

Digital Agency and Counter-Narratives in Religious Mediation: Feminist Niqab-Wearing Women on Instagram @cadargarislucu



Nanang Mizwar Hasyim^{1*} & Mahbub Ghozali¹

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: 198403072011011013@uin-suka.ac.id

Abstract

Research concerning veiled women on social media has predominantly concentrated on issues of identity representation and religious stigma, whereas digital mediation practices as a form of community agency have received comparatively limited scholarly attention. This study seeks to examine the mediation practices employed by the Instagram community @cadargarislucu in the construction of the religious identity of veiled women within Indonesia's digital public sphere. Employing a qualitative methodology, the research analyses thirteen Instagram posts, including images, videos, and carousels, through content analysis and critical discourse analysis. The analytical process was conducted in two phases: initially identifying themes and message patterns, followed by an examination of meaning construction within the interplay of text, discursive practices, and social context. The study's theoretical framework integrates Stewart M. Hoover's theory of religious mediation with Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis. The findings reveal four interrelated forms of mediation practices: firstly, the appropriation of viral language to construct communicative religious-feminist narratives; secondly, the utilisation of contemporary issues and digital technologies as sources of symbolic culture; thirdly, the negotiation of meaning through the articulation of value-based attitudes; and fourthly, the hybridisation of religious-feminist identity as a reinterpretation of the veil (cadar). These practices illustrate how digital agency facilitates the transformation of the veil from a stigmatized symbol into one representing empowerment, inclusivity, and religious moderation. The results underscore the centrality of community agency in the production of religious meaning within digital spaces and contribute to the advancement of counter-narrative strategies for minority groups confronting dominant discourses on social media.

Keywords:

Religious mediation; Veiled women; Social media; Religious identity; Community agency; Religious moderation

Abstrak

Penelitian mengenai perempuan bercadar di media sosial umumnya berfokus pada representasi identitas dan stigma keagamaan, sementara praktik mediasi digital sebagai bentuk agensi komunitas masih relatif terbatas dikaji. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis praktik mediasi yang dilakukan oleh komunitas Instagram @cadargarislucu dalam mengonstruksi identitas religius perempuan bercadar di ruang publik digital Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif, penelitian menganalisis 13 konten Instagram berupa postingan, video, dan carousel melalui analisis konten dan analisis wacana kritis. Analisis dilakukan dalam dua tahap, yaitu identifikasi tema dan pola pesan, serta penelaahan konstruksi makna dalam relasi antara teks, praktik diskursif, dan konteks sosial. Kerangka analisis mengintegrasikan teori mediasi agama Stewart M. Hoover dengan analisis wacana kritis Norman Fairclough. Hasil penelitian mengidentifikasi empat bentuk praktik mediasi yang saling terkait, yaitu: Pertama, apropriasi bahasa viral untuk membangun narasi religius-feminis yang komunikatif; Kedua, pemanfaatan isu kontemporer dan teknologi digital sebagai sumber budaya simbolik; Ketiga, negosiasi makna melalui artikulasi sikap berbasis nilai; dan Keempat, hibridisasi identitas religius-feminis sebagai bentuk reinterpretasi cadar. Praktik-praktik ini menunjukkan bahwa agensi digital memungkinkan transformasi makna cadar dari simbol yang distigmatisasi menjadi representasi pemberdayaan, inklusivitas, dan moderasi beragama. Temuan ini menegaskan sentralitas agensi komunitas dalam produksi makna religius di ruang digital serta memberikan kontribusi bagi pengembangan strategi kontra narasi kelompok minoritas dalam menghadapi wacana dominan di media sosial.

Kata kunci:

Mediasi agama; Wanita bercadar; Media sosial; Identitas agama; Peran komunitas; Moderasi agama

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Introduction

Indonesia, as the country with the world's largest Muslim population, faces complex dynamics in the contestation of religious symbols. Among these symbols, the niqab has become a focal point of controversy due to its historical association with religious extremism. From the 2002 Bali bombings to the 2021 attack on the National Police Headquarters, the involvement of women wearing the niqab in terrorist networks has created a collective stigma associating the wearing of the niqab with radicalism.¹ This stigmatisation is reinforced by mass media coverage, which often simplifies socio-religious complexities into a binary narrative: the niqab versus religious moderation. Consequently, veiled women face systemic discrimination ranging from social ridicule to formal bans within government and educational institutions.²

In their research on Islamophobia in higher education institutions, Cahyo, Kistoro and Latipah found that the wearing of the niqab is often associated with negative perceptions of radicalism, leading to structural discrimination on Indonesian university campuses.³ This phenomenon reflects how social constructions of the niqab have become a systematic mechanism of exclusion against women wearing the niqab, limiting their access to public spaces and civil rights. In February 2021, an interesting phenomenon emerged in Indonesia's digital landscape: the Cadar Garis Lucu (@cadargarislucu) community on Instagram. Unlike previous movements by women wearing the niqab, which tended to be defensive. This defensive stance was reflected in an emphasis on clarification, the rejection of stigma, and the defence against accusations of radicalism, without any active effort to construct an alternative narrative. Meanwhile, this community, initiated by Ainun Jamilah and her friends, adopts a proactive approach by using social media as a platform to construct an alternative identity.⁴ With over 2,800 followers and 342 posts as of July 2024, the @cadargarislucu account has created a counter-narrative to the dominant stigma, showcasing inclusivity, moderation, and flexibility as core values, whilst explicitly embracing feminist issues and interfaith dialogue.

The @cadargarislucu phenomenon is worth examining from the perspective of religious mediation developed by Stewart M. Hoover. Unlike the concept of mediatisation, which emphasises how media logic controls religious institutions, Hoover's perspective on mediation places the active agency of religious actors at the

¹ Akbar Hassani, Muhammad Nasir Badu, and Eni Susanti, "Keterlibatan Perempuan Dalam Jaringan Terorisme Internasional Di Indonesia," *Mandar : Social Science Journal* 1, no. 2 (December 2022): 132–43, <https://doi.org/10.31605/mssj.v1i2.2243>.

² Ryan Setiawan, "Kasus Pemaksaan Jilbab Di Sekolah Masif, Kemendikbud Bisa Apa?," *Tirto.id*, August 8, 2022, <https://tirto.id/kasus-pemaksaan-jilbab-di-sekolah-masif-kemendikbud-bisa-apa-guSw>.

³ Hanif Cahyo Adi Kistoro et al., "Islamophobia in Education: Perceptions on the Use of Veil/Niqab in Higher Education," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 2 (December 2020): 227–46, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v10i2.227-246>.

⁴ Ainun Jamilah, "Cadar Garis Lucu: Gerakan Muslimat Anti Kekerasan," *MIMIKRI : Jurnal Agama Dan Kebudayaan* (Makassar) 8, no. 1 (June 2022): 230–42.

centre.⁵ Hoover argues that in contemporary society, the media has become a cultural source just as significant as traditional religious institutions in shaping how individuals and communities understand and practise their religion.⁶ Religious communities are not passively controlled by the media, but rather actively and reflectively use the media as symbolic raw material for the construction of identity and the negotiation of meaning.

In the context of @cadargarislucu, Instagram is not merely a communication platform but serves as an arena where active mediation takes place. This community appropriates various elements of media culture—from viral language to AI technologies such as ChatGPT—and uses them to construct identities that challenge stereotypes. Moreover, the mediation practices they engage in involve a complex negotiation between religious traditions (the veil as a symbol of piety) and the values of modernity (feminism, inclusivity, pluralism). The result of this negotiation is a hybrid identity that integrates both, demonstrating that religious moderation can be understood as a creative process, not merely a compromise that weakens religious commitment.

Research on veiled women and social media has been conducted by several scholars. Basri analysed the movement of veiled women on Instagram in the context of countering the stigma of radicalism, but his focus was more on self-representation without conducting an in-depth analysis of the active mediation practices taking place.⁷ Kurniawati carried out a critical discourse analysis of five Instagram accounts belonging to veiled women, but did not employ a theoretical framework of mediation to understand the agency of the community.⁸ Dwifatma and Beta analysed the political subjectivity of Muslim women through @cadargarislucu, but their focus was on the political dimension without delving into mediation practices as a process of religious identity construction.⁹ Thus, there remains a gap in the literature regarding how active and reflexive mediation practices are carried out by veiled women's communities to transform the meaning of the veil through the appropriation of media cultural sources.

Studies on religion and social media in Indonesia indicate that the digital sphere has become a key arena for the articulation of moderation and the negotiation of religious authority. Maulana and Roudlotul Jannah argue that social media enables the

⁵ Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age*, Religion, Media and Culture (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006), 25–37.

⁶ Stewart M. Hoover, "Religion and the Media in the 21st Century," *Tripodos*, no. 29 (February 2021): 27–35, <https://doi.org/10.51698/tripodos.2012.29.27-35>.

⁷ Muhammad Ridha Basri, "Melawan Stigma Radikal: Studi Gerakan Perempuan Bercadar Di Instagram," *Aplikasia: Jurnal Aplikasi Ilmu-Ilmu Agama* 21, no. 2 (December 2021): 147–64, <https://doi.org/10.14421/aplikasia.v21i2.2562>.

⁸ Aprilia Eka Kurniawati, "Diskursus Cadar Dalam Akun Media Sosial Instagram (Analisis Wacana Kritis 5 Akun Instagram Perempuan Bercadar)" (skripsi, UNIVERSITAS AIRLANGGA, 2019), <http://lib.unair.ac.id>.

⁹ Andina Dwifatma and Annisa R. Beta, "The 'Funny Line Veil' and the Mediated Political Subjectivity of Muslim Women in Indonesia," *Asian Journal of Communication* 34, no. 3 (May 2024): 284–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2024.2320900>.

rearticulation of Islamic moderation through digital performativity and audience interaction.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Novendri, Ismail, and Maali emphasise the need for the re-actualisation of moderation in the 4.0 era through adaptive communication strategies.¹¹ However, neither of these studies has thoroughly examined how religious minority communities practise active mediation to transform the meaning of stigmatised symbols. Therefore, this research positions social media not merely as a channel for distributing moderate narratives, but as an arena for the production of meaning, placing veiled women's communities as actors who strategically construct counter-narratives against the stigma of radicalism through the appropriation of digital culture.

This study aims to bridge this gap by analysing: (1) how the @cadargarislucu community practises mediation in constructing the identity of veiled women through Instagram; (2) the forms of mediation practised to counter the stigma of radicalism and construct alternative meanings of the veil; and (3) how these mediation practices reflect the negotiation between religious tradition and contemporary media culture within the context of religious moderation. The significance of this research lies in three aspects. First, theoretically, this study enriches the literature on religious mediation by demonstrating how religious actors actively use media as a cultural resource for the transformation of meaning. Second, practically, this study identifies effective agency-based mediation practices to counter the stigmatisation of religious minority groups. Third, socially, this research provides insights into the dynamics of religious moderation in Indonesia, demonstrating how religious traditions and modernity can be productively negotiated.

This study employs a qualitative approach using an in-depth case study design focusing on the Instagram account @cadargarislucu. Primary data was collected through non-participant observation of 13 Instagram posts (posts, videos, carousels) selected on the basis of thematic relevance, high engagement levels, and publication dates between 2023 and 2024. Content selection was carried out using purposive sampling based on three main criteria: thematic relevance, audience interaction levels, and representativeness of mediation practices. The engagement threshold was set at over 100 likes or 20 comments as an indicator of content with above-average interaction. This threshold was not determined arbitrarily, but was adjusted to the characteristics of accounts with around 2,800 followers, a figure representing a relatively high level of engagement in the context of micro-influencer accounts, and indicating significant discursive resonance among the audience. Furthermore, each piece of content selected must explicitly display mediation practices and represent variations of the four forms of practice identified.

¹⁰ Maulana Achmad and Roudlotul Jannah, "Moderasi Islam Dalam Media Sosial; Studi Analisis Terhadap Pemahaman Agamawan Di Youtube," *An-Nida'* 46, no. 2 (December 2022): 125, <https://doi.org/10.24014/an-nida.v46i2.20845>.

¹¹ Mochammad Novendri S, Hidayatullah Ismail, and Dasman Yahya Maali, "Reaktualisasi Moderasi Islam Terhadap Problematika Syariah Pada Era 4.0," *An-Nida'* 46, no. 1 (September 2022): 25, <https://doi.org/10.24014/an-nida.v46i1.19227>.

Data analysis was conducted in two integrated stages: first, using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional critical discourse analysis model (text description, interpretation of discourse practices, and explanation of sociocultural practices).¹² Second, the findings were classified using Hoover's framework of religious mediation to identify the appropriation of cultural sources, the negotiation of meaning, community agency, and the construction of hybrid identities.¹³ Source triangulation was carried out by comparing primary data in the form of uploaded content with audience responses (comments) and relevant secondary literature to test for consistency of meaning. Meanwhile, methodological triangulation was carried out by combining digital observation, archival documentation of content, and layered textual analysis to ensure that the resulting interpretations did not rely on a single analytical technique alone.

Results and Discussion

Community Profile, the Context of Hijab Stigmatisation, and the Theoretical Framework of Mediation

@cadargarislucu is a community of hijab-wearing women founded in February 2021 by Ainun Jamilah and eight other members from various regions across Indonesia. The name 'Garis Lucu' was chosen to represent a humorous, flexible, and inclusive approach to interpreting the hijab. This naming also serves as a contrast to the common perception that tends to view the hijab as a symbol of exclusive and closed-off agency. The community's core values—inclusivity, moderation, and flexibility—are reflected in content that actively addresses feminist issues, interfaith dialogue, and gender equality. In her profile of Ainun Jamilah, Parhani describes the founder of @cadargarislucu as a figure who challenges the dominant narrative by positioning herself as a veiled feminist—an identity that breaks down the binary between religiosity and modernity.¹⁴

The context of stigmatisation faced by this community is rooted in mass media constructions and public discourse that oversimplify the motivations behind the wearing of the niqab. Dzuhayatin demonstrates that the perception of the niqab as a symbol of radicalism does not stand alone, but is the result of complex social constructions. These constructions are influenced by post-9/11 global geopolitical factors, sensationalist media coverage, and security policies that carry a bias against

¹² Eriyanto, *Analisis wacana: pengantar analisis teks media*, Cet. 1 (Yogyakarta: LKiS Yogyakarta, 2001), 285–302.

¹³ Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age*, Second edition, Media, Religion and Culture (Abingdon, Oxon New York, NY: Routledge, 2025), 49–78, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003127017>.

¹⁴ Siti Parhani, "Bercadar Dan Feminis: Mengenal Ainun Jamilah Pendiri Cadar Garis Lucu," *Magdalene.Co*, January 27, 2022, <https://magdalene.co/story/bercadar-dan-feminis-mengenal-ainun-jamilah-pendiri-cadar-garis-lucu/>.

visible expressions of religion.¹⁵ Ahmadi previously analysed that the hijab and niqab in Indonesia have undergone a shift in meaning from symbols of social status to symbols of piety. However, these symbols subsequently became problematic when associated with Islam labelled as hardline.¹⁶ In this context, @cadargarislucu emerged as an active response that is not merely defensive but proactive in constructing alternative meanings through the practice of mediation.

Nisa points out that the reasons why women in Indonesia wear the niqab are highly varied, ranging from spiritual motivation and the expression of religious identity to personal style choices. This diversity of meaning is often oversimplified in public discourse.¹⁷ @cadargarislucu seeks to highlight this complexity through their content, which demonstrates that women who wear the niqab can be religious, modern, critical, and engaged with contemporary issues all at once.

To understand the practices of @cadargarislucu, it is important to grasp the fundamental difference between the concepts of mediatisation and mediation. Mediatisation, as developed by Hjarvard, emphasises how the logic of the media (selectivity, simplification, dramatisation) transforms the practices of non-media institutions, including religion.¹⁸ From this perspective, religious institutions are viewed as subjects that are 'influenced' or 'controlled' by the media, and the transformations that occur are understood as the result of adaptation to the dominant logic of the media. Conversely, mediation in Hoover's perspective places the agency of religious actors at the central focus. Hoover and Clark argue that the media cannot be understood merely as a channel for transmitting religious messages. Rather, the media functions as a cultural resource that is actively utilised by individuals and communities to construct meaningful religious identities within the context of everyday life.¹⁹

A key concept in Hoover's theory of mediation is the media as a source of culture.²⁰ In contemporary society, the media provides the symbolic and narrative raw material that people use to shape their understanding of their religious identity, express values and beliefs in a language relevant to contemporary culture, mediate the tension between tradition and modernity, and create alternative narratives that respond to stigma or marginalisation. The media does not replace traditional religious

¹⁵ Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin, "Islamism and Nationalism among Niqabis Women in Egypt and Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 1 (May 2020): 49-77, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v10i1.49-77>.

¹⁶ Ahmadi and Nova Yohana, "Konstruksi Jilbab Sebagai Simbol Keislaman," *Jurnal Mediator* (Bandung) 08, no. 02 (December 2007): 235-48.

¹⁷ Eva F. Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia," *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5, nos. 1-2 (February 2018): 68-99, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340085>.

¹⁸ Stig Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 105-13.

¹⁹ Stewart Hoover, *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture*, with Lynn Schofield Clark (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 25-30.

²⁰ Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age*, Second edition, 95-118.

authorities such as sacred texts, religious institutions, or religious leaders, but serves as an arena in which such authorities are negotiated, contested, and transformed.²¹

Hoover emphasises that religious audiences are not passive recipients of media content, but rather active and reflective consumers who select and interpret media content in accordance with their religious value frameworks, produce meaning through the creative appropriation of media cultural sources, negotiate between media narratives and religious traditions, and use media as a tool for the articulation of identity and community.²² In the context of social media, practices of consumption and production have become more integrated – religious communities not only consume content but also actively produce, distribute, and negotiate meaning through digital platforms.

Another key aspect of Hoover's theory is the concept of negotiation between religious traditions and media culture.²³ Contemporary religious communities neither entirely reject media culture as secular or contrary to religious values, nor do they fully adopt media culture without filtering it through religious values. Instead, they engage in active negotiation whereby elements of media culture are adopted, adapted, or rejected based on their compatibility with community values. This process of negotiation creates hybridity – a religious identity that is a creative fusion of tradition and modernity, of religious values and popular culture, and of institutional authority and individual agency.²⁴

To deepen the analysis at a broader level of social structure, this community mediation practice needs to be understood within the context of sociocultural practice. In this context, the mediation practice carried out by @cadargarislucu cannot be separated from the broader power structures in Indonesia. The stigmatisation of veiled women is not only produced by the media, but is also reinforced by institutional policies and state security discourses that tend to associate visible religious symbols with the potential for radicalism. In this context, the mediation practices carried out by the community can be interpreted as a form of discursive resistance against the regime of truth shaped by the relationship between the state, the media, and security discourse. Thus, the counter-narrative they construct operates not only at the level of representation but also constitutes an effort to negotiate their position within a social structure that tends to be exclusionary towards certain religious expressions.

Forms of Mediation Practice on @cadargarislucu

An analysis of 13 posts by @cadargarislucu identified four main forms of mediation practice that demonstrate the community's active agency in using Instagram as a cultural resource. These forms of mediation practice do not exist in isolation but are

²¹ Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age*, 283–90.

²² Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age*, Second edition, 107–15.

²³ Stewart M. Hoover and Knut Lundby, eds., *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, Communication and Human Values (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 2010), 28–32.

²⁴ Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age*, Second edition, 105–18.

interlinked in creating a coherent communication ecosystem for the transformation of the meaning of the veil.

1. Active Appropriation of Viral Language for Identity Construction

@cadargarislucu strategically appropriates phrases and language that are currently trending on social media to articulate their religious-feminist stance. An example is the use of the phrase “*come on, that’s a waste!*” in a video responding to a man’s comment that “women in niqabs are intriguing” with sexual connotations.²⁵ This phrase, which is popular among Indonesia’s digital generation and is usually used in the context of entertainment or light-hearted complaints, is taken out of its original context and used to convey a serious message about women’s rights and a critique of objectification. In the 30-second video, Ainun Jamilah responds with a satirical tone: *‘Come on, that’s a waste! Women aren’t commodities to satisfy men’s curiosity. The veil is our choice, not an invitation to be turned into an object of fantasy.’*²⁶

This practice demonstrates that veiled women can speak the language of the digital generation, challenging the stereotype that they are isolated from popular culture or rigid in their communication. Moreover, this appropriation serves as a form of mediation that bridges the gap between the informal language of popular culture and serious religious-feminist content, creating accessibility and relevance. Young audiences familiar with this viral phrase can easily engage with the message, but are then presented with substantive content critiquing the objectification of women.

In Fairclough’s discourse analysis, this choice of vocabulary functions on the relational dimension to build rapport with the audience through familiar language and foster generational solidarity.²⁷ However, from Hoover’s mediation perspective, this practice is more than merely a rhetorical strategy; it constitutes a creative appropriation of media cultural sources for the construction of complex identities. The community does not passively accept popular language, but actively uses it for purposes different from its original intent, namely as an articulation of social critique grounded in religious and feminist values. Audience comments on this post confirm the effectiveness of this strategy: *‘I really love how they convey serious issues whilst still being fun and relatable’*,²⁸ *‘Finally, someone is using our language to talk about heavy topics’*,²⁹ demonstrating that the appropriation of viral language facilitates deeper engagement.

²⁵ Ainun Jamilah, “Perempuan Bercadar Dilarang Menunjukkan Ekspresi di Media Sosial,” Instagram, February 1, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/haiininun/reel/C2zhWLeS5J2/>.

²⁶ Jamilah, “S. Ainun Jamilah di Instagram.”

²⁷ Eriyanto, *Analisis wacana*, 295–302.

²⁸ @cadargarislucu, “Cadard Candu Canda di Instagram: “Karena... ‘Kita Semua Pernah Alay dalam Beragama,’” Instagram, May 30, 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/cadargarislucu/p/Cs3pXJ-yU4a/>.

²⁹ @cadargarislucu, “Teman KBR di Instagram: Jurnalis KBR, Muthia Kusuma Wardani mengulik perjuangan mereka memperkenalkan wajah cadar yang lebih ramah,” Instagram, March 15, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/temankbr/p/C4iAtEFyegk/>.

An analysis of audience comments reveals that responses are not entirely homogeneous, but can be classified into three main patterns. Firstly, affirmative responses, namely comments that support the community's narrative and appreciate a communication style deemed relevant and inclusive. Secondly, negative responses, namely comments that accept the main message whilst still questioning certain aspects, such as the relationship between the niqab and feminism. Third, counter-responses, albeit limited in number, which demonstrate resistance to the reinterpretation of the veil as a feminist symbol, whilst continuing to refer to a more conservative normative understanding. This classification indicates that mediation practices not only generate acceptance but also open up a space for contestation of meaning amongst the audience.

This classification shows that the practice of mediation not only leads to acceptance, but also opens up a space for contestation of meaning amongst the audience. This variation in responses is also linked to the diversity of discursive strategies employed by the community in producing content. Another example can be seen in the use of the popular "POV" template on social media. In a carousel post, @cadargarislucu uses the format "POV: *You meet a veiled Muslim woman who...*"³⁰ to construct an alternative narrative. This format is filled with various scenarios that challenge stereotypes, such as being tech-savvy,³¹ active in feminist organisations,³² or enjoying popular culture.³³ Through this construction, it is emphasised that veiled women cannot be reduced to a single, homogeneous identity. By appropriating a popular entertainment format, the account uses it as a discursive strategy to showcase the diversity of experiences and deconstruct monolithic imaginaries.

2. The Appropriation of Contemporary Issues as a Source of Symbolic Culture

The @cadargarislucu account actively identifies contemporary issues or events that are currently trending, ranging from the controversy surrounding Zavilda TV—a content creator who forced non-Muslim women to wear the hijab—to the emergence of ChatGPT in the digital public sphere. These issues are then appropriated as raw material to articulate the values, normative positions, and constructions of identity that they reflectively construct. This practice of appropriating issues demonstrates the community's ability to respond to the

³⁰ @cadargarislucu, "Cadaru Canda Canda di Instagram: "Yuk ngopi yuk, Kak Vilda 🍵," Instagram, August 30, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/cadargarislucu/p/Ch3fzyUvF4/>.

³¹ @cadargarislucu, "Apa Kata ChatGPT tentang Perempuan Bercadar? Yuk simak jawaban-jawaban cerdas dari Ukhti ChatGPT," Instagram, June 20, 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/cadargarislucu/p/CttkvvRysZp/>.

³² @cadargarislucu, "Sudah saatnya gerakan-gerakan perempuan merangkul identitas perempuan bercadar di dalamnya," Instagram, March 8, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/cadargarislucu/p/C4QIdGSy85Q/>.

³³ @cadargarislucu, "Cadaru Canda Canda di Instagram: "Happy belated christmas! 🎉🎊," Instagram, January 25, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/cadargarislucu/reel/DFP4EGiyBvn/>.

dynamics of public discourse and capitalise on the momentum to amplify their message.

When the Zavilda TV controversy emerged in October 2023, @cadargarislucu promptly issued a statement criticising the practice of imposing religious symbols. They simultaneously reaffirmed their commitment to tolerance and inclusivity in the public sphere. The statement was presented in a seven-slide carousel format, employing a persuasive yet non-confrontational communication style. It emphasised that tolerance does not mean imposing religious symbols, and that ethical da'wah must respect individual choices and not measure value solely by virality. In the concluding section, they clarified their identity as veiled women who reject all forms of coercion in the name of religion.³⁴

The post received over 500 likes and 80 comments, a figure well above the average engagement on the account's posts. This demonstrates that capitalising on trending issues that align with current momentum can significantly boost visibility. More than just a measure of engagement, the post provided a space for @cadargarislucu to assert their distinct identity from other actors who use the same religious symbols, such as the niqab or hijab, but espouse different values, such as intolerance and coercive practices. Through this response, they indirectly affirmed who they are and, at the same time, who does not share the values they champion. Thus, this practice can be understood as a conscious and targeted mediation strategy, namely utilising a viral issue as an opportunity to clarify the boundaries of their identity and the values they are committed to.

The adaptation of ChatGPT technology stands out as a notable form of innovation. As this technology gained popularity towards the end of 2022, @cadargarislucu created a carousel post that positioned the AI as an objective respondent on the issue of the hijab through a simulated dialogue about whether the hijab is good or bad. In its response, ChatGPT framed the hijab as a personal choice that cannot be judged by a single standard, whilst affirming the individual's right to dress according to their beliefs without discrimination.³⁵ The caption accompanying the post even stated that artificial intelligence can demonstrate greater empathy than some humans, serving as an implicit critique of public responses that tend to judge women who wear the hijab.

This practice demonstrates a creative appropriation of the currently popular artificial intelligence technology for the purpose of articulating pluralism and social critique regarding the issue of the veil. ChatGPT is repositioned not merely as a productivity tool, but as a reference perceived as neutral in affirming an inclusive perspective. This is understood by the audience, as seen in comments such as *"Brilliant! Using the latest technology to say something that should already be*

³⁴ @cadargarislucu, "Cadar Candu Canda di Instagram," August 30, 2022.

³⁵ @cadargarislucu, "Cadar Candu Canda di Instagram," June 20, 2023.

obvious” and “Even AI is more tolerant than humans. Sad but true.”³⁶ At the same time, this strategy dismantles the stereotype that veiled women are anti-technology, by portraying the community as adaptive and digitally literate.

From Hoover’s perspective, this appropriation of contemporary issues demonstrates that the community does not engage with media culture passively, but rather as an active source for the production of religious meaning relevant to the contemporary context. Communities do not wait for traditional religious issues (such as fiqh debates on the niqab), but proactively seek out and utilise contemporary issues that resonate with digital audiences (AI technology, the content creator phenomenon). This is a manifestation of strong agency in mediation practices—the ability to identify opportunities, appropriate relevant cultural sources, and use them to amplify messages.

3. Negotiating Meaning through Value-Based Position Statements

@cadargarislucu consistently issues formal position statements on controversial issues relating to the identity of veiled women. The format typically used by official institutions is appropriated to position itself as an actor with moral authority in the public sphere, whilst maintaining a communicative and friendly style of communication. This strategy conveys credibility without losing a sense of closeness to the audience. In response to the Zavilda TV case, they asserted that it is unjustifiable to invoke tolerance whilst forcing others to wear specific religious attire. Through this statement, the meanings of tolerance and da’wah are renegotiated as practices that respect individual choice and emphasise ethical exemplarity, rather than symbolic coercion.

This practice of negotiating meaning is clearly evident in content concerning the compulsory wearing of the hijab in educational institutions. Through a microblog post titled “So as Not to Be the ‘Most Muslim Woman’ Just Because I Wear a Hijab”,³⁷ which consists of nine parts, this account uses irony to criticise double standards within the Muslim women’s community. The opening section poses a reflective question about the pressure to be the “most Muslim woman” simply because one wears a hijab or niqab. Subsequent parts outline forms of double standards, such as the expectation that women who wear the hijab must always look perfect, greater tolerance for those who do not wear the hijab because they are considered to be “still learning”, traumatic experiences resulting from coercion at school, and the tendency to treat the hijab as the sole marker of Islam.

The crux of the critique is emphasised by the assertion that women’s Islamic identity is often reduced solely to the headscarf, as if those who do not wear it are automatically less Islamic, whereas Islam cannot be narrowed down to mere

³⁶ @cadargarislucu, “Dengan ketidakmungkinan sebuah mesin memiliki empati sebagaimana manusia dalam menanggapi fenomena sosial,” Instagram, June 20, 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/cadargarislucu/p/CttkvvRysZp/>.

³⁷ @cadargarislucu, “Agar tidak menjadi ‘Si Paling Muslimah’ hanya karena berjilbab,” Instagram, December 30, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/haiininun/p/Cmx3rOpJl6t/>.

symbols. This irony targets religious reductionism that excludes women who fall outside certain symbolic standards. From the perspective of religious mediation, this content reflects a process of negotiation between respect for the hijab as a legitimate religious practice and criticism of the imposition and standardisation of a singular definition of Islam. The result is a hybrid position that affirms the legitimacy of the choice to wear the hijab without making it a moral yardstick for judgement.

The audience response showed strong resonance. A number of comments expressed appreciation and shared personal experiences, such as expressions of gratitude that this issue had been raised, as well as accounts of having been forced to wear the hijab at school, which created an emotional distance from religion. Others emphasised that the hijab should be understood as a choice, not a basis for judging others.³⁸ These responses indicate that the negotiation of meaning undertaken by this account intersects with the experiences of many Muslim women caught between the demands of tradition, religious values, and personal autonomy within the context of modernity.

4. The Hybridisation of Religious-Feminist Identity through a Focus on Contemporary Issues

The most significant form of mediation is evident in @cadargarislucu's systematic focus on contemporary issues, particularly feminism, which is utilised as a cultural resource in the construction of hybrid identity. This practice does not merely add a feminist label to religious identity, but rather undertakes a fundamental reinterpretation of the meaning of the veil within the context of modernity and women's empowerment. Thus, the veil is repositioned not only as a symbol of piety, but also as an expression of choice and self-awareness.

To mark *International Women's Day 2024*, @cadargarislucu posted a carousel titled "*The Niqab is Feminism Too*."³⁹ This post explicitly positions the niqab as a feminist expression – namely, as a woman's conscious choice regarding her body. The opening slide features an illustration of a veiled woman with the text, "My body, my choice – including the choice to cover." The next slide explains that feminism is rooted in the principle of women's autonomy in making decisions about their bodies without social pressure, and that the choice to wear a veil can be a manifestation of autonomy as long as it is based on awareness and freedom, not coercion.

³⁸ @cadargarislucu, "Tapi ada dosen sekaligus kaprodi perempuan yg menyindir anak² yg hijabnya tidak panjang & tidak bercadar, hingga mendoktrin untuk tidak percaya kepada pemerintah," Instagram, February 19, 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/haiininun/reel/Co1Ae32Jt5L/>.

³⁹ @cadargarislucu, "Karena simbol cadar tidak selamanya melambangkan dominasi laki-laki terhadap tubuh perempuan," Instagram, March 8, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/cadargarislucu/p/C4QIdGSy85Q/>.

The next slide anticipates criticism with the question, “*But isn’t the niqab a symbol of patriarchy that controls women?*”,⁴⁰ to which it responds by asserting that coercion does indeed perpetuate patriarchy, yet a conscious choice based on spirituality or comfort constitutes a form of women’s agency. This argument demonstrates a careful balancing act between feminist critiques of religious symbols and the lived reality of women who wear the niqab by their own autonomous choice. Ainun Jamilah, founder of @cadargarislucu, reinforces this position in a video by stating, “*Feminism isn’t about a uniform... Feminism is about women’s right to choose. And I choose the veil,*” whilst emphasising that forcing women to remove their veils is also a form of patriarchy from a different angle.⁴¹

This response demonstrates an articulation of hybrid identity that integrates Islamic spiritual commitment with a commitment to women’s empowerment. From Hoover’s perspective, this practice represents a creative negotiation between religious tradition and contemporary culture that produces hybridity, rather than dichotomy.⁴² The veil is reinterpreted as a symbol of autonomy or personal choice, whilst feminism is understood as a framework open to religious choices. This hybridisation is also evident in discussions regarding consent, body positivity, and mental health. For example, there is a statement that “consent applies to all forms of interaction, including touch, conversations about our appearance, and requests to remove the niqab.”⁴³ This statement demonstrates an effort to link feminist discourse with the concrete experiences of women who wear the niqab in their daily lives.

The Process of Mediation and the Transformation of the Meaning of the Veil

A holistic analysis of four forms of mediation practice reveals a coherent and systematic process in the use of Instagram as a cultural resource to transform the meaning of the hijab. *The first* stage is the identification of relevant cultural resources. The community reflectively maps out digital cultural elements that are currently resonating, such as viral language, contemporary issues, new technologies, and the frameworks of social movements such as feminism. This selection process demonstrates high media literacy and sensitivity to the dynamics of digital audiences. Hoover explains that audiences of religious media are not passive recipients of messages, but active and discerning users in their understanding of content. The @cadargarislucu account demonstrates this

⁴⁰ @cadargarislucu, “*Cadar Candu Canda di Instagram,*” March 8, 2024.

⁴¹ @cadargarislucu, “*Simbol cadar tidak selamanya melambangkan dominasi laki-laki terhadap tubuh perempuan,*” Instagram, February 1, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/cadargarislucu/p/C4QIdGSy85Q/>.

⁴² @cadargarislucu, “*S. Ainun Jamilah di Instagram,*” December 30, 2022.

⁴³ @cadargarislucu, “*Memangnya ada masalah apa dengan perempuan bercadar yang tengah merasa cantik, bangga dengan fisik yang sehat dan baik yang ia miliki. Bukankah itu merupakan bentuk ekspresi kesyukuran seseorang,*” Instagram, January 27, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/haiininun/reel/C2miiX2Sx_u/.

discernment through its ability to read the situation, identify issues that are culturally relevant, and then utilise them appropriately in the content they create.

The second stage involves the creative appropriation of the cultural sources that have been identified. These elements are not used passively, but are transformed to articulate religious identity, social critique, and the production of counter-narratives against stigma. ChatGPT is repositioned as an objective reference to affirm pluralism, viral language is used as a medium for social critique, and the feminist concept of consent is adapted to explain the specific experiences of veiled women. This process demonstrates the community's imaginative capacity to 'reorient' the original meaning of cultural sources to align with their values. Thus, appropriation becomes a space for the production of new meaning, rather than merely the reproduction of popular symbols.

The third stage involves a negotiation between religious tradition and modernity. Communities do not abandon the veil as a symbol of religious identity, yet they do not shut themselves off from contemporary culture either. They select elements compatible with religious values and reject those that conflict with them, thereby creating a reflective synthesis. Feminism is interpreted as autonomy, not uniformity; technology is utilised for inclusivity, not merely as a trend. Hoover argues that negotiation is an inherent characteristic of contemporary religiosity, where the integration of tradition and modernity is made possible through conscious mediation.⁴⁴ @cadargarislucu exemplifies this model of negotiation in their digital practice.

The fourth stage involves the construction and articulation of hybrid identities. Identities such as '*feminist veiled women*' or '*tech-savvy veiled women*' challenge the often-contrasted dichotomy of the religious versus the modern. This hybridity is not a compromise that weakens either side, but rather an integration that gives rise to new configurations of identity. The symbol of the veil is redefined as compatible with autonomy, technology and pluralism. This articulation of identity broadens the horizons of religious meaning within the digital public sphere.

The fifth stage involves dissemination and reinforcement through sustained practice. The hybrid identity that has been constructed is reinforced through hundreds of posts that are consistent and coherent in their messaging. This repetition and consistency are crucial because the transformation of social meaning requires a long-term process. Through continuous mediation practices, the meaning of the niqab shifts from a symbol of radicalism and patriarchy towards a symbol of moderation, technological compatibility, and women's empowerment. This transformation is not a superficial rebranding, but rather a strategic and sustained active construction within the digital media ecosystem.

The transformation of meaning resulting from this process of mediation can be summarised as a shift from traditional or dominant meanings towards new meanings that are actively constructed. The veil, previously represented as a symbol of radicalism

⁴⁴ Hoover, *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media*, 215–26.

and extremism, is rearticulated as a symbol of moderation and inclusion. What was often framed as a symbol of anti-modernity and backwardness is subsequently reinterpreted as a symbol compatible with technology and contemporary culture. Similarly, whilst previously associated with symbols of patriarchy and the subordination of women, the veil is now positioned as a symbol of women's empowerment and autonomy. Indeed, from what was originally viewed as an exclusive, isolating symbol, it is now represented as a symbol capable of coexisting with pluralism and interfaith dialogue. This transformation is not merely a change in external perception or a superficial rebranding exercise, but rather an active construction of new meanings through strategic, reflective and sustained mediation practices.

Religious Moderation as the Outcome of Active Negotiation

One of the key contributions of this research is to reframe religious moderation as the outcome of active negotiation, rather than as a passive compromise or the erasure of identity. Within the dominant discourse in Indonesia, moderation is often assumed to be an effort to 'reduce' the visibility of religious expression or to distance oneself from symbols deemed conservative. Within this framework, veiled women who wish to be seen as moderate are seemingly required to remove or minimise their religious attributes. Moderation is reduced to a movement towards a middle ground that is synonymous with the abandonment of distinctive religious practices. This perspective tends to overlook the possibility that religious symbols can coexist with inclusive values.

The mediation practices of @cadargarislucu challenge this assumption. They demonstrate that moderation is not determined by the level of visibility of a symbol, but rather by the values articulated through the symbol itself. The veil is upheld as a religious choice, yet accompanied by a commitment to inclusivity, pluralism, interfaith dialogue, and a critique of intolerance. Thus, a symbol often associated with conservatism is repositioned as a medium for championing moderate values. Moderation is understood as an ethical orientation, not as a blurring of identity.

From Hoover's perspective, this practice reflects a reflective negotiation between religious tradition and contemporary reality. Such negotiation demands agency, creativity and the courage to construct a hybrid identity that does not always fit into established categories.⁴⁵ @cadargarislucu does not reject religious authorities who view the veil as a valid form of worship, but nor does it accept exclusive interpretations that seek to impose it universally. They integrate the identity of veiled women with feminism, digital literacy, and an inclusive orientation. Their media practices are also carried out through an ethical lens, rather than merely following the logic of virality.

Furthermore, this community engages in internal self-criticism regarding intolerant practices within the Muslim women's community. They openly

⁴⁵ Hoover and Lundby, *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, 30–34.

acknowledge and criticise the imposition of the hijab as a form of trauma and patriarchy. In the case of Zavilda TV, criticism was directed at actions deemed intolerant, without resorting to defences based on shared religious symbols. This kind of self-criticism reflects genuine moderation—that is, reflection from within the community, rather than merely a response to external pressure. In line with Goffman's theory of *stigma management*,⁴⁶ they do not adopt a defensive strategy that rejects all criticism, but instead employ *strategic differentiation* to distinguish themselves from problematic practices whilst maintaining solidarity with women who wear the niqab in an inclusive manner.

Theoretical and Practical Implications for the Study of Religion and Media

The findings of this study expand the discussion on religious moderation in the digital sphere, a topic previously explored by Maulana et al. and Novendri and Maali. Whilst Maulana and Roudlotul Jannah demonstrate that Islamic moderation is produced by religious actors via YouTube as a form of digital authority,⁴⁷ and Novendri, Ismail, and Maali emphasise the re-actualisation of moderation in the 4.0 era through the adaptation of communication.⁴⁸ The practice of @cadargarislucu reveals that moderation can also be constructed from the grassroots by communities experiencing stigmatisation. Moderation in this context is not a normative discourse imposed from above, but rather the result of reflective negotiation between religious symbols, feminist values, and popular digital culture through creative appropriation and the construction of hybrid identities. Thus, the contribution of this research lies in a shift in focus from moderation as a normative agenda towards moderation as an active mediation process based on community agency in transforming the meaning of religious symbols in the digital public sphere.

The findings of this study also have significant implications for the study of religion and media, particularly in the context of Indonesia and contemporary Muslim societies. Theoretically, this study validates and extends Hoover's mediation theory beyond the Western context in which it was originally developed. Social media, particularly Instagram, has been shown to function as an equivalent cultural source; indeed, in certain respects, it is more accessible than traditional religious institutions in the construction of religious identity among the younger generation. Viral language, popular issues, artificial intelligence technology, and feminist frameworks are utilised as sources of identity articulation relevant to the digital landscape. This does not replace classical religious authority, but rather complements it with contextual and communicative cultural references.

⁴⁶ Anne Waldschmidt, "Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity," in *Goffman-Handbuch*, ed. Karl Lenz and Robert Hettlage (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2022), 299–307, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-05871-3_41.

⁴⁷ Achmad and Jannah, "Moderasi Islam Dalam Media Sosial; Studi Analisis Terhadap Pemahaman Agama Di Youtube."

⁴⁸ Novendri S, Ismail, and Yahya Maali, "Reaktualisasi Moderasi Islam Terhadap Problematika Syariah Pada Era 4.0."

Secondly, this study underscores the centrality of agency in the relationship between media and religion. A mediatisation perspective that emphasises the dominance of media logic tends to overlook the capacity of religious actors to engage in creative appropriation and resistance. Through Hoover's mediation approach, it becomes evident that minority communities are able to utilise the media to construct counter-narratives and alternative identities. @cadargarislucu demonstrates that stigmatised groups are not always in a passive position, but can become strategic actors in the transformation of meaning. Thus, the relationship between media and religion is better understood as a dynamic arena of negotiation rather than a deterministic process.

Thirdly, this study offers a constructive understanding of religious hybridity. Hybridity need not be viewed as a dilution of religiosity, but rather as a creative synthesis that enriches religious meaning within the context of modernity. The identity of the 'feminist veiled woman' demonstrates an integration of spiritual commitment and women's empowerment without negating either. This synthesis produces an identity configuration relevant to the reality of contemporary Muslim women. Thus, hybridity becomes a productive and contextual product of mediation.

In practical terms, this study identifies effective mediation strategies for constructing counter-narratives against stigma. Practices such as the appropriation of popular cultural sources, reflective negotiation of values, the articulation of alternative identities, long-term message consistency, internal self-criticism, and strategic differentiation from problematic actors can serve as models for other marginalised communities. In the Indonesian context, these findings confirm that religious moderation in the digital age is not synonymous with the reduction of religious symbols, but rather with an inclusive and dialogical orientation of values. Institutions promoting moderation need to open up space for negotiation from the grassroots level, so that communities can define moderate religiosity in accordance with their own social and cultural contexts.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the mediation practices carried out by the @cadargarislucu community constitute a form of strategic digital agency in transforming the meaning of the veil in the Indonesian public sphere. Through the integration of Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis and Stewart M. Hoover's theory of religious mediation, this study identifies four key practices: the appropriation of viral language, the utilisation of contemporary issues, value-based negotiation of meaning, and the hybridisation of religious-feminist identities. These practices demonstrate that social media serves not merely as a communication channel, but also as a cultural resource actively utilised to construct an inclusive, moderate, and reflective identity for veiled women. These findings confirm that the transformation of the veil's meaning does not occur defensively, but rather through proactive strategies that blend religious values and modernity in the form of hybrid identities. Thus,

religious moderation can be understood as the result of active negotiation based on community agency, rather than as a reduction of religious symbols.

The limitations of this study include the focus on a single account, which restricts generalisability; the limitations of the interviews in exploring internal perspectives in greater depth; and the lack of a comprehensive analysis of audience reception. Consequently, future research is recommended to adopt a digital ethnographic approach with a longer observation period and more intensive participatory engagement. This approach enables researchers to capture practices of interaction, the negotiation of meaning, and the dynamics of content production in a more contextual and layered manner. The use of in-depth interviews with community members is also crucial for exploring subjective dimensions, such as motivations, reflections on identity, and discursive strategies that are not always represented in public content. Furthermore, comparative studies across similar accounts or communities can provide a more comprehensive understanding of variations in mediation practices. Longitudinal analysis of content development and audience responses is also vital for capturing the evolution of these practices and their impact on shifts in public attitudes and policy discourse.

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