

Ontological Flattening on the Screen: Spiritual Domestication and the Syncretism of Pop-Sufi Art Consumption among Urban Indonesian Muslims

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Abstract

This study engages with the global scholarly debate on digital religion by examining how cyber mediatization reshapes faith practices among urban Muslims. While conventional media sociology argues that digital spaces inevitably diminish religious sanctity through superficial visual reproduction, this article demonstrates a counterintuitive shift toward functional spiritual transformation. Employing a netnographic approach combined with multimodal discourse analysis, we examine the pop-Sufi visual arts on the Indonesian Instagram account @_zukkk from 2025 to 2026. The findings reveal a profound ontological flattening, where rigid Islamic doctrines are aesthetically domesticated into intimate tools for psychological recovery and coping with ecological trauma. Rather than triggering secularization, the uniform digital interface deconstructs binding communal laws into casual, personalized identity accessories. This study contributes a novel theoretical framework on digital piety, framing mass communication platforms as functional, inclusive alternative spaces that reconcile popular aesthetics with transcendental needs.

Keywords: *Digital Religion, Domestication, Multimodality, Netnography, Ontological Flattening.*

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Introduction

Global media studies have long accused cyberspace of acting as an agent of extreme secularization, eroding the sacredness of religion through the superficiality of visual



reproduction.¹ However, recent empirical evidence reveals a shift in the opposite direction within the contemporary digital ecosystem. Under the influence of platform algorithms, the circulation of popular imagery no longer functions as an empty simulation that trivializes piety. Instead, it has transformed into a tool for deeply intimate psychological healing. Theological doctrines that were once rigid and dogmatic are now aesthetically softened through smartphone screens, creating a space for collective catharsis that alleviates the existential tensions of urban society.² The ontological blurring of the sacred and the profane within digital consumption spaces has not dissolved the essence of faith; rather, it has reconstructed new functional transcendental channels for mental health. The failure of mainstream literature to capture the therapeutic dimension of this visual desacralization leaves a significant academic gap—specifically concerning how the authority of spirituality is being sublimely redefined today.

Within this global debate, the Instagram account @_zukk in Indonesia emerges as an empirical case study exemplifying the radical transformation of urban middle-class Muslim religiosity. Through visual curation that spans magical surrealism, the domestication of Sharia, and poetic responses to local ecological trauma (2025–2026), the platform serves as a space of cultural syncretism where profound Islamic concepts are adapted to promote public tranquility. Its content is no longer regarded as rigid communal dogma but is instead casually consumed as a fluid and fashionable element of personal identity on mobile screens. An in-depth examination of this case is essential to addressing an academic gap overlooked by conventional media sociology. This investigation reveals how the desacralization of cyber mass communication has, in fact, succeeded in reconstructing an alternative spiritual oasis that effectively heals the collective inner fragility of urban society.

Previous studies on religious expression in new media have generally adopted three main approaches. The first, the functional-authoritative approach, examines the effectiveness of digital da'wah message transmission on subjects' formal religiosity,³ the

¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila F. Glaser (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 84; Pauline Hope Cheong, "The Vitality of New Media and Religion: Communicative Perspectives, Practices, and Changing Authority in Spiritual Organization," *New Media & Society* 19, no. 1 (January 2017): 25–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816649913>.

² Stig Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society* (London: Routledge, 2013), 140.

³ Syaif Uddin and Abdul Muhid, "Efektivitas Pesan Dakwah Di Media Sosial Terhadap Religiusitas Masyarakat Muslim: Analisis Literature Review," *Alhadharah: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 20, no. 1 (September 9, 2021): 17, <https://doi.org/10.18592/alhadharah.v20i1.4835>.

restructuring of cyber preacher authority,⁴ and the fluidity of interfaith interactions⁵. The second, the cultural commodification approach, critiques the hybridization of popular media for allegedly degrading the piety of millennial Muslims in pursuit of market interests,⁶ thereby creating simulacra of sacred space,⁷ and artificial identities⁸. The third, the third-space approach, interprets digital platforms as hybrid sites that mediate dogmatic tensions through the materiality of media.⁹ However, what has not been widely discussed is how the logic of screen interfaces mediates ontological homogenization in the cyber realm. This article addresses that gap by conceptualizing the @_zukkk account as a site of spiritual domestication, where the consumption of functional pop-Sufi art reconfigures the religious orientation of urban Muslims in Indonesia.

Building on this gap, the article aims to elucidate how the cyber-interface mechanics of the @_zukkk account reconfigure the religious orientations of urban middle-class Muslims. Specifically, it addresses three fundamental questions; first, how are weighty Islamic theological doctrines domesticated through a landscape of magical surrealism to alleviate the existential anxieties of urban society? Second, what is the nature of the spatial shift from institutional public spaces toward sentimental private spheres of piety as a form of catharsis for local ecological trauma? Third, how does the

⁴ Moch. Khafidz Fuad Raya, "Digital Religion: The Packaging and Persuasion of Celebrity Preachers in Contemporary Indonesia," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 23, no. 67 (April 8, 2024): 80–94.

⁵ Yidan Ding et al., "The Mediatization of Religion: How Digital-Age Film and Television Reshape Interfaith Experiences," *Religions* 16, no. 9 (September 11, 2025): 1172, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16091172>.

⁶ Annisa R Beta, "Commerce, Piety and Politics: Indonesian Young Muslim Women's Groups as Religious Influencers," *New Media & Society* 21, no. 10 (October 10, 2019): 2140–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819838774>; Eva F. Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia," *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5, no. 1–2 (February 14, 2018): 68–99, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340085>.

⁷ Dayana Lengauer, "Sharing Semangat Taqwa : Social Media and Digital Islamic Socialities in Bandung," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (January 2, 2018): 5–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1415276>.

⁸ Dindin Solahudin and Moch Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority," *Religions* 11, no. 1 (December 31, 2019): 19, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019>.

⁹ Giulia Evolvi, "Religion and the Internet: Digital Religion, (Hyper)Mediated Spaces, and Materiality," *Zeitschrift Für Religion, Gesellschaft Und Politik* 6, no. 1 (May 19, 2022): 9–25, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41682-021-00087-9>; Véronique Cova et al., "The Changing Dichotomy between the Sacred and the Profane: A Historical Analysis of the Santiago de Compostela Pilgrimage," *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* 16, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 109–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766086.2018.1501415>.

process of desacralization in mass communication give rise to a syncretism between ritual values and the logic of cyberspace consumption? By addressing these issues, this study offers new theoretical insights into the emergence of a functional, inclusive, and adaptive mode of digital piety amid the fluidity of contemporary cyber-modernity.

This article argues that the ontological convergence between religious rituals and secular spaces of consumption on digital platforms does not signify the end of the era of piety. Instead, it marks a phase of functional spiritual transformation. While conventional media sociology literature often suspects that digitization inevitably diminishes the depth of religious dogma,¹⁰ the visual reality presented by the @_zukkk account reveals a radical reversal of this trend. The desacralization of cyber mass communication has not created a transcendental void; rather, it serves as a strategy to temper rigid Islamic doctrine, enabling it to adapt to the psychosocial dynamics of urban society.¹¹ Through popular aesthetics, strict Sharia is casually deconstructed into both a personal identity accessory and a tool for collective spiritual healing. Therefore, the circulation of religious symbols on mobile screens should be understood as an alternative space for catharsis—one that successfully reconciles contemporary artistic tastes with the spiritual and emotional needs of digital subjects.

Method

This study employs a qualitative design that integrates a netnographic approach with an intrinsic case study method to examine the complexity of religious symbol circulation in digital spaces.¹² The unit of analysis is the entire corpus of contemporary Islamic art with pop-Sufi nuances on the Indonesian Instagram account @_zukkk. This case was selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria:¹³ the sociological significance of the account, the high volume of content circulation, and its substantial audience engagement rate of 17.27% among 100,474 active followers.

Data collection focused on posts from April 2025 to May 2026 that consistently illustrate the shift from rigid theological frameworks toward narratives of psychological healing, responses to local ecological crises, and the convergence of sacred ritual symbols with the transactional logic of the commercial market. The data sources comprised three

¹⁰ Lengauer, “Sharing Semangat Taqwa : Social Media and Digital Islamic Socialities in Bandung.”

¹¹ Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*, 140.

¹² Jaber F. Hubrium and James A. Holstein, “Analytic Inspiration in Ethnographic Fieldwork,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, ed. Uwe Flick (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 42.

¹³ Robert E. Stake, *Multiple Case Study Analysis* (New York: Guilford Press, 2006), 24–26.

primary modalities: visual data from 14 selected digital artworks, poetic captions authored by the account creator, and public discourse data from comments. Collection involved passive online observation and chronological downloading of text-visual materials without direct interaction.¹⁴ The researcher systematically reviewed the account's timeline, classifying upload patterns in relation to relevant sectoral or social events. Public comment data were gathered using manual text-scraping techniques.

Data analysis employed multimodal discourse analysis, integrating visual semiotics with qualitative content analysis.¹⁵ The process unfolded in three stages. First, data reduction was conducted by tagging visual elements in the images and categorizing the accompanying text according to psychosocial themes. Second, the data were organized horizontally using a visual scheme of coded panels alongside a structural matrix table to juxtapose shifts in traditional theological narratives with expressions of personal psychological healing. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and validating them through functional interpretations of the interplay among captions, visual representations, and audience responses. This approach establishes a robust argument regarding the epistemological transformation of religious institutions within Indonesia's contemporary cyber mass communication ecosystem.

Pop Music Urban Techno-Sufism: The Transformation of Religious Imagery in Indonesia's Cyber Mass Communication Ecosystem

The Islamic intellectual tradition regards visual art not as mere illusion but as a legitimate means of visualizing religious doctrine that facilitates the subject's spiritual understanding. Through the concept of an intermediary realm of imagination, signs and images function as transparent verses guiding human perception toward the Infinite Reality (*al-Ḥaqq*).¹⁶ The use of such imaginative forms is considered a valid spiritual and instructional medium, provided it remains grounded in the principle of *tanzīh*—the purification of God from all limited material likenesses.¹⁷ Within this theological framework, art serves as an ontological bridge connecting the lower sensory realm (*ālam*

¹⁴ Robert V. Kozinets, "The Field behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities," *Journal of Marketing Research* 39, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 61–72, <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935>.

¹⁵ Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 26.

¹⁷ Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (Minnesota: Paragon House, 1994), 110.

al-syahādah) with the higher celestial dimension (*ālam al-ghaib*),¹⁸ positioning visual beauty as an instrument of inner transformation in the pursuit of absolute truth.

This conceptualization of theological aesthetics finds tangible expression in the sociological context of Indonesia, where religious artistic practices flourish as an integral part of popular culture and serve as a collective coping mechanism for the Muslim community. Indonesian Muslim culture is characterized by a deep attachment to Sufi traditions, reverence for traditional cultural authorities, and a keen sensitivity to social issues and local environmental crises.¹⁹ Contemporary Islamic art in Indonesia consistently reflects the realities of urban life, integrating spiritual values with local expressions, references to national literature, and even marginal street subcultures.²⁰ Far from existing in a isolation, religious art in Indonesia functions as a social mirror that captures psychological fragility, inner exhaustion, and the enduring human quest for an oasis of peace amid the complexities of modern urban existence.

These cultural dynamics intersect with the rapid advancement of modern communication technologies, which have gradually transformed traditional artistic expressions and spiritual experiences into the realm of digital media.²¹ Forms of creative imagination that once emerged intimately through inner discipline are now mechanically transmitted onto smartphone screens via platforms such as Instagram. This process of religious mediatization compels sacred symbols, Qur’anic revelatory texts, and Islamic legal rulings to conform to the logic of digital interfaces—governed by visual aesthetics, accelerated information flows, and algorithmic market dynamics.²² Consequently, physical sacred spaces undergo spatiotemporal deconstruction, with the boundaries of ritual sanctity merging horizontally into everyday entertainment and commercial lifestyles.

The pace of the mediatization of Islamic art is exemplified by the Indonesian Instagram account @_zukkk. This account has amassed 100,474 followers and follows 2,745

¹⁸ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 12.

¹⁹ Julia Day Howell, “Introduction: Sufism and Neo-Sufism in Indonesia Today,” *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 46, no. 2 (2012): 1–24.

²⁰ Julia Day Howell, “Modernity and Islamic Spirituality in Indonesia’s New Sufi Networks,” in *Sufism and The “Modern” in Islam*, ed. Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 232.

²¹ Nina Rosfiyanti, Nur Wahidin, and Mulawarman Hannase, “The Transformation of Urban Tasawuf in Indonesia: Cybermedia and the Emergence of Digital Religion,” *Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 4, no. 2 (December 30, 2024): 117–28, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jpi.v4i2.24073>.

²² Solahudin and Fakhruroji, “Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority.”

accounts. Its sociological significance is further underscored by 811 content posts, which have generated an audience engagement rate of 17.27%, with an average of 17,303.75 likes and 44.88 comments per digital canvas.²³ These quantitative indicators provide strong empirical justification for considering this pop-Sufi artistic expression as an active digital communal space, widely consumed by Indonesia's online community.

Representations of Magical Surrealism, Existential Spatiotemporality, and Text-Science Hybridization in Cyberspace

Religious expression in cyberspace creates a new framework of meaning, where visual beauty serves as the primary medium for subliminally conveying transcendental messages. This mode of presentation no longer depends on rigid textual exposition but instead harnesses the evocative power of imagery to reach the deepest layers of digital readers' emotional consciousness.²⁴ Through the poetic arrangement of color, form, and spatial composition, material boundaries gradually dissolve, evoking an atmosphere of inner contemplation that transcends the superficiality of daily routines. Sacred elements are continually reimagined to be directly experienced as part of the subject's quest for inner peace.²⁵ This loosening of theological boundaries manifests through a visual dialogue that integrates traditional ritual symbols with those of modernity.

This symbolic integration reinterprets contemporary Islamic theological doctrine through a magical surrealist visual landscape that blurs the boundaries between earthly physical space and metaphysical dimensions. The associative depth is further enhanced by an aesthetic fusion that unites religious symbols, emotional expressions, and representations of modern scientific anatomy within a single cohesive visual frame (see Figure 1).

²³ Social Blade, "Zuk's Instagram Statistics," socialblade.com, May 8, 2026, https://socialblade.com/instagram/user/_zukkk.

²⁴ Bibi Hajra and Tamkeen Saleem, "The Use of Islamic Patterned Art Therapy: Healing of Psychological Problems Among University Students," *Journal of Religion and Health* 60, no. 6 (December 15, 2021): 4361–86, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01240-7>.

²⁵ Asep Abdul Muhyi et al., "Visual Spirituality of Muslimah Women on Instagram: A Virtual Ethnographic Study on @note.Musymis," *Ishraqi* 24, no. 1 (2025): 163–86.



Source: Instagram account @_zukkk (2025–2026)

Figure 1. A model of visual dramatization using magical surrealism symbols and pop anatomy.

In the surreal landscape segment, visualizations of winged humans soaring above the clouds,²⁶ a figure confronting a dead-end path inscribed with “*aina tazhabūn*,”²⁷ and an image of a human brain²⁸ labeled with poetic typography appear immediately after a caption addressing time deadlines and eschatological themes. The strategic placement of these symbols in transitional positions, as illustrated in Figure 1, demonstrates that the combination of soft pastel colors and contrasting lighting functions as a condensed icon. This serves as a marker for teachings that are not conveyed through normative theological language but are instead recognized intuitively through form, gesture, and digital temporality. In this way, doctrine is absorbed into objects, bodies, and visual narratives, allowing Islamic teachings to manifest spatially and embody rules accessible to urban society.

The creation of contemporary religious visual content consistently shifts the focus of reflection from the frightening threat of normative sin toward the subject’s personal psychological healing. This series of visual expressions demonstrates how rigid theological doctrines are transformed into intimate, reflective, and casual everyday narratives for online audiences (see Table 1).

²⁶ Zuk [@_zukkk], “Sholat Adalah Komunikasi Intim,” Instagram Photo, April 29, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/_zukkk/p/DXs-aSOkn_3/.

²⁷ Zuk [@_zukkk], “Saat Hidup Mempertanyakan Arah Tujuanmu,” Instagram Photo, April 15, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/_zukkk/p/DXIANAPk1Q0/.

²⁸ Zuk [@_zukkk], “Selamat Hari Filsafat Sedunia,” Instagram Photo, November 20, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/_zukkk/p/DRRPeObkmHx/.

Table 1. Matrix Illustrating the Shift from Traditional Theological Narratives to the Subject's Personal Psychological Healing

Visual Cue	Traditional Theological Cue	Creator's Caption Narrative	Subject's Psychological Healing
Dog on a Prayer Rug	Rigid Islamic laws regarding <i>najs mughallazah</i> (severe impurity) and the prohibition against Muslims touching dogs.	The phrase "O my Lord, if Your love is only worthy of those with pure hearts, then where do these sinners seek refuge?"	Express emotional catharsis for the subject, who feels morally flawed (a sinner) yet continues to hope in divine compassion.
The Red Prayer Mat and the Grave	The horror of grave torments, the terrifying certainty of death, and the threat of reckoning for deeds after death.	"We were not born into this world without a reason... Happy <i>sahūr!</i> "	Peaceful acceptance of death as a beautiful path home toward spatiotemporal eternity.
The Human Figure in the Labyrinth	The threat of straying from faith, heresy, major sins, and the punishment of hell for deviating from Sharia.	"No matter how big or complex the problems we face... may Allah always be pleased."	This reflects the psychological vulnerability of urban individuals who often experience disorientation amid the complexity of modern life.
Punk Typography and the Ablution Movement	The rigidity of formal Sharia worship and society's negative stigma toward street youth subcultures.	There is no place as beautiful as Home, the true place of return: " <i>Gusti Allah Taala.</i> "	This represents cultural reconciliation, validating that the transcendental realm is open to marginalized subcultures.
The Allegory of Death and Time	Explores eschatological fear of sudden death and the profound regret stemming from neglecting worldly life.	"Time is a sword; if you do not strike it, it will strike your neck."	This allegory addresses managing existential anxiety about life's limited duration through calm, personal closeness to the Divine.
The Scale of Deeds and Body Weight	A visualization of the terrifying Day of Judgment (<i>yaum al-mizān</i>), depicting the reckoning of sins that leads to hell.	"Apart from Your mercy, O Lord, there is nothing we can rely on from ourselves."	This represents the transformation of the burden of fear of reckoning into total surrender (<i>tawakkal</i>) to

God's all-encompassing
mercy.

The arrangement of poetic literary material in the captions, as summarized in Table 1, consistently shifts the focus of contemplation from the threat of normative sin toward the subject's personal psychological healing. Visual elements such as a dog on a prayer mat,²⁹ a human figure in a labyrinth,³⁰ punk-style typography depicting ritual ablution,³¹ the allegory of the Angel of Death and time,³² and the scales of good deeds and body weight³³ represent a softening of eschatological doctrine into messages that resonate with the emotional fragility of online readers. The writing style reflects contemporary urban society's tendency to seek an oasis of independent spirituality free from doctrinal fears—where divine teachings are reimagined as accessible guides to instant inner peace within the realm of digital media.

This discursive connection is further deepened by audience responses in the comments section, which frame the visual representations and captions in Table 1 as a shared space for emotional therapy. Comments from accounts such as @apr***hihi (on the protection of sinners), @klasi***me (on the regret of lateness), and @m***z_im (defining death as life's deadline) illustrate how religious symbols are embraced as instruments of existential catharsis. This internal mode of worship is reinforced by reflections from @afi***.fzh and @az***ara on the labyrinth of life and the commitment of hearts that reconnect when lost, as well as by @er***oan, who associates the grave with the path back to the “barn of eternity.” The conspicuous absence of normative doctrinal debates suggests that cyber society uses this popular art as a cultural mirror to project a longing for an inclusive, intimate, and soothing conception of the Divine amid the complex rhythms of urban modernity.

The circulation of religious symbols through this magical surrealist landscape constructs a radical epistemological transformation. The realm of creative imagination is

²⁹ Zuk [@_zukkk], “Wahai Tuhanku,” Instagram Photo, September 23, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/_zukkk/p/DO7rDx4kpq8/.

³⁰ Zuk [@_zukkk], “Sebesar Apapun, Serumit Apapun Masalah Yg Kita Hadapi, Seberat Apapun Beban Yg Kita Pikul,” Instagram Photo, October 19, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/_zukkk/p/DP-kWUHEjiN/.

³¹ Zuk [@_zukkk], “Tak Ada Tempat Seindah Rumah,” Instagram Photo, April 19, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/_zukkk/reel/DXR_ERokurW/.

³² Zuk [@_zukkk], “Waktu Adalah Pedang,” Instagram Photo, November 16, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/_zukkk/p/DRFfmXnEvsJ/.

³³ Zuk [@_zukkk], “Berat Amal, Berat Badan,” Instagram Photo, March 7, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/_zukkk/p/DVjPMLFkjgq/.

no longer accessed solely through solitary inner discipline; instead, it is instead absorbed into media simulacra. By combining allegories of death, existential dead ends, and text-science hybridization, these visuals externalize the inner fragility and search for orientation experienced by urban society directly onto the mobile screen.³⁴ When the fear of rigid, normative dogma is softened by pastel colors and poetic compositions, media technology effectively mediates a new spiritual-therapeutic space. This process of aestheticization instantly alleviates the psychological drought of modern consumer society by presenting spiritual beauty as a functional oasis of inner peace. Consequently, the relationship between the subject and God is gently deconstructed: once-fearful religious transcendence is transformed into an aesthetic visual atmosphere that heals the existential fragility of urban humanity.

This aestheticization of creative imagination—through the hybridization of text, science, and magical surrealism—establishes a new channel of spiritual transmission that transcends the boundaries of conventional cybercommunication. Artistic mediation, originally rooted in the creator’s innermost Sufi contemplation, undergoes mechanical externalization before expanding into a broader digital communal expression.³⁵ When these surreal canvases interact with media algorithms, they capture the communal anxiety of alienated urban society and transform it into a shared space of grief and catharsis. Beneath the surface of the device screen, this phenomenon functions not as mere superficial visual consumption but as a profound articulation of religious and spiritual significance.³⁶ The mediated aesthetic beauty effectively evacuates existential trauma stemming from normative theological fears, reweaves collective inner fragility, and heals acute psychological drought through intimate and inclusive spiritual pathways.

This phenomenon presents a compelling counterargument to the prevalent claim in mainstream media studies that digitalization inevitably reduces piety to superficial visual commodities. While traditional simulation theory argues that cyber-image reproduction severs the subject’s connection with the Divine,³⁷ this form of techno-Sufism

³⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996), 34; Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 223.

³⁵ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 84.

³⁶ Cheong, “The Vitality of New Media and Religion: Communicative Perspectives, Practices, and Changing Authority in Spiritual Organization.”

³⁷ Evolvi, “Religion and the Internet: Digital Religion, (Hyper)Mediated Spaces, and Materiality”; Nabil Echchaibi et al., “Third Spaces, Religion and Spirituality in the Digital Age,” *AoIR Selected Papers of Internet Research*, 2013; Steward M. Hoover and Nabil Echchaibi, “Media Theory and the Third Spaces of Digital

demonstrates a clear reversal. The hybridization of contemporary art in cyberspace does not erode the essence of sacredness; rather, it reconstructs a legitimate intermediary space for conveying transcendental values. Far from becoming empty signs that alienate urban society into a false reality,³⁸ these artistic mediations effectively preserve the depth of religious meaning. Visual signs on gadget screens thus remain objects of market consumption while simultaneously serving as potent spiritual instruments that alleviate dogmatic tensions and restore collective existential balance.

Spiritual Domestication, Sentimentalism of Private Space, and the Aesthetic Articulation of Local Socio-Ecological Issues

The transformation of religious expression in cyberspace extends beyond merely reconceptualizing individuals' existential orientations; it also reorganizes the spatial boundaries of piety itself. The flow of contemporary religious symbols has consistently shifted the focus of attention from formal public-institutional settings to more intimate and emotional domains.³⁹ In this digital space, spiritual values are adapted to harmonize with the atmosphere of everyday life through highly sentimental and personal narratives. This mode of presentation pattern deliberately integrates the warmth of traditional family relationships with a profound concern for various social disruptions and environmental crises in the real world. Through visualization strategies attuned to contemporary local dynamics, cyber platforms have successfully created a new medium that connects domestic intimacy with the collective concerns of urban society.

This shift in the locus of spirituality moves from public, communal-institutional spaces toward the private, sentimental domestic sphere of the household. The expression of piety is emphasized through visualizations of intimate family relationships and poetic responses to the trauma caused by ongoing environmental crises in Indonesia (see Figure 2).

Religion," in *The Third Space of Digital Religion*, ed. Nabil Echchaibi and Steward M. Hoover (London: Routledge, 2023).

³⁸ Beta, "Commerce, Piety and Politics: Indonesian Young Muslim Women's Groups as Religious Influencers"; Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia."

³⁹ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 219.



Source: Instagram account @_zukkk (2025–2026)

Figure 2. Model of visual dramatization through the spatial representation of domestic piety and ecological trauma.

In the domestic-ecological segment, visualizations of a child in a mother’s lap,⁴⁰ an upside-down house floating in water,⁴¹ and a man wearing a glove embracing a recumbent Garuda draped in a red-and-white flag⁴² appear immediately after statements of public solidarity and references to local socio-cultural events. The strategic placement of these symbols in transitional positions, as illustrated in Figure 2, demonstrates that the use of intimate local greeting terms—such as “Gusti,” “Ibu,” “Ibu Pertiwi,” or “Rumah Kita”—functions as a condensing icon. This serves as a collective coping mechanism that transforms the burdens of life into intimate visual representations. In this way, profane reality is absorbed into objects, bodies, and emotional atmospheres, rendering suffering as an aesthetic manifestation that alleviates social tension within cyber society.

The emotional connection of this artwork to the real social dynamics of urban society is established through engagement with the contextual momentum of current events. This is achieved via descriptive captions that reference significant national cultural moments, such as International Labor Day (May 1),⁴³ World Philosophy Day (November

⁴⁰ Zuk [@_zukkk], “Di Tengah Riuhnya Dunia, Engkau Gusti Adalah Hening Yang Aku Cari,” Instagram Photo, May 4, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/_zukkk/p/DX6EvFFDX2/.

⁴¹ Zuk [@_zukkk], “Duka Cita Mendalam Atas Bencana Banjir Yang Menimpa Saudara Kita Akhir-Akhir Ini,” Instagram Photo, November 28, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/_zukkk/p/DRI6em2kktj/.

⁴² Zuk [@_zukkk], “Kita Semua Adalah Anak-Anak Yg Dikandung Dan Dibesarkan Oleh Ibu Pertiwi,” Instagram Photo, August 30, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/_zukkk/p/DN962ZaEswj/.

⁴³ Zuk [@_zukkk], “Selamat Hari Buruh,” Instagram Photo, May 1, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/_zukkk/p/DXydcUJEwN5/.

20),⁴⁴ the *al-'Isrā' wal-Mi'rāj* (The Night Journey and Ascension) commemoration,⁴⁵ and the anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday⁴⁶. Expressions of anxiety over actual events reflect the @_zukkk account owner's theological and social concerns, including direct responses to the regional natural disaster on December 9, 2025.⁴⁷ The caption accompanying the flood image explicitly conveys public solidarity: "*Duka cita mendalam atas bencana banjir yang menimpa saudara kita akhir-akhir ini* (Deep condolences for the flood disaster that recently affected our brothers)."⁴⁸ This poetic narrative mirrors the tendency of urban middle-class Muslim communities to idealize traditional family values while collectively coping with environmental trauma. Here, art functions as a medium for aestheticizing reality—transforming the hardships of working-class life and the impacts of natural disasters into a poignant spectacle of piety.

Public interactions in the comments section reveal a blend of individual psychological sentiments, references to national literary works, and knowledge of purification laws. Audiences express the exhaustion of urban working life alongside quotes from contemporary writers, such as @ipinnpun's reference: "*Rumahku keranda terindah untuknya. ~Joko Pinurbo* (My house is the most beautiful coffin for him. ~Joko Pinurbo)." Local cultural expressions, such as "*Matur suwun gus atas dukungannya* (Thank you for your support)" from @ifudbae, affirm the authority of traditional cultural figures. Meanwhile, on the domestic theme of purifying mattresses, @exarcheia_ offered a humorous comment referencing "*Imam Hanafi, Hambali & Maliki*" in response to rules on canceling ablution. Collectively, users treat the comments section as a digital shared mourning space and a venue for casual religious-social interaction.

The circulation of religious symbols within domestic and ecological contexts reflects a profound transformation in how contemporary society redefines the boundaries of the sacred. This phenomenon demonstrates that, under the influence of digital media,

⁴⁴ Zuk [@_zukkk], "Selamat Hari Filsafat Sedunia."

⁴⁵ Zuk [@_zukkk], "Selamat Malam Jum'at, Meresapi Isra Mi'raj Sembari Tirakat.," Instagram Photo, January 15, 2026, <https://www.instagram.com/indonesans/p/DTiEKTAec5d/>.

⁴⁶ Zuk [@_zukkk], "Bagi Ia Yg Hatinya Senantiasa Merasakan Kehadiran Kanjeng Nabi Muhammad Shollallahu Alaihi Wasallam, Setiap Hari Adalah Maulid.," Instagram Photo, September 6, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DOP4PJxklwv/>.

⁴⁷ Zuk [@_zukkk], "Yang Tersisa Dari Kami Hanyalah Puing," Instagram Photo, December 9, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/_zukkk/p/DSB6-iiEk77/.

⁴⁸ Zuk [@_zukkk], "Duka Cita Mendalam Atas Bencana Banjir Yang Menimpa Saudara Kita Akhir-Akhir Ini."

spiritual expression no longer relies on rigid institutional doctrines to address crises.⁴⁹ Instead, it operates through intimately aestheticized private sentiments. When social tensions and the trauma of Indonesia's real environmental crises are transformed into a beautiful spectacle of piety on device screens, religion shifts in function—from public moral law to a communal psychological coping mechanism.⁵⁰ The creator's personal Sufi contemplation, combined with references to national literature and collective anxiety expressed in the comments, illustrates how new media has successfully mediated an alternative sacred space. This spiritual beauty serves as a form of catharsis, reconciling the tangible suffering of urban society with the desire for inner peace.

Through the spatial arrangement of the digital interface, the visual elements in this section document the domestication of complex Islamic theological concepts into casual, emotional narrative forms. Transcendental doctrines—such as surrender to God (*tawakkal*), gratitude, and eschatological awareness of macrocosmic suffering—are intentionally repackaged using soothing Islamic aesthetics to resonate with the affections of online readers. Poetic diction rooted in the value of *tawakkal* in the captions serves as a condensing device that effectively redirects urban society's social anxiety toward a peaceful, calming public space.⁵¹ This mechanism gradually absorbs the once-profane reality of crisis into the intimate sphere of domestic piety. Consequently, the digital platform mediates a daily cathartic space where Islamic values function as a profound spiritual anchor, alleviating social tension and ecological trauma in urban communities.

This reality also offers a counter perspective to the secularization thesis prevalent in conventional media studies, which assumes that cyber-modernity will erode Islamic values from the public sphere.⁵² While digitalization is often criticized for diminishing the depth of religious doctrine and fostering shallow popular culture,⁵³ this phenomenon reveals a significant reversal. The domestication of profound Islamic concepts into the private realm does not eliminate their theological essence; rather, it reconstructs how

⁴⁹ Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, "Introduction," in *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere*, ed. Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 9.

⁵⁰ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 140.

⁵¹ Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*, 140.

⁵² Solahudin and Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority"; Moch Fakhruroji, *Mediatisasi Agama: Konsep, Kasus, Dan Implikasi* (Bandung: Lekkass, 2021).

⁵³ Lengauer, "Sharing Semangat Taqwa : Social Media and Digital Islamic Socialities in Bandung"; Martin Slama, "Social Media and Islamic Practice: Indonesian Ways of Being Digitally Pious," in *Digital Indonesia: Connectivity and Divergence*, ed. Edwin Jurriens and Ross Tapsell (Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2018).

urban society experiences transcendence in a more intimate way. Instead of dissolving piety into market-driven secularism,⁵⁴ this artistic mediation has proven capable of preserving the anchor of spirituality by harnessing values of trust and submission to God. Visual signs on gadget screens, therefore, do not function as empty symbols that distance individuals from faith; they operate as effective Islamic instruments that foster public calm amid social and ecological disruptions.

Desacralization of Mass Communication and the Syncretism of Contemporary Muslim Consumption Spaces

The domestication of Islamic values within private spaces ultimately extends into the vortex of capital circulation that defines the contemporary digital ecosystem. Social media platforms do not merely facilitate the softening of doctrine for public tranquility; they compel transcendental symbols to engage directly with the currents of popular culture and the logic of market materialism.⁵⁵ Beneath the uniform interfaces of smart devices, the boundaries of rigid religious orthodoxy are dissolving as sacred rites intersect with functional commercial aesthetics. This pattern of interaction reflects the cultural ambivalence of urban consumer society, which demands a practical integration of independent spirituality with modern lifestyle preferences.⁵⁶ This boundary-blurring phenomenon is empirically evident in the transformation of pop-Sufi artistic expressions into new, inclusive cultural consumption spaces that also hold economic value within cyber society.

The blurring of boundaries between the sacred value of religious rituals and the logic of market materialism highlights the cultural ambivalence of modern urban consumer society. This aspect of spatial desacralization is demonstrated through the integration of worship symbols, the hybridization of popular media, and commercial economic discourse, all unified within a single digital interface (see Table 1).

⁵⁴ Bouziane Zaid et al., "Digital Islam and Muslim Millennials: How Social Media Influencers Reimagine Religious Authority and Islamic Practices," *Religions* 13, no. 4 (April 8, 2022): 335, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040335>; Beta, "Commerce, Piety and Politics: Indonesian Young Muslim Women's Groups as Religious Influencers."

⁵⁵ Daromir Rudnycky, *Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 251.

⁵⁶ Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 205.

Table 1. Imagery of Islamic Artistic Expressions and Their Functions in Consumer Society Trends.

Category	Pop-Sufi Art Text-Visual Representation	Discursive Patterns	Audience Response
Domestication of Sharia	Modern comic word balloons (“I have performed ablution” and “Me too...”) appear on a minimalist bed.	The use of short, witty emoticon-style pictographs.	Relaxed contextualization of comparisons between schools of law in purification jurisprudence. (@exa***eia_)
Transcendental Space Aesthetics	Monochrome painting of an QS. al-Insyirah iron padlock and the Kaaba amid a forest of abstract trees.	“I knocked on your door many times... knocking on the door from inside your house.”	Mass reproduction of art as personal economic commodities (@bom*.*zuardi).
Pop Culture Syncretism	Text of QS. al-Muzzammil displayed alongside a traditional green-and-white blirik teapot.	Short urban daily motivational exclamation: “Let’s Wake Up!”	Direct pairing of sacred verse quotations with titles of secular contemporary novels.
Deconstruction of Communal Boundaries	Visualization of Arabic text or QS. al-An‘ām verses about the human jugular vein on a pastel background.	Poetic-reflective narrative on God’s personal and intimate closeness.	Inclusive participation across religious and non-Muslim identities (@ronirob***_r***ie).

The repeated pattern of associations—visualizations of purification comics,⁵⁷ theological padlocks,⁵⁸ and material representations of the Kaaba⁵⁹—as shown in Table 1 creates perceptual continuity within the mass communication ecosystem. Through the spatial arrangement of the digital interface and audience interactions in the comments section, the platform enables users to experience religion not as a separate formal legal doctrine but as a visual atmosphere embedded in everyday digital lifestyles. In this way, the circulation of religious signs is configured into an instantly accessible, emotionally resonant form of piety, where religious identity, contemporary art appreciation, and

⁵⁷ Zuk [@_zukkk], “Tak Ada Tempat Seindah Rumah.”

⁵⁸ Zuk [@_zukkk], “Al-Insyirah: 5-6, Al-’Usr,” Instagram Photo, April 20, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/_zukkk/p/DIqCYqfSyZN/.

⁵⁹ Zuk [@_zukkk], “Berkali-Kali Ku Ketuk PintuMu. Ternyata Selama Ini Aku Mengetuk Pintu Dari Dalam RumahMu,” Instagram Photo, November 21, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/_zukkk/p/DRT5ECFkl3N/.

market-driven consumption practices converge on the glass screens of smart devices used by urban society.

This hybridization of popular culture blurs the boundaries of rigid religious orthodoxy through inclusive responses from diverse social groups. The juxtaposition of Qur'anic verse quotations with references to contemporary secular novels has been widely appreciated by a broad audience. In the comments section, users from varied backgrounds—including @ronirob***_r***ie, who openly stated, “*Setuju. Tapi... yaaah, saya bukan Muslim* (Agree. But... yeah, I'm not Muslim)”—offered aesthetic evaluations of the artworks. This demonstrates that contemporary cyber society treats religious symbols as fluid, open, and universal cultural products that can be collectively consumed satisfy everyday visual and aesthetic needs.

The epistemological shift within urban Muslim communities has redefined the role of visual content: it is no longer primarily a guide to communal Sharia but has become an accessory to personal identity. The complexity of revealed texts and narratives of Islamic civilization is distilled into minimalist paintings that serve dual, harmonious functions—as instruments of private inner contemplation and as commercially valuable art objects. Expressions of spiritual prayer and requests to own mass-produced art prints in the comments sections provide tangible evidence of this phenomenon. Religion is thus transformed into a fashionable, functional, and soul-soothing visual atmosphere that modern society has successfully integrated with contemporary artistic tastes and the lifestyles of digital consumer culture.

The circulation of religious symbols within the vortex of the cyber market signifies a radical transformation in how contemporary society negotiates the authority of faith amid the logic of modern consumerism. This pop-culture syncretism does not merely reflect the superficializing of ritual meaning; rather, it illustrates the reconceptualization of Islamic values—from a binding communal religious guide to a fluid and fashionable personal identity accessory.⁶⁰ When formal rites are casually deconstructed and transcendental symbols such as the Kaaba are repurposed as decorative objects of commercial value, digital media effectively tames piety to align with market preferences. The participation of audiences from diverse religious backgrounds in the comments section underscores that religious institutions are no longer perceived as rigid dogmatic boundaries but as universal cultural products capable of fulfilling everyday aesthetic needs while soothing the souls of cyber society.

⁶⁰ Rudnyckyj, *Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development*, 4.

This categorization of artistic expressions reveals an ontological uniformity between the dimensions of ritual sacredness and the profane consumption spaces of urban society. The casual juxtaposition of revealed texts and legal concepts with everyday cultural objects demonstrates how cyber mass communication dismantles rigid theological hierarchies.⁶¹ Through the uniform digital interface, acts of worship are no longer positioned as transcendental rites separate from worldly affairs; instead, they undergo syncretism, becoming practical elements of lifestyle. Consequently, this process of desacralization generates a new perspective in which religious symbols are treated as fluid and fashionable cultural products. They are no longer adhered to as absolute communal legal dogmas but are casually consumed as functional accessories of personal identity that satisfy the contemporary artistic tastes of modern Muslim consumers.

This condition also serves as a theoretical counterpoint to conventional theories of religious commodification, which often conclude that commercialization inevitably erodes spiritual reasoning. While mainstream cyber-media discourse frequently assumes that the collapse of the sacred-profane divide will lead to extreme secularization,⁶² empirical evidence among urban Muslim consumers reveals a different dynamic. The resulting ontological uniformity does not cause cyber society to abandon religious identity in favor of worldliness; instead, it fosters a more adaptive mode of piety. Rather than becoming alienated from divine values through the desacralization of mass communication,⁶³ the modern subject successfully reconciles the pursuit of popular artistic tastes with transcendental needs. Religious symbols do not disappear under market logic; rather, they transform into everyday instruments that help sustain faith amid the fluidity of cyber reality.

Conclusion

The desacralization of mass communication in cyberspace—often assumed to dilute the essence of faith—reveals a markedly different dynamic in this study. Rather than diminishing piety, digital mass communication has triggered radical transformations that

⁶¹ François Gauthier, “The Enchantments of Consumer Capitalism: Beyond Belief at the Burning Man Festival,” in *Religion in Consumer Society: Brands, Consumers and Markets*, ed. François Gauthier and Tuomas Martikainen (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), 148.

⁶² Cova et al., “The Changing Dichotomy between the Sacred and the Profane: A Historical Analysis of the Santiago de Compostela Pilgrimage”; Russell W. Belk, Melanie Wallendorf, and John F. Sherry, Jr., “The Sacred and the Profane in Consumer Behavior: Theodicy on the Odyssey,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 16, no. 1 (June 1989): 1–38, <https://doi.org/10.1086/209191>.

⁶³ Raya, “Digital Religion: The Packaging and Persuasion of Celebrity Preachers in Contemporary Indonesia.”

produce a functional ontological uniformity beneficial to urban society. Through the curation of pop-Sufi art on the @_zukkk account, rigid and weighty Islamic theological doctrines have been aesthetically softened into intimate instruments of psychological healing. The spatial shift from public institutional arenas to the domestic sphere of piety has successfully reconfigured revealed texts and ritual purification laws into elements of casual, everyday lifestyles. Under the uniform digital interface, transcendental symbols such as the Kaaba no longer function as binding communal dogmas; instead, they are absorbed as personal identity accessories that engage in syncretic negotiation with the logic of cyber consumption. Ultimately, the digital platform has reconstructed an alternative spiritual oasis capable of alleviating the existential anxieties and ecological trauma of urban communities.

The integration of a netnographic approach with multimodal discourse analysis proved effective in capturing the natural circulation of religious signs without disrupting the cyber interaction ecosystem. This hybrid methodology enabled the horizontal juxtaposition of visual data from digital canvases, poetic captions, and audience discursive responses, thereby illuminating the phenomenon of techno-Sufism in its entirety. However, the study is limited by its focus on a single case—the @_zukkk account and its predominantly urban, middle-class Muslim audience in Indonesia—and thus does not capture variations in responses across platforms with differing algorithmic logics. This narrow scope opens presents ample opportunities for future research, including comparative studies on other platforms such as TikTok or X (formerly Twitter). Subsequent studies should further examine how the fluidity of digital religious authority operates when confronted with more heterogeneous cyber subcultures.

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The authors ensure that the datasets necessary to replicate the conclusions of this work are presented in their entirety within the article [and/or] its supplementary information.

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Ethical Approval:

This research relies solely on open-access visual assets and textual metadata retrieved from Instagram. Because the methodology is restricted to passive cyber-observation of a public digital creator's profile and the aggregation of open engagement metrics without interactive human involvement, formal institutional ethical clearance was not required. To safeguard individual privacy, all user-generated comments extracted from the platform have been completely pseudonymized. The authors declare that there are no competing financial or personal interests and guarantee absolute alignment with the platform's official Terms of Service.

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