




# Pop Culture and Islamic Identity of Millennials and Gen Z: Hijabers, Muslim YouTubers, and the Contestation of Modest Fashion Meaning

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## Abstract

This study examines the construction and contestation of Islamic identity among Millennials and Generation Z within the landscape of digital popular culture, specifically through the phenomena of hijabers, Muslim YouTubers, and modest fashion. The analysis employs a library research methodology, systematically reviewing scholarly literature to explore how religious values, aesthetics, and digital capitalism intersect in shaping contemporary Muslim identities. Findings reveal that social media functions as a crucial arena where piety is increasingly expressed through performative and aesthetic practices, leading to a dynamic negotiation between authenticity and commodification. The study concludes that Islamic identity in the digital age is fluid and hybrid, marked by a shift from traditional religious authority toward participatory, algorithmically mediated forms of religiosity. These transformations highlight the need to critically re-examine the relationships between religion, media, and popular culture in increasingly digitized Muslim societies.

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## Introduction

Islamic pop culture in the digital era marks a new phase in the expression of religiosity among Millennial and Generation Z Muslims. This phenomenon not only reflects a transformation in lifestyle and aesthetics but also reveals how young Muslims understand, perform, and negotiate their Islamic identities within digital public spaces (Khamis, 2024; Syafira Azzahra, 2024; Zaid et al., 2022). The revolution in communication technology, particularly through social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, has transformed religious practice into something visual, performative, and open to new interpretations (Abdusshomad, 2024; Alena Siti Maharani et al., 2025; Çelebioğlu, 2022; Rahman, 2021). In this space, Hijabers, Muslim YouTubers, and modest fashion influencers have emerged as figures who mediate Islamic values through

style symbols, everyday content, and aesthetically packaged narratives of piety (Barron, 2020; Bernier, 2023; Susilawati et al., 2021). However, this dynamic does not always align with the spiritual ideals of Islam, which emphasize modesty, sincerity, and purity of intention in worship (Grine & Saeed, 2017; Hassan & Harun, 2016).

Social media tends to encourage an orientation toward popularity, content monetization, and the capitalization of religious symbols, which can distance the meaning of piety from its essence (Asya Dwina Luthfia & Rohmat Yanuri, 2025; Kheryadi & Chorbwhan, 2025; Mishol-Shauli & Golan, 2019). The phenomena of “hijab as fashion,” “lifestyle da’wah,” and “Islamic chic” illustrate how digital capitalism infiltrates spaces of religious expression (Gökarıksel & Secor, 2009; “Hijab as a Muslim Attire and a Fashion Trend in Bangladesh,” 2021). Meanwhile, the digital literacy of young Muslim communities often remains limited, making it difficult to distinguish between authentic religiosity and lifestyle expression (Çelebioğlu, 2022; Hajrah Ul Jannah et al., 2025, 2025). As a result, the digital space has become a symbolic arena of contestation between faith and lifestyle, between spirituality and visuality.

From this depiction, it becomes evident that technology and Islamic pop culture among Millennial and Gen Z Muslims have given rise to a new form of religiosity, fluid, adaptive, yet vulnerable to being reduced into an identity performance that is more aesthetic than spiritual. So far, academic studies on Islam and popular culture have grown rapidly; however, most still focus on aspects of visual representation, symbolic consumption, and the dynamics of the religious market, without delving deeper into the contestation of meaning and the construction of Islamic identity within the digital ecosystem. Previous research has largely viewed Islamic popular culture as a symptom of religious modernity, namely, how Muslims adapt to the modern world through the medium of pop culture, without critically examining the power relations and underlying meanings.

Three main research tendencies can be identified. First, studies that emphasize the economic dimension and symbolic consumption, such as: (Forghani et al., 2019; Ramazani & Kermani, 2022) and (Azwina et al., 2023; Dewi Fatmala Putri & Syakur, 2023) which highlight Islam as part of the creative and lifestyle industries. Second, studies that examine the role of digital media in shaping the visual dimensions of da’wah. (Alena Siti Maharani et al., 2025; Khamis, 2024; Zaid et al., 2022), where religion is represented in popular visual formats and the personal narratives of influencers. Third, studies that focus on issues of gender and the Muslim female body within the context of modest fashion (Manzoor et al., 2024; Yuniastuti & Pratama, 2023). However, these three

research directions have paid little attention to how young Muslim identities are formed through the negotiation between religiosity, digital economy, and media aesthetics. Consequently, the aspect of meaning contestation, how piety, popularity, and commodification interact and compete within digital spaces, remains underexplored. This is where a significant academic gap lies: understanding Islamic pop culture not merely as an expression of modern religiosity, but as an ideological space where the meaning of Islam is produced, negotiated, and contested by young Muslims amid the logic of media capitalism.

This paper seeks to address the gaps in previous research by exploring how Millennial and Gen Z Muslim generations form, display, and negotiate their Islamic identities through digital pop culture. These generations have grown up in a fast-paced, visual, and self-performative social media ecosystem, meaning their adoption of Islamic values cannot be separated from the media culture they consume daily. Amid the currents of digital globalization, various new forms of Islamic expression have emerged, from hijab OOTD trends, casual da'wah vlogs, to Ramadan haul videos, that reflect a blending of piety and lifestyle.

This phenomenon raises fundamental questions about how technology and pop culture together shape new meanings of "being a modern Muslim." Accordingly, this study poses three main questions. First, how do social media platforms serve as arenas for Millennial and Gen Z Muslims to construct Islamic identities through pop cultural symbols such as hijab, fashion, vlogs, and digital lifestyles? Second, how do the practices and narratives developed by Hijabers and Muslim YouTubers represent the shifting meaning of modest fashion from piety toward popular lifestyle? Third, how does the contestation of meaning between religiosity and commodification occur within digital spaces that mediate young Muslim identities? Answers to these questions are expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the cultural processes behind popular Islamic expressions, while also serving as a foundation for critical analysis of the relationships among religion, media culture, and digital capitalism in contemporary Muslim societies.

This study is based on the argument that the Islamic identity of Millennial and Gen Z Muslims is no longer shaped solely by religious institutions, but rather by the complex interaction between pop culture, the digital economy, and social media technology. Within this ecosystem, religiosity appears not only as an expression of faith but also as a performative identity produced and consumed through algorithms, visual aesthetics, and market logic. Digital culture drives the transformation of Islamic values from the spiritual realm to the visual and lifestyle domain, so that piety is often measured by appearance, public narratives, or social media popularity. The phenomena of the Hijabers

Community, Muslim YouTubers, and modest fashion influencers demonstrate how religion can transform into an aesthetic identity as well as a symbolic asset within the creative economy. However, this transformation is not free from criticism: some view these trends as a form of banalization or commodification of religion, while others see them as an adaptive strategy to present Islam in modern public spaces. Thus, digital spaces become arenas for contestation between authentic spirituality and industrialized religious expression. The central argument of this study is that Millennial-Z religiosity is the result of negotiation between faith, lifestyle, and the logic of media capitalism. Therefore, understanding the phenomena of modest fashion and Islamic pop culture is not merely about observing cultural trends, but also about examining how the meaning of Islam is produced, disseminated, and reinterpreted within an increasingly digital and global social structure.

### **Research Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative library research approach to investigate the construction of Islamic identity among Millennial and Generation Z Muslims within digital popular culture. Library research is chosen as it allows for a comprehensive and systematic examination of existing scholarly works, theoretical frameworks, and documented phenomena without direct empirical data collection (Hart, 2018). This method enables the researcher to synthesize, critique, and interpret secondary sources to build a coherent understanding of how Islamic identity is represented, performed, and contested in digital media spaces (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The primary data sources for this study consist of scholarly articles, academic books, journal publications, research reports, and credible digital content analyses related to Islam, popular culture, social media, and youth identity. These materials were systematically selected and reviewed to capture diverse perspectives on three key phenomena: the hijabers community, Muslim YouTubers, and modest fashion trends as manifestations of religious and cultural expression among young Muslims.

The research design is exploratory and interpretive, aiming not to test hypotheses but to uncover patterns, meanings, and theoretical connections across literature (Levy & Ellis, 2006). The analysis follows a thematic synthesis approach, in which data from various sources are coded, categorized, and thematically integrated to identify recurring concepts and theoretical insights (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Special attention is given to theories of representation, digital identity, performative piety, and media commodification—drawing on scholars such as Hall (1997), Campbell (2020), and Gökariksel & Secor (2009). To ensure analytical rigor, theoretical triangulation is employed, whereby multiple

conceptual lenses are used to examine the same phenomena from different angles, thereby enhancing the validity and depth of interpretation (Flick, 2018). This approach is particularly useful in library-based studies where cross-referencing and comparative analysis of theories strengthen the scholarly contribution (Bowen, 2009). By employing a structured library research methodology, this study aims to provide a theoretically informed and critically engaged understanding of the interplay between popular culture, Islamic identity, and digital mediation – especially as experienced by Millennial and Gen Z Muslims navigating piety, visibility, and belonging in the social media era (Bunt, 2018; Zaid et al., 2022).

### **Representation of Islam in Digital Pop Culture**

The representation of Islam on social media, particularly through the lens of hijab-wearing women, Muslim YouTubers, and young Muslim influencers, is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. In this digital space, aesthetic values, religious narratives, and religious symbols interact in fluid, flexible, and often negotiated ways. Digital platforms have become key arenas for Muslim women to express their identities while negotiating their social positions amid negative portrayals of Islam in mainstream media.

They are not merely consumers of messages but also producers of meaning, constructing images of Islam that are more diverse, humanistic, and contextualized within modern life. Following the events of September 11, 2001, numerous studies have shown that Western media often depict Muslims within frameworks of violence, extremism, and threats to Western civilization (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017). Such representations create a domino effect, resulting in stereotyping and stigmatization of Muslims, including hijab-wearing women, who are often perceived as symbols of backwardness or oppression. However, digital spaces offer new opportunities. Through social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, hijab-wearing women can counter these narratives, presenting visuals that convey strength, independence, piety, and aesthetic beauty in practicing Islam (Baulch & Pramianti, 2018; Kavakci & Kraeplin, 2017). Here emerges a subtle yet significant form of cultural resistance. The digital content they produce is not merely about lifestyle or fashion but becomes a political and theological statement, asserting that Muslim female identity cannot be simplified into categories of merely “pious” or “oppressed.” Instead, it is presented as a reflective, active, and creative entity that interprets religious symbols amid the currents of global modernity.

The hijab, as a strong symbol of Islam, carries dual meanings that are often debated. On one hand, it is understood as an expression of piety and adherence

to religious commandments. On the other hand, some view it as a form of restriction on women's freedom. These differing interpretations create diverse performativities in hijab practices, both offline and in digital spaces (Rahbari, 2021). On platforms like Instagram, the aesthetic of the hijab is not only a religious garment but also a part of modern lifestyle identity. Through popular hashtags such as #HijabStyle, #ModestFashion, and #MuslimahChic, Muslim women demonstrate how piety can coexist with fashion sensibilities and individual expression (Grine & Saeed, 2017; International Islamic University Malaysia et al., 2019).

This phenomenon reflects the emergence of a "piety aesthetic", a form of religious expression realized through visually appealing, trendy, and publicly accessible language. Figures such as Dina Torkia (Dina Tokio) exemplify a generation of Muslim women negotiating between faith and modernity. She blends Islamic values with elegant urban fashion, showing that being a Muslim woman does not mean rejecting modernity, but rather engaging with it through spiritual and cultural values (Barron, 2020). Through her visual narratives, the hijab is no longer viewed as a boundary but as a bridge between piety and social existence. The interaction between lifestyle and piety is increasingly reinforced in performative digital content. Young Muslim women employ visual elements such as lighting, soft colors, and personal narratives to construct an ideal self-image: pious, empowered, and modern (Hasan, 2022; Khasanah et al., 2021). In this regard, piety becomes part of a digital performance, where religiosity is measured not only by ritual practice but also by how individuals display these values in everyday life and online spaces. Interestingly, this representation aligns with the logic of social media, which emphasizes aesthetics, visual consistency, and audience engagement.

This digital piety generates a new form of religious authority that is more horizontal and participatory. Whereas discourses about Muslim women were once dominated by scholars, academics, or mainstream media, these narratives are now shaped by users themselves through algorithms and social interactions. Islamic identity becomes the result of "continuous negotiation" between spiritual values, popular culture trends, and social expectations, demonstrating how digital spaces function as sites for the dynamic construction of religious meaning (Bhowon & Bundhoo, 2016). Moreover, digital spaces facilitate the emergence of online communities that strengthen solidarity among Muslim women worldwide. Through user-generated content, narratives about "being Muslim" are continuously built and modified, allowing audiences to witness diverse experiences, aspirations, and expressions. This is where religious symbols intersect with popular culture. For example, hijab tutorials on YouTube are often

accompanied by pop music, Qur'anic quotes, and motivational narratives that blend harmoniously, illustrating the flexibility of Muslim identity in a globalized context, piety does not necessarily mean rejecting modern culture but can incorporate it within Islamic values.

For young Muslims, social media becomes a space to be “global Muslims”, culturally, digitally, and spiritually connected. They consume and produce content that balances religious values with urban lifestyle (Hughes, 2016; Maghfirah, 2020). Activities such as sharing halal lifestyle tips, modest fashion guidance, and discussing Islamic social issues indicate that this generation is constructing a new form of religiosity: spiritual but not exclusive, religious yet aspirational and open to cross-cultural dialogue. The role of digital influencers in shaping perceptions of Islam and Muslim women cannot be ignored. By combining religious identity with modern lifestyle choices, these influencers challenge rigid categorizations often imposed on Muslim women, asserting that being Muslim does not require retreating from public spaces but rather actively and creatively engaging in digital spaces (Massoumi, 2015; Rahbari, 2021).

Muslim influencers such as Hanan Tehaili, Ascia Al-Faraj, and Indah Nada Puspita exemplify modern, friendly, and inspiring representations of Islam. They convey Islamic messages through vlogs, reels, or lifestyle posts without compromising spiritual values. Through such content, they not only shape public perception of Islam but also create spaces for Muslim women to confidently assert authority over their own narratives. In this context, social media functions not only as a communication channel but also as a space for meaning production and symbolic resistance. Hijab-wearing women can renegotiate the meaning of piety, expand avenues of expression, and transform public understanding of Islam. This phenomenon reflects new dynamics in the relationship between religion, popular culture, and technology. Digital representation mirrors how Muslims, particularly women, adapt to modernity without losing spiritual and cultural values (Çelebioğlu, 2022; Uyuni & Adnan, 2022).

In conclusion, social media has become a vital space for hijab-wearing women and Muslim influencers to reconstruct narratives about Islam and Muslim female identity. Through the combination of aesthetics, lifestyle choices, and rich narratives, they demonstrate that piety is not a static concept but a form of identity that is continuously negotiated and re-presented. In an increasingly connected world, this representation affirms the resilience of Muslim women's identities and their ability to shape global perceptions of Islam as peaceful, inclusive, and empowering. This phenomenon marks a new chapter in the study of Islam and digital culture: religiosity in the social media era is no longer solely

about ritual but also about aesthetics, performativity, and the capacity to reinterpret spirituality amid global cultural dynamics. Thus, digital spaces are not merely venues for content sharing but arenas for the evolving construction of Islamic meaning, spaces where Muslim women's identities are articulated in more creative, reflective, and transformative ways.

Overall, the phenomenon of Islamic representation in digital pop culture can be mapped into three main manifestations: hijabers, Muslim YouTubers, and modest fashion influencers. These three categories illustrate how Islamic identity is represented, consumed, and contested within digital spaces. The following table presents a comparison of these phenomena based on platform, content, purpose, and emerging issues of contestation.

**Table 1**  
Key Phenomena in the Representation of Digital Islam

Phenomenon	Main Platform	Content Type	Purpose	Example Figures	Contestation Issues
Hijabers	Instagram, TikTok	OOTD, Hijab Tutorials, Lifestyle	Identity expression & lifestyle	Dina Torkia, Hanan Tehaili	Hijab as fashion vs. religious symbol
Muslim YouTubers	YouTube, Podcast	Casual da'wah, Ramadan haul, Daily vlogs	Da'wah & personal branding	Indah Nada Puspita, Young Ustaz	Commodification of piety, new authority
Modest Fashion Influencers	Instagram, TikTok	Style inspiration, Brand collaborations	Empowerment & representation	Ascia Al-Faraj, Hijabistas	Spirituality vs. market pressures

Source: Developed by the author based on literature synthesis, 2025.

From Table 1, it is evident that although the three phenomena use different platforms and content formats, they all function as arenas for negotiating young Muslim identities in the digital era. Hijabers emphasize lifestyle and visual expression, Muslim YouTubers focus on da'wah and personal narratives, while modest fashion influencers operate at the intersection of spirituality, lifestyle, and the creative economy. However, all three also face similar contests of meaning: between authentic piety and performativity, and between religious values and market logic.

## **Modest Fashion as an Arena for Negotiating Muslim Women's Identity**

Modest fashion, particularly as practiced within Islamic contexts, emerges as a complex and layered cultural practice. It is not merely about clothing that covers the body but also serves as a space for negotiating Islamic values, global aesthetics, and gender identity dynamics. This phenomenon reflects how Muslim women navigate piety and modernity in their daily lives. Within this domain, Muslim attire is not only a symbol of religious obedience but also a medium of self-expression, social identity, and even female empowerment. The narratives surrounding Islamic fashion demonstrate that clothing choices are a form of articulating Muslim women's positions in the face of cultural globalization and global consumerism.

The hijab, as a core element of Islamic attire, has become a powerful cultural marker. In many Muslim-majority countries, including Indonesia, the hijab is no longer understood solely as a singular symbol of Islamic identity; it now encompasses diverse expressions of religiosity, social class, and modern lifestyle. (Aula, 2022) notes that in the Indonesian context, the hijab has evolved into a social phenomenon that extends beyond its religious function, integrating urban lifestyles that combine piety and aesthetic appeal. This transformation is linked to the emergence of a post-1980s Muslim middle class, or the "Islamic bourgeoisie" (Sim, 2017) which created demand for products and lifestyles that reflect Islamic values while signaling economic prosperity and prestige. Accordingly, modest fashion embodies a dual character: rooted in religious observance on one hand, and reflecting consumer culture on the other, illustrating the complex interplay between identity, religion, and capitalism.

The modest fashion industry has also become a site for discussions about the commodification of Islamic values. In this context, religious principles risk being commercialized and reduced to lifestyle trends or market fads. (Hasan, 2022) highlight concerns that religious concepts are often exploited for commercial gain, especially when Western brands market products to Muslim consumers without understanding Islamic values in depth. This phenomenon reveals tensions between authentic cultural representation and market interpretations that tend to simplify the meaning of Islam. (Gökarıksel & Secor, 2009) further argue that such commercialization creates ambivalence: it provides space for Muslim women to appear confident in public, yet raises questions about the extent to which Islamic spirituality is preserved within a consumerist culture. The connection between modest fashion and consumption is evident in the prominence of public figures like Dina Torkia, a widely recognized hijabi influencer (Barron, 2020). Through her content, Dina articulates fashion as both a form of female empowerment and a medium for cultural communication. Her

presence demonstrates how digital spaces have become new arenas for Muslim women to express identity, speak about piety, and redefine beauty within an Islamic framework. The combination of fashion, social media, and religion reflects a complex form of cultural agency, where Muslim women leverage technology to challenge stereotypes and claim visibility in a global culture often biased against Islam.

In terms of gender, modest fashion serves as a critical arena for women to assert autonomy and agency. The phenomenon of hijabi vloggers or influencers shows how technology and social media create opportunities for Muslim women to freely express themselves. (Rahman, 2021) notes that through vlogs, Muslim women can present their personal experiences authentically, challenging longstanding stereotypes that depict the hijab as a symbol of oppression. Through creative content, they transform global perceptions of Muslim women, from passive to active, from homogeneous to diverse. (Williams & Kamaludeen, 2017) emphasize that such self-expression enables women to reclaim their narratives and present new understandings of femininity within a contextual and progressive Islamic framework.

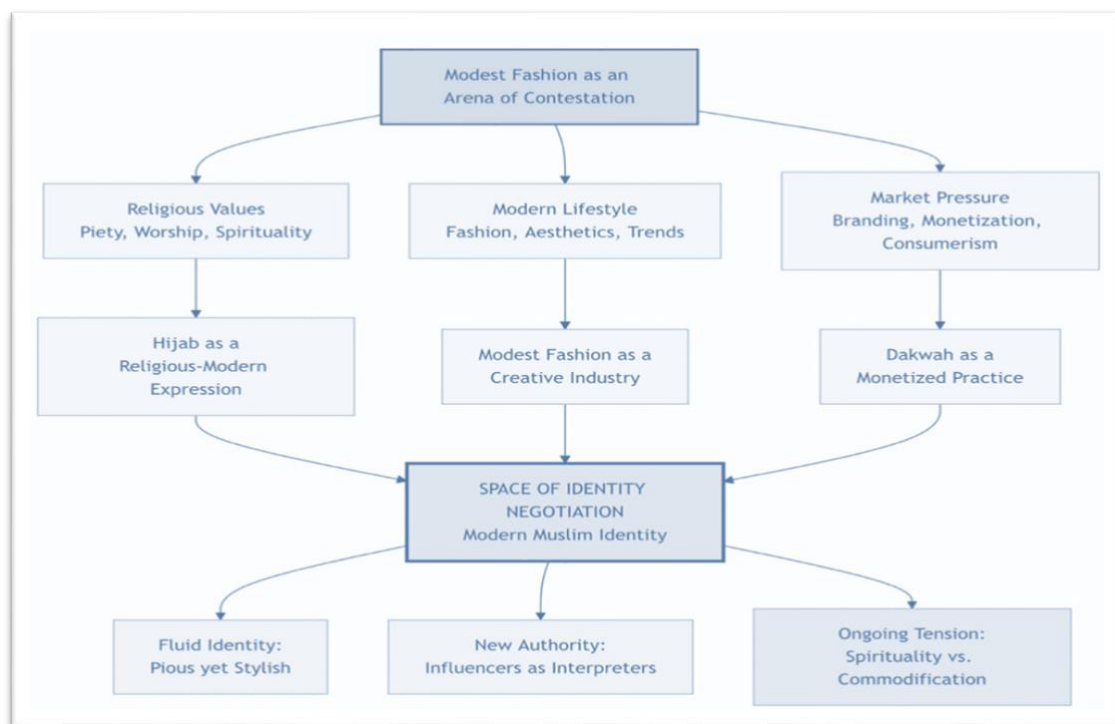
Muslim women's clothing choices are also situated within broader debates about tradition and modernity. (Hass & Lutek, 2019) and (Khadem Makhsuos Hosseini, 2021) argue that decisions regarding Islamic attire often constitute subtle forms of resistance against social norms and Western cultural pressures demanding uniform lifestyles. By choosing to dress modestly, women negotiate the meanings of freedom and personal identity aligned with Islamic teachings while remaining relevant in a modern world. In fashion studies, the aesthetic aspect of covering the body is understood not merely as compliance but also as a cultural communication strategy. (Khan et al., 2012; O'Cass et al., 2013) argue that Muslim clothing functions as a symbolic tool enabling women to assert their values, beliefs, and aspirations within a competitive global market.

Globalization both enriches and challenges modest fashion narratives. On one hand, it expands access and representation of Muslim identity on the global stage. On the other, it pressures Muslims to adapt to global trends often saturated with Western values. (Shafee, 2019) found that most Muslim consumers now prefer to combine traditional styles with contemporary fashion, reflecting a desire to express piety without losing relevance in modern public spaces. This blending is not merely aesthetic but a statement of identity: being Muslim and modern, pious and stylish. However, this phenomenon also raises critical questions about whether such expressions continue to reflect spiritual values or simply conform to market pressures and global beauty standards. (Al-Mutawa, 2013; Kartajaya et al., 2019) highlight that the development of modest fashion has

the potential to become a space for collective empowerment, provided it is managed with awareness of Islamic values and ethics. When Muslim women actively participate in creating, marketing, and interpreting their clothing, they are not just consumers but producers of cultural meaning. In this position, modest fashion becomes a form of cultural resistance against Western capitalist hegemony that tends to standardize bodies and beauty.

Modest fashion is not merely a dressing practice, but also an arena of meaning contestation in which religious values, modern lifestyles, and market logics interact, compete, and negotiate with one another. This process produces a dynamic space of identity for Muslim women. The following flowchart visualizes this process of contestation and negotiation:

**Figure 1**  
The Contestation of Meaning in Modest Fashion



Source: Author's Conceptualization, 2025.

As shown in Figure 1, modest fashion functions as a meeting point for three major forces: religious values that emphasize piety and spirituality, modern lifestyles that demand aesthetics and trend relevance, and market pressures that drive commodification and consumerism. These forces intersect and create a space of negotiation for modern Muslim identity – a space where Muslim women actively formulate themselves as pious yet stylish, religious yet connected to global markets, and spiritual yet performative in digital spaces. This space also becomes

the locus for the emergence of new forms of authority (influencers) while simultaneously maintaining tensions between authentic spirituality and the commodification of religion.

Overall, these dynamics demonstrate that modest fashion is not merely a clothing trend but a cultural arena where Islam, modernity, and gender identity interact and transform. Narratives about hijabers and Muslim fashion communities illustrate the active role of Muslim women in shaping and negotiating their identities. In this process, piety and modernity are no longer seen as opposing poles but as elements that can harmoniously coexist within a unified identity. Thus, modest fashion provides a new space for Muslim women to exercise agency: to be devout without abandoning aesthetics, to appear in public spaces without losing spirituality, and to negotiate their positions between tradition and globalization. It becomes a symbol of significant social change, that piety is not backwardness, and modernity does not necessarily mean secularization. In an ever-changing world, Muslim clothing serves as a bridge between faith and the world, between eternal values and ephemeral trends, and between spirituality and social existence for Muslim women in the global era.

### **Da'wah, Popularity, and the Commodification of Piety**

The reproduction of piety through social media algorithms and digital capitalism has become an increasingly significant area of study in contemporary cultural and religious research. In digital ecosystems, spiritual objectives often encounter the logic of popularity, where religious values are measured not by the depth of meaning or sincerity of intention, but by viewer counts, “likes,” and subscriber numbers. Social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have evolved beyond spaces for entertainment or communication to become arenas for da'wah and expressions of spirituality infused with digital economic and political dynamics. This phenomenon demonstrates that religiosity is now inseparable from the logic of digital capitalism, where even spiritually grounded actions can be commodified.

Interactions between Muslim YouTubers and digital platforms illustrate how virtual spaces function not only as venues for religious expression but also as arenas for the commodification of piety. The phenomenon of “virtual piety,” as described by (Hidayat & Zein, 2022) shows how traditional Sufi and spiritual values are adapted into online formats. They emphasize that social media provides a new platform for expressing piety, where spiritual values can be displayed, measured, and even monetized. The tension between sincere spiritual practice and performative piety for social validation is a logical consequence of

this transformation. In other words, what was once a private expression of faith has shifted into a public performance subject to algorithms and market logic.

This shift marks a transformation in religious narratives in the digital era. Da'wah, once focused on moral guidance and the formation of spiritual communities, is increasingly entangled in content monetization strategies inherent to platforms like YouTube. Monetization mechanisms, such as ads and sponsorships, render religious activities not purely spiritual but also economic. Digital preachers must consider watch time, audience interaction, and "algorithmically attractive" content to remain relevant and generate income. In this context, spirituality faces a paradox: it can reach a wider audience but risks losing depth of meaning.

(Lazzarino & Papadopoulos, 2023) highlight that marketing religious practices in digital spaces can erode both communal bonds and spiritual authenticity. When spiritual values are packaged as marketable content, religiosity loses its collective power and becomes a shallow form of personal consumption. Online communities surrounding digital religious figures are often fragmented and based on temporary individual connections. Consequently, deep spiritual solidarity is replaced by consumeristic relations between "producers" and "followers." This illustrates how social media, despite its potential, also transforms engagement with spiritual values from reflective practice into consumptive behavior. (Zaluchu, 2024), in his study on "digital religion," reinforces this perspective, noting that digital platforms expand religious experiences into new cultural contexts. Through digital media, individuals' interactions with religion are no longer confined to ritual spaces but extend into social and economic arenas. Religion is present not only in mosques but also in short videos, podcasts, and daily vlogs. However, this spatial shift has epistemological consequences: the line between da'wah and entertainment blurs, and spirituality is often framed through visual aesthetics and personal narratives that cater to popularity algorithms.

(Rofhani, 2020) adds a socio-economic dimension in his analysis of piety expression, especially among middle-class Muslim women. He shows that, in the context of digital capitalism, piety is often associated with middle-class aspirations to present themselves as both modern and religious. On social media, this is visible in how Muslimah influencers display themselves as devout, independent, and economically empowered. Their appearances are not only expressions of faith but also personal branding strategies that attract sponsorships and commercial collaborations. Consequently, piety is no longer understood solely as closeness to God but also as a form of symbolic capital convertible into social and economic resources.

The tension between spiritual authenticity and commercial viability is increasingly apparent in this digital landscape. Muslim YouTubers, in their effort to build a broad audience, are often compelled to produce light, entertaining, and viral content rather than deeply theological material. While such strategies are algorithmically effective, they raise ethical questions: to what extent can religious messages still be considered sincere if tailored to market preferences? At this point, the commodification of faith becomes tangible, religion transforms into a popular cultural product, and preachers become “content creators” balancing spiritual missions with engagement targets.

(Rofhani, 2020) emphasizes that middle-class aspirations strongly influence how piety is constructed in the digital sphere. Here, piety becomes not only a moral tool but also part of a lifestyle that can be displayed and evaluated. The more appealing the content packaging and the wider its reach, the higher the symbolic value of the piety presented. This phenomenon confirms that social media functions not merely as a communication tool but as a space for identity production reflecting modern capitalist values. Theoretically, (Possamai, 2022) links this to Weber’s concept of “instrumental rationality,” where modern society increasingly employs efficient means to achieve quantifiable goals. In the context of digital religion, this is evident in how individuals manage their spiritual identities according to contemporary socio-economic demands. Social media allows believers to extend the reach of their da’wah but also fosters curated and quantified identities. Spirituality becomes part of “self-branding,” with success measured by digital metrics such as views or engagement rates rather than moral or spiritual transformation of audiences.

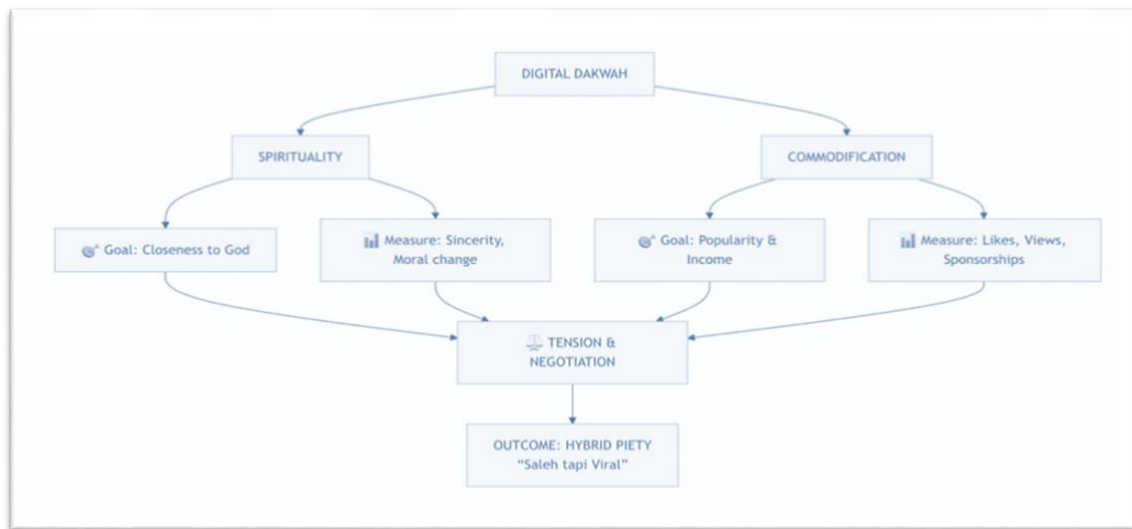
Nonetheless, not all implications of digital religiosity are negative. Digital platforms also provide space for new discourses on diversity, inclusivity, and contextual reinterpretation of religious values. Some Muslim creators use digital spaces to critique religious conservatism, promote social awareness, and expand Islamic literacy among youth. In this context, digital religion can be a tool for empowerment and the democratization of religious discourse. Yet challenges remain: how to balance spiritual values with the economic pressures of digital platforms that demand instant popularity? In conclusion, the dynamics of digital capitalism have fundamentally reshaped the landscape of contemporary spirituality. Piety is no longer solely understood as a vertical relationship between humans and God but also as a socio-economic practice negotiated within the frameworks of algorithms, monetization, and personal branding. The tension between authenticity and commercialization presents a primary challenge for digital da’wah practitioners and religious communities alike. In an increasingly digitized world, maintaining sincerity and spiritual meaning

requires critical awareness of how social media and surrounding capitalist structures operate. Only through deep reflection and strong digital ethics can religious expression in virtual spaces remain a vehicle for moral formation rather than merely a visual commodity stripped of spiritual essence.

The interplay between da'wah, popularity, and the commodification of piety creates a complex landscape where spiritual values and market logic constantly interact, compete, and hybridize. The following chart/matrix illustrates this dynamic tension and the resulting forms of digital religiosity.

**Figure 2**

Two Faces of Digital Piety



Source: Author's Conceptualization, 2025.

As visualized above, digital piety exists along a spectrum – from sincere spiritual practice to fully commodified religious content. Most Muslim YouTubers and influencers operate in the hybrid zone, where da'wah is both a spiritual mission and a branding strategy. This matrix helps clarify why certain forms of digital Islamic content gain popularity while others are criticized for lacking depth: it is precisely this negotiation between spiritual authenticity and commercial appeal that defines contemporary digital da'wah.

### **The Contestation of Islamic Meaning in the Social Media Era: Between Spirituality and Performance**

The digitalization of spiritual practices within contemporary Islam reflects a significant transformation in how individuals, particularly Millennials and Generation Z, engage with their religious identities. This shift manifests through a range of digital technologies that facilitate the dissemination of Islamic

teachings and enable diverse expressions of faith in online environments. Firstly, digital technologies have become pivotal in reshaping how religious narratives and practices are communicated. The mediatization of religion, as described by Ding et al., demonstrates that religious traditions, including Islam, utilize audiovisual media not only to reinforce identities but also to foster interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural exchanges within online platforms (Ding et al., 2025). These platforms serve as vital spaces where multiple religious expressions converge, creating a new layer of spiritual experience distinct from traditional congregational worship.

In addition, online platforms have significantly influenced modes of religious education and community interaction. Khabibullina highlights the role of social networks and digital platforms in shaping how Islamic information is disseminated, noting that this virtual landscape is crucial for community building and educational engagement among Muslims (R.G. Kuzeev Institute of Ethnological Research of the Ufa Federal Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences & Khabibullina, 2024). The integration of mobile applications and social media into religious practices allows for reinterpretation and innovation in the expression of faith, evident in practices such as virtual prayers and online discussions about spirituality.

The contestation of Islamic meanings in the era of social media occurs not only at the level of practice but also at the level of values and authority. At least three interrelated dimensions of contestation can be identified: spirituality versus performance, authenticity versus commodification, and traditional authority versus digital authority. The table below outlines these three dimensions along with their implications within the context of digital Islamic pop culture.

**Table 2**  
Dimensions of Meaning Contestation in Digital Spaces

Dimension of Contestation	Description	Examples in the Article	Implications
Spirituality vs. Performance	Authentic piety vs. staged piety	Hijab OOTD, Ramadan haul vlogs	Religiosity becomes performative and measurable
Authenticity vs. Commodification	Religious values vs. market values	Sponsored da'wah content, hijab as a fashion item	Spirituality becomes a marketable commodity
Traditional vs. Digital Authority	Ulama vs. Muslim influencers	Muslim YouTubers vs. traditional kiai	Religious authority becomes horizontal and participatory

Source: Developed by the author based on literature synthesis, 2025.

Table 2 shows that contestation within digital spaces is not dichotomous but dialectical. For example, the practice of the hijab as fashion (commodification) can simultaneously serve as a medium of da‘wah (spirituality). Likewise, digital authority emerging from Muslim influencers does not entirely replace traditional authority; instead, it creates a new arena in which both interact, compete, and influence one another. This contestation reflects the fluid and continuously negotiated dynamics of Islamic identity amid the pressures of algorithms, markets, and visual culture.

The emergence of digital Islam is further characterized by a reconfiguration of authority and identity among Muslims. According to Bunt, the rise of digitally literate religious scholars and influencers has disrupted traditional hierarchies within Islamic authority, enabling diverse voices, including those of young Muslims, to articulate and share their interpretations of faith through platforms like TikTok and Instagram (Bunt, 2018). This democratization of religious discourse aligns with findings from Zaman, who elucidates the psychosocial dynamics of digital piety in regions such as Bangladesh, recognizing that cyberspace functions as a forum for both personal and communal expressions of faith (Zaman, 2019).

Moreover, the phenomenon of “cyber religion” reflects the blending of virtual and physical faith experiences. Malik discusses how the roles of spiritual leaders have evolved in digital contexts, with virtual figures gaining prominence as sources of religious guidance and community engagement (Malik, 2021). The generation of content creators within these platforms actively shapes and transforms Islamic teachings, embodying a participatory culture that appeals to younger audiences seeking meaning and connection in the digital age. The unique characteristics of Islamic digital engagement among Millennials and Generation Z reflect their distinct preferences and practices. For instance, Faisal’s analysis of Islamic preaching on TikTok underscores how short-form video content integrates elements of faith and entertainment, shaping a new model of religious communication that resonates with younger users (Faisal et al., 2025). Similarly, Khunaifi notes the growing integration of religious content across various social media platforms, highlighting that these mediums serve as dynamic spaces for both learning and community building among young Muslims (Khariroh, 2022).

As a result, the prevailing influence of digital technologies on religious identity and practice represents a broader cultural shift. Research by Rofidah and Muhid emphasizes how online media fosters hybridity among youths, allowing them to negotiate their religious identities through both traditional and modern lenses (Rofidah & Muhid, 2022). This hybridity underscores the need for a

comprehensive understanding of how young Muslims navigate their spiritual lives within an increasingly digital world. In conclusion, the digitalization of spiritual practices in contemporary Islam not only reshapes religious expression but also redefines community interaction and authority. Millennials and Generation Z are uniquely positioned to leverage these digital tools, creatively merging their faith with technology, thereby transforming their religious identities in the process.

## Conclusion

This study finds that digital popular culture has become a crucial space for Millennial and Gen Z Muslims to construct and negotiate their Islamic identities. Phenomena such as hijabers, Muslim YouTubers, and modest fashion communities illustrate that piety is no longer understood as a singular, fixed concept; rather, it has become a flexible, aesthetic, and digitally performative social practice. The study's key finding highlights that social media functions not only as a channel for religious expression but also as an arena of contestation between piety, lifestyle, and the capitalization of spirituality. Consequently, Islamic identity in the digital era emerges not merely as a reflection of religious values but as the result of a complex interplay between faith, popular culture, and the logic of digital capitalism.

From an academic perspective, this research contributes to expanding the understanding of the relationship between religion, media, and popular culture, particularly within contemporary Islam. The findings emphasize that Islamic practice cannot be separated from the dynamics of media and the digital economy, enriching studies of religious representation that have traditionally focused on ritual or institutional spaces. By employing a qualitative, literature-based approach, this study opens a new analytical space for exploring how young Muslims shape their spirituality amidst cultural globalization and algorithmic social media logic. However, the study has limitations due to its exploratory nature and reliance on secondary sources, without direct field data. Future research should be directed toward digital ethnography or visual discourse analysis to empirically examine how digital piety is practiced and interpreted by participants in specific contexts. Moreover, issues of spiritual authenticity, religious commodification, and gender inequalities in digital culture remain critical topics that warrant further investigation.

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