

The Role of Social Networks in Disseminating Religious Knowledge and Countering Religious Doubts

1. Fateme Yazdanifar[✉]: Department of Jurisprudence and Fundamentals of Law, Bi.C., Islamic Azad University, Birjand, Iran

2. Ali Akbar Taheri*[✉]: Department of Islamic Studies, Zah.C., Islamic Azad University, Zahedan, Iran

3. Hasan Ghowth[✉]: Department of Jurisprudence and Islamic Fundamentals of Law, Bi.C., Islamic Azad University, Birjand, Iran

*Correspondence: taheri@iau.ac.ir

Abstract

Social networks have become one of the most influential environments for the circulation, interpretation, and contestation of religious knowledge in contemporary societies. This article analyzes the role of social networks in disseminating Islamic religious knowledge and countering religious doubts, with attention to their communicative capacities, educational potential, ethical risks, and jurisprudential implications. The study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach and is based on library research, drawing on scholarly sources related to digital religion, social networking, religious identity, media communication, cyberspace ethics, and Islamic religious education. The analysis shows that social networks can significantly expand access to religious knowledge by enabling rapid communication, multimedia education, interactive learning, virtual religious communities, and direct engagement between religious scholars and public audiences. These platforms can support Qur'anic education, moral instruction, religious ceremonies, and practical responses to users' questions, especially among youth and students who increasingly encounter religion through digital media. At the same time, the findings indicate that social networks may intensify religious doubts by spreading fragmented, emotional, decontextualized, or misleading content. The speed, anonymity, and participatory nature of these platforms can weaken the distinction between authentic religious knowledge and personal opinion, thereby affecting religious identity and public trust in religious authority. The article argues that countering religious doubts requires more than reactive correction or restriction. It requires systematic digital religious communication, credible scholarly presence, media literacy, ethical dialogue, audience-centered content, rapid response mechanisms, and connection between online religious activity and real religious institutions such as mosques and educational centers. The article concludes that social networks are neither inherently harmful nor automatically beneficial for religion. Their impact depends on how religious actors use them to combine authentic knowledge, moral responsibility, communicative skill, and strategic engagement in the digital age.

Keywords: Social networks; religious knowledge; religious doubts; digital religion; Islamic education; cyberspace ethics; religious identity

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1. Introduction

Social networks have become one of the most influential environments for the circulation of ideas, beliefs, values, and public interpretations of religion in contemporary societies. In earlier periods, the transmission of religious knowledge was primarily organized through face-to-face institutions such as mosques, schools, seminaries, religious gatherings, family-based instruction, and printed texts. These spaces still remain central to religious life, but the communicative ecology in which people encounter religion has changed substantially. The modern believer, especially the young believer, does not receive religious knowledge only through formal religious authorities; rather, religious concepts, doubts, answers, images, slogans, narrations, clips, and debates are encountered daily through social platforms. This transformation is consistent with the broader shift in mass communication theory, in which media are not merely channels of message transmission but also social institutions that shape perception, identity, interpretation, and collective behavior (McQuail, 2006). In this context, social networks should be understood not as neutral technological tools but as dynamic environments in which religious knowledge may be strengthened, distorted, simplified, commercialized, challenged, or defended. The present article therefore focuses on the role of social networks in disseminating religious knowledge and countering religious doubts, with attention to their opportunities, risks, ethical implications, and requirements for responsible religious communication.

The rise of social networks has changed the meaning of religious access. In the past, access to religious knowledge often required physical attendance, institutional membership, or direct contact with scholars, teachers, and preachers. Today, a user may encounter religious content through a mobile phone, participate in a live religious lecture, ask a jurisprudential question anonymously, follow Qur'anic educational pages, or become involved in theological debates without entering a formal religious institution. Social media platforms are defined by user-generated content, interactivity, visibility, sharing, participation, and networked circulation, and these features distinguish them from older one-way media systems (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Microblogging and short-message platforms also intensify this process because they allow users to participate in public discourse through concise expressions, hashtags, replies, and rapidly circulating fragments of interpretation (Java et al., 2007). These communicative characteristics are highly relevant to religious education because they allow religious content to move quickly, reach dispersed audiences, and become part of everyday conversation. At the same time, the same characteristics make it possible for doubts, polemics, misinformation, satire, anti-religious arguments, and decontextualized claims to circulate with unusual speed.

The importance of this issue becomes clearer when social networks are examined as spaces of youth identity formation. Empirical studies on social networking experiences show that students and young users often use these platforms not only for entertainment but also for self-expression, relational maintenance, group belonging, and identity exploration (Pempek et al., 2009). In religious societies, identity formation is never separate from moral, cultural, and spiritual frameworks; therefore, the online formation of identity inevitably affects the way users understand religion, religious authority, religious belonging, and religious practice. Studies conducted in Iranian contexts have similarly emphasized the relationship between social networks and religious identity among young people, showing that online interaction can influence how youth interpret their religious commitments and social affiliations (Ghasemi et al., 2012). This means that religious doubts in social networks should not be treated simply as isolated intellectual questions. They are often connected to identity, peer culture, emotional experience, generational change, and the search for meaning.

Social networks also influence religious belief by altering the authority structure of knowledge. In traditional religious education, the difference between scholar and audience, teacher and learner, authentic text and informal opinion, reliable interpretation and personal impression was often more visible. In social networks, however, these boundaries are less stable. A religious scholar, an anonymous user, a political activist, a satirical page, a commercial influencer, and an algorithmically amplified account may appear side by side in the same feed. This can democratize access to religious debate, but it can also create confusion regarding authenticity and credibility. Research on the effects of social networks on culture and religious beliefs among users has shown that online platforms may influence both religious attitudes and cultural orientations, particularly when users are continuously exposed to diverse and competing value systems (Rostami et al., 2017). Similarly, studies on mobile social networks and adherence to religious beliefs among adolescents suggest that digital exposure may have measurable relationships with religious commitment during formative developmental years (Ahangari, 2018). These findings

point to the central concern of the present article: social networks are not external to religious formation; they have become one of its main arenas.

The dual nature of social networks is one of the main reasons they require careful analysis. On the one hand, they create powerful opportunities for the dissemination of religious knowledge. They can extend Qur'anic education, support moral instruction, promote religious ceremonies, connect isolated believers, and provide accessible responses to questions. Research on strategic models for propagating and promoting Qur'anic teachings in social networks directly supports the idea that these platforms can be used intentionally and systematically for religious education when communication strategies are designed according to the nature of the medium (Mir-Mousavi, 2019). Studies on the relationship between young people's use of social networks and participation in religious ceremonies also indicate that digital networks may contribute to the visibility, organization, and continuation of religious participation when used constructively (Kaveh Ghafarokhi & Tajik Esmaeili, 2017). On the other hand, social networks can weaken religious understanding when religious content is fragmented, sensationalized, commercialized, or replaced by emotional reactions and unverified claims. This ambivalence requires a balanced approach that neither demonizes social networks nor treats them as automatically beneficial.

The problem of religious doubts is especially significant because doubts in the digital age are not limited to formal theological objections. A doubt may appear as a short video that ridicules a religious ruling, a post that isolates a Qur'anic verse from its interpretive context, a meme that frames religion as irrational, a comment thread that spreads hostility toward religious authority, or a fabricated narration shared as authentic. Such doubts may not always be produced by trained critics of religion; they may emerge from confusion, emotional disappointment, lack of education, ideological campaigns, or algorithmic amplification of provocative content. Research on the transformation of collective identities in virtual social networks shows that religious, national, and modern identities may be reshaped through online interaction and symbolic exchange (Rahbar Qazi et al., 2018). The challenge is therefore not simply to answer individual questions but to understand the wider digital environment in which doubts become socially meaningful and emotionally persuasive. If religious communication remains slow, abstract, defensive, or disconnected from the language of users, it will be unable to respond effectively to this environment.

At the same time, an overly restrictive or purely negative response to social networks is inadequate. Critics of social media have warned that digital platforms can manipulate attention, weaken autonomy, encourage addiction-like behaviors, and reshape human relationships through design features that prioritize engagement over truth or depth (Lanier, 2018). Such criticisms are important, but the religious response cannot be limited to withdrawal. Religious institutions and communicators must learn how to act ethically and intelligently within the digital sphere. Digital theology has argued that religious reflection must reconsider the relationship between God, neighbor, community, and responsibility in technologically mediated environments (Le Duc, 2015). This insight is valuable for Islamic religious communication as well: the digital environment does not remove moral accountability; rather, it creates new forms of responsibility regarding speech, interpretation, privacy, persuasion, and public influence. The aim of this article is to analyze the role of social networks in disseminating religious knowledge and countering religious doubts by examining their communicative capacities, educational opportunities, identity effects, ethical risks, and requirements for credible religious response.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

Any analysis of religious knowledge in social networks must begin with a clear understanding of the medium itself. Social networks are not merely websites or applications; they are interactive communicative systems that allow users to produce, share, comment on, evaluate, remix, and circulate content. Their defining characteristics include user participation, relational visibility, networked diffusion, multimedia representation, and continuous feedback. Kaplan and Haenlein's analysis of social media emphasizes the participatory and user-generated nature of these platforms, showing that they differ from earlier media because users are not only receivers but also producers and distributors of messages (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This feature is decisive for religious communication because every user may become a transmitter of religious content, whether accurately or inaccurately. A verse, hadith, legal ruling, moral lesson, or theological claim may be shared by a scholar, but it may also be

reinterpreted, shortened, misquoted, or emotionally reframed by ordinary users. Thus, religious communication in social networks is decentralized, and decentralization creates both educational opportunity and interpretive risk.

Mass communication theory helps clarify why the social-network environment has such influence over religious understanding. Media do not simply deliver information to passive audiences; they participate in agenda-setting, framing, representation, identity formation, and cultural reproduction (McQuail, 2006). When this principle is applied to religious communication, it becomes clear that social networks shape not only what religious issues users encounter but also how those issues are emotionally framed and socially evaluated. A jurisprudential issue may be framed as oppression, a theological question may be framed as absurdity, a religious ceremony may be framed as identity, and a moral warning may be framed as intolerance. These frames affect interpretation before a user even encounters a serious explanation. Consequently, countering religious doubts requires more than providing correct information; it requires understanding how media frames organize perception, emotion, and public conversation. Religious communicators who ignore the framing power of social networks may provide accurate answers but fail to address the actual form in which doubt has been received.

The concept of networked interaction is also essential. Studies of microblogging communities show that online communication often develops through short messages, user communities, repeated interaction, shared topics, and collective attention around specific issues (Java et al., 2007). Religious discourse in social networks frequently follows this same pattern. A doubt may become visible because it is repeatedly shared, not because it is intellectually strong. A response may become influential because it is emotionally clear, visually attractive, and socially shareable, not necessarily because it is the most detailed. This does not mean that depth is unimportant; rather, it means that religious depth must be translated into communicative forms appropriate to the medium. If the medium rewards brevity, visibility, and interaction, then religious educators must find ways to preserve accuracy while also producing content that users can understand, remember, and circulate. A long scholarly answer may be necessary, but it may also need to be accompanied by summaries, short videos, question-and-answer formats, and links to deeper resources.

Religious knowledge in social networks must also be understood in relation to digital theology and mediated religious life. Bennett's discussion of doing theology in an internet age shows that the digital environment raises questions about authority, embodiment, community, and the nature of religious reasoning in online spaces (Bennett, 2012). Le Duc similarly argues that cyber or digital theology requires reflection on human relationships with God and neighbor in technologically mediated environments (Le Duc, 2015). Although these works emerge from broader theological contexts, their implications are relevant to Islamic religious communication because they show that digital media are not merely external tools for religion. They alter the conditions under which religious questions are asked, religious communities are formed, and religious authority is encountered. In Islamic contexts, this means that dissemination of religious knowledge must remain grounded in Qur'an, Sunnah, reasoned interpretation, jurisprudential method, and ethical responsibility, while also recognizing that the audience receives these teachings through digital forms that shape attention, emotion, and trust.

The concept of cyberspirituality is also useful for understanding the religious potential of networks. Paul's discussion of social networking and cyberspirituality presents networks as environments in which spiritual communication, community, and religious meaning may be reorganized through digital connection (Paul, 2017). Sweet likewise emphasizes the viral potential of social networking in spreading religious enthusiasm and revival-oriented communication (Sweet, 2012). These views help explain why social networks can be powerful tools for disseminating religious knowledge. A religious message that once reached a local audience can now reach thousands or millions of users across cities and countries. A Qur'anic reflection can be shared instantly; a religious lecture can be replayed; a doubt can be answered publicly; a youth group can be formed around ethical learning; a mosque can extend its presence beyond its physical building. However, the same networked structure that enables religious dissemination also enables religious distortion. A viral religious message may be authentic, but it may also be superficial, manipulative, or inaccurate. Therefore, the networked character of cyberspirituality must be joined with epistemic discipline.

The distinction between virtual and real religious community is particularly important. Abbasi Shavazi's sociological study of participation in virtual religious communities and its relationship with real religious communities suggests that online religious participation should not be dismissed as unreal simply because it occurs through digital mediation (Abbasi Shavazi, 2012). Virtual religious communities can provide belonging, discussion, emotional support, and access to religious content.

Yet their relationship with offline religious institutions remains complex. Online religious participation may complement mosque attendance and religious gatherings, but it may also become a substitute for embodied community if users withdraw from real-life religious relationships. Rezaei-Tabar's mosque-centered approach to establishing Islamic social networks is relevant here because it proposes that religious social networks should not be detached from Islamic communal institutions but connected to mosque-based religious life (Rezaei-Tabar, 2017). This idea offers a balanced model: social networks can expand religious communication, but they should remain linked to credible institutions, ethical oversight, and embodied community.

The Iranian literature on religion and cyberspace also provides useful theoretical insights. Ameli and Haji-Jafari's dual-spatial approach to virtual harms and religion emphasizes that religious experience and harm must be analyzed across the interaction between real and virtual spaces (Ameli & Haji-Jafari, 2012). This is important because a religious doubt encountered online may affect offline prayer, family conversation, participation in ceremonies, and trust in religious authority. Similarly, the ethical literature on modest communication in cyber social networks shows that digital speech must be evaluated through religious and moral norms, including modesty, respect, self-restraint, and the avoidance of destructive interaction (Sharaf al-Din et al., 2014). Hosseini's Qur'an- and narration-based discussion of cyberspace reinforces the view that digital conduct must remain subject to Islamic moral guidance (Hosseini, 2017). These sources together support the conceptual position of this article: cyberspace is not outside the domain of religion; rather, it is one of the contemporary fields in which religious knowledge, religious responsibility, and religious doubt are actively formed.

The concept of religious doubt must also be defined carefully. In this article, religious doubt refers to questions, objections, misunderstandings, criticisms, suspicions, or emotionally persuasive claims that weaken confidence in religious belief, religious practice, religious authority, or religious morality. Not all doubt is harmful. A sincere question may become the beginning of deeper faith when it receives a thoughtful and respectful answer. Islamic intellectual history has long recognized the importance of reasoning, inquiry, argumentation, and clarification. The problem arises when doubt is produced or circulated through deception, distortion, ridicule, partial quotation, emotional manipulation, or hostility. In social networks, this problem becomes more serious because doubts often circulate without context and reach audiences before they have the interpretive resources to evaluate them. Studies on the pathology of mobile-based virtual social networks in religious education show that digital networks may create educational and religious vulnerabilities among secondary-school students if use is not guided by proper literacy and moral formation (Adlipour & Soleimani, 2016). For this reason, religious communication in social networks must combine openness to questions with resistance to manipulation.

Finally, the theoretical foundation of this article rests on the idea that social networks are fields of religious mediation. They mediate knowledge by changing how teachings are presented. They mediate authority by changing who is heard. They mediate identity by changing how users display belonging. They mediate doubt by changing how objections are framed and circulated. They mediate community by changing how people gather, support, and influence one another. Research on the transformation of collective identities in virtual social networks confirms that online environments can reshape religious, national, and modern identities simultaneously (Rahbar Qazi et al., 2018). Therefore, the dissemination of religious knowledge and the countering of religious doubts must be studied together. A religious community that only disseminates information but does not answer doubts will leave users vulnerable. A religious community that only reacts to doubts but does not provide rich, attractive, and continuous education will remain defensive. The most effective model is one in which religious knowledge is actively disseminated, doubts are respectfully and systematically addressed, and digital communication is governed by ethical and jurisprudential awareness.

3. Social Networks in the Dissemination of Religious Knowledge

Social networks offer significant opportunities for the dissemination of religious knowledge because they expand access, accelerate communication, diversify educational formats, and allow religious content to enter the daily communicative habits of users. In traditional religious education, the learner often needed to attend a specific place at a specific time, but social networks make it possible for religious instruction to be available continuously. Studies on online social networking in teaching and learning show that students may perceive social networks as beneficial when they support communication, resource sharing, collaboration, and informal learning beyond the classroom (Hamid et al., 2015). This finding has direct relevance for

religious education because religious learning is not limited to formal institutions. A user may encounter a Qur'anic lesson, moral reminder, explanation of a religious ruling, or response to a theological question while moving through ordinary online interaction. The educational value of social networks therefore lies not only in their capacity to host formal lessons but also in their ability to integrate religious knowledge into everyday digital life.

One of the most important functions of social networks is their ability to make religious knowledge accessible to diverse audiences. Religious content can be adapted for children, adolescents, university students, families, new learners, and advanced audiences. Research on students' perceptions of Facebook as an interactive learning resource suggests that social platforms can support learning when they enable interaction, immediacy, and informal communication between participants (Irwin et al., 2012). Religious educators can benefit from this feature by moving beyond one-way preaching and creating interactive spaces for questions, discussion, clarification, and feedback. A young person who is hesitant to ask a question in a public religious gathering may ask it anonymously online. A student who does not understand a jurisprudential ruling may request clarification through a comment or message. A family may access religious guidance through recorded lectures or short explanatory posts. In this sense, social networks can reduce barriers to religious inquiry, especially when religious communicators create safe, respectful, and intellectually serious environments.

The educational potential of social networks is strengthened by their multimedia nature. Religious knowledge can be transmitted through text, image, audio, video, livestream, infographic, podcast, story, and interactive conversation. This is especially important because many users do not engage deeply with long written texts, even when those texts are valuable. A Qur'anic concept can be introduced through a short video and then linked to a longer explanation; a moral teaching can be represented visually; a complex theological issue can be divided into several accessible posts; a religious ceremony can be explained through historical, spiritual, and practical dimensions. Studies on using social networking technology to enhance learning in higher education show that platforms such as Facebook can support educational engagement when they are used deliberately to facilitate interaction and learning activities (Rachman & Firpo, 2011). In religious communication, this means that the medium should not be used randomly. Content must be planned according to audience needs, platform affordances, and the educational purpose of each message.

The dissemination of Qur'anic teachings is one of the most important areas in which social networks can be used productively. Mir-Mousavi's study on strategic models for propagating and promoting Qur'anic teachings in social networks is directly relevant because it treats social networks as spaces that require strategy, not merely presence (Mir-Mousavi, 2019). Qur'anic education in social networks should not be reduced to posting verses without explanation. Users need context, translation, interpretation, moral application, and connection to everyday concerns. A verse related to patience, justice, family, sincerity, repentance, or social responsibility may become more meaningful when accompanied by clear explanation and practical reflection. At the same time, Qur'anic content must avoid superficial emotionalism or decontextualized use. The authority of Qur'anic knowledge requires care, precision, and respect for interpretive tradition. A strategic approach can organize Qur'anic dissemination around themes, audience levels, contemporary questions, ethical issues, and recurring doubts.

Social networks can also strengthen the relationship between religious institutions and public audiences. A mosque, religious school, Qur'anic center, or scholarly institution can use social networks to announce programs, publish educational content, answer questions, share summaries of sermons, and maintain contact with people who cannot attend in person. Rezaei-Tabar's mosque-centered approach to Islamic social networks is valuable because it emphasizes the possibility of grounding digital religious communication in an established communal institution (Rezaei-Tabar, 2017). This model prevents online religious communication from becoming detached from embodied worship, communal accountability, and local religious leadership. When digital platforms extend the mosque rather than replace it, social networks can become instruments of religious continuity. They can remind users of prayer programs, encourage participation in ceremonies, introduce charitable activities, and maintain educational relationships between scholars and community members.

Virtual religious communities are another important dimension of dissemination. Abbasi Shavazi's study of participation in the Imam Reza Club on Cloob.com shows that online religious communities can become meaningful sites of participation and may relate to real religious communities in complex ways (Abbasi Shavazi, 2012). These communities can bring together people who share religious interests, devotional commitments, ethical concerns, or educational goals. They may be especially valuable for users who live far from religious centers or who lack access to reliable teachers. However, virtual religious

community requires guidance. Without credible moderation, online religious groups can become spaces of rumor, weak narrations, emotional conflict, or unverified rulings. Therefore, the dissemination of religious knowledge through virtual communities should include source verification, scholarly supervision, respectful interaction, and clear boundaries between personal opinion and reliable religious teaching.

Social networks also allow religious communicators to reach younger audiences in their own communicative language. Research on the relationship between mobile social networks and adherence to religious beliefs among adolescents indicates that adolescent religiosity may be connected to patterns of digital use (Ahangari, 2018). This does not mean that all digital use weakens religion; rather, it means that religious education must take seriously the environments in which adolescents spend time. If young people encounter doubts, alternative value systems, and peer pressure online, then religious education must also have a strong online presence. The language of this presence must be clear, respectful, and intellectually honest. Young audiences often reject content that appears artificial, authoritarian, or disconnected from their lived experience. Religious educators must therefore learn to communicate with empathy, answer real questions, and avoid reducing complex concerns to slogans. Digital religious education should not merely command belief; it should cultivate understanding.

The promotion of religious ceremonies and practices is another positive function of social networks. Kaveh Ghafarokhi and Tajik Esmaeili's study on young people's use of social networks and participation in religious ceremonies suggests that online networks may be related to religious participation in communal rituals (Kaveh Ghafarokhi & Tajik Esmaeili, 2017). Social networks can increase awareness of religious events, explain the meaning of ceremonies, share devotional materials, and encourage collective participation. However, the value of digital promotion depends on whether it deepens understanding or merely produces symbolic display. A ceremony announced online may attract attendance, but religious communicators should also explain its spiritual, historical, ethical, and communal significance. Otherwise, digital religious participation may become performative rather than transformative. The goal should be to connect visibility with meaning, participation with knowledge, and emotion with ethical commitment.

The dissemination of religious knowledge through social networks also requires attention to the credibility of the messenger. In digital environments, users are exposed to countless voices. Some are scholarly, some emotional, some ideological, some commercial, and some deceptive. Hosseini's discussion of cyberspace from the perspective of Qur'anic verses and narrations emphasizes that digital conduct must remain tied to religious responsibility and moral accountability (Hosseini, 2017). This principle applies not only to users but also to religious communicators. A person who disseminates religious content must avoid exaggeration, unverified narrations, manipulative headlines, sectarian hostility, and careless legal opinions. Religious knowledge must be presented with humility, evidence, and awareness of interpretive limits. The digital desire for quick influence should not lead to the abandonment of scholarly discipline. In Islamic communication, credibility is not only a technical matter of popularity; it is also a moral matter of truthfulness.

Finally, social networks can help religious knowledge become dialogic rather than merely declarative. Digital theology emphasizes that online environments reshape relationships with God and neighbor by changing how religious persons encounter others, respond to questions, and practice responsibility in mediated spaces (Le Duc, 2015). This insight is important because the dissemination of religious knowledge should not be imagined as one-directional broadcasting. Social networks allow users to ask, object, share experience, request evidence, and compare interpretations. This can be challenging for religious authorities, but it can also enrich religious education. A dialogic model does not mean that every opinion has equal scholarly validity; it means that religious communication recognizes the audience as active, questioning, and situated. When social networks are used in this way, they can become spaces of religious learning, ethical formation, communal connection, and intellectual clarification.

4. Countering Religious Doubts and Ethical-Jurisprudential Challenges

The second major role of social networks in religious communication is their connection to the production, spread, and countering of religious doubts. Doubts have always existed in religious life, but the digital environment changes their speed, form, audience, and emotional force. In earlier contexts, theological questions might be raised in scholarly books, public debates, classrooms, or private conversations. In social networks, however, doubts may appear as short posts, provocative images, edited videos, sarcastic comments, anonymous questions, or emotionally charged narratives. Because social platforms

are designed for rapid engagement, the most visible doubt is not always the most serious or rational; it may simply be the most provocative. Lanier's critique of social media is useful here because he argues that the design of digital platforms can manipulate attention and behavior in ways that do not necessarily serve truth, autonomy, or human flourishing (Lanier, 2018). For religious communication, this means that countering doubts requires understanding not only the content of objections but also the platform mechanisms that amplify them.

Religious doubts in social networks can be classified into several broad types. Some are theological, such as questions about divine justice, suffering, fate, revelation, prophecy, resurrection, or the relationship between reason and faith. Some are jurisprudential, such as objections to Islamic rulings on family, gender, economics, punishment, worship, or social conduct. Some are historical, such as doubts related to the lives of prophets, the history of Islam, or the authenticity of narrations. Some are ethical and emotional, such as claims that religion is incompatible with freedom, dignity, love, or modern life. Some are identity-based, where users experience conflict between religious belonging and modern, national, gendered, or generational identities. Research on collective identity transformation in virtual social networks shows that religious identity interacts with national and modern identities in online environments (Rahbar Qazi et al., 2018). Therefore, a religious doubt may not be merely a question of information; it may reflect a deeper struggle over belonging, recognition, and self-understanding.

The effect of social networks on religious identity has been repeatedly addressed in empirical studies. Ghasemi, Adlipour, and Kianpour studied interaction in virtual social networks and its effect on the religious identity of youth in the context of Facebook use among young people in Isfahan (Ghasemi et al., 2012). Karvani and Aminzadeh examined the relationship between virtual social networks and students' religious identity at the University of Sistan and Baluchestan (Karvani & Aminzadeh, 2018). These studies are important because they show that online interaction may influence religious identity within concrete social groups, not only in abstract theory. When users repeatedly encounter content that questions religious authority, ridicules religious practice, or normalizes distance from religious obligations, their identity may gradually shift. Conversely, when they encounter credible, meaningful, and compassionate religious content, their identity may be strengthened. The religious impact of social networks therefore depends heavily on the balance between doubt-producing content and knowledge-producing content.

Adolescents and students require special attention because they are often more exposed to mobile social networks and more vulnerable to identity instability. Ahangari's study on mobile social networks and adherence to religious beliefs among students aged 12 to 18 in Kashmar indicates that digital network use must be considered in relation to adolescent religious belief (Ahangari, 2018). Adlipour and Soleimani's pathology of mobile-based virtual social networks in religious education among secondary-school students in Tabriz similarly highlights the educational risks of unguided digital engagement (Adlipour & Soleimani, 2016). These findings suggest that countering religious doubts should begin before doubts become crises. Preventive religious education should cultivate interpretive literacy, source awareness, moral reasoning, and the ability to distinguish sincere questions from manipulative content. If adolescents are taught only rules without understanding, they may be more vulnerable when social networks present objections in emotionally attractive forms. Religious education must therefore include intellectual preparation, not only behavioral instruction.

A major ethical challenge in social networks is the collapse of responsibility caused by anonymity, distance, and speed. Users may insult, accuse, distort, or spread rumors more easily online than in face-to-face settings. Sharaf al-Din, Alam al-Hoda, and Nowrouzi Eqbali's work on modest communication in cyber social networks is relevant because it frames digital interaction through moral norms of modesty, restraint, and ethical speech (Sharaf al-Din et al., 2014). Countering religious doubts must itself follow these norms. A religious response that humiliates the questioner, accuses all doubters of bad faith, or responds to mockery with mockery may damage the credibility of religious communication. In many cases, the person expressing doubt may be confused, wounded, uninformed, or influenced by persuasive content. Ethical response requires patience, clarity, compassion, and firmness without aggression. The Islamic ethics of speech should therefore govern both dissemination and defense.

The dual-spatial approach to religion and virtual harms also helps explain why online doubts have offline consequences. Ameli and Haji-Jafari argue that harms in virtual space should be understood in relation to real social and religious life (Ameli & Haji-Jafari, 2012). A doubt encountered online may lead to offline neglect of worship, conflict with family, distrust of

religious institutions, or withdrawal from religious ceremonies. Similarly, online religious support may lead to renewed prayer, participation, study, and moral reform. Thus, the boundary between online and offline religion is porous. Countering doubts in social networks is not merely a matter of digital reputation management; it is connected to the lived religious condition of individuals and communities. This means that religious institutions must monitor online discourse not only to defend their image but to understand the real questions, anxieties, and confusions affecting the public.

A responsible strategy for countering religious doubts should begin with diagnosis. Not every doubt requires the same type of answer. A jurisprudential doubt requires explanation of legal reasoning, sources, objectives, and conditions. A theological doubt requires rational argument, scriptural grounding, and philosophical clarity. A historical doubt requires evidence, context, and methodological distinction between reliable and unreliable reports. An emotional doubt requires empathy before argument. Bennett's work on theology in the internet age shows that online religious reasoning must adapt to the conditions of digital communication without abandoning intellectual seriousness (Bennett, 2012). In Islamic contexts, this means that scholars and communicators must avoid oversimplification while still making answers accessible. A short social media response may introduce the answer, but deeper resources should be available for users who need more detail.

Source credibility is central to countering doubts. Social networks often blur the distinction between knowledge and opinion. A confident user may appear as authoritative as a trained scholar if the audience lacks criteria for evaluation. Hosseini's Qur'an- and narration-based perspective on cyberspace emphasizes the need to approach digital activity through religious accountability (Hosseini, 2017). This accountability includes the duty not to attribute false statements to religion, not to issue rulings without competence, and not to circulate content without verification. Religious institutions can respond to this challenge by developing verified pages, transparent scholarly teams, reliable question-answer archives, and clear references to sources. The goal is not to monopolize all religious conversation but to make authentic knowledge visible and accessible in a crowded digital environment.

The format of response is also crucial. Social networks reward content that is concise, visual, interactive, and emotionally engaging. If religious responses are always long, technical, and delayed, they may fail to reach the audience most affected by the doubt. Studies on social networking and learning show that users value interaction, immediacy, and accessible communication in educational contexts (Hamid et al., 2015). Religious communicators should therefore design layered responses. A short post can address the main misconception; a video can explain the issue more personally; a longer article can provide scholarly depth; a livestream can allow questions; and a private consultation channel can help users with sensitive concerns. This layered model respects both the nature of the platform and the seriousness of religious knowledge. It also prevents the false choice between superficial popularity and inaccessible scholarship.

The communal dimension of countering doubts should not be overlooked. Religious doubts spread socially, and they must often be answered socially. A single scholar cannot respond to every doubt circulating across platforms. Communities need trained volunteers, students, teachers, mosque activists, and media-literate religious communicators who can recognize common doubts and direct users to reliable answers. Rezaei-Tabar's mosque-centered model of Islamic social networks provides a useful framework because it connects digital communication with local religious institutions (Rezaei-Tabar, 2017). Mir-Mousavi's strategic approach to promoting Qur'anic teachings also supports the need for organized planning rather than isolated content production (Mir-Mousavi, 2019). A systematic response network can identify emerging doubts, classify them, produce appropriate materials, and maintain continuity between online answers and offline religious education.

Another important challenge is the emotional economy of social networks. Doubts often become persuasive because they are tied to anger, injustice, disappointment, humor, or personal pain. A user may reject a religious answer not because it is logically weak but because it does not address the emotional frame through which the doubt was received. Paul's discussion of cyberspirituality highlights the relational and networked dimensions of spiritual communication (Paul, 2017). Sweet's emphasis on the viral potential of social networking also suggests that religious messages spread when they resonate emotionally and relationally (Sweet, 2012). Countering doubts therefore requires emotional intelligence. Religious content should be truthful, but it should also be compassionate, beautiful, hopeful, and relevant. The defense of religion should not appear as a cold institutional reaction; it should appear as guidance that understands human vulnerability.

Finally, countering religious doubts requires media literacy among the general public. Users must learn how algorithms prioritize content, how misinformation spreads, how emotional manipulation works, how to verify sources, and how to avoid

confusing popularity with truth. College students' social networking experiences show that users often integrate social platforms deeply into everyday life, which means that media literacy is not optional but necessary (Pempek et al., 2009). The educational literature on social networks confirms that online platforms can support learning, but only when users and educators understand how to use them effectively (Irwin et al., 2012). Religious literacy and media literacy should therefore be combined. A religiously literate but media-illiterate user may still be deceived by digital manipulation. A media-literate but religiously uninformed user may recognize manipulation but lack religious criteria for truth. The strongest response to religious doubt in social networks is produced when authentic knowledge, ethical speech, institutional credibility, emotional intelligence, and media literacy work together.

5. Discussion

The analysis presented in this article indicates that social networks have become one of the major fields in which religious knowledge is disseminated and religious doubts are formed, circulated, and answered. This finding is consistent with communication theory, which treats media as active environments of social meaning rather than passive channels of information (McQuail, 2006). Social networks intensify this role because they are participatory, interactive, and user-driven, as Kaplan and Haenlein emphasize in their discussion of social media opportunities and challenges (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In the field of religious communication, this means that the authority, reception, and interpretation of religious knowledge are increasingly shaped by digital environments. The central implication is that religious institutions can no longer treat social networks as peripheral. They are now among the primary contexts in which users encounter Qur'anic teachings, moral advice, doubts, criticism, religious ceremonies, and debates about identity.

The first major result of the analysis is that social networks can significantly support the dissemination of religious knowledge. They increase access to religious content, enable interactive learning, and allow religious educators to reach audiences who may not participate regularly in traditional settings. This result aligns with studies showing that online social networking can support teaching and learning by facilitating communication and resource sharing (Hamid et al., 2015). It is also consistent with Irwin and colleagues' finding that students may perceive Facebook and similar platforms as useful interactive learning resources when they are integrated purposefully into educational activities (Irwin et al., 2012). Applied to religious education, this suggests that social networks can serve as supplementary learning environments for Qur'anic education, theological explanation, moral training, and practical religious guidance. However, the usefulness of these networks depends on intentional design. Religious content that is irregular, unverified, overly emotional, or poorly adapted to the platform may fail to educate even if it attracts attention.

The second major result is that social networks can contribute to the transformation of religious identity. This is supported by Iranian studies that directly examine the relationship between virtual networks and religious identity. Ghasemi, Adlipour, and Kianpour's study of Facebook and youth in Isfahan shows that interaction in virtual social networks may affect religious identity (Ghasemi et al., 2012). Karvani and Aminizadeh's research among students at the University of Sistan and Baluchestan similarly connects virtual social networks with students' religious identity (Karvani & Aminizadeh, 2018). Rahbar Qazi, Hatami, and Abbasi further broaden this point by examining the relationship between virtual social networks and the transformation of collective identities, including religious, national, and modern identity (Rahbar Qazi et al., 2018). Taken together, these studies indicate that social networks are not simply places where already-formed religious identities are expressed. They are also places where religious identity is negotiated, questioned, displayed, weakened, or strengthened. This is especially important for young users who are simultaneously exposed to religious education, peer influence, modern cultural narratives, and competing moral frameworks.

The third major result is that the same features that make social networks useful for religious dissemination also make them powerful channels for religious doubt. Speed, interactivity, anonymity, emotional intensity, and shareability are double-edged features. Java and colleagues' analysis of microblogging communities helps explain how short-form communication can organize communities of attention around recurring themes and shared topics (Java et al., 2007). In religious discourse, this means that a doubt can spread not because it is intellectually sophisticated but because it is brief, provocative, and socially repeated. Lanier's criticism of social media design further supports the concern that platforms may prioritize engagement over

depth, reflection, or truth (Lanier, 2018). Therefore, religious communicators must recognize that online doubt is not merely an intellectual object. It is also a media object shaped by design, affect, repetition, and visibility. A response that ignores this structure may be correct in content but weak in communicative effect.

The fourth result is that religious doubt in social networks requires a multidimensional response. A purely prohibitive approach is insufficient because users often need explanation, emotional support, and intellectual trust. At the same time, an entirely open and unregulated environment may expose users to harmful content, distorted religious claims, and unethical interaction. The ethical literature on modest communication in cyber social networks is important because it emphasizes that online speech must be governed by moral discipline (Sharaf al-Din et al., 2014). Hosseini's Qur'an- and narration-based approach to cyberspace similarly supports the view that digital activity remains subject to religious responsibility (Hosseini, 2017). These perspectives indicate that countering doubts should not be reduced to winning arguments. It should be a moral practice that protects truth, dignity, sincerity, and the rights of others. A religious answer that is technically correct but ethically harsh may undermine the very knowledge it seeks to defend.

The fifth result is that religious institutions need strategic planning for digital religious communication. Mir-Mousavi's work on strategic models for promoting Qur'anic teachings in social networks directly supports this conclusion (Mir-Mousavi, 2019). The dissemination of religious knowledge should not depend only on individual enthusiasm or occasional posting. It requires audience analysis, content planning, platform-specific formats, scholarly supervision, rapid response mechanisms, and evaluation of impact. Rezaei-Tabar's mosque-centered approach to Islamic social networks also supports a model in which online religious activity remains connected to embodied institutions and communal religious life (Rezaei-Tabar, 2017). This is essential because purely digital religious communication can become fragmented or detached from worship, community, and accountability. A mosque-centered or institutionally connected model can provide credibility, continuity, and ethical oversight while still benefiting from the reach of social networks.

The sixth result concerns the importance of youth and student audiences. Studies on mobile social networks and religious belief among adolescents, such as Ahangari's research in Kashmar, show that young users' religious adherence can be discussed in relation to their use of mobile networks (Ahangari, 2018). Adlipour and Soleimani's pathology of mobile-based virtual social networks in religious education among secondary-school students also indicates that religious education faces specific challenges in mobile and youth-centered digital environments (Adlipour & Soleimani, 2016). These studies suggest that religious communicators should not wait until doubts become deeply rooted. Preventive education is necessary. Young users should be taught how to evaluate religious claims, identify unreliable sources, distinguish scholarly disagreement from misinformation, and ask questions without fear. Religious education for youth must also address the emotional and existential dimensions of doubt. Many doubts are not merely informational; they are connected to loneliness, injustice, social pressure, or the desire for recognition.

The seventh result is that social networks can strengthen religious participation when they are used to connect knowledge with practice. Kaveh Ghafarokhi and Tajik Esmaeili's study on social network use and participation in religious ceremonies suggests that online platforms may influence or accompany religious participation (Kaveh Ghafarokhi & Tajik Esmaeili, 2017). Abbasi Shavazi's study of virtual religious communities also shows that online religious participation can be meaningfully related to real religious communities (Abbasi Shavazi, 2012). These findings support the view that social networks can function as bridges between digital learning and embodied religious life. Religious content should therefore not remain at the level of information alone. It should guide users toward prayer, ethical conduct, community service, religious ceremonies, Qur'anic study, family responsibility, and social compassion. The success of digital religious communication should be measured not only by views and likes but also by its contribution to deeper understanding and lived religiosity.

The eighth result is that countering religious doubts requires integration between theology, pedagogy, media studies, and ethics. Bennett's work on theology in the internet age shows that religious reasoning must engage the digital environment thoughtfully (Bennett, 2012). Le Duc's cyber/digital theology similarly emphasizes that digital environments reshape relationships with God and neighbor (Le Duc, 2015). Paul's theology of networks and Sweet's discussion of viral religious communication further suggest that networked media can transform the way religious messages spread and communities gather

(Paul, 2017; Sweet, 2012). However, these insights must be joined with Islamic ethical and jurisprudential concerns. In Islamic religious communication, the goal is not merely visibility, influence, or virality. The goal is truthful guidance, moral formation, protection from distortion, and the cultivation of responsible faith. Therefore, digital strategy must remain subordinate to religious authenticity and ethical discipline.

Overall, the article shows that social networks should be approached as environments of both opportunity and responsibility. They can disseminate religious knowledge more widely than many traditional platforms, but they can also intensify confusion and doubt. They can connect users to scholars, but they can also blur the distinction between scholarship and opinion. They can promote religious participation, but they can also encourage superficial performance. They can answer doubts, but they can also produce new doubts through misrepresentation and emotional manipulation. The most effective response is not rejection of social networks but disciplined engagement with them. Religious communicators must combine source-based knowledge, media literacy, ethical interaction, institutional credibility, youth-centered pedagogy, and rapid response. Only through such an integrated approach can social networks become instruments for strengthening religious understanding rather than channels for fragmentation and confusion.

6. Conclusion

Social networks have become one of the most decisive arenas of religious communication in contemporary life. They are no longer marginal spaces used only for entertainment or informal exchange; they are environments in which religious knowledge is learned, questioned, circulated, challenged, defended, and transformed. Their influence derives from their speed, interactivity, accessibility, multimedia capacity, and ability to connect users across geographical and institutional boundaries. For this reason, the role of social networks in disseminating religious knowledge and countering religious doubts must be understood as a central concern for contemporary Islamic thought, religious education, and public communication.

The analysis of this article shows that social networks possess a powerful capacity for the dissemination of religious knowledge. They can make Qur'anic teachings, ethical guidance, jurisprudential explanations, theological reflections, and religious ceremonies accessible to broad and diverse audiences. They can support informal learning, encourage dialogue, connect religious institutions with the public, and provide opportunities for those who may not have direct access to traditional religious settings. When used responsibly, social networks can extend the educational mission of mosques, seminaries, Qur'anic centers, scholars, teachers, and religious communities. They can help religious knowledge move beyond physical limitations and become present in the everyday communicative life of users.

At the same time, the article shows that social networks are not automatically beneficial. Their openness, speed, and participatory structure can also contribute to the spread of religious doubts, misinformation, distorted interpretations, weak narrations, emotional manipulation, and hostility toward religious authority. Doubts in social networks are often not presented as careful intellectual arguments. They may appear as short, emotional, sarcastic, visual, or decontextualized messages that influence users before they have the opportunity to examine the issue carefully. This makes the digital environment especially challenging for young people and students, whose religious identities may still be developing and who may be more exposed to peer influence and online cultural pressure.

The most important implication is that countering religious doubts cannot be limited to reaction, prohibition, or defensive argumentation. A successful response requires a comprehensive strategy. Religious communicators must first understand the nature of the medium and the audience. They must distinguish between sincere questions and manipulative claims, between intellectual confusion and emotional injury, and between ordinary misunderstanding and deliberate distortion. They must respond with knowledge, evidence, patience, and ethical language. The aim should not be to silence every question but to guide users toward reliable understanding, responsible inquiry, and deeper confidence in religious truth.

Religious institutions also need to develop organized digital strategies. Individual efforts are valuable but insufficient. The scale and speed of social networks require planned content production, verified scholarly pages, rapid-response teams, youth-oriented educational formats, question-and-answer archives, multimedia resources, and sustained engagement with common doubts. These strategies should be connected to real religious communities so that digital communication does not become detached from worship, ethical practice, and communal responsibility. The strongest model is one in which online religious education complements offline religious life and strengthens users' participation in meaningful religious practice.

The ethical dimension is equally important. Religious communication in social networks must be governed by truthfulness, modesty, respect, responsibility, and care for the dignity of others. The defense of religion loses its value when it relies on insult, humiliation, exaggeration, or unreliable claims. In the digital environment, where speech spreads quickly and remains visible, ethical discipline is not optional. Every act of sharing, commenting, answering, or criticizing can shape the public image of religion and influence the faith of others. Therefore, the religious communicator must be both knowledgeable and morally disciplined.

In conclusion, social networks should be understood as both an opportunity and a responsibility for contemporary Islamic religious communication. Their capacity to disseminate religious knowledge is significant, but this capacity can be realized only through systematic, ethical, audience-centered, and source-based engagement. Countering religious doubts in social networks requires more than the correction of isolated errors; it requires the construction of a trustworthy digital religious presence that combines authentic knowledge, media competence, emotional intelligence, institutional credibility, and moral integrity. If these requirements are met, social networks can become powerful instruments for strengthening religious understanding, deepening faith, supporting religious identity, and responding constructively to the doubts of the digital age.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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