

Negotiating Social Inclusion amid Uneven Digital Religious Communication in Coastal Muslim Communities of Bengkulu

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital communication has transformed religious interaction within peripheral Muslim communities, creating new opportunities as well as challenges for social inclusion. This study examines how social inclusion is negotiated through digital religious communication within coastal Muslim communities in Bengkulu, Indonesia. While digital religious communication is often viewed as a medium for disseminating Islamic messages, its role in shaping participation, recognition, solidarity, and exclusion remains underexplored in peripheral coastal settings. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research employed purposive sampling and analyzed semi-structured interviews, digital observations of WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, online sermons, and relevant documents through thematic analysis. The findings show that digital religious communication expands access to religious and community information, strengthens participation beyond physical religious spaces, and supports mutual aid. However, these inclusive opportunities are continuously negotiated because digital literacy, internet access, gender norms, economic capacity, and religious authority influence who can participate and whose voices are recognized. The study demonstrates that digital religious communication functions as an important mechanism through which coastal Muslim communities negotiate social inclusion amid ongoing digital transformation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bengkulu is a predominantly Muslim province on the western coast of Sumatra, where religious life is closely embedded in coastal livelihoods, local community networks, and everyday forms of social cooperation. In 2024, the Muslim population of Bengkulu reached 2,066,774 people, accounting for 97.85% of the province's total population, which indicates that Islam is not only a private religious identity but also a major social framework shaping public morality, community relations, and local forms of belonging [1]. This demographic condition is significant because many coastal communities in Bengkulu rely on collective norms, religious authority, and informal social networks to manage uncertainty in maritime livelihoods. Capture fisheries remain an important part of the provincial economy, with official statistics recording fishery production across coastal districts and municipalities in 2024 [2]. These coastal settings are marked by livelihood vulnerability, dependence on seasonal marine resources, uneven access to public services, and strong reliance on community-based solidarity. Therefore, the study of Muslim coastal communities in Bengkulu requires attention not only to religious belief, but also to how religious communication organizes social inclusion, recognition, and collective participation.

At the same time, the social life of Muslim communities in Bengkulu is increasingly mediated by digital communication. Nationally, 72.78% of Indonesia's population accessed the internet in 2024, increasing from 69.21% in 2023, while 68.65% of the population owned mobile phones in 2024 [3]. These figures show that digital

communication has become a major infrastructure for accessing information, maintaining social relations, and participating in public discourse.

In coastal Muslim communities, this transformation is visible through the use of WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, YouTube sermons, online religious lectures, and short-video platforms for circulating religious messages, community announcements, charity information, and moral advice. Religious communication that was previously concentrated in mosques, Qur'anic study groups, family gatherings, and local religious forums is now extended into digital spaces. This shift is important because digital media does not merely accelerate communication; it changes who can speak, who receives information, whose religious interpretation becomes influential, and how community members participate in collective life.

Digital religious communication in coastal Muslim communities cannot be understood as an automatically inclusive process. Although mobile-based communication can expand access to religious information, it may also reproduce social inequalities when digital participation is shaped by age, gender, economic capacity, educational background, internet access, and religious authority. Previous studies on digital religion have demonstrated that online platforms reshape religious authority, religious learning, and Muslim public discourse in contemporary societies [4], [5]. Other studies on social inclusion have emphasized participation, access, recognition, and the ability of marginalized groups to become part of collective social life [6], [7].

Much of the existing literature remains concentrated on urban Muslim publics, national Islamic debates, institutional religious communication, or generalized patterns of digital religiosity. Coastal Muslim communities in peripheral regions are rarely positioned as central analytical sites, even though their social conditions differ significantly from urban Muslim middle-class communities. In Bengkulu, the interaction between coastal livelihoods, Islamic identity, local authority, and digital communication creates a specific context for examining how inclusion is formed and contested. This gap is important because digital religious practices in coastal societies are shaped not only by theology and technology, but also by livelihood insecurity, geographical marginality, kinship networks, and local hierarchies of voice.

This article addresses that gap by examining how social inclusion is negotiated within coastal Muslim communities through digital religious communication in Bengkulu. The study focuses on the circulation of religious messages, the role of digital community groups, the participation of different social actors, and the ways religious communication supports or limits access to collective life. Social inclusion is analyzed through four interrelated dimensions: access to religious and community information, participation in digital religious interaction, recognition of different community voices, and mobilization of solidarity through religiously framed communication. This approach allows the article to move beyond a descriptive account of digital media use and instead examine how digital religious communication operates as a social mechanism. The central argument is that digital religious communication can strengthen inclusion when it broadens access to religious knowledge, facilitates mutual aid, and opens participatory spaces for socially diverse groups.

The new value of this research lies in its empirical and conceptual focus on coastal Muslim communities in Bengkulu as a peripheral site of Muslim digital life. Rather than treating digital religion as an urban or institutionally driven phenomenon, this article situates it within coastal communities whose everyday life is shaped by maritime work, religious solidarity, and local vulnerability. By connecting digital religious communication, social inclusion, and coastal Muslim society, the article contributes to critical studies on Muslim societies in the Global South. It shows that digital religious communication is not only a medium for transmitting Islamic messages, but also a field where belonging, authority, solidarity, and exclusion are continuously negotiated. This perspective is relevant for understanding how Muslim communities in peripheral regions respond to digital transformation while maintaining local religious traditions and community-based social relations.

2. METHOD

This study used a qualitative case study design to examine how social inclusion is negotiated through digital religious communication within coastal Muslim communities in Bengkulu. A qualitative design was appropriate because the research focused on social meaning, religious interaction, community participation, and the ways digital communication is interpreted in everyday Muslim social life [8], [9]. The case study approach was used to provide a contextual explanation of a specific social setting rather than to produce a statistical generalization. The unit of analysis was digital religious communication within coastal Muslim communities, including the circulation of religious messages, online religious discussions, mosque-related announcements, digital charity information, and community-based religious interaction. Social inclusion was examined through four analytical dimensions: access to religious and community information, participation in digital religious interaction, recognition of different community voices, and solidarity mobilized through religious communication.

The research was conducted in coastal Muslim communities in Bengkulu, Indonesia. This location was selected because Bengkulu represents a coastal Muslim region where Islamic social life, maritime livelihoods, local kinship relations, and digital communication intersect in everyday community practices. The research participants were selected purposively to obtain information from actors directly involved in religious communication and community interaction. They included religious leaders, mosque administrators, members of religious study groups, women active in community religious activities, youth users of digital media, fishers' family members, and coastal

residents who participated in digital religious networks. Purposive sampling was used because the study required participants who had direct experience with the phenomenon being investigated [10]. The selection of participants was not intended to represent the population statistically, but to capture variations of experience related to religious authority, digital access, gendered participation, and community inclusion.

Data were collected through three main techniques: semi-structured interviews, digital observation, and documentation review. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' experiences of using digital media for religious communication, their perceptions of inclusion and exclusion, and their views on how digital religious messages influence community participation. Digital observation was carried out by examining religious communication practices on platforms commonly used by the community, such as WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, YouTube sermon links, and online community announcements. This observation focused on patterns of message circulation, types of religious content, forms of participation, expressions of solidarity, and the presence of authority or exclusion in digital interaction. Documentation review was conducted by examining relevant demographic data, local religious activity information, coastal community context, and institutional reports related to Bengkulu's social and digital conditions. The use of multiple data sources was intended to strengthen triangulation and provide a more complete understanding of the phenomenon [11], [12].

The research procedure was conducted chronologically in seven stages. First, the research problem was identified by linking digital religious communication with the issue of social inclusion in coastal Muslim communities. Second, the research site and participant criteria were determined based on their relevance to coastal Muslim life and digital religious participation. Third, data were collected through interviews, digital observation, and documentation review. Fourth, all data were organized by transcribing interview results, arranging observation notes, and classifying documents according to the research focus. Fifth, the data were coded thematically based on the dimensions of access, participation, recognition, solidarity, authority, and exclusion. Sixth, the coded data were compared across sources to identify recurring patterns and differences. Seventh, the findings were validated and interpreted using the theoretical perspectives of digital religion, social inclusion, and Muslim community studies. The chronological procedure is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Chronological procedure of the research

No	Research Stage	Description	Output
1	Problem identification	Identifying the relationship between digital religious communication and social inclusion in coastal Muslim communities	Research focus
2	Site and participant selection	Selecting coastal Muslim communities and participants involved in religious and digital communication	Research setting and participants
3	Data acquisition	Conducting interviews, digital observation, and documentation review	Primary and supporting data
4	Data organization	Transcribing interviews, arranging observation notes, and classifying documents	Organized data corpus
5	Thematic coding	Coding data into access, participation, recognition, solidarity, authority, and exclusion	Thematic categories
6	Pattern comparison	Comparing findings across participants, platforms, and documents	Analytical patterns
7	Validation and interpretation	Applying triangulation, member checking, and theoretical interpretation	Credible findings

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis because this technique enables researchers to identify, organize, and interpret patterns of meaning across qualitative data [13]. The coding process combined deductive and inductive strategies. Deductive coding was guided by the conceptual dimensions of social inclusion, namely access, participation, recognition, and solidarity. Inductive coding was used to identify themes that emerged from the data, including digital religious authority, moral surveillance, gendered participation, intergenerational differences, trust in religious messages, and unequal digital literacy. This combination allowed the study to maintain theoretical direction while remaining open to empirical complexity in the field.

The credibility of the findings was tested through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing interview results, digital observation notes, and supporting documents. Source triangulation was applied by comparing the perspectives of religious leaders, mosque administrators, women, youth, fishers' families, and other coastal residents. Member checking was conducted by confirming selected interpretations with participants to ensure that their views were not misrepresented [14]. Peer debriefing was used to discuss emerging interpretations with academic colleagues familiar with qualitative research, Muslim community studies, and digital communication. These validation techniques were used to ensure that the findings were not based on a single source or subjective assumption, but on consistent patterns found across different forms of evidence [15] [16].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that digital religious communication among coastal Muslim communities in Bengkulu functions not only as a medium for transmitting Islamic messages but also as a social arena where inclusion, authority, solidarity, and exclusion are negotiated. Religious messages circulated through WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, online sermons, and community-based digital networks were closely related to everyday social needs, including religious learning, moral guidance, collective prayer, charity mobilization, family support, and information about community activities. These digital practices did not replace mosque-based and face-to-face religious communication, but extended it into more flexible and continuous forms of interaction. The results indicate that digital religious communication strengthens social inclusion when it enables wider access to religious knowledge, supports participation across social groups, and mobilizes solidarity among coastal residents. However, the same process may also reproduce exclusion when digital access, literacy, gender norms, and religious authority remain unevenly distributed [17], [18].

The results are discussed through four main themes: access to religious and community information, participation in digital religious interaction, recognition of community voices, and solidarity mobilization. These themes reflect the analytical dimensions used in the study and show how social inclusion is negotiated in everyday digital religious practices. Table 2 summarizes the main empirical patterns found in the study.

Table 2. Main findings on digital religious communication and social inclusion

No	Analytical Dimension	Empirical Pattern	Form of Inclusion	Potential Exclusion
1	Access	Religious messages, sermons, announcements, and charity information circulate through digital platforms	Wider access to religious and community information	Exclusion of residents with limited internet access or digital literacy
2	Participation	Community members respond, forward messages, join discussions, and support religious activities	Increased participation beyond physical gatherings	Passive participation among elderly residents, women, or low-income groups
3	Recognition	Digital spaces allow youth, women, and ordinary residents to share religious and social concerns	Broader visibility of community voices	Dominance of established religious or male authority
4	Solidarity	Digital religious communication supports mutual aid, donations, prayer networks, and social care	Strengthening of community-based support	Selective solidarity based on group closeness or digital visibility
5	Authority	Religious leaders remain influential in validating religious messages	Maintenance of trusted religious guidance	Limited space for alternative interpretations
6	Negotiation	Inclusion is shaped through interaction between digital platforms and local norms	Adaptive religious communication	Digital gaps and social hierarchy remain persistent

3.1. Access to Religious and Community Information

The first major finding shows that digital religious communication expands access to religious and community information among coastal Muslim communities in Bengkulu. Religious messages that were previously delivered mainly through sermons, mosque announcements, Qur'anic study groups, and informal face-to-face gatherings are now circulated through WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, YouTube links, and other digital platforms. These messages include daily religious advice, prayer schedules, information about Islamic study sessions, announcements of communal worship, charity requests, funeral notices, and moral reminders related to family and community life. This pattern indicates that digital platforms have become part of the communicative infrastructure of coastal Muslim society. They help community members remain connected to religious and social information even when livelihood activities, geographical distance, or household responsibilities prevent them from attending physical gatherings.

For coastal residents, particularly fishers and their families, this expanded access is socially significant. Maritime livelihoods often involve irregular working hours, seasonal uncertainty, and physical absence from community spaces. Digital communication allows religious messages and community information to reach residents who may not be present in the mosque or local gathering at the time of announcement. In this sense, digital religious communication reduces the dependence on physical presence as the only basis of participation. It creates a more flexible mode of religious and social connection, especially for residents whose daily routines are shaped by work at sea, domestic labor, or mobility between coastal settlements. This finding supports the view that digital religion should not be understood merely as online religious expression, but as a mediated extension of lived religious practice [19].

Wider access does not mean equal access. The findings indicate that digital religious communication remains shaped by unequal ownership of devices, internet stability, digital skills, and confidence in using online platforms. Younger residents tend to access, forward, and respond to digital religious messages more actively, while some elderly residents depend on children, relatives, or neighbors to receive digital information. Women may access religious messages through family or community groups, but their ability to participate actively can still be shaped by domestic responsibilities and local gender expectations. Low-income residents may also experience limitations due to data costs, unstable connectivity, or limited familiarity with digital applications. Therefore, digital religious communication expands the possibility of inclusion, but it does not automatically eliminate structural barriers.

The negotiation of inclusion becomes visible in the way community members adapt digital religious information to local needs. Messages are often forwarded from religious leaders or mosque administrators to smaller family, neighborhood, or occupational groups. This layered circulation allows information to move from formal religious authority to more intimate social networks. At the same time, it creates dependence on certain actors who control message distribution. Those who manage groups, validate religious content, or decide which information is important may influence whose needs become visible and whose concerns remain marginal. Thus, access to information is not only a technological issue, but also a social and religious process shaped by trust, authority, and community hierarchy [20].

3.2. Participation in Digital Religious Interaction

The second finding concerns participation in digital religious interaction. Digital religious communication enables community members to participate in religious and social life through practices such as reading messages, responding to announcements, sharing sermon links, joining online discussions, forwarding charity information, and expressing support through digital comments or symbols. These forms of participation may appear simple, but they are meaningful in coastal communities where social belonging is often expressed through responsiveness to collective needs. Participation is no longer limited to attending religious gatherings physically; it also includes being present in digital interaction, acknowledging community concerns, and contributing to religiously framed communication.

The findings show that digital participation is particularly important for youth and mobile community members. Young people often act as intermediaries who search for religious content, edit community announcements, manage digital groups, and help older residents access online religious information. This role gives youth greater visibility in community religious communication, even though formal religious authority is still usually held by older male religious leaders. Digital participation also allows residents outside the immediate neighborhood to remain involved in community life, including those who temporarily migrate for work, education, or family reasons. Through digital platforms, they can still receive religious messages, contribute to donations, and follow community events. This shows that digital religious communication extends the spatial boundaries of participation within coastal Muslim communities.

At the same time, participation remains uneven. Some community members are active contributors, while others remain silent observers. This difference is not simply a matter of personal interest, but is shaped by social position, religious confidence, gender norms, educational background, and perceived authority. Residents who are recognized as knowledgeable, older, male, or religiously legitimate tend to have a stronger influence in digital discussions. Women and younger participants may be active in forwarding messages or organizing support, but they may be more cautious in expressing religious interpretation publicly. This condition shows that digital platforms can broaden participation while still carrying offline hierarchies into online spaces. Digital religious communication, therefore, becomes a hybrid field where new participatory opportunities interact with older structures of authority.

This finding is important for understanding social inclusion as a negotiated process. Inclusion is not achieved only when people have access to digital platforms; it also depends on whether they can participate meaningfully, whether their contributions are acknowledged, and whether their voices influence community decisions. In coastal Muslim communities, digital participation often strengthens social connections, but it may not fully democratize religious communication. Existing authority structures continue to shape who speaks, who is listened to, and whose interpretation becomes dominant. Therefore, the inclusive value of digital religious communication depends on the extent to which digital spaces allow diverse members to move from passive reception to active participation [21].

3.3. Recognition of Community Voices and Religious Authority

The third finding shows that digital religious communication creates new spaces for recognition, but this recognition remains mediated by religious authority and local social hierarchy. In the observed communication patterns, religious leaders, mosque administrators, and respected community figures continue to play an important role in validating religious messages. Their messages are often treated as more legitimate and are more likely to be forwarded across community groups. This indicates that digital platforms do not remove religious authority; instead, they extend and reconfigure it. Religious authority becomes visible not only through physical presence in mosques or study circles but also through the ability to circulate messages, respond to religious questions, and provide moral guidance in digital spaces.

Recognition is also experienced by ordinary community members when they use digital platforms to share concerns, request prayers, announce social needs, or mobilize support. For example, digital religious communication can make illness, bereavement, financial hardship, religious events, or collective needs more visible to the wider community. This visibility can produce recognition because the problems of individuals or families become part of

collective moral concern. In this sense, digital religious communication helps transform private difficulties into shared community responsibilities. It allows religious values such as care, charity, patience, and mutual assistance to be translated into practical social responses.

However, recognition is not equally distributed. The findings indicate that some voices are more easily recognized than others. Residents who are already socially connected to religious leaders or active community networks tend to receive stronger attention in digital spaces. Meanwhile, socially quiet, poor, elderly, or digitally disconnected residents may remain less visible. This creates what can be understood as selective recognition, where inclusion depends on one's position within both offline and online networks. Digital communication may make social needs more visible, but it can also privilege those who are already connected, articulate, or digitally active. This pattern shows that recognition in digital religious communication is shaped by relational proximity, moral legitimacy, and digital visibility.

Religious authority also influences the boundaries of acceptable speech. Digital religious groups often encourage moral advice, prayer, charity, and community announcements, but may be less open to disagreement, theological debate, or critical discussion of local power relations. This does not mean that digital religious communication is repressive in a simple sense. Rather, it shows that inclusion is negotiated within norms of respect, politeness, religious hierarchy, and communal harmony. Community members may participate actively, but they often adjust their speech to avoid conflict or being seen as disrespectful toward religious authority. Therefore, digital religious communication produces recognition through shared moral language, but it may also limit forms of expression that challenge dominant norms [22].

3.4. Solidarity, Mutual Aid, and Community-Based Inclusion

The fourth finding indicates that digital religious communication plays an important role in mobilizing solidarity and mutual aid. In coastal Muslim communities, religious messages are frequently connected to practical forms of care, including donations for sick residents, support for bereaved families, assistance for religious events, information on collective prayer, and appeals for community participation. Digital platforms accelerate the circulation of these messages and allow community members to respond more quickly. This is particularly important in coastal settings where livelihood uncertainty and economic vulnerability require strong social support networks. Religious communication provides the moral language through which assistance is framed as worship, obligation, compassion, and collective responsibility.

The findings suggest that solidarity mobilized through digital religious communication operates through three related mechanisms. First, digital platforms increase the speed of information circulation, allowing urgent community needs to be shared rapidly. Second, religious framing gives moral legitimacy to acts of support, making donations, prayers, and assistance part of Islamic social responsibility. Third, digital networks make participation visible, encouraging others to contribute and reinforcing collective norms of care. These mechanisms show that digital religious communication is not limited to symbolic interaction, but is connected to material and social forms of inclusion. It can help marginalized or vulnerable residents gain access to support that might otherwise be delayed or limited.

Table 3. Mechanisms of solidarity through digital religious communication

No	Mechanism	Digital Practice	Social Effect
1	Rapid circulation	Sharing announcements, charity requests, and prayer information	Faster community response
2	Religious framing	Connecting assistance with Islamic values and moral duty	Stronger motivation for mutual aid
3	Network visibility	Public acknowledgment of participation and support	Reinforcement of collective responsibility
4	Emotional connection	Sharing prayers, condolences, and encouragement	Strengthening social belonging
5	Resource mobilization	Coordinating donations, visits, and communal activities	Practical support for vulnerable residents

Solidarity through digital religious communication can also be selective. Community members who are more visible in digital networks or closer to influential actors may receive faster and broader support. Those outside active digital groups may be less likely to benefit from digitally mobilized solidarity. This condition shows that digital solidarity depends on network inclusion. If someone is not connected to the group, lacks digital access, or is socially distant from key communicators, their needs may remain invisible. Therefore, digital religious communication can strengthen mutual aid, but it can also create unequal patterns of care when visibility and connection become conditions for recognition.

This finding contributes to a broader discussion of social inclusion by showing that inclusion is not only about access to information but also about access to care, recognition, and collective resources. In the context of coastal Muslim communities, digital religious communication becomes inclusive when it transforms religious messages into social action. It enables the community to respond to vulnerability, maintain emotional bonds, and

organize practical support. However, the inclusiveness of this process depends on whether digital networks are broad enough to reach less visible residents. This means that digital religious communication should be understood as both an opportunity and a challenge for community-based inclusion [23].

3.5. Negotiating Inclusion and Exclusion in Coastal Muslim Digital Life

The overall findings show that social inclusion within coastal Muslim communities is negotiated through the interaction between digital platforms, religious authority, local norms, and social inequality. Digital religious communication expands access, creates new participatory spaces, supports recognition, and strengthens solidarity. These inclusive outcomes are not automatic. They depend on who controls communication, who has access to digital tools, whose voice is considered legitimate, and how local religious norms shape the boundaries of participation. This means that digital religious communication operates as a relational process rather than a neutral technological channel.

The negotiation of inclusion can be explained through the relationship between four main elements: digital access, religious legitimacy, community participation, and social recognition. Digital access enables residents to receive and share religious messages. Religious legitimacy determines whether messages are trusted and accepted. Community participation shows how residents respond to religious communication through discussion, support, or collective action. Social recognition reflects whether different voices and needs are acknowledged within the community.

In this study, the equation is not used as a statistical model, but as a conceptual representation of the relationship between the main analytical dimensions. It shows that social inclusion is not produced by a single factor. Instead, it emerges from the interaction between access, participation, recognition, and solidarity. If access exists without recognition, inclusion remains limited. If participation exists without equal voice, digital interaction may reproduce hierarchy. If solidarity is mobilized only for visible groups, care becomes selective. Therefore, the quality of social inclusion depends on whether these dimensions operate together in an equitable and relational manner.

This interpretation demonstrates the critical value of studying digital religious communication in peripheral Muslim communities. In Bengkulu's coastal context, digital religious communication is shaped by Islamic identity, maritime livelihoods, local authority, and uneven digital capacity. It provides opportunities for broader religious engagement, but also reflects the social inequalities of the community. The findings, therefore, challenge the assumption that digital media automatically democratizes religious communication. Instead, digital religion in coastal Muslim societies must be understood as a negotiated field where inclusion and exclusion are continuously produced through everyday communication practices [24], [25].

3.6. Discussion: Digital Religious Communication as Relational Infrastructure

The findings indicate that digital religious communication functions as a form of relational infrastructure within coastal Muslim communities in Bengkulu. It connects individuals, families, religious leaders, mosque networks, and community groups through the circulation of religious messages and social information. This relational infrastructure is not purely technological because it depends on trust, religious legitimacy, shared norms, and local social relations. Digital platforms become socially meaningful when community members use them to sustain religious belonging, coordinate collective activities, and respond to vulnerability. Therefore, the importance of digital religious communication lies not only in the technology itself, but in the relationships it enables and reorganizes.

As relational infrastructure, digital religious communication strengthens inclusion by connecting religious discourse with everyday social needs. Sermons, moral reminders, and religious advice are not only consumed as spiritual content but also linked to practical issues such as illness, poverty, death, family conflict, livelihood uncertainty, and community obligations. This connection allows religious communication to become a medium through which social care is organized. In coastal Muslim communities, where formal welfare access may be limited and livelihoods remain vulnerable, this function is particularly important. Religious digital networks help sustain community-based support and provide moral justification for mutual assistance.

Relational infrastructure can also reproduce unequal relations. Digital groups may strengthen bonding among already connected members while leaving less connected residents outside the main flow of information. Religious authority may provide trust and stability, but it may also limit alternative voices. Youth may gain new roles as digital intermediaries, but formal decision-making may remain concentrated among older male figures. Women may benefit from digital access to religious information, but their participation may still be shaped by gendered expectations. These patterns show that inclusion is always negotiated within the tension between new digital possibilities and existing social structures.

The discussion, therefore, confirms that digital religious communication in coastal Muslim communities has a dual character. It is inclusive because it expands access, participation, recognition, and solidarity. It is also ambivalent because these processes are shaped by unequal resources, authority, and visibility. This dual character is central to critical studies on Muslim societies because it avoids both technological optimism and cultural simplification. Digital religious communication should not be seen merely as a modernization of Islamic communication, nor as a threat to traditional religious life. Instead, it should be understood as a negotiated social process through which Muslim communities adapt, maintain, and contest inclusion in changing digital conditions.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that digital religious communication plays a significant role in shaping social inclusion within coastal Muslim communities in Bengkulu. Rather than functioning solely as a channel for disseminating Islamic messages, digital religious communication operates as a dynamic social process through which access to religious information, community participation, social recognition, and mutual support are continuously negotiated. The findings reveal that digital platforms broaden opportunities for religious engagement and collective action while simultaneously reproducing inequalities associated with digital literacy, internet access, gender norms, and religious authority. These findings suggest that digital transformation does not automatically create more inclusive religious communities; instead, inclusion emerges through ongoing interactions between technological opportunities and existing social structures.

The study contributes to the literature on digital religion by extending current discussions beyond urban and institutional settings to the context of peripheral coastal Muslim communities. It demonstrates that social inclusion is shaped not only by digital connectivity but also by locally embedded religious authority, community solidarity, and everyday communication practices. These insights provide practical implications for religious leaders, community organizations, and local governments seeking to strengthen inclusive digital religious engagement through improved digital literacy, broader access to digital infrastructure, and greater participation of women, youth, and other socially marginalized groups.

This study is limited to a qualitative case study conducted in coastal Muslim communities in Bengkulu, and therefore, its findings should not be generalized to all Muslim communities in Indonesia. Future research may employ comparative or mixed-method approaches across different coastal and non-coastal contexts to examine how varying socio-cultural and technological conditions influence the relationship between digital religious communication and social inclusion.

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