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Transitional Religiosity in Accessing Sources of Islamic Law: Transforming Authority and Practices among Generation-Z Muslims in Austria

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Abstract: The global phenomenon of Islamic legal authority transitioning from traditional institutional settings to digital platforms and online media arose in both minority and majority Muslim countries. This study examines how digital culture shapes the religious transition of Generation-Z Muslims in Austria, who hold two identities at once: a religious Muslim identity and a progressive European identity, focusing on their access to Islamic legal sources and the shifting authority from scholarly to media sources. This study aims to identify how digital platforms restructured Islamic legal authority through processes of disintermediation and fragmentation, and how they operate outside conventional scholarly hierarchies. Based on qualitative in-depth interviews with nine Austrian Muslim Gen-Z, who were born in the new millennium and are the first generation to be digital natives, the study demonstrates that transitional religiosity among them which marked with the shift from scholarly to media authority, is due to Islamic law sources more widely spread and scattered across digital media, making them instantly and easily accessible then replaces traditional credentialing. It's driven by the challenges of practicing and enforcing Islam in a Muslim-minority country that faces significant challenges, including implementing Islamic teachings. This study argues that the shift in access to authority over Islamic legal sources, apparently not indicating a reduction in the development of contemporary Islamic law, rather signals Austrian Muslim society living its religiosity with creativity, activism, and openness. In fact, this reality symbolizes a new typology of access to Islamic law in minority communities as a concept of algorithmic religious authority.
Keywords: Transitional Religiosity; Islamic Law; Transforming Authority; Digital Platforms; Gen-Z

Introduction

Over the past two decades, extensive research has examined the impact of digital culture and learning on religious beliefs and practices (Fauzi et al., 2026; Hautala-Kankaanpää, 2022; Kirillova, 2023; Mualimin et al., 2025). Governments, scholars, and religious organizations have sought to understand how intensive engagement with web-based platforms and information sources might shape people's thinking, especially younger generations, on matters of faith, including Islamic law practices (Campbell, 2012, 2024; Krueger, 2004; McClure, 2016; Nadeem et al., 2019; Shorer-Zeltser & Ben-Israel, 2007; Sm et al., 2025). Various sites and social media platforms connected to the internet have become one of the primary sources of reference for the post-millennial generation in shaping all aspects of their lives, including their religious identity (Zhandossova et al., 2025).

The youth generation regarded online information as more authoritative than offline sources, because they rely heavily on visual cues and presentational styles when assessing the validity of different types of religious teachings and Islamic law resources (Andok, 2024; Maemonah et al., 2022). In a rapidly changing world, one gets the sense that religion offers stability and comfort (Dawson & Cowan, 2013). Muslim-Z generation in Austria develops religious orientations from religious socialization from family,

mosque, and public schools (Ahmad, 2024). More than 75% of their information comes from the internet as everyday life becomes digitalized (Bunt, 2003, 2018). Many of the Islamic legal sources used by Muslim Gen-Z in Austria are obtained online, so they are more influenced by the information available there. Furthermore, religious information and sources of Islamic law obtained from their parents and ulama are then validated by sources from the internet and social media, including celebrity preachers (Tuna, 2020). This means that the authority of Islamic legal sources has shifted significantly from scholarly authority to media authority (Campbell, 2024; Roy, 2017; Whyte, 2024). These conditions highlight the urgency of rethinking how digital culture affects religiosity and Islamic law practices, and how Islamic law is practiced through interpretations of internet sources.

Although earlier scholarship has richly explored and confirmed the shift of Islamic legal authority to the digital arena (Bunt, 2018), demonstrating a shift from traditional ulama to celebrity preachers and the emergence of online fatwas (Suaedy et al., 2023), and challenges of digital literacy (Ali & Aljahsh, 2025; Campbell, 2012), where social media algorithms play a significant role in shaping religious understanding and often triggering polarization (Ahmed et al., 2025; Bunt, 2003; Faizin et al., 2025; Jago, 2022; Rachman et al., 2025), these works do not examines the pattern of transitional religiousity in assesing the source of Islamic law and and has not explored the epistemology of the transformation of authority which involves elements of obedience or acceptance of coercion. According to Krueger (2004), authority involves more than the ability to coerce; it also consists of an element of obedience or acceptance of coercion. Authority is a situation in which people give up their full autonomy and accept direction from others. Throughout its history, authority has always been fluid, contested, and contextual (Krueger, 2004). The transformation of authority in patterns of access to Islamic legal sources has given rise to a relational space, in which authority has not disappeared but has changed form (Krueger, 2004; Warman et al., 2023). Furthermore, Islamic scholars continue to play a role but must negotiate with the digital public (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003). This arises because the extension of the *ijtihad* (personal examination) space has shifted to the internet and media realm (Hakim et al., 2025). Consequently, in the context of Gen-Z Muslims in Austria, they view the internet as a new medium for da'wah and fatwas, as well as a means of expanding discussions on Islamic jurisprudence across schools of thought and countries.

In recent years, as Nadeem & Buzdar (2019) argue, religious knowledge is no longer based on three social institutions for students: family, school, and religious institutions. According to Nadeem & Buzdar (2019) , parents in the family, teachers at school, or religious leaders in religious institutions are role models in the offline world (Nadeem et al., 2019). Meanwhile, students are also members of online communities. Currently, the identities in the two types of environments are intertwined in the personality of young people of Generation Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2018). This reality makes the exploration of religious knowledge in the framework of constructing students' religious identity unique and distinctive, given the differences between offline and online communities or networks (Tuna, 2020). Algorithms enable rapid access to contemporary Islamic legal sources. However, are digital media used to obtain contemporary Islamic legal sources merely intermediaries for authoritative sources of Islamic law, or are they becoming new authoritative sources of law?.

The urgency and scholarly significance of this research lie in unpacking the religious transition of Gen-Z Muslims in Austria, focusing on their access to Islamic legal sources, where there is a shift in authority from scholarly to media sources. Furthermore, this research fills the void in the lack of analysis of the epistemology of Islamic legal authority in digital environments. Austria was chosen as the research location because Gen-Z Muslims there strive to hold two identities at once, namely a religious Muslim identity and a developed and progressive European identity. Moreover, Austria's 2015 *Islamgesetz* regulates prioritizing Austrian law over sharia with the aim of fostering an Islam with an Austrian character. In addition to accessing Islamic legal sources in the media, Gen-Z Muslims in Austria also actively use social media to demonstrate the diversity of their religious practices, for example, displaying Muslim clothing as part of a lifestyle, and not as a compulsion that contradicts the values of Human Rights, as values highly respected in European culture. The adherence of Gen-Z Muslims in Austria to religious values is interpreted as religion is not only a ritual, but also a tool to affirm identity, fight injustice, and build dialogue with the broader community. This study provides new theoretical clarity to the ongoing

debate about the shift in access to authority of Islamic legal sources, apparently not indicating a reduction in the development of contemporary Islamic law, but rather as a sign of Austrian Muslim society that lives its religiosity with creativity, activism, and openness, symbolizes a new typology of access to Islamic law in minority communities as a concept of algorithmic religious authority.

Literature Review

This research begins with an academic debate on Islamic legal authority, transitioning from traditional institutional settings to digital platforms and online media. Digital platforms have fundamentally restructured Islamic authority through processes of disintermediation, democratization, and fragmentation. Digital media has expanded access to religious guidance and enabled new forms of community formation, but it has simultaneously created significant challenges related to authenticity verification, quality control, and the erosion of traditional scholarly hierarchies (Wahid & Abdulloh, 2026). In this discourse, several familiar terms are used by several researchers, including "cyber-Islam" and "hashtag Islam" (Bunt, 2018; Khamis, 2021), "digital *da'wah*" (Prayogi et al., 2025; 'Ulyan, 2023); "virtual space" (Pabbajah et al., 2024); and "cyber-religion" (Chair et al., 2024). The literature demonstrates that this shift is not merely a technological adaptation but represents a profound reconfiguration of how Islamic knowledge is produced, validated, and disseminated globally.

The scholarly discourse surrounding the shift of Islamic legal authority from traditional institutional settings, such as mosques, madrasas, and established religious councils, to digital platforms, including websites, social media, mobile applications, and online forums. These digital spaces have become primary sites for the dissemination of religious legal opinions, the contestation of traditional authority structures, and the emergence of new religious influencers who operate outside conventional scholarly hierarchies (Sisler, 2011; Wahid, 2024).

Pabbajah et al. (2024) show that ulama authority in virtual spaces reveals how traditional scholars struggle to maintain their authoritative status when competing with social media influencers who lack formal religious training but possess superior digital communication skills. Furthermore, the younger Muslims increasingly prioritize accessibility, relatability, and engagement over traditional credentials when selecting religious authorities online (Pabbajah et al., 2024). The shift to networked authority is particularly evident in how fatwas are now disseminated. Whereas traditional fatwas were issued by recognized muftis affiliated with official institutions and disseminated through controlled channels, online fatwas circulate through decentralized networks of websites, social media accounts, and messaging apps (Bunt, 2003). Wahid (2024) argues that online fatwas are disseminated through multiple models of digital fatwa dissemination, which can allow anyone, anywhere, to pose as a religious authority.

The digitalization of Islamic authority presents both significant opportunities and serious challenges. Prayogi et al. (2025) examine how Islamic jurisprudence is evolving in response to digital technologies used enable new methodological approaches to *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), including crowdsourced legal reasoning, real-time consultation with multiple scholars, and algorithmic analysis of classical texts. These innovations challenge traditional methodologies while claiming continuity with classical legal principles. This reality is prevalent in urban communities with limited access to Islamic legal sources. Whereas traditional fatwas might take weeks or months to formulate, online platforms create expectations for immediate responses, potentially compromising scholarly deliberation (Astor et al., 2024). Consequently, quick and responsive access to Islamic legal issues is available through internet sources and digital media. Issues such as cryptocurrency, online marriage contracts, digital privacy, and virtual religious practices are readily accessible and susceptible to misinterpretation, necessitating new legal frameworks.

Finally, the literature review scholarship demonstrates that digital Islamic authority cannot be understood through simple online/offline dichotomies but must be analyzed as integrated into contemporary Muslim life. Digital platforms have dramatically expanded access to religious knowledge, enabled personalized guidance, facilitated transnational community formation, and created space for diverse interpretive voices (Manu & Moreno, 2016). On the other hand, these same platforms create challenges related to authenticity verification, quality control, authority fragmentation, and the potential

for misinformation (Andok, 2024; Febrian, 2024). Ultimately, the shift of Islamic legal authority to digital platforms represents not merely a technological change but a profound transformation in the epistemological, social, and institutional foundations of Islamic religious life.

This study addresses the gap by examining the religious transition of Gen-Z Muslims in Austria, focusing on their access to Islamic legal sources, while digital Islamic authority operates differently in contexts where Muslims are minorities, and how digital platforms enable Gen-Z Muslims in Austria to access religious guidance from scholars in Muslim-majority countries, creating transnational authority networks. These opportunities and challenges are intrinsically linked and emerge from the same structural features of digital platforms.

Method

This study employs a qualitative ethnographic approach to examine how Gen-Z Muslims in Austria access and evaluate Islamic legal sources in digital environments. Data collection techniques included observation, in-depth interviews, casual chats, hangouts during organizational religious meetings, and religious study in Vienna, Austria. The researchers collected data through interviews with nine Austrian Muslims, all born after 1998, including men and women, who were considered members of Generation Z. These nine Gen-Z Muslims are informants representing Muslim communities in Die Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich (IGGiÖ) and were selected based on their religious orientations, drawn from family, mosque, and public schools. These interviews were not limited to the students, but also to the three social institutions, namely family, school, and religious institutions, which play an important role in the formation of religious identity and its relationship with digital culture. Researchers are directly involved in activities carried out by Gen-Z Muslim communities in Die Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich (IGGiÖ), Vienna, Austria, to depict and examine how their religious practices serve as a confirmation of transitional identity and religiosity in assessing Islamic legal sources. The data in this study are presented descriptively to explain the phenomena, situations, and conditions in the social movements of Gen-Z Muslim communities in Austria. Furthermore, the researcher conducted a study of literary sources, including books, journal articles, and other media sources. Methodologically, the research combined normative and empirical inquiry, positioning Islamic law not only as a system of formal rules but also as a set of living norms embedded in social, cultural, and religious life (Christiani, 2016). By interpreting the phenomena, this study highlights that digital platforms are not simply fragmenting traditional authority but also enabling new forms of madhhab coherence and revival. This approach enabled the authors to develop a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of *fiqh* in the digital era, requiring contemporary scholars to engage in extensive ijtihad, which was typically an individual scholarly endeavour.

Results and Discussion

Religiousness Identity Hybridization: Transitional Religiosity Landscape of Gen-Z in Austria

Transitional religiosity refers to shifts in religious beliefs, practices, and affiliations within a population over time. In Austria, as in many European countries, religiosity has declined across recent generations (Sejdini, 2022). This trend is often attributed to evolving personal values, with younger generations placing greater emphasis on openness to change and self-direction, which can lead to decreased religious adherence. While specific data on generation Z in Austria is limited, broader European studies provide insight into their religious tendencies. Research indicates that Generation Z exhibits lower levels of religious affiliation and participation than older cohorts (Tuna, 2020). This decline is linked to generational shifts in values, particularly an increased focus on individualism and skepticism toward traditional institutions. However, it's important to note that this trend is not uniform across all contexts. This suggests a complex, varied landscape of religiosity among generation-Z, shaped by cultural, social, and regional factors. In summary, while Austria has experienced a general decline in religiosity among younger generations, the specific patterns and factors shaping this trend among generation-Z remain poorly understood.

The religiosity of Gen-Z Muslims varies (Ahmad, 2024). Some embrace progressive interpretations of Islam, including on the discourse of gender equality in prayer spaces and debates about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender inclusivity, while others maintain their traditional understanding of the religion and practices. This adherence to Islamic traditions in religious thought, understanding, and practice is understandable, given their roots as immigrants from Turkey, Bosnia, Syria, and Afghanistan. However, in general, the religious views of Gen-Z in Europe are quite diverse and unique. They tend to have a more open and liberal outlook on religion. Gen-Z in Europe is also more likely to seek out religious information online and through social media, making them more influenced by the various sources available there (Ahmad, 2025).

The findings demonstrate that digital platforms have fundamentally restructured Islamic authority through processes of disintermediation and fragmentation. Digital spaces operate outside conventional scholarly hierarchies and have become primary sites for the dissemination of religious legal opinions, which is assumed by Gen-Z circles. In general, several characteristics of Gen-Z's religious views in Austria include: *first*, they are more religious but liberal. Gen-Z in Europe tends to have more religious views but is also more liberal and open to differences. *Second*, they seek information online. Gen-Z in Vienna, Austria, is more likely to look up religion online and on social media. One informant explained: 'When I have a question about halal investment, I first search YouTube scholars before asking the imam in my mosque (Ahmad, 2024). *Third*, they are more critical of religious institutions. They tend to be more critical of religious institutions and more likely to seek answers to their own questions. Gen-Z Muslims in Austria are adapting to pop culture and technology (Mahmud, 2024). They access religious content through platforms like YouTube (German sermons) or Quran apps. They also build and foster virtual communities (for example, the Austrian Muslim TikTok group) that serve as discussion spaces for topics such as the meaning of the hijab, the challenges of fasting in the summer, religious practices in public spaces, such as praying at train stations (Fatimah, 2024). Interestingly, they maintain their religious identity to combat Islamophobia. They speak out and oppose discrimination against Islam and Muslims. They create hashtags for campaigns, such as #MeineStimmeGegenHass, highlighting the personal experiences of Gen Z Muslims as victims of discrimination.

The sources of religious knowledge for Gen Z Muslims in Austria are divided into three segments. *First*, the internet and social media. They use platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook to seek religious information and interact with religious communities. *Second*, family and community. Family and religious communities play a significant role in shaping Gen-Z's religious knowledge in Austria. *Third*, schools and religious education. Schools and religious education are also important sources of religious knowledge for Gen-Z in Austria. Interestingly, many of their sources of religious knowledge come from the internet and social media. Consequently, this knowledge is then put into practice in their religious beliefs, including on matters related to Islamic law. Specifically, among Gen-Z Muslims in Austria, there are unique challenges in practicing private religious teachings, particularly in performing the five daily prayers. Religious practice among Gen-Z Muslims in the modern context is tied to their activities in public spaces, both online and in the real world. This digital practice, for example, involves using social media. Gen-Z Muslims in Austria use social media to share religious information, discuss religious topics, and share spiritual experiences (Fatimah, 2024).

The following table provides a concise overview of the sources of religious knowledge for Gen Z Muslims in Austria:

Table 1. The Sources of Religious Knowledge for Gen-Z Muslims in Austria

Source of Religious Knowledge	Main Channels / Actors	Role & Function	Impact on Religious Beliefs & Islamic Law	Forms of Religious Practice	Key Challenges /Characteristics
Internet & Social Media	YouTube, Instagram, Facebook	Accessing religious information; interacting with	Strong influence on understanding and practicing Islamic teachings,	Digital religious practice; sharing content; online	Fragmented authority; selective learning; challenges in applying

		online religious communities	including Islamic law	discussions; expressing spirituality	teachings (e.g., five daily prayers)
Family & Community	Parents, relatives, local Muslim communities	Transmission of religious values and traditions	Shapes foundational beliefs and moral orientation	Everyday religious habits; communal religious activities	Tension between traditional teachings and digital influences
Schools & Religious Education	Schools, formal Islamic religious education	Providing structured and institutional religious knowledge	Reinforces formal understanding of Islam and religious norms	Classroom-based learning; curriculum-guided practice	Limited reach compared to digital sources; formalized instruction

Source: Authors processed data (2025)

Accessing Islamic Legal Sources through Digital Space: The Transformation of Traditional Authority Structures

This study found that younger Gen Z Muslims increasingly prioritize accessibility, relatability, and engagement over traditional credentials when selecting religious authorities online. Furthermore, the religious identity of Gen Z Muslims in Austria is hybrid, favoring access to Islamic legal sources through digital media (Ahmad, 2024). This indicates a shift in religious authority from institutional to networked authority. The process of negotiating religious authority in the Islamic public sphere no longer affects only the internal structure of the Muslim community but also its interactions with the wider public through new media. If information obtained through digital platforms relates to social issues, it does not have a particularly serious impact. However, if the information obtained from digital media concerns the sources of Islamic law issues that require a clear chain of transmission of knowledge, then distortion occurs, and the authority of the ulama is reduced. The emergence of "religious influencers" who lack formal scholarly backgrounds often displaces the role of traditional ulama.

The process of exploring religious identity above illustrates what is currently happening in digital culture (Bunt, 2018; Khamis, 2021). One discourse of religiosity that has been affected is a shift in spiritual authority. Broadly speaking, there are two elements in authority. The first element is domination. Authority is defined as legitimate domination. Authority implies power, namely the ability to compel people to act in a certain way (Krueger, 2004). Dominance is the probability of a particular order, or even all the orders, being obeyed by a particular group of people. The second element is legitimacy. According to Krueger (2004), authority involves more than the ability to coerce; it also involves an element of obedience or acceptance of coercion. Authority is a situation in which people give up their full autonomy and accept direction from others. Throughout its history, authority has always been fluid, contested, and contextual. Regarding religiosity, there are two main reasons for power in religion to turn into religious authority, namely legitimacy through performance and legitimacy through symbolic construction. With the massive increase in the use of online digital media, the discourse around religious authority has resurfaced, especially about its shift in the digital culture era. Kruegel (2004) proposed the term multiple layers of authority, because for him it is not enough to say that the internet has changed or challenged traditional religious authority.

The shift to networked authority is particularly evident in how fatwas are now disseminated (Wahid, 2024). Whereas traditional fatwas were issued by recognized muftis affiliated with official institutions and disseminated through controlled channels, online fatwas circulate through decentralized networks of websites, social media accounts, and messaging apps whereas traditional fatwas might take weeks or months to formulate, online platforms create expectations for immediate responses, potentially compromising scholarly deliberation (Prayogi et al., 2025; Sisler, 2011). This buffet of religious narratives related to Islamic law, accessible quickly and easily, then leads the younger generation to instantly learn and access sources of Islamic legal authority. This reality is reflected in Gen-Z Muslims and is driven by the challenges of practicing and enforcing Islam in a Muslim-minority country that faces significant challenges, including implementing Islamic teachings for Gen-Z in Austria. Several challenges are faced

there and can be identified, including structural discrimination. This occurs in the practice of religious teachings in public spaces, such as the ban on the hijab in public sectors, schools, and government offices, which makes some women feel forced to choose between career and faith. Another challenge relates to social interactions. This often occurs in institutions such as schools or workplaces. They often face questions such as, "do you prefer sharia law or Austrian law?" (Ahmad, 2024). Ultimately, Gen-Z Muslims in Austria turn to online mujtahids in digital media.

Traditional Islamic authority, characterized by clearly defined institutional structures such as the Ulama, which provided mechanisms for quality control, debate, and the resolution of conflicting opinions, and the preservation of scholarly lineages, is no longer an option. Digital platforms have disrupted these institutional structures by enabling alternative pathways to religious influence. The contestation of Ulama authority in virtual spaces demonstrates how traditional scholars shifted in their provision of sources of Islamic law. This shifting authority stems from the growing prioritization of accessibility, relatability, and engagement over traditional credentials when selecting religious authorities online, including the preference of the young generation in Muslim-minority countries, such as Vienna, Austria.

Shifting of Islamic Legal Authority: The Evolution of *Fiqh* and the Emergence of New Authority

The shifting of Islamic legal authority refers to a long-term transformation in how *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) is produced, transmitted, and recognized as authoritative. However, in the digital age, this shift is not a rupture with tradition, but rather an evolution shaped by technological changes. This evolution has accelerated, leading to the emergence of new forms of religious and legal authority beyond classical institutions. The digital age marks a decisive shift in Islamic legal authority as algorithm-driven visibility replaces traditional credentialing (Shuhufi et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the younger generation is more likely to be active users of online religious resources, such as online fatwa platforms, YouTube preachers, and Instagram scholars, as a digital-native generation (Díez Bosch And & Micó, 2023). A digital native is a person who has grown up in the digital age, surrounded by technology such as the internet, social media, smartphones, and computers. The term was coined by Prensky (2001) to describe younger generations who are naturally familiar with digital tools. Digital natives tend to be comfortable with online communication, multitasking across devices, and quickly adopting new technologies (Prensky, 2001). As a result, Islamic legal authority (*fiqh*) divides into three aspects: it becomes decentralized, meaning no single authoritative center; the second popularizes rulings based on reach, charisma, and relatability; and the third is individualized, with believers choosing rulings that fit their lived realities.

This shift is perceived positively or negatively, depending on how Gen-Z evaluates credibility, accessibility, and religious authenticity. As a religious minority, Austrian Muslim Gen-Z uses digital platforms differently. Rather than seeking alternative religious authorities, they use digital culture to navigate identity, representation, and community-building. In 2021, Austria passed a law banning the hijab in primary schools, sparking online backlash from Muslim influencers. This highlights how Austrian Muslim Gen-Z uses digital Islam not just for religious learning but for political resistance (Fatimah, 2024). So, while digital platforms empower Gen-Z Muslims to engage with their faith on their own terms. However, the digital space allows young Muslims in Vienna, Austria, to explore different expressions of religiosity, from conservative movements to more liberal and inclusive interpretations (Ahmad, 2024). Online communities reinforce their religious identity while also engaging in ideological debates. While it provides access to religious knowledge and global Muslim networks, it also presents challenges related to ideological conflicts, authenticity, and social integration, which can lead to misinterpretations of Islamic legal discourse that put it in the wrong way in Islamic legal practices.

Digital media has given birth to a new authority that negotiates between scholars, communities, and individuals (Astor et al., 2024). For example, in a minority context, issues such as prayer at work, halal consumption, or gender interaction are often resolved through pragmatic reasoning, drawing selectively from online sources rather than formal fatwas (Fatimah, 2024). Furthermore, the evolution of *fiqh* authority reflects Islam's historical adaptability. While classical scholars monopolized legal interpretation through rigorous methodology, contemporary authority is networked, mediated, and negotiated. The emergence of new authorities including digital, collective, and experiential, does not abolish traditional *fiqh* but

reconfigures its role in modern Muslim life. This study underscores that the shift in Islamic legal authority should be comprehensively understood in the context of contemporary Islamic law, especially among younger generations navigating faith in pluralistic, digital, and public-oriented societies.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that digital platforms have fundamentally restructured the religious transition of Gen-Z Muslims in Austria in accessing the source of Islamic legal discourse. This indicates a shift in religious authority from institutional to networked authority. The process of negotiating religious authority in the Islamic public sphere no longer affects only the internal structure of the Muslim community but also its interactions with the wider public through new media. The finding reveals that traditional Islamic authority, characterized by clearly defined institutional structures such as the Ulama, is an alternative option, flexible, confirmatory, and based on personal ethics rather than formal rules of authority.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in identifying how the shift in access to authority of Islamic legal sources, apparently not indicating a reduction in the development of contemporary Islamic law, but rather as a sign of Austrian Muslim society that lives its religiosity with creativity, activism, and openness, symbolizes a new typology of access to Islamic law in minority communities as a concept of algorithmic religious authority. This reality is reflected in Gen-Z Muslims and is driven by the challenges of practicing and enforcing Islam in a Muslim-minority country that faces significant challenges. Despite the study's limited geographical scope and single-country case study, it provides insight into the contestation of Ulama authority in virtual spaces, demonstrating how traditional scholars shifted the sources they relied on for Islamic law. This shifting authority stems from the growing prioritization of accessibility, relatability, and engagement over traditional credentials when selecting religious authorities online, including the preference of the young generation in Muslim-minority countries, such as Vienna, Austria. Ultimately, this study encourages further research and invites comparative inquiries into how the dynamics of transitional religiosity among young generations in Muslim and minority countries, in terms of access to Islamic legal sources, and how Islamic law is practiced through interpretations of internet sources.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest. The institutional and individual support received, as stated in the acknowledgments section, played no role in the study design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or report writing, nor in the decision to publish the results.

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Interview List

Interview with Ahmad, an Austrian Muslim Gen-Z, Vienna, Austria, November 2024
Interview with Mahmud, an Austrian Muslim Gen-Z, Vienna, Austria, November 2024
Interview with Fatimah, an Austrian Muslim Gen-Z, Vienna, Austria, November 2024
Interview with Syakur, an Austrian Muslim Gen-Z, Vienna, Austria, November 2024
Interview with Siti, an Austrian Muslim Gen-Z, Vienna, Austria, November 2024
Interview with Zaidan, an Austrian Muslim Gen-Z, Vienna, Austria, November 2024
Interview with Sayyidah, an Islamic School Teacher, Vienna, Austria, November 2024