

Reimagining Interfaith Futures: Youth, Multimodality, and the Semiotics of Hope in a Polarized World

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Abstract

In an era of escalating global polarization, youth from Christian, Muslim, and other faith traditions are harnessing multimodal digital resources to construct hopeful interfaith futures. This qualitative metasynthesis synthesizes 14 peer-reviewed studies published between 2015 and 2023 that explore how young people aged 15–30 deploy visual, textual, sonic, gestural, and performative modes across social media platforms to reimagine Christian–Muslim and broader interfaith relations. Grounded in social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) and transnationalism theory (Appadurai, 1996; Levitt & Schiller, 2004), the study conceptualizes “semiotics of hope” as the deliberate redesign of religious symbols, rituals, and digital aesthetics into multimodal ensembles that signal possibility, relationality, and collective becoming beyond conflict paradigms. Following a six-phase reciprocal translation process (Noblit & Hare, 1988; Lachal et al., 2017), the metasynthesis integrates findings from studies conducted in Europe, North America, Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa using interviews, digital ethnography, and multimodal content analysis. Three core themes emerge: (1) multimodal redesign of sacred symbols into hybrid icons of hope; (2) performative and narrative strategies that enact interfaith futures through collaborative rituals, storytelling, and counter-narratives; and (3) navigation of algorithmic polarization and structural constraints while sustaining hopeful semiotic agency. Youth consistently prioritize relational hope and everyday coexistence over doctrinal agreement. This metasynthesis positions youth as active semiotic agents who reimagine interfaith futures through multimodality. It contributes to semiotics, digital religion, peacebuilding, and futures studies by theorizing hope as a multimodal practice. Implications for youth-centered digital literacy, interfaith education, and platform governance are discussed. Limitations include urban sample bias and the evolving digital landscape. Future research should adopt longitudinal and participatory designs.

Keywords: Semiotics of Hope, Youth Interfaith Futures, Multimodality, Digital Peacebuilding, Metasynthesis

Introduction

The world of the early 2020s felt increasingly fractured. Religious tensions, political echo chambers, and algorithmic systems designed to reward outrage created an atmosphere in which differences too often hardened into hostility. News cycles repeatedly highlighted clashes between communities, while social media platforms, intended as spaces for connection, frequently deepened divides rather than healing them (Hirblinger, 2023; Golan et al., 2023). In many parts of the world, Christian–Muslim relations appeared trapped in cycles of suspicion, securitization, and mutual othering, intensified by global events ranging from pandemics to geopolitical conflicts. Yet in the midst of this unease, something quieter, more determined, and ultimately more hopeful was taking shape among young people. Far from accepting fragmentation as inevitable, youth from Christian, Muslim, and other faith backgrounds began using the very digital tools that fueled division to imagine and enact different possibilities. They crafted images, short videos, live sessions, sound collages, collaborative stories, and performative acts that pointed toward futures built on understanding rather than suspicion. This metasynthesis gathers and interprets those efforts, framing them as a distinctive *semiotics of hope*.

The concept of semiotics of hope refers to the intentional creation of multimodal signs that orient individuals and communities toward coexistence, possibility, and shared becoming. It draws on established ideas about how meaning is made through combined modes of communication (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Kress, 2010) and how identities stretch across borders in our increasingly connected world (Appadurai, 1996; Levitt & Schiller, 2004). Young people do not simply react to polarization — they actively redesign familiar religious elements into new combinations that carry messages of shared humanity and potential reconciliation. A cross merged with a crescent in a warm-toned digital artwork, a video duet blending Islamic prayer calls with Christian choral music, or a live session where participants from different faiths share personal hopes and dreams — these are not random posts but purposeful acts of world-making (Trysnes, 2022; Shamim, 2023).

The need for such work became especially clear after 2020. Global events exposed deep fault lines in societies, while digital platforms often magnified anger and simplified complex identities into opposing camps (Hirblinger, 2023; Campbell, 2020). Yet the same platforms simultaneously gave youth accessible spaces to respond differently. In various regions, young Christians and Muslims experimented with visual styles that blended their traditions with local cultural elements. They created short films showing joint community service projects, composed music that wove together sacred sounds from different faiths, and organized online events that emphasized common values such as compassion, justice, and dignity (Golan et al., 2023; Ossai, 2023). These activities went beyond polite dialogue. They represented active, creative efforts to build emotional and imaginative foundations for different kinds of relationships — relationships rooted in hope rather than fear.

What makes these practices particularly interesting is their distinctly multimodal nature. Young people rarely rely on words alone. They combine visuals that evoke warmth and connection, sounds that stir shared emotions, movements captured in video that

demonstrate unity, and stories that trace deliberate paths from conflict toward hope (van Leeuwen, 2005; Kress, 2010). This rich layering allows them to communicate complex feelings and aspirations that plain text cannot convey. It also helps them reach audiences who might dismiss traditional arguments but respond to something visually compelling or emotionally resonant (Jamal, 2022; Khalid, 2021).

The studies included in this metasynthesis, spanning several continents, reveal both common patterns and important local variations. European youth often focused on challenging stereotypes through everyday hybrid imagery that asserted belonging in diverse societies (Trysnes, 2022; Byng, 2017). Southeast Asian participants drew on rich cultural traditions to create aesthetically appealing content that felt deeply rooted in their own societies while opening space for interfaith connection (Shamim, 2023; Khalid, 2021). African youth emphasized practical solidarity in contexts where religious differences had sometimes contributed to violence, using digital tools to document joint peace initiatives and shared celebrations (Ossai, 2023; Hirblinger, 2023). In North America, diaspora communities used digital spaces to connect across distances and reframe inherited narratives of division (Jamal, 2022). Despite these contextual differences, a consistent thread runs through the work: the belief that futures are not predetermined, and that small, repeated acts of symbolic creativity can gradually shift what seems possible.

This metasynthesis brings these scattered efforts together to reveal larger patterns. It asks how youth design hopeful signs in polarized environments, how these signs function in everyday digital practice, and what obstacles they encounter along the way. By looking across diverse studies, it moves beyond individual cases to develop broader insights about the role of multimodality in building interfaith hope. The work matters not only for understanding current digital cultures but also for thinking more creatively about what kinds of futures we might collectively shape in an increasingly interconnected yet divided world (Appadurai, 1996; Levitt, 2007).

Earlier research laid important groundwork for this inquiry. Social semiotics has long shown how people actively reshape signs to meet social needs (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Hodge & Kress, 1988). Digital religion studies have documented how young people use online spaces for identity exploration and community formation (Campbell, 2013, 2020). Peacebuilding scholars have increasingly recognized the potential of digital tools for grassroots dialogue (Hirblinger, 2023; Ragandang, 2020). However, few studies before 2024 brought these perspectives together to examine how youth specifically use multimodality to generate hope across faith lines. This metasynthesis fills that gap.

The following sections lay out the specific questions guiding the synthesis, review relevant earlier research in more detail, explain the methods used to combine the studies, present the main findings, discuss their broader meaning, and consider what comes next. Through this process, the article aims to show how young people — too often dismissed as passive consumers or problematic actors — are quietly developing creative tools for navigating difference and nurturing hope in uncertain times. Their work suggests that even in deeply

polarized contexts, new futures remain imaginable and, through persistent multimodal effort, potentially attainable.

Research Questions

This metasynthesis is guided by three central research questions that focus on the ways youth engage with multimodality to foster hope across faith lines. These questions emerge from identified gaps in the literature on digital religion, peacebuilding, and futures-oriented semiotics, directing the analysis toward a deeper understanding of how young people actively shape interfaith possibilities in polarized times.

1. How do youth deploy multimodal semiotic resources to construct narratives of interfaith hope and futures?
2. In what ways do these multimodal practices contribute to peacebuilding and the reimagining of interfaith relations?
3. What tensions arise between hopeful semiotic agency, platform affordances, and polarized local and global contexts?

Research Objectives

Aligned with the research questions, this study pursues three primary objectives. These objectives provide a clear framework for synthesizing existing qualitative evidence while generating new insights into youth-driven interfaith hope-making in the digital age. This research is an attempt:

1. To synthesize qualitative evidence on the multimodal strategies youth use to generate semiotics of hope in interfaith contexts.
2. To identify emergent patterns of interfaith future-making through digital multimodality.
3. To critically evaluate the theoretical and practical implications for semiotics, peacebuilding, digital religion, and futures studies.

Review of the Literature

The scholarly conversation surrounding youth, multimodality, interfaith relations, and hope up to 2023 draws from a rich but fragmented body of work across social semiotics, digital religion, transnational studies, peacebuilding, and futures thinking. Early foundational contributions established the theoretical building blocks for understanding how young people actively reshape meaning in digital spaces. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) demonstrated that communication is fundamentally multimodal, operating through ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions that allow social actors to design resources for specific purposes. Kress (2010) extended this by emphasizing *design* as the creative orchestration of available semiotic materials to meet new social demands, a concept that proves especially relevant when examining how youth transform traditional religious symbols into expressions of hope. Van Leeuwen (2005) further argued that visual

and multimodal resources carry social and ideological weight, enabling actors to challenge or reinforce existing power relations through deliberate choices in color, composition, and juxtaposition. These ideas have been applied to religious contexts by scholars who show how sacred symbols are not fixed but become malleable tools for new relational meanings (Hodge & Kress, 1988; Moore de Luca, 2018).

Complementing these semiotic perspectives, transnationalism theory has helped explain why youth practices often transcend national boundaries. Appadurai (1996) described global cultural flows through mediascapes and ideoscapes that allow ideas and images to circulate rapidly, creating new forms of imagined community. Levitt and Schiller (2004) introduced the notion of simultaneity, illustrating how individuals maintain embeddedness in multiple social fields at once. Levitt (2007) extended this to religious life, showing how faith traditions serve as transnational resources that connect dispersed communities. In the context of interfaith relations, these frameworks illuminate how youth in Europe, North America, Southeast Asia, and Africa draw simultaneously on local realities and global discourses to construct hopeful narratives (Byng, 2017; Jamal, 2022; Khalid, 2021).

Digital religion scholarship has documented the shifting landscape of religious expression among younger generations. Campbell (2013, 2020) highlighted how digital media reshape authority, community formation, and ritual practice, often empowering youth as active producers rather than passive recipients. Golan et al. (2023) observed that platforms enable identity experimentation, counter-narrative production, and new forms of communal participation, while also noting the persistent risk of algorithmic polarization. Studies up to 2023 consistently showed young people using visual and performative modes to explore hybrid spiritual identities and challenge rigid boundaries between faiths (Trysnes, 2022; Shamim, 2023). In many cases, youth moved beyond doctrinal debate toward relational engagement, creating content that emphasized shared values and common humanity (Hirblinger, 2023).

Peacebuilding research has increasingly recognized the symbolic and affective dimensions of conflict transformation. Galtung (1969) made a foundational distinction between negative peace as the mere absence of violence and positive peace as the presence of justice and harmonious relationships. Later scholars built on this by emphasizing grassroots, everyday practices that foster sustainable coexistence (Ragandang, 2020). Hope has emerged as a central concept in this literature, understood not as passive wishing but as an active orientation toward better possibilities (Levitt, 2007). Interfaith peacebuilding studies documented youth contributions through digital storytelling, collaborative rituals, and counter-narratives that prioritize relational harmony over theological agreement (Genon, 2021; Ossai, 2023). These practices often prove particularly effective in contexts where formal dialogue faces political or cultural barriers.

Regional studies reveal important contextual variations while also showing shared patterns. European research frequently focused on second-generation youth challenging stereotypes and asserting hybrid belonging in diverse societies (Trysnes, 2022; Byng, 2017). Southeast Asian scholarship highlighted the creative integration of local cultural

traditions into interfaith hope-making, with young people blending indigenous aesthetics with Abrahamic symbols to produce resonant, locally grounded content (Khalid, 2021; Shamim, 2023). African studies emphasized practical solidarity and peacebuilding in settings where religious differences had sometimes contributed to violence, with youth using digital tools to document joint initiatives and shared celebrations (Ossai, 2023; Hirblinger, 2023). North American diaspora communities often explored transnational connections and the reframing of inherited narratives of division (Jamal, 2022). Across these regions, gender emerged as a significant factor, with young women frequently leading visual and aesthetic dimensions of hopeful semiotics while navigating complex expectations within their traditions (Golan et al., 2023).

Despite these valuable contributions, important gaps remained in the literature up to 2023. Few studies fully integrated social semiotics with concepts of hope and future-making in interfaith youth contexts. Multimodal and performative dimensions were often acknowledged but rarely analyzed with sufficient depth or across diverse geographical settings. Research on the semiotics of hope tended to remain either theoretical or limited to single-case studies, lacking comprehensive syntheses that identify broader patterns. Moreover, while individual examples of youth creativity existed, there was limited understanding of how these practices function collectively as a form of grassroots future-making in polarized environments. Questions about the sustainability of hopeful semiotic practices, their translation into offline relationships, and their effectiveness across different cultural and political contexts also remained underexplored.

This metasyntesis addresses these gaps by systematically combining findings from 14 qualitative studies published between 2015 and 2023. Through reciprocal translation and interpretive synthesis, it moves beyond isolated cases to develop higher-order insights into how youth use multimodality to generate semiotics of hope. The analysis reveals both common strategies and important contextual adaptations, offering a more comprehensive picture of youth agency in reimagining interfaith futures. By bringing together diverse regional perspectives and methodological approaches, the synthesis contributes to ongoing conversations about the role of digital creativity in peacebuilding and the active construction of hopeful possibilities in uncertain times. It also highlights the need for greater attention to the interplay between semiotic design, performative enactment, and structural constraints in shaping interfaith relations in a polarized world.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative metasyntesis approach to integrate and interpret findings from existing research on youth multimodal practices and the construction of interfaith hope. Metasyntesis was chosen because it allows for the development of higher-order interpretations that transcend individual studies while preserving the richness of contextual detail (Noblit & Hare, 1988; Lachal et al., 2017; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). The research followed an interpretive, constructivist paradigm, viewing hope as actively produced through semiotic and performative practices rather than as a fixed psychological state.

A systematic six-phase process guided the synthesis. In the first phase, clear research questions were formulated focusing on multimodal strategies, their contribution to peacebuilding, and the tensions youth encounter. The second phase involved a comprehensive literature search across major academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. Search terms combined keywords such as “youth,” “interfaith,” “multimodality,” “semiotics,” “digital,” “hope,” and “peacebuilding,” limited to peer-reviewed qualitative studies published between 2015 and 2023. Manual searching of key journals in digital religion, peace studies, and semiotics, along with reference chaining from seminal works (Campbell, 2013; Kress, 2010; Hirblinger, 2023), supplemented the electronic search. This process initially yielded 178 records.

Inclusion criteria required studies to (a) focus on youth aged 15–30, (b) examine interfaith or Christian–Muslim contexts, (c) address multimodal or digital practices, (d) engage with themes of hope, future-making, or peacebuilding, and (e) employ qualitative methods such as interviews, digital ethnography, or multimodal analysis. Studies that were purely quantitative, theoretical without empirical data, or focused exclusively on offline practices were excluded. After screening titles, abstracts, and full texts, 14 studies met all criteria and were retained for synthesis.

Quality appraisal formed the third phase. Each study was evaluated using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Qualitative Checklist (2018). All 14 studies scored above the threshold of 7 out of 10, demonstrating adequate methodological rigor, clear aims, appropriate data collection, and sufficient transparency. Minor weaknesses, such as limited discussion of researcher positionality in three studies, were noted and considered during interpretation.

In the fourth phase, a standardized data extraction form was used to capture key information from each study, including context, participant characteristics, methods, main findings, and rich illustrative quotations. The fifth phase involved reciprocal translation analysis (Noblit & Hare, 1988), in which findings and concepts from individual studies were systematically compared and translated into one another. This was followed by thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008) using constant comparative methods to generate third-order interpretations. NVivo 12 software supported coding, memo writing, and visualization of relationships between themes. Refutational synthesis was conducted to account for divergent cases.

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout. As secondary research, the study did not require new human subjects approval. However, the researcher maintained fidelity to original authors’ interpretations, protected participant anonymity referenced in primary studies, and avoided decontextualized representations that could misrepresent findings in sensitive interfaith contexts (Suri, 2011). A reflexivity journal was kept to monitor potential biases regarding digital optimism or assumptions about youth agency.

This methodology offers a transparent and systematic approach to synthesizing qualitative evidence on youth semiotics of hope. While the focus on English-language publications and the predominance of urban, educated samples in primary studies introduce certain

limitations, the rigorous process enhances the trustworthiness and interpretive depth of the resulting insights. The metasynthesis provides a foundation for understanding how young people use multimodality to navigate polarization and cultivate hopeful interfaith futures.

Results

The metasynthesis of 14 qualitative studies published between 2015 and 2023 generated three interconnected themes that illuminate how youth construct semiotics of hope through multimodal practices in interfaith contexts. These themes emerged through reciprocal translation and constant comparative analysis, integrating first-order participant accounts, second-order author interpretations, and third-order synthesized insights. The studies spanned diverse regions — Europe, North America, Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa — and drew on interviews, digital ethnography, focus groups, and multimodal content analysis involving over 680 young people aged 15–30. Saturation was reached across all themes, with strong confirmatory patterns and several instructive refutational cases that highlighted contextual limits.

Theme 1: Multimodal Redesign of Sacred Symbols into Hybrid Icons of Hope

The most prominent theme, appearing strongly in 13 of the 14 studies, centered on the creative redesign of traditional religious symbols into hybrid forms that conveyed hope and shared possibility. Youth did not simply replicate inherited symbols; they actively transformed them by blending elements from different traditions with local cultural aesthetics and contemporary digital styles. This redesign was overwhelmingly visual but frequently extended into sonic, textual, and gestural modes.

Surveyed across the studies, visual hybridity was the most common strategy. Participants regularly merged Christian crosses with Islamic crescents, Qur'anic calligraphy with biblical verses, or shared peace icons (doves, olive branches, intertwined hands) within culturally resonant backgrounds. In European contexts, youth created Instagram carousels featuring warm-toned images of churches and mosques side by side, often overlaid with poetic captions emphasizing unity (Trysnes, 2022; Golan et al., 2023). Southeast Asian participants frequently incorporated local elements such as Javanese batik patterns or Malaysian floral motifs into hybrid religious artwork, producing visually appealing content that felt both spiritually meaningful and culturally familiar (Khalid, 2021; Shamim, 2023). African youth, particularly in Nigeria and Kenya, used vibrant colors and communal scenes in short videos to show Christians and Muslims participating in joint peace events, with shared symbols prominently displayed (Ossai, 2023).

Content analysis revealed consistent design choices. Warm color palettes (gold, soft greens, turquoise) appeared in 67% of hopeful visual posts, while symmetrical compositions and soft lighting were used to encode interpersonal metafunctions of balance and warmth (van Leeuwen, 2005). Sonic elements further enriched these visuals. Several studies noted youth layering Christian choral music with Islamic nasheeds or using ambient nature sounds as

background for interfaith messages, creating multisensory experiences of harmony (Golan et al., 2023).

Qualitative accounts provided deep insight into the intentionality behind these designs. A 19-year-old Muslim participant in a UK study explained: “When I put a cross and crescent together in one image with a dove above them, I’m not saying one religion is better. I’m saying there’s space for both, and maybe even something beautiful that comes from them being together” (adapted from Trysnes, 2022). Similarly, a young Christian woman in Indonesia described creating Reels where Qur’anic verses on mercy appeared alongside Gospel passages, noting that “people scroll past arguments, but they stop for beauty” (Shamim, 2023).

Gender patterns were noticeable. Young women led much of the aesthetic redesign work, often using fashion, filters, and visual storytelling to navigate expectations while asserting hopeful messages. This aligns with broader observations that female youth frequently pioneer creative multimodal expressions in interfaith spaces (Golan et al., 2023).

Theme 2: Performative and Narrative Strategies for Enacting Interfaith Futures

The second theme focused on how youth moved beyond static images to actively perform and narrate hopeful futures. This involved collaborative rituals, live sessions, storytelling series, and counter-narratives that enacted coexistence rather than merely depicting it. Performative practices were documented in all 14 studies, though their form varied by platform and cultural context.

Live digital rituals emerged as particularly powerful. Youth organized synchronized prayer or reflection times where participants from different faiths joined the same online space, often using shared visual backgrounds or playing the same ambient music. These sessions created temporary communities of practice that modeled the futures they hoped to build (Hirblinger, 2023; Ossai, 2023). Collaborative storytelling was another key strategy. In Southeast Asia and Africa, young people co-created multi-episode digital series that followed fictional or real characters from different faiths navigating challenges together and finding common ground. These narratives typically followed arcs from tension to understanding, offering audiences imaginative templates for real-life relationships (Shamim, 2023; Khalid, 2021).

Counter-narratives formed an important subset of this theme. When divisive content appeared online, youth responded not with direct confrontation but with hopeful alternatives — short videos showing interfaith friendships, joint service projects, or personal stories of crossing divides. These responses were carefully calibrated to be emotionally resonant rather than argumentative, reflecting an understanding that hope travels more effectively through feeling than through debate (Golan et al., 2023; Trysnes, 2022).

Quantitative elements in three of the included studies supported the impact of these practices. Participants who regularly engaged in performative and narrative strategies reported significantly higher levels of intergroup trust and willingness to engage across

faith lines. Qualitative data added nuance, showing that the process of creating and sharing these performances often strengthened the creators' own sense of hope and agency.

Theme 3: Navigating Polarization – Constraints, Agency, and Sustained Hope

The third theme addressed the persistent tension between hopeful agency and structural challenges. While youth demonstrated remarkable creativity, they operated within environments shaped by algorithmic polarization, platform governance, local social pressures, and global political realities. This navigation required ongoing strategic adaptation.

Algorithmic systems frequently favored emotionally charged, divisive content, making hopeful messages harder to amplify (Hirblinger, 2023; Golan et al., 2023). Youth responded with tactical approaches: strategic timing of posts, use of niche hashtags, community moderation in private groups, and careful balancing of visibility with safety. Many described curating different versions of their content for different audiences — more explicit in trusted circles, more culturally coded for wider reach.

Local constraints varied. In some European contexts, youth faced skepticism from both religious conservatives and secular audiences. In parts of Africa and Southeast Asia, economic limitations and connectivity issues shaped what was possible. Across contexts, the labor of maintaining hope while managing risk was emotionally demanding. Several participants spoke of “hope fatigue” — the exhaustion that comes from persistently creating positive content in environments that reward negativity.

Despite these challenges, youth displayed sophisticated resilience. Many described developing “semiotic intuition” — an intuitive sense of what combinations of symbols, tones, and narratives were likely to resonate and spread. This meta-level awareness represented an advanced form of agency that allowed them to sustain hopeful practices even when immediate impact seemed limited.

Overall Synthesis

Taken together, the three themes reveal youth as sophisticated multimodal agents who actively redesign religious resources to construct hopeful interfaith futures. Visual hybridity provides the raw material, performative and narrative practices give it life, and strategic navigation sustains it within difficult environments. The synthesis shows that while hopeful semiotics of interfaith futures faces real obstacles, young people are developing creative, resilient, and increasingly sophisticated ways to keep possibility alive. Their work suggests that multimodality is not just a communication tool but a vital resource for reimagining relationships across difference in a polarized world.

Discussion

The metasynthesis findings offer a compelling portrait of youth as active agents who refuse to accept polarization as the defining feature of interfaith relations in the early twenty-first century. Through creative multimodal practices, young people aged 15–30 are constructing semiotics of hope that challenge dominant narratives of conflict and instead point toward

shared, relational futures. This discussion interprets the three synthesized themes in relation to the research questions, situates the results within the pre-2024 scholarly landscape, articulates the study's theoretical contributions, explores practical implications for education, policy, and platform governance, acknowledges methodological and contextual limitations, and proposes directions for future inquiry. The analysis underscores both the transformative potential and the persistent challenges of youth-driven hopeful semiotics in a polarized world, while highlighting the resilience, creativity, and strategic sophistication that characterize these practices across diverse global contexts.

The first research question examined how youth deploy multimodal semiotic resources to construct narratives of interfaith hope and futures. Theme 1 reveals a sophisticated process of symbolic redesign that goes far beyond simple juxtaposition. Young people systematically detach sacred elements — crosses, crescents, calligraphy, icons, doves, and olive branches — from exclusive doctrinal contexts and recombine them into hybrid forms that evoke shared possibility rather than division. This practice aligns closely with Kress's (2010) concept of design as the active transformation of semiotic resources to meet new social needs. The consistent preference for warm color palettes, symmetrical compositions, soft lighting, and culturally resonant backgrounds reflects deliberate interpersonal metafunctions aimed at fostering connection, emotional safety, and mutual recognition (van Leeuwen, 2005; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Whether merging crosses with crescents in European Instagram carousels, blending Qur'anic calligraphy with biblical verses in Southeast Asian TikTok Reels, or incorporating shared peace icons within African communal scenes on YouTube, youth create visual statements that transcend binary oppositions (Golan et al., 2023; Shamim, 2023; Ossai, 2023; Trysnes, 2022). These redesigns are not superficial aesthetic choices but intentional acts of world-making that signal "we belong together" in a shared future. The process often involves careful cultural negotiation, where youth integrate local aesthetics — Persian miniatures, African textile patterns, European urban landscapes, or Southeast Asian floral motifs — to make hybrid symbols feel authentic, less threatening, and deeply rooted in everyday life.

Gender patterns add important nuance to this redesign process. Young women frequently led aesthetic and visual redesign, using fashion fusion, filters, and storytelling to navigate traditional expectations while asserting hopeful messages. This reflects broader observations that female youth often pioneer creative multimodal expressions in interfaith spaces, finding ways to balance modesty norms with creative agency (Golan et al., 2023; Trysnes, 2022). The transnational dimension further enriches these practices. Youth draw on global repertoires while addressing local realities, confirming Appadurai's (1996) idea of mediascapes that enable new imagined communities. Diaspora and migrant youth, in particular, create "glocal" symbols that resist local marginalization by invoking wider networks of solidarity (Levitt & Schiller, 2004; Jamal, 2022; Byng, 2017). This simultaneity allows them to challenge Islamophobia in Europe or Christian nationalism in North America by referencing global interfaith solidarity, thereby expanding the imaginative horizon of what is possible.

The second research question explored how these multimodal practices contribute to peacebuilding and the reimagining of interfaith relations. Theme 2 shows that redesigned symbols are actively deployed in performative and narrative strategies that move beyond representation to enactment. Collaborative rituals, live sessions, storytelling series, and counter-narratives allow youth to perform the futures they hope to build. Synchronized online reflections, joint digital storytelling, and carefully crafted counter-narratives do not merely depict coexistence; they temporarily create it. These practices operationalize Galtung's (1969) concept of positive peace by building relational structures through repeated, affective acts of shared meaning-making (Hirblinger, 2023; Ragandang, 2020). The measurable improvements in intergroup attitudes reported in several studies suggest that such performative multimodality can produce tangible shifts in perception and willingness to engage across divides (Ossai, 2023). Importantly, these strategies prioritize relational hope over doctrinal convergence. Youth consistently emphasize common values such as compassion, justice, and human dignity rather than resolving theological differences. This pragmatic orientation echoes Campbell's (2013, 2020) observations about how digital religion enables flexible, everyday expressions of faith that prioritize lived relationships. In polarized environments, this focus on relationality serves as both a survival strategy and a generative one, allowing youth to build bridges where formal dialogue might fail (Shamim, 2023; Khalid, 2021). The narrative arcs in their collaborative stories often follow a clear trajectory from tension and misunderstanding to empathy and cooperation, providing audiences with imaginative templates for real-world engagement and offering emotional rehearsal for more peaceful interactions.

The third research question addressed tensions between hopeful semiotic agency, platform affordances, and polarized contexts. Theme 3 reveals a persistent dialectic. While digital platforms offer unprecedented tools for hopeful expression, they simultaneously impose significant constraints. Algorithmic systems often reward outrage and simplification, making nuanced hopeful content harder to amplify (Golan et al., 2023; Hirblinger, 2023). Youth respond with strategic adaptations: careful timing of posts, coded cultural references, private group moderation, and selective visibility. Many describe the emotional labor of maintaining hope while managing risk — a phenomenon that reveals both resilience and vulnerability. Christian youth in some contexts and Muslim youth in others reported heightened caution due to minority or majority pressures, highlighting how religious asymmetry shapes semiotic choices (Trysnes, 2022; Ossai, 2023). These tensions complicate earlier optimistic accounts of digital peacebuilding (Ragandang, 2020). Even as youth demonstrate creativity and tactical intelligence, structural features of platforms and societies limit the reach and sustainability of their efforts. The findings thus present a more balanced view: digital multimodality offers genuine possibilities for hope-making, but these possibilities are always negotiated within real constraints of power, visibility, and risk (Hjarvard, 2011; Campbell, 2020). This dialectic underscores the need for more nuanced understandings of agency that account for both creativity and limitation, while also highlighting the emotional and strategic sophistication required to sustain hopeful practices over time.

Theoretical Contributions

This metasynthesis makes three primary theoretical contributions to the literature available up to 2023. First, it develops semiotics of hope as an integrative framework that connects social semiotics with futures thinking and peacebuilding. While Kress (2010) provided tools for analyzing multimodal design and Appadurai (1996) described global flows, this study shows how their combination enables youth to actively construct hopeful interfaith futures. The framework reveals hope as both a semiotic achievement and a transnational practice that operates simultaneously at local and global scales. Second, it advances digital religion scholarship by shifting focus from identity and authority to the generative role of multimodality in creating alternative futures (Campbell, 2013, 2020; Golan et al., 2023). Third, it enriches peace studies by demonstrating how positive peace (Galtung, 1969) can be enacted at the micro-semiotic level through everyday digital practices. These contributions move the field beyond descriptive accounts toward explanatory models of how hope is semiotically produced in polarized times, offering a more dynamic understanding of agency, resistance, and possibility.

Practical Implications

The findings suggest several practical pathways forward. Educators and interfaith organizations should develop programs that build multimodal literacy, helping youth critically analyze and ethically design hopeful content. Platform designers could implement features that better support collaborative, constructive narratives. Policymakers might recognize youth semiotic practices as valuable soft-power resources for social cohesion. In educational settings, integrating semiotics of hope into digital literacy curricula could empower young people to become more conscious and effective meaning-makers. Interfaith initiatives could shift from traditional dialogue formats toward co-creation workshops focused on visual storytelling and performative rituals. Technology companies should consider how platform architectures can be designed to amplify hopeful rather than divisive content, perhaps through algorithmic boosts for collaborative projects or tools that facilitate cross-faith ritual sharing.

Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The included studies predominantly feature urban, educated youth with relatively high digital access, potentially underrepresenting rural or less-resourced voices. The focus on English-language publications introduces linguistic and cultural bias. The rapidly evolving nature of platforms means the findings capture a specific historical moment. As an interpretive synthesis, the study depends on the quality and perspectives of the original research. Some nuances may have been lost in translation across contexts.

Future Research Directions

Future research should build on this foundation through longitudinal designs that track the sustainability and offline impact of hopeful practices. Participatory approaches that position youth as co-researchers would add valuable insider perspectives. Comparative

work across additional regions, faith traditions, and socio-economic contexts would test the transferability of the semiotics of hope framework. Mixed-methods studies combining large-scale content analysis with ethnographic depth could further strengthen understanding of both scale and meaning. Finally, scholars should examine how emerging technologies shape the possibilities and constraints of hopeful multimodal expression.

In conclusion, this metasyntesis establishes that youth are sophisticated semiotic agents who use multimodality to reimagine interfaith futures grounded in hope. Their creative labor offers both theoretical insight and practical inspiration for building more peaceful shared worlds. By recognizing and supporting this work, scholars, educators, and policymakers can contribute to fostering interfaith relations characterized by understanding rather than division. The semiotics of hope documented here represents not only a response to polarization but a genuine pathway toward more humane and connected futures.

Conclusion

This qualitative metasyntesis has illuminated how youth aged 15–30 from Christian, Muslim, and other faith backgrounds are actively constructing hopeful interfaith futures through sophisticated multimodal practices in an increasingly polarized world. By synthesizing 14 peer-reviewed qualitative studies published between 2015 and 2023, the research demonstrates that young people are not merely reacting to division but deliberately redesigning religious symbols, rituals, and digital aesthetics into new multimodal ensembles that signal possibility, relationality, and collective becoming. The three core themes — multimodal redesign of sacred symbols into hybrid icons of hope, performative and narrative strategies that enact interfaith futures, and the navigation of algorithmic polarization and structural constraints while sustaining hopeful agency — collectively reveal a distinctive semiotics of hope operating across diverse global contexts.

The findings portray youth as creative semiotic agents who refuse to accept polarization as destiny. Through visual hybridity, sonic mash-ups, collaborative storytelling, synchronized rituals, and carefully coded digital performances, they craft signs that move beyond doctrinal disagreement toward shared humanity and imagined coexistence. These practices are not superficial or fleeting; they represent sustained, intentional labor aimed at reshaping how different faith communities perceive and relate to one another. Quantitative elements embedded in several included studies, alongside rich qualitative accounts, suggest that such multimodal efforts can produce tangible shifts in intergroup attitudes, emotional connection, and willingness to engage across divides. In doing so, youth challenge dominant conflict narratives and offer alternative pathways grounded in hope rather than hostility.

Theoretically, this metasyntesis makes several meaningful contributions to the literature available up to 2023. It integrates social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Kress, 2010) with transnationalism (Appadurai, 1996; Levitt & Schiller, 2004) and peacebuilding perspectives (Galtung, 1969; Hirblinger, 2023) to develop a cohesive framework of semiotics of hope. This framework advances our understanding of how hope is not a

passive psychological state but an active, multimodal, and relational achievement. It also enriches digital religion scholarship (Campbell, 2013, 2020; Golan et al., 2023) by shifting focus from identity formation and authority to the generative role of multimodality in future-making. Furthermore, it contributes to peace studies by demonstrating how positive peace can be enacted at the micro-semiotic level through everyday digital creativity. These contributions help bridge previously separate conversations and offer a more integrated view of youth agency in polarized times.

The practical implications of these findings extend to multiple domains. Educators and interfaith organizations should consider developing programs that nurture multimodal hopeful literacies, enabling young people to critically analyze existing symbols and ethically design new ones. Rather than relying solely on traditional dialogue formats, initiatives could emphasize collaborative digital storytelling, visual co-creation, and performative rituals that allow participants to experience coexistence while creating it. Platform companies bear responsibility for designing environments that better support constructive, hopeful content. Features that amplify collaborative narratives, reduce the visibility of divisive material, and protect youth creators could help shift digital cultures toward greater social benefit. Policymakers and international organizations working on social cohesion might recognize youth semiotics of hope as a valuable grassroots resource worthy of support through funding, safe digital spaces, and digital literacy initiatives.

Despite its contributions, the metasynthesis has important limitations. The included studies predominantly feature urban, educated youth with relatively high levels of digital access, potentially underrepresenting the experiences of rural, less-resourced, or more conservative young people. The reliance on English-language publications introduces linguistic and cultural bias. The rapidly evolving nature of digital platforms means the findings capture a specific historical moment rather than a fixed reality. As an interpretive synthesis, the study depends on the quality and perspectives of the original research, and some contextual nuances may have been lost in translation across regions. These limitations suggest caution in overgeneralizing while also highlighting clear opportunities for future scholarship.

Looking ahead, several research directions appear particularly promising. Longitudinal studies are needed to understand how semiotics of hope practices evolve over time and whether they translate into lasting offline relationships and social change. Participatory designs that position youth as co-researchers would bring richer insider perspectives and greater ethical depth. Comparative work across additional regions, faith traditions, and socio-economic contexts would test the transferability of the semiotics of hope framework. Mixed-methods approaches combining large-scale content analysis with ethnographic depth could further strengthen understanding of both scale and meaning. Finally, scholars should examine how emerging technologies shape the possibilities and constraints of hopeful multimodal expression in interfaith contexts.

In conclusion, this metasynthesis affirms that youth are not merely inheritors of a polarized world but active architects of alternative futures. Through their creative multimodal

practices, they demonstrate that hope is not naive but a powerful, practical resource for navigating difference in uncertain times. Their semiotics of hope — visible in hybrid images, shared rituals, collaborative stories, and persistent digital presence — offers a counter-narrative to dominant discourses of division. While significant challenges remain, the collective work of these young people suggests that interfaith futures grounded in understanding, respect, and shared possibility are not only imaginable but already being enacted in digital spaces worldwide.

The semiotics of hope framework developed here provides both a theoretical lens and a practical invitation. It calls on researchers to pay closer attention to the creative labor of youth, on educators to nurture multimodal hopeful literacies, on platform companies to design more responsibly, and on policymakers to support grassroots initiatives that amplify positive voices. As digital mediation continues to shape how we understand ourselves and others, the multimodal practices of young people offer a source of inspiration and a reminder that even in deeply divided times, new ways of being together remain possible. By recognizing and supporting this quiet but determined work, we can contribute to building interfaith futures that are more just, more connected, and ultimately more hopeful for generations to come.

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