# PIETY, SOCIAL PRESSURE, AND *RIYA'*:
## Religious Practices of Yogyakarta Urban Muslim Youth in Digital Media

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## Abstract

*This article examines the relationship between piety, social pressure, and riya' among urban Muslim youth in Yogyakarta who use social media to express religiousity, and the way the youth negotiate to deal with the contradiction between displayed piousness and religious norms. Employing a phenomenological approach this article explore the negotiation of ambiguity among urban Muslim youth, in particular the urban students actively involved in lecture series branded "Ngaji Filsafat" conducted by Dr. Fahruddin Faiz. This article argue that not only digital media provide space for youth to express their piety, it also offer bigger social pressure to gain social validation for their (digital) existence, in the form of likes and followers, for instance. The social pressure increases ethical ambiguity, where expressions of online piety can be considered as violating a moral principle of religiosity, namely riya'. Finally, this article contributes to debates on the intersection of religion and media, especially on the aspect of individual negotiation space in responding to biases and dilemmas arising from the hybridity of the two.*

*(Artikel ini mengkaji relasi antara kesalehan, tekanan sosial, dan riya' (pamer) di kalangan pemuda Muslim urban di Yogyakarta yang menggunakan media sosial untuk mengekspresikan keagamaannya. Tidak hanya itu, artikel ini dengan menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologi juga mengkaji bagaimana proses negosiasi di tengah ambiguitas di kalangan pemuda Muslim urban, khususnya mahasiswa urban yang terlibat aktif dalam rangkaian kuliah bertajuk "Ngaji Filsafat" yang diselenggarakan oleh Dr. Fahruddin Faiz. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa media digital tidak hanya menyediakan ruang bagi pemuda untuk mengekspresikan kesalehannya, tetapi juga menawarkan tekanan sosial yang lebih besar untuk mendapatkan validasi sosial atas eksistensi (digital) mereka, dalam bentuk like dan follower. Tekanan sosial tersebut meningkatkan ambiguitas etika, di mana ekspresi kesalehan daring dapat dianggap melanggar prinsip moral religiusitas, yaitu riya'. Terakhir, artikel ini berkontribusi pada perdebatan tentang persinggungan agama dan media, khususnya pada aspek ruang negosiasi individu dalam menanggapi bias dan dilema yang timbul dari hibriditas keduanya.)*

**Keywords:** *Piety; Riya', Urban Muslim Youth, Islam and New Media, Yogyakarta*

## Introduction

In the contemporary digital age, private manifestations of piety have hitherto transformed into public displays on social media, engendering new uncertainties in religious practices.[1] Unlike what has been expected as the main premises of the theory of secularization, that religion in the modern world will "decline and become increasingly privatized, marginal, and politically irrelevant"[2] the rapid development of digital technologies has enabled people of religion to express their religiosity in public space wider and easier. Unnecessarily limited to particular groups of certain religion, region, or age, for instance, the digitalization trend is a phenomenon occurring globally. In particular is a segmented group of urban Muslim youth, who, based on their urban socio-geographical

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[1] Dawam Multazamy Rohmatulloh, Mochammad Irfan Achfandhy, and Astuti Patmaningsih, "The Encounter of Da'wah Digitalization with Urban Muslim Culture," *Akademika : Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 28, no. 1 (2023): 101.

[2] Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

position, have better access to the technology, and as youth, are so-called digital native, for their engagement with the technology since their early age. Especially in Indonesia, where the urban Muslims, not necessarily youth, engaged on platforms such as *Instagram, YouTube*, and *TikTok* to express religiosity while simultaneously intensifying social pressure, as persistent digital traces frequently elicit ambiguous interpretations of users' intentions.[3] Within this context, religious practices are complicated with negotiation between values and norms, as social media obscures the distinction between authentic piety and the pursuit of social approval or validation, which, in turn, brings them into *riya'* (an act of showing off). This phenomenon warrants examination as it signifies a substantial transformation in the digital era's interplay between religious principles and social dynamics.

Scholarly discourse has extensively examined the role of social pressure and the pursuit of validation in digital environments which fosters a continuous search for validation, driven by network dynamics and algorithmic biases that reinforce feelings of inadequacy.[4] On *Instagram*, for example, social pressure compels users to conform to dominant social norms, as evidenced by the widespread use of aesthetic filters and strategic self-presentation, often accompanied by subsequent regret[5] and fear of social exclusion[6] not only leads to digital fatigue but also intensifies pressure to attain validation, ultimately affecting psychological well-being.

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[3] Fatimah Husein and Martin Slama, "Online Piety and Its Discontent: Revisiting Islamic Anxieties on Indonesian Social Media," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018): 80–93.

[4] Alfonso Pellegrino, "Social Comparison, Problems of Digital Consumption and Its Implications," in *Decoding Digital Consumer Behavior* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2024), 113–131.

[5] Ifra Iftikhar et al., "Filtered Reality: Exploring Gender Differences in *Instagram* Use, Social Conformity Pressure, and Regret among Young Adults," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 34, no. 7 (2024): 1153–1171.

[6] Amandeep Dhir et al., "Online Social Media Fatigue and Psychological Wellbeing—A Study of Compulsive Use, Fear of Missing out, Fatigue, Anxiety and Depression," *International Journal of Information Management* 40 (2018): 141–152.

Similarly, Chua & Chang also demonstrate how teenage girls construct their identities on social media based on peer-driven beauty standards, which are intrinsically linked to the need for recognition.[7] These studies collectively emphasize the pivotal role of social validation in shaping identity, both within institutional contexts and digital environments.[8] They further highlight how social pressure in digital spaces influences identity representation, frequently making public validation a central component of self-presentation.

Furthermore, Grubbs et al noted that public displays of moral or religious ideas on social media frequently fulfil social status-seeking objectives and incite polarizing conflicts.[9] Digital media facilitates accessibility for Muslim youth to develop their religious identity[10] and to articulate their piety[11] through feedback mechanisms such as likes and comments.[12] However, Cole-Turner highlights the commodification of piety in digital spaces, where religious self-representation, including curated images and performative religious engagement, may be

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[7] Trudy Hui Hui Chua and Leanne Chang, "Follow Me and like My Beautiful Selfies: Singapore Teenage Girls' Engagement in Self-Presentation and Peer Comparison on Social Media," *Computers in Human Behavior* 55 (2016): 190–197.

[8] Laura G. E. Smith et al., "The Social Validation and Coping Model of Organizational Identity Development," *Journal of Management* 39, no. 7 (2013): 1952–1978.

[9] Joshua B. Grubbs et al., "Moral Grandstanding in Public Discourse: Status-Seeking Motives as a Potential Explanatory Mechanism in Predicting Conflict," ed. Geoffrey Wetherell, *PLOS ONE* 14, no. 10 (2019): e0223749.

[10] Elif Kavakci and Camille R Kraeplin, "Religious Beings in Fashionable Bodies: The Online Identity Construction of Hijabi Social Media Personalities," *Media, Culture & Society* 39, no. 6 (2017): 850–868.

[11] Annisa R Beta, "Commerce, Piety and Politics: Indonesian Young Muslim Women's Groups as Religious Influencers," *New Media & Society* 21, no. 10 (2019): 2140–2159.

[12] Enes Abanoz, "The Reactions to Muslim Identity Building through Social Media: User Comments on *YouTube* Street Interview Videos," *Religions* 13, no. 6 (2022): 498; Teguh Fachmi, "What Drives Indonesian Muslim Youth Express Their Piety on Social Media: Do Psychological, Socio-Cultural, and Politics Interfere?," in *Proceeding of Annual International Conference on Islamic Education and Language (AICIEL)*, 2024, 409–416.

strategically employed to cultivate an online presence.[13] This underscores the cultural and ethical complexities of forming religious identities in digital environments. Furthermore, Ho et al argue that social pressure in digital spaces significantly influences religious identity construction and individuals' engagement with religious activities.[14] Collectively, these studies affirm that the representation of religious identity on social media is deeply intertwined with social pressures embedded in digital culture.

Although prior research has explored the correlation between piety and social pressure, particularly in the context of seeking social approval through digital media, there is a paucity of discourse regarding the intersection of social pressure and the phenomena of *riya'*, as the term is deeply entrenched in Islamic jurisprudence. Prior research often neglected the emergence or transformation of the idea of *riya'* within the context of digitized representation. The concept of *riya'* in the digital realm has garnered heightened scrutiny with the growing display of piety on social media platforms. Nahar and Hidayatulloh investigated how the motivations for posting self-portraits on social media may signify the practice of *riya'*, particularly when individuals share images to elicit admiration or achieve personal solace instead of genuine worship goals.[15] This phenomenon corresponds with Husein and Slama's findings that online piety behaviors frequently entail tension and anxiety associated with *riya'*, particularly in activities such as collective Qur'an recitation

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[13] Ron Cole-Turner, "Commodification and Transfiguration: Socially Mediated Identity in Technology and Theology," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (2019).

[14] Shirley S Ho, Waipeng Lee, and Shahiraa Sahul Hameed, "Muslim Surfers on the Internet: Using the Theory of Planned Behaviour to Examine the Factors Influencing Engagement in Online Religious Activities," *New Media & Society* 10, no. 1 (2008): 93–113, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444807085323.

[15] Muhammad Hasnan Nahar and Miftah Khilmi Hidayatulloh, "Riya dalam Selfie di Media Sosial," *Al FAWATIH: Jurnal Kajian Al Quran dan Hadis* 1, no. 2 (2020): 48–61.

online or sharing alms through social media.[16] Moreover, Kailani and Slama also emphasized that transparency in online philanthropy may result in ambivalence, as individuals can be viewed as ostentatiously displaying their piety.[17]

The phenomenon indicates that *riya'* contradicts the essence of genuine piety, which ought to be directed toward sincerity and devotion to God rather than succumbing to societal pressures for external validation. In the digital realm, the opportunity for *riya'* expands as social media enables individuals to showcase their worship or virtuous actions to a broader audience. Nonetheless, despite apprehensions regarding *riya'*, the prevalence of online piety activities continues to thrive among Indonesian middle-class Muslims, indicating a reconciliation between piety and digital presence.

This article seeks to address the gap by including the viewpoints of the Islamic religion and the behaviours of urban Muslim youth as active participants in the digital realm. In further, this article employed phenomenological approach examines the influence of social pressure in digital media on Muslim youth forming their religious identity, including the rise of *riya'* practice as a reaction to social pressure in the digital realm. This article is significant as it enhances comprehension of the interplay between religious norms and social pressures within the framework of modernity influenced by advancements in digital technology. It broadens the discourse on how urban Muslim youths are able to maneuver the junction of religion and social influences inside digital environments, specifically focusing on the dynamics of their life. The study was conducted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in July to August 2024, concentrating on urban Muslim youth who actively utilize social

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[16] Husein and Slama, "Online Piety and Its Discontent: Revisiting Islamic Anxieties on Indonesian Social Media."

[17] Najib Kailani and Martin Slama, "Accelerating Islamic Charities in Indonesia: Zakat, Sedekah and the Immediacy of Social Media," *South East Asia Research* 28, no. 1 (2020): 70–86 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0967828X.2019.1691939.

media to articulate their religiosity. All participants regularly attended the *"Ngaji Filsafat"* lecture series led by Dr. Fahruddin Faiz at Jenderal Sudirman Mosque (MJS), Yogyakarta. Additionally, their presence across various digital platforms—including *YouTube, Instagram, TikTok*, and *Spotify* to illustrates how their religious practices adopt a hybridized approach that integrates offline and online expressions of piety.

## Social Pressures on Urban Muslim Youth

The interview findings reveal the social pressure experienced by urban Muslim youth to maintain an active presence on social media following their participation in religious activities, such as *pengajian* (Islamic religious lectures), especially at *"Ngaji Filsafat."* AL disclosed feeling compelled to post a self-portrait after attending the lecture, as her peers frequently questioned the absence of new posts. This recurring expectation created a sense of obligation to demonstrate religious engagement publicly, despite her initial reluctance.

Similarly, FK acknowledged that while he did not always intend to share images, he experienced discomfort when his peers posted group photos without his presence. These accounts underscore how social media fosters implicit societal expectations, wherein the expression of piety becomes intertwined with digital visibility, reinforcing the notion that religious devotion must be publicly performed and validated in online spaces.

Social media serves as a mechanism to demonstrate commitment to religious activity despite occasional misalignment with personal comfort. BR expressed a compulsion to post on *Instagram* to counter the impression of being unserious. This discomfort arises from the pressure experienced, accompanied by an implicit expectation to update content continuously. CM stated that she frequently created short videos of lecture lines on *TikTok* with the primary aim of sharing. She gradually perceived a societal requirement for her posts to mirror her degree of

devotion. This indicates that social media platforms can affect individual behavior, even regarding spiritual practices.[18]

Alongside the necessity of demonstrating presence, participants also articulated a desire for social affirmation from their posts. DN articulated that sharing lecture excerpts on *Instagram* demonstrated engagement and elicited affirmative feedback from her peers, offering a sense of validation.

Meanwhile, EL experienced pressure to upload lecture videos on *YouTube* or *Instagram* constantly. She perceives a void in her existence as a religious individual if she refrains from posting for an extended period. This social validation is a component that enhances their engagement in social media despite the pressure to meet these expectations.

The pressure as acknowledged by the interviewees is additionally affected by collective behavior. AL and FK noted that their peers' behavior served as a standard that motivated their participation. FK even felt discomfort when he refrained from posting while others did. Social media posts serve as personal expressions and instruments for upholding conformity to social standards within one's community. In this setting, social media has clearly evolved into a platform for constructing both collective and individual identities, with involvement quantified by participation in the digital realm.[19]

The social pressure experienced by urban Muslim youth to showcase engagement in religious activities through social media underscores the considerable impact of societal expectations and digital affirmation. Initially utilized as a sharing tool, social media has transformed into a medium for negotiating identity and piety. The feeling of obligation to regularly produce and post social media materials, reinforced by

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[18] Parag Singla and Matthew Richardson, "Yes, There Is a Correlation: -From Social Networks to Personal Behavior on the Web," in *Proceedings of the 17th International Conference on World Wide Web*, 2008, 655–664.

[19] Adrian Lüders, Alejandro Dinkelberg, and Michael Quayle, "Becoming 'Us' in Digital Spaces: How Online Users Creatively and Strategically Exploit Social Media Affordances to Build up Social Identity," *Acta Psychologica* 228 (2022): 103-643.

communal standards, indicates that religious rituals are now conducted in both physical and digital realms, which mutually impact one another. This illustrates how digitalization presents new barriers or burdens to religious experience in contemporary society.

## Piety and Identity Representation

Social media has emerged as a platform for Muslim youth to express their piety. Interviews indicate that many individuals use *Instagram* or *TikTok* to express their religious identity. AL stated that social media has signified personal piety. Posts concerning recitation activities, prayers, or snippets from lectures signify personal piety and serve as a medium for conveying religious identity to other individuals. In this context, CM underscored the significance of visible proof of piety, as she believed others frequently questioned her dedication to religion in its absence. The compulsion to perpetually showcase religious activities on social media indicates that piety has evolved from a private practice to a matter of public perception, while the public perception would easily measure and make sense the practice through visualities.[20]

Nevertheless, the societal expectation to share religious content on social media often generates ambivalence among participants. BR revealed that while his posts about prayer or recitation reflected his genuine religious commitment, he acknowledged that not all of them were entirely sincere. Similarly, FK admitted that certain posts were influenced more by external social pressure than by personal religious intention. This suggests that the expression of piety on social media is not solely driven by individual devotion but is also shaped by societal norms and expectations. Consequently, this pressure can create internal tension, as individuals navigate the contradiction between the desire to publicly display their faith and the concern that such actions may be

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[20] Birgit Meyer, *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses* (New York: Springer, 2009); David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (California: Univ of California Press, 2012).

perceived as performative rather than sincere expressions of religiosity.

Conversely, others perceive their social media posts as an effort to effectuate a good influence. EL underscored that piety encompasses not only intention but also the consequences of the posts. She believes that sharing video lectures can motivate people to pursue a religious lifestyle. In addition, DN also endeavors to ensure that her posts are significant and pertinent, selecting lecture quotations that hold worth for both herself and her audience. Social media posts containing *da'wah* messages are indeed influential to motivate the audience to become more pious.[21] The varied responses from the interviewees show that social media has evolved into a platform for social validation, advocacy, and disseminating ethical messages.

In addition, they are also noticeable to evaluate social media visuals profoundly. Specific posts regarding piety may appear as mere images unless genuine goals and significance support them. This underscores the significance of authenticity in the practice of digital piety. Nevertheless, social media serves as a venue for young Muslims to explore their Islamic identity in the context of societal pressures and communal expectations. This event illustrates the intricate interplay among piety, individual goals, and the necessity of self-presentation in the digital public domain.

The findings from these interviews indicate that social media significantly influences the representation of Muslim youth's piety and religious identity. The influences show significant changes in showcasing piety in public, unlike in the early years of digital advancement, let alone in the years before, where it is only embedded on limited individuals with religious authority, especially with the higher social status. For instance, by wearing *baju takwa* (a traditional Islamic dress), buying Islamic art or caligraph to be displayed in houses, and performing five pillars of Islam

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[21] Risris Hari Nugraha, Muhamad Parhan, and Aghnia Aghnia, "Motivasi Hijrah Milenial Muslim Perkotaan Melalui Dakwah Digital," *MUHARRIK: Jurnal Dakwah dan Sosial* 3, no. 02 (2020): 175–194.

(especially *hajj,* the pilgrimage to Mecca).[22] Nowadays, every individual has equal chance to brand him or herself, or to be known as a pious person, thanks to the advancement of the social media. However, societal pressures compel individuals to maintain a façade of piety in the digital public arena despite potential misalignment with their actual objectives. Even though specific posts may be considered as personal branding, some respondents utilize the platform to do the *da'wah,* ranging from re-proselytizing the lecture to inviting the audience to join the lectures. Piety's engagement on social media illustrates the intricate interplay between personal authenticity and societal standards in forming a religious identity in the digital age.

### *Riya'* and Social Media

Social media has increasingly become a significant instrument in shaping the intentions and motivations of Muslim youth in expressing their piety. More than a decade ago, indeed, Campbell has theorized a phenomenon that she coined as "digital religion", where "digital media are shaping and being shaped by religious practices."[23] Following her, the findings from the interviews also indicate shifts in respondents' motivations for utilizing social media to share their religious activities. AL initially engaged in posting religious content as a genuine act of worship; however, over time, she became triggered by the number of "likes" she received. This led to a sense of obligation to participate in similar online engagements to gain comparable recognition.

Similarly, DN also admitted that certain posts, including self-portraits taken after religious recitations, were shared not only as a means of religious expression but also to gain visibility and recognition within her social circle.

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[22] Greg Fealy and Sally White, *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008).

[23] Heidi Campbell, "Considering Spiritual Dimensions within Computer-Mediated Communication Studies," *New Media & Society* 7, no. 1 (2005): 110–134; Heidi A. Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

The shifts highlight how social media fosters an environment where the original intention of worship becomes intertwined with the pursuit of social validation, reflecting the complex interplay between religious devotion and digital self-presentation.

The phenomenon of *riya,*' or the inclination to display religious rituals on social media, emerged as a significant issue in these conversations. BR disclosed that specific posts exhibit characteristics of *riya,'* including sharing prayer photographs to project an image of devotion in worship. Nevertheless, he endeavors to regulate his motives and maintain authenticity. FK also acknowledged that his social media peers frequently prompted him to post messages that appeared to seek recognition. Another instance is of CM, that the affirmative feedback she garnered on a *TikTok* video with a lecture quote was a significant factor in her motivation to persist in content creation despite occasional uncertainties regarding the sincerity of her objectives. This underscores the impact of the digital milieu on individuals' religious conduct and motivations, frequently engendering a conflict between genuine intentions and the compulsion to display.

Specific individuals endeavored to alleviate the burden of *riya'* by redirecting attention to the substance of their posts instead of their personas. EL stated that she favors posting lecture videos over self-portraits, as she considers the former as more important and focuses on religious messages. Nevertheless, she also felt pleasure when her videos garnered several views successfully. The phenomenon illustrates that although certain Muslim youth endeavor to uphold genuine intentions in their online engagements, a component of pride stems from the attention and approval garnered through social media. Religious practice on social media frequently exists at the intersection between worship intentions and the pursuit of recognition.

The obligation to sustain a facade of piety on social media was a dilemma for the responders. Some even believed that *riya'* was an

unavoidable outcome of residing in a digital milieu. FK underscored that the necessity for recognition in the digital realm frequently incites a desire to exhibit piety despite it perhaps not accurately representing one's true intentions. DN also acknowledged an underlying incentive for publishing self-portraits, specifically the desire to attract attention from others. This dynamic indicates that social media produces circumstances in which individuals must reconcile their desire to worship with the social expectations embedded in their online behaviors.

The interviews indicated that *riya'* inside social media is a significant challenge for Muslim youth. Social media has evolved into a domain where religious reasons intertwine with the pursuit of social validation, resulting in a conflict between the aspiration to worship and the compulsion to display. Although some interviewees endeavor to preserve authenticity and concentrate on the substance of their messages, the digital landscape frequently compels them to exhibit piety in more conspicuous manners. The findings indicate that religious practices on social media indicate human goals and arise from intricate interactions among intents, societal pressures, and expectations within the digital context.

This pressure compels individuals to perpetually update their platforms while occasionally feeling uneasy about the "pseudo"-obligation. In this context, piety transcends mere internal or personal significance, becoming a manifestation of societal identity that needs visual, public representation in the digital space. Although they endeavor to uphold genuine intentions in worship and disseminating religious posts, pursuing validation and attention through obtaining likes, comments, and viewership on social media is unavoidable. This conflicts between genuine worship intentions and the societal desire to be perceived as pious by others. These findings indicate that social media has influenced a novel approach for Muslim youth in managing their religious practices. Piety and intentions frequently fluctuate between the pursuit of social recognition and the preservation of spiritual purity.

Digitalization has transformed how urban Muslim youth articulate their religious identity, establishing a new dynamic in which piety is manifested in physical settings and social media. This tendency arises in a competitive metropolitan environment, where engagement in religious activities must frequently be technologically 'visible' to gain social recognition. They reside in areas with significant social media engagement and encounter distinct pressures, therefore they must balance the expectations of religious communities with the requirements of platform algorithms that promote viral content. The interviews indicated that the failure or even the delay in publishing social media posts "as a proof of religious engagement", such as self-portraits, may result in inquiries from peers and even skepticism over their religious dedication. This signifies a paradigm change in which piety transcends mere intention or consistent worship, encompassing the capacity to project a religious image that aligns with group norms in the digital realm.

This discovery corresponds with Goffman's self-presentation theory, which characterizes social media as a 'stage' for enacting social roles, including religious identity.[24] This research expands the understanding of the complexities surrounding the pressure to look devout among urban Muslim youth, highlighting the interplay between group norms and social media algorithms. Prior research, including Bunt's important work on Islamic spirituality and the internet, emphasizes religious authority inside the digital realm, whereas this study underscores individuals' challenges in preserving spiritual authenticity.[25] The notion of digital piety is also pertinent. Nonetheless, the research indicates that this practice is shaped by individual aspirations and societal validation mechanisms, such as likes and comments, transforming religious intents into performative commodities. The primary distinction from prior

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[24] Erving Goffman, "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. 1959," *Garden City, NY* 259 (2002).

[25] Gary R. Bunt, "Islamic Spirituality and the Internet," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Islamic Spirituality* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2021), 496–514.

writing is the focus on the internal conflict faced by youth, wherein technology intensifies the discord between religious ideals prioritizing faith and digital culture prioritizing visibility.

The research findings substantiate by demonstrating that digital recognition significantly influences religious engagement among urban Muslim youth. According to CM, the lack of visual proof of piety, such as posts of gathering activities, renders her religious devotion doubtful within the social context. This corresponds with research on digital religion that characterizes social media as a venue for identity negotiation. This research uncovers a new aspect: the compulsion to appear 'pious' originates from offline networks and algorithms penalizing accounts with minimal participation. DN perceives a compulsion to regularly share lecture quotations to avoid being 'forgotten' by her (online) audience. This phenomenon indicates that piety in the digital era has transformed into a social currency wherein an individual's religious worth is assessed through quantifiable criteria, such as the number of likes rather than spiritual profundity.

Social pressure compels urban Muslim youth to reconcile community and individual identities in their religious observance. FK acknowledged that his posts were frequently motivated by "peer customs" rather than individual inclinations, whereas BR experienced a sense of obligation to conform to the trend of religious posts despite feeling uneasy. In this context, social media serves as a tertiary space that obscures the distinction between private and public spheres: formerly personal practices, such as prayer or spiritual contemplation, must be publicized to authenticate religious identity. For instance, EL posts lecture videos on *YouTube* to disseminate and validate her consistency as a religious person. However, as CM acknowledged, this dynamic engenders internal difficulties, feeling her piety is "less recognized without visual support." In this context, social media shapes behavior and establishes a novel hierarchy of piety, wherein individuals capable of generating captivating

content are regarded as more devout.

The phenomenon of *riya'* directly results from the need to meet digital expectations. AL acknowledged that her original purpose of sharing her religious experience shifted while observing her peers' posts garner numerous likes, leading her to pursue a comparable trend for social affirmation. DN also described self-portrait as an endeavor "to gain attention" rather than only for documenting. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of *riya'* in Islam when acts of worship are conducted for human admiration rather than Allah's approval. Nevertheless, the study indicates that social media intensifies this inclination through features such as *notifications* and *algorithms*, establishing an immediate feedback loop between religious content and social reinforcement. BR even openly acknowledged that specific posts exhibit characteristics of *riya'*, such as sharing prayer photographs to project an image of piety. Although confident interviewees endeavored to uphold their aims, exemplified by EL, who concentrated on lecture material, the pride associated with her content's virality illustrates that *riya'* is challenging to evade completely.

The compulsion to perpetually exhibit piety on social media exerts considerable psychological effects. CM felt anxious as her religious devotion was scrutinized without posters. In contrast, FK even questioned the sincerity of his motives: "Is this for me or the approval of others?" This discontent illustrates the cognitive contradiction between religious beliefs emphasizing sincerity and digital performance imperatives. Furthermore, social media algorithms that prioritize popular material inadvertently diminish the significance of worship, reducing it to a mere visual instrument. DN felt obligated to select "trend-relevant" lecture lines to evade being perceived as obsolete. Piety has transitioned from a reflexive activity to a curatorial strategy aimed at appealing to the preferences of a digital audience.

## Conclusion

This article uncovers the paradox inherent in the digitalization of religion: social media enables urban Muslim youth to articulate their Islamic identity; nonetheless, these platforms somehow might be called as tricking them into a cycle of external validation that undermines spiritual authenticity. The desire for social acknowledgment substantially influences the phenomenon of *riya'*, as admitted by some interviewees who compromised their genuine goals for social validation. Nevertheless, certain respondents attempt to mitigate the pressure by emphasizing substantive substance, although they are not completely satisfied with their popularity. The results indicate that piety in the digital era arises from a continual negotiation among religious beliefs, collective norms, and the computational logic (algorithm) governing visibility. To alleviate the effects of *riya'*, a digital literacy strategy grounded in religious values is essential, enabling Muslim youth to distinguish the core of worship from the performative aspects dictated by digital environments.

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