to affect the quality of religious education (Solaiman, 2021). Recent research further suggests that ideological and theological discourse can shape how young Muslims internalize religious beliefs and translate them into everyday behavior. For instance, Binocal and Lunzaga (2025) found that theological narratives among Muslim millennials in the southern Philippines can significantly influence belief formation and behavioral commitment. Similarly, Rasyida (2024) observed that exposure to discourses emphasizing religious moderation strengthened consistency in belief and affiliation among university students in Indonesia. These findings highlight the importance of examining how exposure to contemporary Islamic discourse interacts with religious identity formation among young Muslims.

Contemporary Islamic thought refers to modern engagements with Islamic intellectual traditions in response to present-day social, political, and technological developments. Scholars often emphasize interpretive reasoning (*ijtihad*), renewal (*tajdid*), and the objectives of Islamic law (*maqasid al-shari'ah*) in addressing issues such as governance, education, globalization, and digital ethics (Rahman, 1982; Kamali, 2008). For many Muslim youth, exposure to these discussions occurs through online lectures, digital *da'wah* platforms, and social media, where contemporary scholars contextualize Islamic teachings within modern realities. Such engagement introduces themes of religious moderation, Islamic social ethics, and pluralistic coexistence, shaping how young Muslims reflect on their beliefs and negotiate the relationship between tradition and modernity (Nisa, 2018; Campbell and Evolvi, 2020).

The expansion of digital platforms has transformed access to Islamic discourse, allowing Muslim youth to engage with diverse interpretations of Islam through online *da'wah* initiatives, social media, and global religious scholarship. Studies in Southeast Asia suggest that exposure to contemporary Islamic education can enhance critical reasoning, tolerance, and civic engagement, although digital environments may also introduce fragmented or competing interpretations (Shobirin et al., 2024; Sudarman et al., 2025). For youth in remote areas, where formal religious education may be limited, digital platforms often serve as a primary source of religious learning. Despite growing research on Muslim youth religiosity, many studies focus on urban populations, leaving rural communities underrepresented (Campbell and Evolvi, 2020; Restalia and Khasanah, 2024). In the Philippine context, quantitative evidence examining the relationship between exposure to contemporary Islamic discourse and religious identity stability remains limited (Alonto, 2024).

Palimbang, Sultan Kudarat, provides a particularly relevant context for exploring these issues. The municipality is predominantly Muslim and largely composed of Maguindanaon and other Moro communities whose social life is deeply shaped by Islamic traditions. At the same time, Palimbang carries a complex historical legacy, including the 1974 Malisbong (Palimbang) massacre, which continues to influence collective memory and community identity (Human Rights Violations Victims' Memorial Commission, 2014). Despite its rural setting, the municipality hosts numerous madrasah institutions that make Islamic education accessible to many young people. However, differences in curriculum quality, teacher preparation, and exposure to contemporary Islamic scholarship contribute to diverse religious learning experiences.

Muslim youth in Palimbang therefore navigate a complex intersection of traditional Islamic instruction, local cultural norms, and the growing influence of global Islamic discourse. Understanding how these influences interact with religious identity stability is essential for understanding youth religiosity in marginalized Muslim communities (Shobirin et al., 2024; Kamal and Roslan, 2025).

Given this context, the present study seeks to examine: (1) the extent to which Muslim youth in Palimbang demonstrate stability across the dimensions of belief, practice, and affiliation, and (2) the relationship between exposure to contemporary Islamic thought and religious identity stability. By addressing these questions, the study contributes empirical evidence to ongoing debates about the relationship between tradition and contemporary interpretation in Muslim societies.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Description of the study area

Palimbang is a coastal municipality located in the province of Sultan Kudarat in the SOCCSKSARGEN region of Mindanao, Philippines. Administratively created by Executive Order No. 350 on 14 August 1959, Palimbang covers a land area of approximately 484.85 km² and had a population of 92,828 at the 2020 Census (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020; PhilAtlas, 2025). The municipality is divided into multiple barangays and forms an important portion of Sultan Kudarat's coastal economy and cultural landscape (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020).

Palimbang's historical origins are tied to early Muslim settlement and maritime connections across the Sulu Sea. Local tradition and secondary histories record that the place-name derives from visitors from Palembang (Indonesia) who settled and intermarried with indigenous *datus*, and that coastal communities around the Biwang area became focal points for the spread of Islam. The municipality was formed from barrios previously belonging to Lebak and Kiamba and later became part of the newly created province of Sultan Kudarat in 1973 (Presidential Decree No. 341, 1973). Palimbang occupies a complex historical and political position in Mindanao's modern history. During the Martial Law period and the Moro secessionist conflict, the municipality was the site of serious human rights abuses, most notably the Malisbong/Malibong Masjid massacre of September 1974, which has had lasting effects on collective memory, community relations, and local political dynamics (Sarmiento, 2021; Mindanews, 2021). More recent reporting and local government initiatives emphasize recovery, commemoration, and socio-economic development efforts, including tourism and municipal infrastructure projects aimed at rebuilding livelihoods and civic life (Sarmiento, 2021; Mindanews, 2021).

The population of Palimbang is predominantly Muslim; Islam shapes communal life, social institutions, and local cultural practices. Religious identity and affiliation are central to community organization, and local institutions—including mosques, madrasa education, and community-based organizations, play a key role in governance, social support, and intergenerational transmission of religious values (CMCI DTI, 2024; PhilAtlas, 2025). Contemporary dynamics show active engagement with both traditional Islamic practices and modern forms of Islamic learning (e.g., online scholarship and regional networks), reflecting broader trends among Muslim youth in Mindanao (PhilAtlas, 2025; Roslan et al., 2025).



Figure 1. Map of the Municipality of Palimbang, Sultan Kudarat, Philippines.

Sampling technique and participants

Due to the absence of official demographic data specifically identifying the number of Muslim youth in Palimbang, the number of youth population was approximated through consultations with local youth organization representatives and community-based youth coordinators who regularly facilitate youth activities within the municipality. Based on their estimates of active youth members reachable through existing community networks and social media platforms, the number of Muslim youth aged 15 to 30 was approximately 220 individuals. This estimate represents the accessible population rather than the entire youth population of the municipality, which is expected to be significantly larger given Palimbang's total population of 92,828.

Given the exploratory nature of the study and the absence of reliable population data, a purposive sampling technique was employed. This approach allowed the researcher to intentionally recruit respondents who met the inclusion criteria: Muslim youth aged 18 to 30 years old, residing in Palimbang, and capable of reading and understanding a structured questionnaire. Although the initial estimate included youth aged 15–30, only those who met the inclusion criteria were retained for analysis. Those aged 15 to 17 were excluded to ensure that respondents had reached the age of legal adulthood and possessed greater cognitive, emotional, and social maturity to reflect on their religious beliefs and practices independently.

Following the screening of submitted responses, a total of 220 valid respondents aged 18–30 were retained in the final dataset. While statistical representativeness cannot be claimed due to the non-probability sampling design, this targeted recruitment strategy ensured alignment with the study's objectives and captured diverse perspectives within the

accessible Muslim youth population of Palimbang.

Survey instrument

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire specifically developed for this study. It comprised two major sections: (1) Identity Stability, which assessed the consistency and strength of religious belief, practice, and affiliation across three dimensions—Belief, Practice, and Affiliation; and (2) Exposure to Contemporary Islamic Thought, which examined engagement with modern interpretations, digital content, and contemporary Islamic interpretations, further divided into two sub-sections—Modern Thought Engagement and Perceived Influence. The items measuring exposure to contemporary Islamic thought were designed to capture the degree of youth engagement with contemporary Islamic discourse rather than adherence to specific ideological or doctrinal positions within Islamic thought. The questionnaire therefore focuses on patterns of interaction with contemporary Islamic scholarship, digital da'wah, and peer discussions that introduce modern interpretations of Islamic teachings.

All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale of agreement, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The questionnaire was reviewed by academic experts in Social Studies and Islamic Studies to ensure alignment with the research objectives. To ensure clarity, internal consistency, and cultural appropriateness, the questionnaire was pilot tested on a sample of 35 respondents. The internal consistency of the survey instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The resulting coefficient was $\alpha = 0.94$, indicating excellent reliability and suggesting that the items exhibit strong interrelatedness in measuring the target construct (Taber, 2018).

Data collection procedure

The survey was administered online through Google Forms and disseminated via social media platforms such as Facebook, which served as the primary medium for reaching Muslim youth in Palimbang. Data collection was conducted over a four-week period. Throughout the process, respondents' anonymity and confidentiality were strictly upheld to ensure ethical integrity and promote genuine responses. A total of 233 responses were initially received. Prior to analysis, the dataset underwent a screening process to ensure completeness and eligibility. Each submission was reviewed to identify responses with missing questionnaire items, inconsistent demographic information, or entries that did not meet the study's inclusion criteria, particularly age (18–30 years old) and residency in Palimbang. Responses that contained substantial missing data or did not satisfy these eligibility criteria were excluded from the dataset.

Following this screening procedure, 13 incomplete or invalid responses were removed, resulting in a final dataset of 220 valid responses. These respondents constituted the purposively recruited sample described in the sampling procedure. The inclusion of all qualified responses ensured that the dataset reflected the accessible Muslim youth population reached through community networks and social media during the data collection period.

Conceptual framework

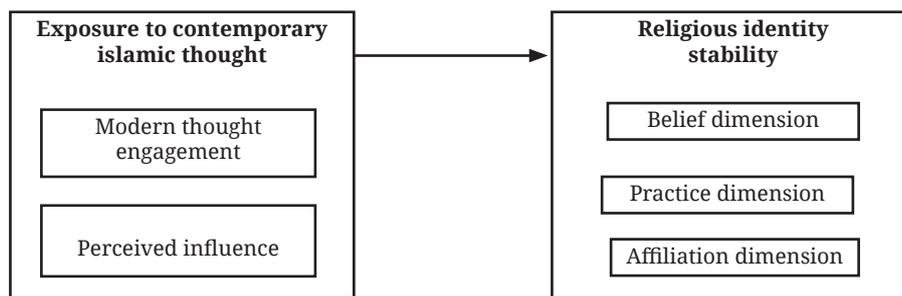


Figure 2. Conceptual framework showing the relationship between exposure to contemporary Islamic thought and religious identity stability among Muslim youth.

This study is anchored on the premise that religious identity among Muslim youth is shaped by both internal convictions and external influences, particularly exposure to contemporary Islamic thought. Drawing from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) and models of religious socialization (Rizzuto, 1979; Peek, 2005), the framework posits that engagement with contemporary interpretations of Islam, whether through digital platforms, contemporary Islamic interpretations, or social discourse, can influence the stability of religious identity across three dimensions: belief, practice, and affiliation.

From the perspective of Islamic intellectual tradition, the relationship between continuity and renewal has long been recognized within Muslim scholarship. Classical jurists and theologians emphasized the importance of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and *tajdid* (renewal) in responding to changing historical contexts while remaining grounded in foundational religious principles. This tradition of interpretive engagement illustrates that Islamic thought has historically evolved through dialogue between scripture, scholarship, and social realities (Rahman, 1982; Kamali, 2008). Within this perspective, contemporary Islamic discourse encountered by Muslim

Statistical analysis

This study employed a descriptive–correlational research design to identify patterns and examine the relationship between exposure to contemporary Islamic thought and religious identity stability without manipulating variables (Creswell, 2002; Cohen et al., 2007). Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to summarize the levels of religious identity stability across belief, practice, and affiliation, as well as the dimensions of exposure to contemporary Islamic thought, modern thought engagement and perceived influence, among Muslim youth in Palimbang.

Prior to analysis, responses were cleaned and encoded in Microsoft Excel to ensure accuracy and consistency. Composite scores for each dimension were computed by averaging item-level responses. Descriptive statistics were also used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and overall response patterns. To examine the relationship between exposure to contemporary Islamic thought and religious identity stability, Pearson's product–moment correlation was applied. This test was appropriate given the linear relationship between variables and the use of aggregated Likert-scale scores that approximate interval-level measurement. Preliminary inspection using scatter plots confirmed the assumption of linearity. All analyses were conducted using Jamovi version 2.6.44, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$.

youth through digital media and modern scholarship may be understood as part of an ongoing process of intellectual engagement rather than a departure from established religious tradition.

The independent variable is exposure to contemporary Islamic thought, operationalized through two subcomponents: Modern Thought Engagement and Perceived Influence. The dependent variable is religious identity stability, measured across three dimensions: Belief, Practice, and Affiliation. The framework assumes that increased exposure may either reinforce or challenge identity stability, depending on the nature and interpretation of the content encountered.

RESULT

Religious identity stability among muslim youth

This section presents the results on the stability of religious identity among Muslim youth in Palimbang, focusing on three major dimensions—belief, practice, and affiliation. These dimensions capture the cognitive, behavioral, and social aspects of religiosity that together reflect the strength and consistency

of one's religious identity over time. As shown in Tables 1 to 3, the analysis examines how Muslim youth maintain their faith commitments, perform religious obligations, and sustain a sense

of belonging to the broader Muslim community amid social and cultural change.

Table 1. Religious identity stability: Belief dimension.

Statements	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I consistently believe in the core teachings of Islam.	4.38	0.62	Very High Agreement
2. My religious beliefs remain stable even when challenged by new ideas.	4.09	0.84	High Agreement
3. I feel confident in my understanding of Islamic principles.	4.02	1.04	High Agreement
4. I rarely question the foundations of my faith.	3.72	0.94	High Agreement
5. My belief in Islam has remained strong over the past few years.	4.24	0.74	Very High Agreement
Mean	4.09	0.83	High Agreement

The results in Table 1 indicate that Muslim youth in Palimbang demonstrate a high level of stability in their religious beliefs (Grand Mean = 4.09, SD = 0.83), interpreted as High Agreement. The highest mean score was recorded for the statement "I consistently believe in the core teachings of Islam" (M = 4.38, SD = 0.62), followed by "My belief in Islam has remained strong over the past few years" (M = 4.24, SD = 0.74), both interpreted as Very High Agreement. Respondents also expressed confidence in their understanding of Islamic principles (M = 4.02, SD = 1.04) and reported that their

beliefs remain stable even when challenged by new ideas (M = 4.09, SD = 0.84), reflecting High Agreement. The statement "I rarely question the foundations of my faith" obtained the lowest mean score (M = 3.72, SD = 0.94), although it still falls within the High Agreement category. The results therefore highlight that among Muslim youth, strong and stable belief functions as an anchor of identity, helping them maintain coherence and purpose amid exposure to modern ideas and social change.

Table 2. Religious identity stability: Practice dimension.

Statements	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I regularly perform religious practices such as prayer and fasting.	3.96	1.12	High Agreement
2. My religious practices are consistent regardless of external influences.	3.88	0.91	High Agreement
3. I actively participate in religious events or gatherings.	3.86	1.09	High Agreement
4. I follow Islamic teachings in my daily decisions and behavior.	3.85	1.05	High Agreement
5. My commitment to religious practice has not changed significantly over time	4.02	0.73	High Agreement
Mean	3.91	0.98	High Agreement

Table 2 shows that Muslim youth in Palimbang demonstrate a high level of stability in religious practice (Grand Mean = 3.91, SD = 0.98), interpreted as High Agreement. The highest mean score was obtained for the statement "My commitment to religious practice has not changed significantly over time" (M = 4.02, SD = 0.73), followed by "I regularly perform religious practices such as prayer and fasting" (M = 3.96, SD = 1.12). Respondents also reported that they consistently follow Islamic

teachings in their daily decisions and behavior (M = 3.85, SD = 1.05) and participate in religious events or gatherings (M = 3.86, SD = 1.09), both interpreted as High Agreement. The statement "My religious practices are consistent regardless of external influences" recorded a mean score of 3.88 (SD = 0.91), which also falls within the High Agreement category. The results indicate that respondents maintain a consistently high level of engagement in religious practices.

Table 3. Religious identity stability: Affiliation dimension.

Statements	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I feel a strong sense of belonging to the Muslim community in Palimbang.	4.30	0.63	Very High Agreement
2. I identify myself as a practicing Muslim in social settings.	3.96	0.97	High Agreement
3. I maintain close relationships with others who share my faith.	4.05	0.86	High Agreement
4. I actively support Islamic organizations or movements.	4.11	0.92	High Agreement
5. My religious identity is an important part of how I define myself.	4.29	0.73	Very High Agreement
Mean	4.14	0.82	High Agreement

Table 3 indicates that respondents exhibit high levels of affiliation stability (Grand Mean = 4.14, SD = 0.82), interpreted as High Agreement. The highest mean scores were recorded for the statements “I feel a strong sense of belonging to the Muslim community in Palimbang” (M = 4.30, SD = 0.63) and “My religious identity is an important part of how I define myself” (M = 4.29, SD = 0.73), both interpreted as Very High Agreement. Respondents also reported maintaining close relationships with others who share their faith (M = 4.05, SD = 0.864), identifying themselves as practicing Muslims in social settings (M = 3.96, SD = 0.97), and supporting Islamic organizations or movements (M = 4.11, SD = 0.92), all of which fall within the High Agreement category. The findings suggest that respondents demonstrate a consistently strong sense of affiliation with the Muslim community.

Exposure to contemporary islamic thought

This section presents the findings on Muslim youth's exposure to and engagement with contemporary Islamic thought, focusing on two key dimensions: modern thought engagement and perceived influence. These dimensions capture how young Muslims interact with modern interpretations of Islamic teachings through digital platforms, peer discussions, and personal reflection, and how such exposure shapes their understanding of faith and identity. The results in Tables 4 and 5 highlight the extent to which respondents are open to new perspectives, influenced by contemporary Islamic scholarship, and capable of integrating contemporary ideas while maintaining a stable religious identity. This exploration provides insight into how Muslim youth in Palimbang navigate the intersection of tradition and modernity in their ongoing process of religious identity development.

Table 4. Muslim youths contemporary thought engagement.

Statements	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I read or listen to contemporary Islamic scholars online.	3.87	0.99	High Agreement
2. I am familiar with contemporary interpretations of Islamic teachings.	3.76	0.98	High Agreement
3. I follow Islamic content on social media platforms.	3.85	1.08	High Agreement
4. I have discussed contemporary Islamic ideas with peers or mentors.	3.77	1.08	High Agreement
5. I am open to new perspectives on Islamic law and theology.	4.08	0.78	High Agreement
Mean	3.87	0.98	High Agreement

Table 4 shows that respondents report high agreement across all indicators of engagement with contemporary Islamic thought (Grand Mean = 3.87, SD = 0.98), interpreted as High Agreement. The highest mean score was recorded for the statement “I am open to new perspectives on Islamic law and theology” (M = 4.08, SD = 0.78). Respondents also indicated that they read or listen to contemporary Islamic scholars online (M = 3.87, SD = 0.99), follow Islamic content on social media

platforms (M = 3.85, SD = 1.08), and discuss contemporary Islamic ideas with peers or mentors (M = 3.77, SD = 1.08), all interpreted as High Agreement. Familiarity with contemporary interpretations of Islamic teachings (M = 3.76, SD = 0.98) also falls within the High Agreement category. The data indicate that respondents demonstrate a consistently high level of engagement with contemporary Islamic thought.

Table 5. Muslim Youths' Perceived Influence.

Statements	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Contemporary Islamic thought has influenced how I view my faith.	4.06	0.77	High Agreement
2. Exposure to contemporary Islamic interpretations has made me reflect on my religious identity.	3.95	0.77	High Agreement
3. I sometimes adjust my religious practices based on new interpretations.	3.95	0.76	High Agreement
4. I feel tension between traditional teachings and contemporary Islamic views.	4.11	0.74	High Agreement
5. Contemporary Islamic thought has strengthened my understanding of Islam.	4.20	0.72	High Agreement
Mean	4.05	0.75	High Agreement

Table 5 indicates that respondents report a high level of perceived influence of contemporary Islamic thought on their religious identity and understanding (Grand Mean = 4.05, SD = 0.75), interpreted as High Agreement. The highest mean score was obtained for the statement “Contemporary Islamic thought has strengthened my understanding of Islam” (M = 4.20, SD = 0.72), which falls within the Very High Agreement category. Respondents also reported feeling tension between traditional teachings and contemporary views (M = 4.11, SD = 0.74) and indicated that contemporary Islamic thought has influenced

how they view their faith (M = 4.06, SD = 0.77), both interpreted as High Agreement. Additionally, respondents agreed that exposure to contemporary interpretations encourages reflection on their religious identity (M = 3.95, SD = 0.77) and may sometimes lead to adjustments in religious practices (M = 3.95, SD = 0.76). These results suggest that for Muslim youth in Palimbang, contemporary Islamic thought functions as both a reflective and reinforcing force, encouraging deeper contemplation of faith while broadening interpretive perspectives. The respondents' responses reflect a mature

engagement with religious ideas that integrates contemporary influences without compromising core beliefs.

Relationship between exposure to contemporary islamic thought and religious identity stability

This section examined the relationship between exposure to contemporary Islamic thought and the stability of religious identity. It assessed whether openness to contemporary interpretations and intellectual engagement with Islamic discourse contribute to maintaining or enhancing religious

identity among Muslim youth in Palimbang.

Table 6 presents the correlation between exposure to contemporary Islamic thought and religious identity stability among Muslim youth in Palimbang. The results show a moderate positive correlation between the two variables ($r = 0.48, p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of exposure to contemporary Islamic thought are significantly associated with higher levels of religious identity stability. This suggests a positive relationship between engagement with contemporary Islamic thought and the stability of religious identity among the respondents.

Table 6. Relationship between Exposure to Contemporary Islamic Thought and Religious Identity Stability.

Correlated variables	Pearson's r	p-value
Exposure to contemporary islamic thought and religious identity stability	0.48***	<.001

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

DISCUSSIONS

The findings indicate that Muslim youth in Palimbang demonstrate a high degree of religious identity stability across belief, practice, and affiliation. This suggests that religiosity among Muslim youth remains both enduring and adaptive amid contemporary intellectual influences and exposure to contemporary Islamic thought. Rather than weakening faith, such exposure appears to strengthen the cognitive, behavioral, and social dimensions of religiosity. The persistence of strong belief, consistent practice, and firm communal affiliation reflects adaptive stability, the capacity to maintain coherence of faith while engaging with social and intellectual change. The high cognitive commitment observed aligns with Glock and Stark's (1965) model, which identifies belief as the core dimension anchoring other expressions of religiosity. Similarly, Glock (1962) emphasizes the cognitive dimension of religiosity as central to the internalization of religious teachings and identity formation. Yet, this stability is not rigid; it reflects reflective engagement and self-awareness. As King and Boyatzis (2015) and Pargament (1997) argue, questioning and reflection are vital processes in mature religious identity formation. In this regard, the openness of some respondents to reflecting on their beliefs may represent a developmental process through which faith becomes more personally meaningful and resilient. Previous research also suggests that stable religious belief systems contribute to moral orientation and personal coherence among Muslim youth (Mahudin et al., 2016), while strong religious identity has been associated with psychological resilience and well-being (Dolcos et al., 2021).

The sustained consistency in practice and communal affiliation further underscores the integration of faith into everyday life. Religious rituals and participation in collective activities continue to provide moral and psychological grounding. Global studies have similarly shown that Muslims across different societies maintain regular engagement in religious practices such as daily prayer and fasting despite broader social changes (Evans et al., 2025). Consistent participation in religious activities has also been associated with improved psychological well-being and emotional resilience when these practices are experienced as meaningful expressions of faith (Aggarwal et al., 2023). At the same time, variations in participation in communal religious activities may reflect contextual influences such as peer networks, accessibility to religious spaces, and social environments. Research on youth religiosity indicates that peer relationships and social contexts can shape levels of engagement in religious gatherings and

community activities (Shen et al., 2023). Similar patterns have been observed among Indonesian Muslim youth, where religious commitment remains strong but participation in communal activities may fluctuate due to academic responsibilities or changing social lifestyles (Nuruzzaman and Abu Bakar, 2025; Nurfitriya, 2023).

The strong sense of affiliation reported by respondents highlights the importance of communal belonging in sustaining religious identity. Religious affiliation provides individuals with a sense of shared identity, emotional security, and access to supportive social networks. Previous studies have emphasized that for Muslim youth, belonging to a religious community reinforces collective values and strengthens identity formation (Spiegler et al., 2024; Ishaq et al., 2024; Kerasha et al., 2024). From the perspective of social identity theory, group belonging plays an important role in shaping self-definition and motivating behaviors that maintain group cohesion and shared norms (Bañales et al., 2024). In communities such as Palimbang, where religion plays a central role in social organization, this sense of affiliation may serve as a stabilizing force that reinforces both personal faith and communal solidarity.

A key finding of the present study is the positive correlation between engagement with contemporary Islamic thought and religious stability. This challenges the assumption that contemporary interpretations of Islam necessarily erode traditional belief systems. Instead, exposure to contemporary Islamic discourse, often encountered through digital platforms, online lectures, and peer discussions, appears to encourage deeper reflection and understanding of faith. Research on digital religion similarly suggests that online Islamic scholarship and social media platforms provide important spaces where Muslim youth can access religious knowledge and engage with diverse perspectives (Roslan et al., 2025; Zaid et al., 2022). These platforms allow young Muslims to interact with religious scholars and ideas beyond their immediate communities, facilitating intellectual engagement while maintaining religious commitment.

This pattern may also be understood within the broader intellectual tradition of Islam, where engagement with scholarly interpretation and reflective reasoning has historically been central to sustaining religious understanding. Islamic intellectual history has long emphasized the importance of interpretive reasoning through concepts such as *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and *tajdid* (renewal), which encourage scholars to respond to new social circumstances while remaining grounded in foundational religious principles (Hallaq, 2009; Rahman, 1982). From this perspective,

contemporary exposure to Islamic discourse through digital platforms may represent a continuation of this tradition of interpretive engagement rather than a departure from established religious practices (Hallaq, 2009).

The respondents' openness to new interpretations while maintaining core beliefs illustrates a balanced negotiation between continuity and change. Contemporary Islamic discourse often encourages contextual interpretations of religious teachings that allow believers to address modern social realities without abandoning traditional principles. Studies on Muslim youth and digital religiosity have similarly found that young Muslims frequently reinterpret religious teachings within contemporary contexts rather than rejecting them altogether (Zaid et al., 2022; Wahid, 2024). The tensions some respondents reported between traditional teachings and contemporary perspectives may therefore represent a constructive process of intellectual engagement. Research on youth religiosity indicates that exposure to diverse interpretations can foster critical thinking and deeper understanding of faith (Haq, 2023; Nurfitriya, 2023). Rather than indicating religious fragmentation, such engagement may strengthen personal conviction by encouraging individuals to reflect more deeply on the meaning of their beliefs.

Taken together, these findings suggest that religious identity among Muslim youth may be best understood as a form of adaptive stability. Core beliefs, practices, and affiliations remain stable, yet young Muslims actively engage with contemporary interpretations and intellectual influences. This dynamic process challenges assumptions that modernization or digital exposure necessarily leads to religious decline. Instead, it highlights the capacity of religious traditions to remain resilient while evolving in response to new social and intellectual contexts (Berger, 2012).

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study employed a purposive sampling approach based on an accessible youth population in Palimbang, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other Muslim communities in the Philippines or in different sociocultural contexts. Second, the cross-sectional design captures patterns at a single point in time and therefore cannot fully explain how religious identity may evolve across different stages of youth development. Third, the study adopts a sociological perspective and does not attempt to engage in theological evaluation of specific Islamic doctrines or interpretations. Instead, it focuses on observable patterns of belief, practice, and affiliation among Muslim youth. Future research may address these limitations by employing longitudinal approaches, broader sampling strategies, or mixed-method designs that combine quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to provide deeper insights into the evolving dynamics of Muslim youth religiosity.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that religious identity among Muslim youth in Palimbang remains highly stable across belief, practice, and affiliation despite exposure to contemporary Islamic thought. Rather than weakening faith commitment, engagement with contemporary Islamic discourse is positively associated with greater identity stability, suggesting that intellectual interaction with modern interpretations can reinforce religious understanding and commitment. These findings support Social Identity Theory and the Religious Socialization Model by illustrating that religious identity

stability among Muslim youth is maintained through both communal belonging and ongoing engagement with religious knowledge. The results highlight that religious identity stability is not a static preservation of tradition but a dynamic process in which youth actively interpret and reaffirm their faith in response to contemporary realities. Exposure to contemporary Islamic scholarship, digital religious platforms, and peer discussions appears to cultivate reflective engagement that strengthens rather than disrupts religious commitment. Based on these findings, religious education institutions and youth development programs may benefit from incorporating structured discussions on contemporary Islamic thought alongside traditional teachings. Providing access to credible Islamic scholarship, promoting digital literacy in evaluating religious content, and creating safe dialogical spaces for youth to discuss contemporary issues may help strengthen interpretive understanding and faith resilience. Such initiatives can support Muslim youth in developing informed, confident, and socially grounded religious identities capable of navigating both tradition and modernity.

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DECLARATION

Informed consent statement

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study to ensure the protection, privacy, and voluntary participation of all respondents. Prior to data collection, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and their rights as respondents, including the right to decline participation or withdraw at any time without penalty. An informed consent statement was provided on the first page of the online questionnaire, which respondents were required to read and acknowledge before proceeding. The consent form clearly stated that participation was voluntary, that no identifying information would be collected, and that responses would remain anonymous and confidential. All data were collected, stored, and analyzed in compliance with standard ethical research protocols. Access to the dataset was limited to the researcher, and all electronic files were password-protected to maintain data security. Results were reported in aggregate form only, ensuring that no individual respondent could be personally identified.

Conflict of interests

The author declared no competing interests.

AI Disclosure

The authors declare that no Artificial Intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted technologies were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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