

GENDER AND RELIGIOSITY IN INDONESIAN POPULAR MEDIA: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL READING OF CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Digital media have become central sites for the production, circulation, and negotiation of religious meaning among young Muslims in Indonesia. While existing studies on religion and social media often rely on quantitative indicators of religiosity or focus on isolated platforms, they rarely examine how everyday digital practices function as culturally meaningful religious texts. This study addresses this gap by conceptualizing social media content as a form of popular digital religious literature within the broader Nusantara Islamic literary tradition. Drawing on qualitative digital ethnography and digital literary analysis, the study examines multimodal content produced by Indonesian Muslim youth on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter/X, including captions, visual Qur'anic quotations, personal narratives, and performative displays of piety. The analysis situates these digital texts within anthropological theories of lived religion, gender, and mediated authority, highlighting how religious identity is constructed through narrative, aesthetics, and platform-specific affordances. The findings show that digital platforms do not merely transmit religious messages but actively reshape religious expression by generating new genres, redefining authorship, and reconfiguring religious authority, particularly in relation to gendered piety. By framing social media practices as platformed religious literature, this study contributes to scholarship on digital religion, Islamic studies, and anthropology by demonstrating how contemporary Indonesian Islam is articulated through hybrid literary forms shaped by both tradition and

algorithmic culture.

Keywords: *Digital Religiosity, Digital Religious Literature, Indonesian Muslim youth, Religious Identity, Social Media Analysis*

ABSTRAK

Media digital telah menjadi ruang sentral bagi produksi, sirkulasi, dan negosiasi makna keagamaan di kalangan Muslim muda di Indonesia. Meskipun berbagai studi tentang agama dan media sosial cenderung mengandalkan indikator kuantitatif religiositas atau berfokus pada platform tertentu secara terpisah, kajian-kajian tersebut jarang menelaah bagaimana praktik digital sehari-hari berfungsi sebagai teks keagamaan yang bermakna secara kultural. Penelitian ini merespons celah tersebut dengan mengonseptualisasikan konten media sosial sebagai bentuk sastra keagamaan populer digital dalam tradisi sastra Islam Nusantara yang lebih luas. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan etnografi digital kualitatif dan analisis sastra digital, penelitian ini mengkaji konten multimodal yang diproduksi oleh Muslim muda Indonesia di platform seperti Instagram, TikTok, dan Twitter/X, termasuk caption, kutipan Al-Qur'an visual, narasi personal, dan performativitas kesalehan. Analisis ini ditempatkan dalam kerangka antropologi agama hidup, gender, dan otoritas keagamaan yang termediasi, sehingga memperlihatkan bagaimana identitas keagamaan dibangun melalui narasi, estetika, dan affordans khusus platform. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa platform digital tidak sekadar menyalurkan pesan keagamaan, tetapi secara aktif membentuk ulang ekspresi keagamaan dengan melahirkan genre-genre baru, mendefinisikan ulang kepengarangan, dan merekonfigurasi otoritas keagamaan, khususnya dalam kaitannya dengan kesalehan yang berkelindan dengan gender. Dengan memosisikan praktik media sosial sebagai sastra keagamaan yang terplatformisasi, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian agama digital, studi Islam, dan antropologi dengan menunjukkan bagaimana Islam Indonesia kontemporer diekspresikan melalui bentuk-bentuk sastra hibrid yang dibentuk oleh tradisi sekaligus budaya algoritmik.

Kata Kunci: *Analisis Media Sosial, Literatur Keagamaan Digital, Pemuda Muslim Indonesia, Identitas Keagamaan, Religiositas Digital*

INTRODUCTION

Digital media have become integral to everyday social life and increasingly shape how religion is experienced, expressed, and negotiated. In contemporary societies, religious practice no

longer unfolds solely within institutional settings such as mosques, churches, or formal study circles, but circulates through algorithmically driven platforms where texts, images, sounds, and interactions converge. Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-majority country, offers a particularly fertile context for examining these transformations. Here, young Muslims actively engage with religion through Instagram posts, TikTok sermons, Twitter/X debates, and influencer-driven Islamic content, forming religious identities that are at once personal, public, and mediated. These developments demand analytical frameworks that move beyond viewing digital media as neutral channels and instead treat them as cultural environments that actively shape religious meaning.

Existing scholarship on religiosity and digital media in Indonesia has expanded significantly over the past decade. Much of this research, however, remains dominated by quantitative approaches that seek to measure religiosity through indicators such as frequency of worship, attitudes toward religious norms, or correlations between media use and religious commitment. While these studies provide valuable macro-level insights, they often overlook how religiosity is lived, interpreted, and performed in everyday digital contexts. Religiosity in digital spaces is not merely a variable to be measured but a dynamic practice that unfolds through narrative construction, visual aesthetics, and interactive engagement. By focusing primarily on outcomes rather than processes, quantitative approaches tend to obscure the cultural logics and forms of agency through which young Muslims make sense of faith online.

Qualitative studies that attend to these dimensions have begun to emerge, particularly those focusing on specific platforms or communities. Research on pious Muslim women's use of Facebook, for example, shows how digital spaces enable new forms of moral self-fashioning and ethical negotiation. Similarly, studies of Instagram-based *da'wa* reveal how visual culture, affect, and entrepreneurship intersect in shaping contemporary Islamic expression among youth. These works mark important advances by foregrounding meaning, creativity, and agency. Yet they often remain fragmented, platform-bound,

or focused on isolated case studies. As a result, scholarship still lacks a holistic and historically grounded understanding of how digital religious expression operates as a broader cultural and literary phenomenon within the Indonesian context.

This limitation becomes more evident when situated against Indonesia's long-standing tradition of religious literature. Nusantara Islamic culture has historically developed through diverse textual forms, including palm-leaf manuscripts, Arabic–Malay script writings, Sufi poetry such as *Syair Perahu* and *Syair Burung*, and printed *kitab kuning* that circulate widely in pesantren. These texts did not merely transmit doctrinal content; they functioned as cultural media through which religious values, ethical norms, and social identities were negotiated. Religious literature in Nusantara has thus always been embedded in everyday life, shaped by local aesthetics, social relations, and historical contingencies. However, most studies of digital religion treat contemporary online content as a rupture from textual traditions rather than as part of a longer trajectory of religious literary production.

As communication technologies evolved, religious expression in Indonesia moved from manuscript and print cultures to radio and television, and eventually into digital environments. Social media platforms now host a proliferation of religious content that blends text, image, sound, and interaction, circulating through algorithmic systems that shape visibility and engagement. These platforms do not merely extend earlier forms of religious communication; they actively reconfigure authorship, authority, and aesthetics. Instagram captions featuring Qur'anic verses, TikTok "Hijrah Storytime" videos, and curated hijab tutorials operate as recognizable genres with shared narrative structures and visual conventions. Yet existing scholarship rarely conceptualizes such content as religious literature in its own right.

This study addresses this gap by approaching social media content as a form of popular digital religious literature. Drawing on digital ethnography, the research treats user-generated posts as cultural texts that invite close reading and interpretation rather than statistical aggregation. Instead of counting likes, shares, or

comments, the study examines how young Indonesian Muslims symbolically construct religious identity through multimodal forms. This perspective aligns with the sociological insight that social reality, including religious meaning, is continuously produced through processes of interpretation and interaction. By framing digital content as literary production, the study situates contemporary online religiosity within the broader history of Nusantara's textual traditions while recognizing the distinctive affordances of digital platforms.

The concept of digital religion as lived practice further informs this approach. Digital religion scholarship emphasizes that online and offline religious lives are deeply interconnected, and that digital platforms serve as spaces where believers enact piety in everyday ways. Building on this framework, the present study links digital religion with the idea of digital religious literature, arguing that platform-specific genres constitute an emerging corpus of religious texts. These genres not only transmit religious messages but also shape how faith is narrated, embodied, and evaluated within peer networks and public audiences.

Gender emerges as a central axis through which these dynamics unfold. Religious expression mediated through the body and outward appearance, particularly the hijab, has long played a key role in shaping Muslim women's identities. In digital environments, embodied religiosity becomes highly visible and subject to intensified scrutiny, circulation, and commodification. Scholars have described this expansion of religious space into online environments as part of what Bunt terms *cyber-Islam*, where traditional structures of religious authority are reconfigured through digital mediation. However, much of the existing research on hijab and gender focuses either on offline communities, or on normative debates, leaving everyday digital practices underexplored.

Intersectionality studies further highlight the need for more nuanced analysis. Religious experiences are shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, class, age, and technological access, and cannot be treated as uniform or universal (Barbosa, 2017; Vuola, 2017). From this perspective, practices such as

creating Qur'anic quote images, sharing hijab tutorials, or narrating personal religious journeys online become sites where religious norms, gender expectations, and platform logics intersect. These practices generate new genres of religious expression that are neither fully traditional nor entirely secular, but hybrid forms embedded in global digital culture.

The relevance of this inquiry is heightened by Indonesia's rapidly expanding digital infrastructure. More than 70 percent of the population now uses the internet, with social media serving as the primary point of access. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the migration of religious activities into digital spaces, from online Friday sermons to livestreamed Qur'anic studies. At the same time, digitalization has introduced new tensions, including religious anxiety, intensified moral surveillance, and the commodification of piety. These dynamics underscore that digital media do not simply democratize religious expression; they also introduce new hierarchies and pressures shaped by visibility, metrics, and algorithmic governance.

Against this backdrop, this study asks how Indonesian Muslim youth build, negotiate, and display religious identity through everyday social media practices, and how these practices generate new forms of digital religious literature within the Nusantara tradition. This question arises from two core insights. First, digital platforms actively shape religious life rather than merely transmitting religious messages. Second, young users live and contest faith within algorithmically structured environments that privilege certain aesthetics, narratives, and performances. The multimodal texts produced on these platforms mark a new phase in the history of religious literary expression in Indonesia and demand analytical attention as curated cultural artifacts.

Rather than asking what content is shared, this research examines how and why it is shared. Drawing on theories of self-presentation and performance, the study conceptualizes religious identity as an ongoing narrative project shaped by interaction, recognition, and platform affordances. Features such as hashtags, visual filters, short-form video formats, and algorithmic

recommendation systems fundamentally influence how users present and interpret faith. These dynamics produce what this study terms “platformed religious literature,” a body of texts that emerges from the interplay between individual creativity, communal norms, and technological infrastructures.

By applying a digital literary studies lens alongside anthropological and media studies perspectives, this research offers a novel contribution to scholarship on religion and digital media. It demonstrates how close reading of social media content can reveal patterned genres, narrative strategies, and aesthetic conventions that both continue and transform Nusantara’s religious literary heritage. In doing so, the study positions digital religious expression not as a peripheral phenomenon but as a central site for understanding contemporary Indonesian Islam within a global digital landscape shaped by hybridity, power, and cultural negotiation.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative digital content analysis to examine how Indonesian Muslim youth express religious identity through social media content, which this research treats as digital religious literature. This design places digital artifacts at the center of analysis and reads them as texts that reveal representations, narratives, and discursive patterns of religious expression. The study does not involve direct ethnographic interaction with users. Instead, it draws methodological sensitivity from digital ethnography’s concern for cultural context while relying primarily on the systematic analysis of content artifacts. For this reason, qualitative digital content analysis offers the most accurate methodological framing¹.

Data collection focused on three social media platforms widely used by Indonesian youth: Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter/X. The study followed a structured protocol and applied purposive sampling to select publicly accessible content that

¹ Rogers, Richard. 2013. *Digital Methods*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
<https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/8718.001.0001>

matched predefined criteria. The analysis treated each individual social media post as the main unit of analysis, including visual elements, captions, and metadata. The study also examined comment threads when analyzing discursive negotiations of authority. In total, the dataset consists of 450 data units. The study determined this number by applying the principle of thematic saturation, where additional data no longer generated new themes relevant to the research questions.

The analysis followed² six-phase thematic analysis framework. The study combined several qualitative techniques to capture different dimensions of the data. These techniques include descriptive coding, discursive analysis, visual analysis, and comparative analysis across platforms and genres.

The researchers' positions inevitably influence the analytical process. The research team includes scholars from media studies, anthropology, and Islamic studies who hold different insider and outsider relationships to Indonesian Muslim communities. To strengthen analytical rigor and trustworthiness, the team practiced reflexivity throughout the study. This practice involved writing analytical memos, conducting peer debriefings, and critically reflecting on how personal backgrounds and disciplinary perspectives shaped interpretation.

The study limited its analysis to digital content that users made publicly accessible without login restrictions. To protect privacy, the research anonymized all posts through a systematic procedure. The study also recognizes several methodological constraints. The analysis relies only on observable content, while platform algorithms shape visibility in ways that remain opaque. The sample does not capture private or semi-private expressions, and the data represent a static snapshot rather than ongoing change over time.

The study strengthened credibility by applying multiple validation strategies. These strategies include thick description,

² Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

transparent documentation of methods, peer checking, and negative case analysis.

Table 1.
Methodological Design

Component	Brief Description	Justification / Rationale
Approach	Qualitative Digital Content Analysis	Systematically examines digital artifacts as texts
Platforms	Instagram, TikTok, Twitter/X (Jan–Jun 2024)	Key platforms for youth religious expression
Sample	450 public posts (purposive sampling)	Reached thematic saturation
Primary Unit	Individual post (visual, textual, metadata elements)	Enables consistent cross-platform comparison
Analysis	Thematic and multimodal approaches	Integrates coding with attention to visual and textual forms
Ethics	Anonymized public data; no user interaction	Protects privacy of content creators
Reflexivity	Positionality statement, analytical memos, peer debriefing	Reduces researcher bias in interpretation
Validation	Thick description, transparency, peer checking, negative case analysis	Enhances credibility of qualitative findings

Source: processed by the author.

This study analyzes digital content through multiple modes rather than limiting the analysis to written text alone. The analysis includes visual, audio, and interactive elements that together shape religious meaning online. For the visual dimension, the study applies visual content analysis that examines composition, color, typography, and symbolism in images and videos. Content such as Qur'anic quote images is therefore read not only through textual messages but also through visual choices. Elements like Arabic calligraphy, minimalist backgrounds, and pastel color palettes work together to produce a carefully curated atmosphere of piety.

This visual reading extends to video content, where the analysis focuses on narrative structure, self-presentation, and audience interaction through features such as Q&A sessions or duet functions. The study also examines comment sections by tracing conversational patterns, reply networks, and power dynamics that emerge as users negotiate religious interpretation. This multimodal approach allows the study to read digital content as integrated texts that combine multiple semiotic modes into a coherent literary form.

The research team brings together scholars with diverse backgrounds. Two researchers are Indonesian Muslim women who actively use social media. One researcher comes from computer engineering and focuses on algorithmic ethics. Two researchers work as anthropologists specializing in Indonesian Islamic studies, and one researcher is a Muslim scholar currently studying in Egypt. This diversity enables a multi-perspective reading of the data, while it also requires careful reflexivity.

During the analytical process, the team regularly engaged in peer debriefing to examine how individual positions might shape interpretation. For instance, researchers rooted in more conservative religious traditions often read hijab-related content as an expression of obedience, while researchers informed by feminist perspectives tended to interpret the same content as identity negotiation. Rather than weakening the analysis, these differences strengthened it when the team managed them reflexively through analytical memos and open discussion.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

The thematic analysis of 450 social media content units identifies three closely connected patterns in how Indonesian Muslim youth shape and display religious identity through digital literary practices.

Curated Piety Aesthetics: Literary Templates for Digital Devotion

The first pattern shows how users turn religious expression into standardized aesthetic templates that operate as digital literary genres. Visual analysis reveals recurring “piety templates” in which Quranic verses appear within minimalist layouts, bilingual Arabic–Indonesian captions, and carefully selected color palettes. These templates function as visual literary forms that combine religious messages with self-presentation. One post, for instance, places a verse on patience over an image of cherry blossoms and pairs it with the caption, “Patience is like a flower. It needs time to bloom perfectly. #DigitalDakwah.” This practice allows users to express devotion while simultaneously curating identity. This pattern becomes especially visible in gendered content, such as hijab tutorials that use pastel tones to produce a visual language that feels both sacred and platform-friendly.

The findings on curated piety aesthetics show that digital piety does not operate as a neutral form of expression. Instead, users actively commodify these aesthetics within platform economies. The idea of “branded religiosity” in Islamic fashion³ becomes visible in how hijab shifts from a religious practice into a marketable visual marker of identity. This shift also mirrors the distinct segmentation of Islamic fashion lifestyles in Indonesia⁴. As a result, each curated post no longer functions only as a spiritual reminder. These posts now act as literary artifacts that actively shape, circulate, and commercialize ideals of modern Muslim femininity within the digital attention economy.

³ Echchaibi, N. 2021. “Branded Religiosity: Islamic Fashion and the Aesthetics of Persuasion.” *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research* 14 (1): 3–21. Https://Doi.Org/10.1386/Jammr_00032_1.

⁴Kartajaya, Hermawan, Muhammad Iqbal, R. Alfisyahr, L. D. R. Devita, and T. Ismail. 2019. “Segmenting Islamic Fashion Lifestyle on Indonesian Woman.” *Research Journal of Textile and Apparel* 23 (4): 306–322. <Https://Doi.Org/10.1108/RJTA-09-2018-0055>.

Negotiating Religious Authority in Digital Literary Spaces

These aesthetic practices lead directly to debates about meaning and authority in digital comment sections. Users actively negotiate religious interpretation in these spaces, and authority often emerges from engagement metrics rather than from formal religious credentials. Creators with large followings receive affirmations such as “Your explanation is so relatable, ustaz,” even when they hold no recognized religious title. These exchanges become strongly gendered when users discuss hijab and women’s roles. Comment threads frequently divide between conservative positions, such as “This isn’t a *syar’i* hijab,” and more flexible views, such as “Hijab is about piety, not style.” Through these interactions, social media operates as a literary public sphere where users collectively interpret, challenge, and reaffirm religious meaning.

Performance–Practice Gap and Digital Validation Anxiety

These negotiations of authority intersect with tensions between online performance and offline practice. Cross-platform observation shows users posting moral quotations about honesty while engaging in conflict on other platforms. Users also reframe acts of worship, such as charity, for public display through hashtags like #SedekahHariIni, which shift attention from sincerity toward visibility. Many captions openly express concern about algorithmic feedback, as in statements such as, “Posts about goodness get few likes, silly posts go viral instead. Sad, it seems my dakwah content isn’t appealing.” These expressions reveal how religious self-understanding becomes closely tied to platform metrics. As a result, users experience anxiety when digital validation fails to align with their expectations of pious engagement.

Table 2.
Summary of Findings from Digital Content Analysis

Thematic Pattern	Key Characteristics	Core Insight
Curated Piety Aesthetics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Standardized visual templates• Bilingual captions	Users transform religious expression into

	Consistent aesthetic codes • Gendered expressions	branded identity templates shaped by platform logic
Negotiation of Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authority linked to engagement • Active comment debates • Tension between interpretations • Parallel authority forms 	Digital platforms redistribute religious authority, especially in discussions of gender
Performance–Practice Gap & Digital Validation Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mismatch between online display and behavior • Public framing of worship Anxiety over low engagement • Reliance on metrics for validation 	Pressure to perform piety online creates disconnection from practice and produces algorithm-driven anxiety

Source: processed by the author

Genres of Digital Religious Literature

Our analysis identifies four main genres of digital religious literature that have emerged on social media platforms. These genres show how users shape religious meaning through specific literary and visual conventions.

Visual Quote Genre

This genre presents images that feature Qur'anic verses, hadith, or inspirational religious statements. Creators design these images with Arabic calligraphy and Indonesian translations to achieve a strong aesthetic appeal. This genre adapts the earlier manuscript and *kitab* tradition that paired sacred texts with commentary, but it reshapes that tradition into brief, visually engaging digital formats.

Hijrah Narrative Genre

This genre appears in short videos or tweet threads that tell personal stories of spiritual transformation toward a more

religious life. These narratives often follow a clear beforeafter structure. They emphasize visible change, especially in appearance such as women's adoption of the hijab, alongside shifts in everyday behavior.

Piety Tutorial Genre

This genre delivers practical religious guidance through instructional content. Creators explain acts of worship such as ablution, prayer, or Qur'anic recitation with proper *tajwid*. Young women often lead this content, and they combine claims to religious knowledge with a friendly and relatable style that appeals to peer audiences.

Interpretive Community Genre

This genre takes shape in comment sections, where users discuss, debate, and negotiate religious meaning. Participants ask questions, correct one another, and share perspectives, and they collectively produce a participatory form of interpretation that resembles a shared digital *tafsir*.

Each genre follows its own conventions and responds to specific platform logics. Together, these genres form a dynamic and evolving ecosystem of digital religious literature.

Discussion

This study examines how Indonesian Muslim youth shape religious identity through social media practices that function as digital religious literature. The findings highlight three connected patterns that this discussion interprets within wider theoretical and socio-cultural debates, with close attention to gender relations and platform dynamics.

Digital Piety as Gendered Literary Production

The curated piety aesthetics identified in this study extend beyond visual style and operate as emerging literary genres in

digital religious life. These recurring templates illustrate what⁵ describes as aestheticized religion, while also revealing clear gendered processes. Young Muslim women dominate the production of hijab tutorials and stylized devotional content, a pattern that echoes the observations⁶. When viewed as literary production, this content gains deeper meaning. Through images, captions, and narratives, these creators negotiate social expectations and stereotypes in ways that⁷ describe as double ambassadorship. Their posts act as visual autobiographies in which users carefully compose and present religious identity within platform-specific conventions.

Platformed Authority and Gendered Interpretation

These gendered forms of expression connect directly to changing patterns of religious authority in digital spaces. Comment sections actively reshape authority by valuing visibility and engagement over formal religious training. Female creators often gain recognition through follower counts and interaction levels, even without institutional credentials. This shift contrasts with Indonesia's established religious landscape, where organizations such as Muhammadiyah and NU have long guided religious discourse⁸. Debates around hijab in comment threads clearly show what⁹ describe as the intersection of gender and

⁵Klein, J. 2022. "Aestheticized Religion: Visual Culture and Religious Expression on Social Media." *Digital Culture & Society* 8 (2): 78–95. [Https://Doi.Org/10.1386/Dcs_00057_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/dcs_00057_1).

⁶Baulch, Emma, and Angraini Pramiyanti. 2018. "Hijabers on Instagram: Using Visual Social Media to Construct the Ideal Muslim Woman." *Social Media + Society* 4 (2): 1–15. [Https://Doi.Org/10.1177/2056305118764449](https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118764449).

⁷ Martínez-Cuadros, R., and A. Giorgi. 2024. "Muslim Women as 'Double Ambassadors' of Islam: Breaking Stereotypes in Everyday Life and Muslim Communities." *Identities*: 1–20. [Https://Doi.Org/10.1080/1070289X.2024.2379714](https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2024.2379714).

⁸ Brown, Greg. 2019. "Civic Islam: Muhammadiyah, NU and the Organizational Logic of Consensus-Making in Indonesia." *Asian Studies Review* 43 (3): 397–414. [Https://Doi.Org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1626806](https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1626806).

⁹ Frenkel, Michal, and Varda Wasserman. 2020. "With God on Their Side: Gender-Religiosity Intersectionality and Women's Workforce

religiosity in public participation. In these spaces, users collectively interpret, challenge, and reinforce religious meanings, turning comment sections into shared interpretive communities.

Algorithmic Anxiety and the Platformed Self

These shifts in authority intersect with tensions between online performance and everyday religious practice. Users who express disappointment over low engagement on religious posts reveal how platform metrics begin to stand in for spiritual affirmation. This pressure weighs heavily on young women, whose social and religious value has long faced public scrutiny¹⁰. Through repeated exposure to likes, views, and shares, users internalize a digital gaze that shapes how they perform piety. These patterns reflect broader structural forces rather than individual shortcomings. Argue, platform societies require all forms of social life, including religion, to align with systems of visibility, popularity, and engagement¹¹.

Table 3.
Discussion Synthesis: Digital Religious Literature in Platformed Spaces

Analytical Pillar	Curated Piety as Digital Literary Production	Gendered Authority in Platformed Arenas	Algorithmic Anxiety & the Platformed Self
Theoretical Lens	Aestheticized Religion (Klein, 2022); Double Ambassadorship (Martínez-Cuadros &	Gender-Religiosity Intersectionality (Frenkel & Wasserman, 2020);	Digital Gaze; Algorithmic Validation; Platform Society (van Dijck et al.,

Integration.” *Gender & Society* 34 (5): 818–843. [Https://Doi.Org/10.1177/0891243220949154](https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243220949154).

¹⁰ Amar, Paul. 2011. “Middle East Masculinity Studies: Discourses of ‘Men in Crisis,’ Industries of Gender in Revolution.” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 7 (3): 36–70. [Https://Doi.Org/10.2979/Jmideastwomstud.7.3.36](https://doi.org/10.2979/Jmideastwomstud.7.3.36).

¹¹ van Dijck, J., Poell, T., & de Waal, M. (2018). The platform society: Public values in a connective world. Oxford University Press.

	Giorgi, 2024); Digital Literary Genres	Interpretive Communities; Restructured Authority	2018); Performance- Practice Gap
Empirical Pattern	Users organize piety through standardized visual formats such as Quranic quote images and hijab tutorials	Users negotiate religious legitimacy in comment sections through interaction and visibility	Users experience tension between sincere religiosity and the demand for engagement
Key Interpretation	Digital piety operates as visual autobiography and produces new genres of religious literature	Platform metrics replace formal credentials as sources of authority, especially for women	Algorithmic feedback shapes religious self-worth and generates validation anxiety
Socio- Cultural Effect	Religion blends with branding and aesthetic labor in the attention economy	Authority becomes participatory but unstable and gender-sensitive	Religious identity becomes fragile and dependent on platform visibility
Scholarly Implication	Literary analysis must include multimodal and visual religious texts	Religious studies must rethink authority beyond institutional frameworks	Platform studies must account for spiritual and emotional consequences
Practical Relevance	Digital religious literacy should teach users to critically read curated piety	Religious education can adopt dialogic models while questioning popularity	Ethical platform design should consider impacts on spiritual life

hierarchies	and well-being
Source: processed by the author	

Table Note: This table integrates the discussion into three interconnected analytical pillars. It traces the movement from textual production (digital religious genres), to interpretive struggle (authority and gender), and finally to psychosocial consequence (algorithmic anxiety). Together, these dimensions illustrate how social media reshapes religiosity as a form of digital religious literature within platform society.

These findings must be read within Indonesia's specific context as the world's largest Muslim-majority country undergoing rapid modernization. This context shapes how curated piety appears and gains meaning. Indonesian social life places strong value on visual display and performative presence, where outward appearance carries significant social weight. This cultural emphasis on appearance interacts closely with platform logics that also privilege visuality, and together they produce forms of piety that users carefully curate for public consumption.

This visual dynamic also connects to patterns of religious authority on social media. Indonesian Islam has long developed through plural and decentralized structures rather than a single authoritative center.¹² While some Muslim societies concentrate religious authority within state institutions or officially sanctioned scholars, Indonesia sustains multiple centers of authority, ranging from Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama to newer groups such as the Hijabers Community. Social media enables these actors to compete, collaborate, and negotiate influence as they shape contemporary religious discourse.¹³

This digital transformation, therefore, does not replace older structures of authority. Instead, it reorganizes the religious

¹² Riaz Hassan, "On Being Religious: Pattern of Religious Commitment in Muslim Societies," *The Muslim World* 97 (2007): 437–78, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2007.00196.x>

¹³ PPIM, "Api dalam Sekam: Keberagamaan Generasi Z," *Covey Report* 1 (2018): 1; Setara Institute, *Tipologi Keberagamaan Mahasiswa: Survei di 10 Perguruan Tinggi Negeri* (Press Release, Jakarta, June 20, 2019).

field by bringing traditional and emerging actors into continuous interaction within complex and mediated digital forms.¹⁴

Scientific Contributions

Theoretical Implications

This study extends Nusantara literary scholarship by recognizing digital content as a legitimate object of literary analysis. Previous research in this field has largely focused on canonical manuscripts and printed texts, while scholars often dismiss social media production as trivial or merely popular culture. By treating social media content as digital religious literature, this study creates space to examine how literary traditions persist and change within new media environments.

This contribution also enriches digital religion studies by showing that digital transformation does not simply alter religious practice. Digital media actively produce new forms of religious texts that follow their own structures, genres, and conventions. An interdisciplinary approach that combines literary studies, anthropology, and platform studies proves effective for capturing the complexity of these processes.

Concrete Practical Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study offers the following recommendations:

For Educators and Parents

- Educators and parents should develop digital religious literacy modules that train young people to read religious content on social media critically. These modules should address algorithmic bias, recognize the commodification of religion, and distinguish digital performance from lived religious practice.

¹⁴ Arief Anshory Yusuf, Akhmad Rizal Shidiq, and Hariyadi Hariyadi, “On Socio-Economic Predictors of Religious Intolerance: Evidence from a Large-Scale Longitudinal Survey in the Largest Muslim Democracy,” *Religions* 11 (2020): 21, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010021>

- Educators and families should also create open spaces for dialogue about digital pressure, including digital validation anxiety related to religious expression.

For Religious Organizations

- Religious organizations should adopt more dialogical and participatory approaches to digital *da'wah*. In contemporary digital spaces, actors gain authority through engagement and relevance rather than formal titles alone.
- These organizations should also produce ethical guidelines for social media use that respect Indonesia's plural context, avoid divisive content, and encourage constructive discussion.

For Social Media Platforms

- Platform developers should design algorithms that do more than maximize engagement, which often amplifies controversy. These systems should also support religious content that is thoughtful, inclusive, and fact-based.
- Platforms should further create reporting mechanisms that respond sensitively to religious contexts, especially in cases involving the misuse of religious symbols or hate speech framed in religious terms.

For Religious Content Creators

- Content creators should develop shared ethical codes that emphasize transparency, accountability, and social responsibility, given their strong influence on young people's religious understanding.
- Content creators should also collaborate with traditional religious scholars to ensure accuracy while maintaining creativity and relevance for younger audiences.

Platform Responsibility

Social media companies should reflect on how algorithmic design choices shape religious expression and user experience.

This study advances its contribution by bringing together platform society theory with an intersectional analysis of gender

and religion¹⁵. This combined perspective helps explain how users negotiate authority in comment sections beyond theological disagreement. Debates around “masculinity in crisis”¹⁶ and forms of feminist solidarity in secular societies¹⁷ provide a lens to read these interactions as platformed struggles over discourse.

These findings also connect to, yet remain distinct from, broader global contexts. Studies on the relationship between religion and right-wing populism in Europe^{18, 19, 20} reveal comparable patterns of power negotiation, but they unfold within different historical and political settings. By showing how intersecting power relations based on gender, religiosity, and platform logics appear in everyday digital texts, this research adds a new layer of complexity to the study of Nusantara religious literature in the digital age.

This intersectional analysis shows that experiences of digital religiosity vary sharply across gender, class, and geographic location. Young urban middle-class women, for example,

¹⁵ Weber, B. M. 2015. “Gender, Race, Religion, Faith? Rethinking Intersectionality in German Feminisms.” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 22 (1): 22–36. [Https://Doi.Org/10.1177/1350506814552084](https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506814552084).

¹⁶ Amar, Paul. 2011. “Middle East Masculinity Studies: Discourses of ‘Men in Crisis,’ Industries of Gender in Revolution.” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 7 (3): 36–70. [Https://Doi.Org/10.2979/Jmideastwomstud.7.3.36](https://doi.org/10.2979/Jmideastwomstud.7.3.36).

¹⁷ Van Den Brandt, N. 2015. “Feminist Practice and Solidarity in Secular Societies: Case Studies on Feminists Crossing Religious–Secular Divides in Politics and Practice in Antwerp, Belgium.” *Social Movement Studies* 14 (4): 493–508. [Https://Doi.Org/10.1080/14742837.2014.994094](https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2014.994094).

¹⁸ De Lange, Sarah L., and Liza M. Mügge. 2015. “Gender and Right-Wing Populism in the Low Countries: Ideological Variations Across Parties and Time.” *Patterns of Prejudice* 49 (1–2): 61–80. [Https://Doi.Org/10.1080/0031322X.2015.1014199](https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2015.1014199).

¹⁹ Norocel, O. C., and A. Giorgi. 2022. “Disentangling Radical Right Populism, Gender, and Religion: An Introduction.” *Identities* 29 (4): 417–428. [Https://Doi.Org/10.1080/1070289X.2022.2079307](https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2022.2079307).

²⁰ Schwörer, J., and X. Romero-Vidal. 2020. “Radical Right Populism and Religion: Mapping Parties’ Religious Communication in Western Europe.” *Religion, State & Society* 48 (1): 4–21. [Https://Doi.Org/10.1080/09637494.2019.1704611](https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2019.1704611).

often possess the resources and skills to create aesthetically refined piety content, while women from lower economic backgrounds more often engage as passive viewers rather than active producers.

These class-based differences intersect with gendered pressures in digital religious spaces. Women face stronger demands to display visible piety online, since many societies, including Indonesia, routinely subject female bodies and appearance to public scrutiny. Men encounter a different set of expectations. Young Muslim men must express religiosity without appearing “too feminine,” given common associations between piety and female domesticity. As a result, men’s piety-related content often emphasizes leadership, authoritative religious knowledge, or social activism rather than aesthetic self-presentation.

This analysis highlights that digital platforms do not operate as neutral arenas. Instead, they reproduce and sometimes intensify existing inequalities, while simultaneously opening limited but meaningful spaces where users can challenge these hierarchies through creative forms of expression.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Indonesian Muslim youth actively reshape social media into a vibrant literary space for religious life. Young users craft religious identity through aesthetic choices, negotiate authority through public interaction, and seek recognition within algorithm-driven environments. By defining social media content as digital religious literature, this research connects literary studies, digital anthropology, and platform studies, and it offers new ways to examine religion in platform-based societies.

This study also faces several limitations. The analysis relies only on publicly available content, which highlights curated performances rather than private or internal religious experiences. The study does not engage directly with content creators, and this absence limits insight into personal intentions and subjective meaning-making. In addition, the cross-sectional

design captures a single moment and does not follow changes in digital religious practices over time.

Future research can address these limits and extend the findings in several ways.

First, longitudinal studies can trace how digital religious content and user identities develop over longer periods. Such work can also explore how platform shifts, such as the transition from Twitter to X, reshape religious expression and online communities.

Second, comparative studies can examine Indonesia alongside other Muslim-majority contexts, such as Malaysia, Egypt, or Pakistan. This comparison can clarify whether the characteristics of *Islam Nusantara* produce distinctive digital patterns when set against other Islamic traditions.

Third, mixed-methods research can combine qualitative content analysis with surveys to assess how widespread phenomena such as digital validation anxiety are and how they affect young Muslims psychologically.

Fourth, intersectional research can move beyond gender and examine how digital religiosity intersects with disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, and ethnic minority status.

Fifth, studies can explore alternative platforms such as Telegram, WhatsApp, or Discord. These platforms operate as more private yet influential spaces, and they may shape religious authority and expression differently from mainstream platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

In conclusion, this research provides strong evidence that social media operates as more than a communication tool. Social media functions as a contemporary literary arena where young Indonesian Muslims actively write, read, and interpret their faith. Through genres such as visual Qur'anic quotes, hijrah narratives, and piety tutorials, they both sustain and transform Nusantara's long-standing literary traditions. This process generates ongoing tension between aesthetics and substance, traditional authority and digital influence, and online performance and offline practice. Within these tensions, religion remains a living and adaptive force that responds to new technological conditions.

Understanding these dynamics matters not only for scholars but also for educators, religious leaders, and policymakers who aim to support Indonesian youth as they navigate faith, identity, and algorithmic visibility in the digital age.

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