Religious Trauma in the Digital Era: A Case Study of Muslim Diaspora and the Clash of Global Traditions with Indonesian Islam

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze how religious trauma among Indonesian Muslim diasporas is produced, reproduced, and negotiated in digital spaces, and how these experiences contribute to the transformation of religious identity in a global-digital context. Beyond the experience of physical migration, Indonesian Muslim diaspora engage in ongoing religious identity negotiation through sustained exposure to digitally mediated religious norms circulating within transnational online publics. Employing a qualitative case-study approach, the research analyzes approximately 150 units of digital data collected from YouTube and TikTok between 2021–2024, including short videos, comment threads, and public interviews involving Indonesian Muslim diaspora figures. The data were examined through thematic digital discourse analysis combined with a social exegesis approach. The findings indicate that religious trauma is largely generated through digitally mediated moral judgment, the algorithmic amplification of rigid religious narratives, and the public delegitimation of individual religious choices. At the same time, digital platforms function as counter-spaces for healing, enabling narrative expression, community support, and inclusive reinterpretations of Islamic teachings. This study proposes the concept of digitally mediated religious trauma.

Keywords: Indonesian Muslim Diaspora, Religious Trauma, Digital Religion, Social Exegesis

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bagaimana trauma religius di kalangan diaspora Muslim Indonesia diproduksi, direproduksi, dan dinegosiasikan di ruang digital, serta bagaimana pengalaman tersebut berkontribusi terhadap transformasi identitas keagamaan dalam konteks global-digital. Diaspora Muslim Indonesia mengalami proses negosiasi identitas religius tidak hanya melalui pengalaman migrasi, tetapi juga melalui paparan berkelanjutan terhadap norma-norma keagamaan yang termediasi secara digital dan beredar dalam ruang publik daring transnasional. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus yang melibatkan sekitar 150 unit data digital yang dikumpulkan dari platform YouTube dan TikTok pada periode 2021–2024, meliputi video pendek, kolom komentar, dan wawancara publik yang melibatkan figur diaspora Muslim Indonesia. Analisis data dilakukan melalui analisis wacana digital tematik yang dipadukan dengan pendekatan tafsir sosial. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa trauma religius terutama dihasilkan melalui penghakiman moral yang termediasi secara digital, amplifikasi algoritmik terhadap narasi keagamaan yang rigid, serta delegitimasi publik atas pilihan keagamaan personal. Di sisi lain, platform digital juga berfungsi sebagai ruang tandingan bagi proses pemulihan melalui artikulasi naratif, dukungan komunitas, dan reinterpretasi ajaran Islam yang lebih inklusif. Penelitian ini mengajukan konsep trauma religius termediasi digital.

Kata Kunci: *Diaspora Muslim Indonesia, Trauma Religius, Agama Digital, Tafsir Sosial*

Background

In contemporary religious studies, religious trauma has increasingly been discussed as an affective and narrative experience shaped by disciplinary power, normative authority, and moral regulation within religious systems.[1]

Growing scholarly concern to this issue reflects an increasing awareness that religious experience does not always generate security and peace; in certain contexts, it can instead give rise to fear, guilt, alienation and identity conflict.[2] This phenomenon

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[1] Sahruman, 'Adolescence Under Pressure: Religious Trauma and Identity in Dill'S Narrative', *Lire Journal (Journal of Linguistics and Literature)*, 9.2 (2025), 342–52 <https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v9i2.453>.

[2] Lara Carminati and Ying Fei Gao Héliot, 'Professional and Religious Identity Conflict: Individual and Organizational Dynamics in Ethically-Charged

becomes even more complex when experienced by diaspora communities, including Indonesian Muslim diaspora, who live in multicultural social spaces and global digital ecosystems.[3]

Among Indonesian Muslim diasporas, religious practices and interpretations do not occur within a homogeneous social or epistemic space. Religious identity is formed through multiple layers of interaction among inherited Islamic traditions from Indonesia, the lived experience of migration, normative expectations in host societies, and transnational religious discourses circulating through digital media.[4] Rather than framing this condition as a binary conflict between 'Indonesian Islamic tradition' and 'global culture,' this study considers it as a dynamic process of negotiation. In this process, local values, global discourse, and personal experiences intertwine, at times leading to creative synthesis, but under certain conditions giving rise to emotional tension and conflicts of meaning.[5]

The evolution of digital environments has further reinforced these dynamics. Social media platforms, online forums, and video-sharing sites not only serve as spaces for religious expression but also as arenas for the production of authority, moral normalization, and symbolic surveillance. Within these digital spaces, Indonesian Muslim diasporas confront diverse standards of piety, divergent religious interpretations, and public assessments that are often normative and exclusive in nature. Pressures to conform to specific religious discourses, whether conservative, puritanical, or ostensibly 'cosmopolitan,' can create

experiences perceived by those involved as religiously traumatic.[6]

In this paper, trauma is not conceptualized in the clinical or psychological sense associated with mental disorders resulting from life-threatening events. Rather, it is framed as a socio-cultural construct: an affective and narrative experience shaped by symbolic power relations, mechanisms of exclusion, and the inability of religious meaning systems to generate security and social recognition.[7] This perspective aligns with Judith Herman's concept of social trauma, which underscores trauma as emerging from a breakdown of trust within social systems, and with Cathy Caruth's theoretical approach, which foregrounds the narrative dimension of trauma and the repetitive return of meaning within traumatic experiences.[8] Accordingly, religious trauma here is examined as an experience articulated through narratives, emotional expressions, and practices of self-reflection within digital spaces, rather than as a form of psychological diagnosis.

This study is grounded in the assumption that religious trauma among the Indonesian Muslim diaspora can be traced through personal narratives that express fear, guilt, or a loss of religious meaning, and tensions between individual convictions and dominant religious authorities. Such trauma also manifests in experiences of exclusion, moral judgement, and the delegitimisation of religious identity. In response to these conditions, individuals often develop a range of discursive strategies, including acts of resistance, efforts to reinterpret religious teachings, and the

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Circumstances', *Self and Identity*, 22.7–8 (2023), 1065–92 <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2023.2248686>.

[3] Nina Averianova, 'THE CONCEPT OF «DIASPORA» IN RESEARCH WORKS OF FOREIGN SCIENTISTS: PARTICULARITIES OF INTERPRETATIONS AND USE', *Almanac of Ukrainian Studies*, 2021, 8–13 <https://doi.org/10.17721/2520-2626/2021.28.1>.

[4] Shodiq Abdullah and others, 'Religious Confusion and Emptiness: Evaluating the Impact of Online Islamic Learning among Indonesian Muslim Adolescents', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 80.1 (2024) <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9510>.

[5] Rose, Bisson, and Wasseley, 'Psychological Debriefing for Preventing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Review," Dalam Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews', 2002.

[6] Abdul Hannan and Ach. Fatayillah Mursyidi, 'Social Media and the Fragmentation of Religious Authority among Muslims in Contemporary Indonesia', 1.2 (2023), 19.

[7] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (Basic Book, 1992).

[8] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History.* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

pursuit of healing spaces made available through digital media.

To examine these dynamics, the study draws on three complementary theoretical frameworks. The first is the digital religion approach, which conceptualizes digital media as a social arena in which religious practices are enacted, contested, and reconfigured. The second framework is diaspora studies, which highlights the formation of identity through processes of migration, displacement, and cross-cultural engagement. The third is a social interpretive approach, employed to examine how religious norms and authoritative discourses are re-read and renegotiated by Muslim diasporic communities within shifting socio-cultural contexts. Taken together, these perspectives allow religious trauma to be analysed not merely as an individual psychological experience, but as a relational phenomenon shaped by the interplay of social structures, religious discourse, and communication technologies.[9]

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative case study approach, focusing on social media posts and publicly accessible video content. The empirical materials consist of digital productions by Indonesian Muslim diaspora public figures, with particular attention to TikTok videos that articulate religious identity, gendered self-presentation, and responses to socially and religiously contested issues. Two posts were selected for in-depth analysis because they generated intense public debate and revealed forms of digital stigma and psychosocial pressure relevant to this study.

Specifically, the research examines two TikTok videos created by Indonesian Muslim diaspora public figures that function as spaces for the articulation and negotiation of religious identity in digital environments. The first case involves a TikTok video addressing the decision to remain childfree, produced by a public figure identified by the initials GS. In the video, GS frames childfree living as a personal choice within marriage. The content elicited extensive reactions from netizens, who debated the legitimacy of childfree decisions through the lenses of religious values, morality, and dominant social norms in Indonesian Muslim society. Accordingly, the analysis extends beyond the video itself to include user comments, enabling an examination of discursive dynamics, forms of resistance, and patterns of moral judgement within the digital public space. (GS's Tiktok Video about *childfree*: https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSPjhm2C9/)[10].

The second case examines a TikTok video with an entertainment-oriented format produced by an Indonesian Muslim diaspora public figure identified by the initials RM. The video features performative expressions of identity and personal relationships, which subsequently provoked moralized reactions from Indonesian netizens who interpreted the content through normative and hegemonic frameworks, particularly in relation to LGBTQ-related issues. These responses illustrate how diasporic self-expression in digital spaces is frequently subjected to moral scrutiny and symbolic regulation.

Consistent with the first case, this study does not limit its focus to the video content itself, but also incorporates netizen comments as a crucial source of data. These responses are analysed to explore processes of discourse formation, mechanisms of moral judgement, and the power relations that shape interactions between diaspora public figures and Indonesian Muslim audiences within social media environments.[11]

The study employs a qualitative approach to uncover the social meanings embedded in these media posts and to examine them in depth within their specific digital and cultural contexts.[12] A case study design was adopted to enable a contextual

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[9] Moch Nur Ichwan, Ahmad Muttaqin, *Agama dan Perdamaian dari Potensi menuju Aksi,* Program Studi Agama dan Filsafat Program Pascasarjana Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, *CR-Peace SUNAN KALIJAGA.*

[10] Netizens' coments on GS's TikTok video about childfree, accessed on 12 November 2025.

[11] Netizen comment on RM's TikTok video on LGBTQ, accessed in November 12, 2025. <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSPjhaDoV>.

[12] Weng Marc Lim, 'What Is Qualitative Research? An Overview and Guidelines', *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 33.2 (2025), 199–229 <https://doi.org/10.1177/14413582241264619>.

and holistic analysis of a limited number of phenomena that nonetheless reveal complex social dynamics.[13] Data ara examined through digital discourse analysis, which attends not only to linguistic structures but also to the construction of social meanings, identities, and moral positions within online interactions.

Building on this framework, the study formulates the following research questions: (1) What forms of experience and social conditions shape narratives of religious trauma among the Indonesian Muslim diaspora? (2) How do religious discourses and practices in digital spaces contribute to both the reproduction and transformation of these traumatic experiences? (3) What discursive strategies do Indonesian Muslim diasporic actors employ to reconstruct religious identities and reinterpret traumatic experiences within the digital ecosystem?

Through these inquiries, the study aims to contribute beyond normative or descriptive concerns by offering substantive theoretical advancements in the form of analytical models and conceptual typologies for the study of religion, diaspora, and digital religion. More specifically, it advances the social interpretation approach by systematically incorporating traumatic and affective dimensions as central analytical categories, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of religious diversity and lived experiences of Indonesian Muslims in the global digital era.[14]

Social Conditions Shaping Religious Trauma among the Indonesian Muslim Diaspora in Digital Spaces

Analysis of social media posts and comment sections demonstrates that religious trauma among the Indonesian Muslim diaspora often manifests as recurring affective and symbolic experiences, most notably in the form of religious guilt, the questioning of religious identity, and tensions between personal faith and publicly enforced religious norms. Rather than resulting from isolated incidents, these experiences accumulate through sustained digital interactions in which normative and judgemental responses are continuously reproduced.[15] Within diasporic contexts, these dynamics are inseparable from the structural conditions faced by Indonesian Muslims living as religious minorities within social, legal, and cultural systems that differ markedly from those of their countries of origin. Migration, in this sense, entails not only geographical relocation but also profound transformations in religious identity. Existing scholarship on Islam and the Indonesian diaspora highlights how such conditions generate a persistent dialectic between the preservation of religious identity and the pressures of social adaptation in host societies. Consequently, religious practices in diaspora settings no longer unfold within a relatively homogeneous and stable cultural environment, but within a multicultural terrain marked by diverse values, norms, and social expectations.[16]

In these situations, individuals within the diaspora are required to navigate their religious lives by selecting, adapting, and reinterpreting religious teachings in ways that align with their everyday realities. This process is often complex and uneven, as diasporic religious identities remain deeply connected to communities of origin through ongoing transnational relationships facilitated by digital communication technologies. Consequently, digital spaces become central arenas in which diasporic identities, religious practices, and personal life choices are continually observed,

[13] Nerida Hyett, Amanda Kenny, and Virginia Dickson-Swift, 'Methodology or Method a Critical Review of Qualitative Case Study Reports', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being*, 9.1 (2014), 1–12 <https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v9.23606>.

[14] Anas Edoli, 'CONCEPTS ON DIASPORA: REFLECTIONS ON TIME AND SPACE.', *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 6.2 (2018), 471–74 <https://doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/6461>.

[15] Abd Rahman Mas'ud and others, *Islam \& Diaspora Indonesia.* (Litbangdiklat Press, 2021).

[16] Eka Srimulyani, 'Indonesian Muslim Diaspora in Contemporary South Korea: Living as Religious Minority Group in Non-Muslim Country', *Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam*, 5.2 (2021).

evaluated, and discussed by broader religious publics.[17]

The findings show that lifestyle choices, such as the decision to remain childfree, the adoption of more egalitarian gender relations, or particular ways of expressing religious faith are frequently interpreted not as contextual and personal decisions, but as symbols of the collective moral identity of Indonesian Muslims. In GS's TikTok post discussing the choice to be childfree, narratives of religious trauma emerge clearly in netizens' responses that frame individual decisions as moral transgressions rather than lived experiences. One comment states, "Childfree is rejecting the nature of women. If you claim to be Muslim but reject nature, then your faith is problematic."[18] This response illustrates how diasporic religious identity is reduced to a narrow normative marker, a biological reproduction thereby foreclosing space for contextual and experiential interpretations of diasporic life. A similar pattern appears in RM's entertainment-oriented post, in which expressions of personal relationships are interpreted through a moral framework associated with LGBTQ issues. One netizen commented, "If this is the case, don't bring Islam into it. Islam does not teach deviance."[19] Such reactions demonstrate how digital moral discourse operates to discipline expressions of identity by positioning Islam as a fixed moral boundary, while delegitimising alternative interpretations and reinforcing symbolic pressure on diaspora individuals.[20]

Such expressions reveal processes of religious delegitimisation in which individuals are not only subjected to moral criticism but are also symbolically positioned outside the boundaries of the religious community. For members of the diaspora, this experience generates profound tensions of identity, particularly for those who continue to affirm their Muslim identity while not fully conforming to dominant standards of piety circulating in digital spaces. Social media discourse further shows that lifestyle-related issues within the diaspora are frequently framed in normative and ahistorical terms. Decisions such as remaining childfree, for instance, are reduced to moral deviations from Islamic teachings, with little consideration given to the structural conditions shaping diasporic life, including economic precarity, career trajectories, social security arrangements, and family policy regimes in host societies. These patterns indicate that religious authority does not disappear in diasporic contexts; rather, it is reconstituted through digital media in the form of rapid and often decontextualized moral judgements. In digital environments, religious authority is produced and circulated horizontally through everyday user interactions among users.[21] Standards of piety emerge through comments, posts, and the repeated circulation of moral narratives, forming a powerful mechanism of moral policing that leaves little room for contextual reflection. This dynamic reflects the fragmentation of religious authority, in which individuals and public figures within the diaspora may simultaneously experience processes of religious legitimisation and delegitimisation. In this context, digital media functions not only as a platform for religious expression but also as a site of intensified social control, with significant potential to generate psychospiritual harm.[22]

Studies on Muslim diasporas indicate that responses to global values are far from uniform. This study identifies a broad spectrum of responses, ranging from selective adaptation and

[17] Tati Hartimah and others, 'Expressing National Identity: National Issues from the Indonesian Muslim Diaspora', *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi (Indonesian Journal of Communications Studies)*, 9.1 (2025), 41–53 <https://doi.org/10.25139/jsk.v9i1.9385>.

[18] Netizen comment on GS's TikTok video on the childfree issue, uploaded in 2025.

[19] Netizen comment on RM's TikTok video featuring entertainment content, uploaded in 2025.

[20] https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSPjhaDoV/.

[21] Abdullah and others.

[22] Ghadeer Udwan, Koen Leurs, and Amanda Alencar, 'Digital Resilience Tactics of Syrian Refugees in the Netherlands: Social Media for Social Support, Health, and Identity', *Social Media and Society*, 6.2 (2020) <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120915587>.

pragmatic negotiation to normative resistance toward values such as individualism and gender equality. These varied responses reflect ongoing efforts to navigate the tension between social integration in host societies and the preservation of religious identity. Such negotiations are often uneven, particularly when normative pressures originate from communities of origin that position diaspora members as symbolic representatives of Indonesian Muslim morality on a global stage.

Indonesian Islamic values, which are largely collectivist and closely embedded in local custom, play an ambivalent role in diasporic contexts. On the one hand, these values offer a sense of belonging, solidarity, and stability of identity amid the uncertainties of migration. On the other hand, collectivist orientations may also intensify moral pressure on individuals whose life choices diverge from dominant communal norms. This tension becomes particularly pronounced in open digital spaces, where interactions often unfold with limited empathy, giving rise to symbolic conflicts that are personal, repeatedly enacted, and capable of producing lasting psychospiritual effects.[23]

In digital spaces, religious authority is produced and circulated horizontally through ongoing interactions among users. Standards of piety take shape through comments, posts, and the repetition of moral narratives, forming powerful mechanisms of moral policing. This dynamic reflects the fragmentation of religious authority, in which individuals and public figures within the diaspora may be simultaneously subjected to processes of religious legitimisation and delegitimisation. In this context, digital media functions not only as a platform for religious expression but also as an arena of intensified social control.[24]

Accordingly, the experiences and lifestyle choices of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora examined in this study can be understood as sites of religious identity negotiation marked by significant social and symbolic tensions. When these negotiations fail to secure recognition from both communities of origin and wider digital publics, lifestyle choices cease to function merely as personal practices and instead become catalysts for a crisis of religious meaning.[25] It is under these conditions that religious trauma emerges as a socially and psychospiritually mediated experience embedded in the digitally networked lives of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora.[26]

Digital Religious Authority and the Production of Religious Trauma

In the context of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora, religious trauma cannot be reduced to an individual psychological condition. Rather, it is a social experience mediated by power relations, religious norms, and digital technologies.[27] The analysis demonstrates that such trauma is produced and continually reproduced through horizontal mechanisms of moral policing in digital environments. Social media operates not only as a platform for religious expression but also as a site of moral surveillance, where standards of piety are negotiated and enforced through comments, responsive posts, and the circulation of short-form normative religious content. Within this space, religious authority is no longer monopolised by formal institutions but dispersed among users who collectively generate and legitimise moral judgements.[28]

In the comment section of GS's TikTok video, moral policing is articulated through rigid and ahistorical religious judgements. One comment reads, "In the West, people have

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[23] Julia Elvina, Meylani Eka Putri, and Siti Nabila, 'Metode Pembelajaran Dalam Surah An-Nahl Ayat 125', *IHSANIKA : Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 2.3 (2024), 207–17 <https://doi.org/10.59841/ihsanika.v2i3.1425>.

[24] Hannan and Mursyidi.

[25] Nagendra Bahadur Bhandari, 'Diaspora and Cultural Identity: A Conceptual Review', *Journal of Political Science*, 21 (2021), 100–108 <https://doi.org/10.3126/jps.v21i0.35268>.

[26] Muhammad Soufi and others, 'MEMIJAK BUMI, MENJUNJUNG LANGIT: IDENTITAS KELOMPOK DIASPORA MUSLIM DI EROPA' <https://doi.org/10.21043/jp.v14i2>.

[27] Herman.

[28] User comments in the comment section of *da'wah* content on TikTok (2025), anonymized and used as qualitiative data for this study.

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forgotten religion. Islam clearly regulates matters of lineage. Do not use trauma or economic reasons as excuses."[3] This response positions the diaspora as subjects deemed morally "deviant" under the influence of global culture, while disregarding the structural conditions that shape diasporic life, including economic pressures, social security arrangements, career demands, and the lived realities of migration. Such discourse underscores that religious authority has not diminished in diasporic contexts; rather, it is reproduced through digital media in the form of rapid moral judgements that allow little space for contextual or reflective engagement.

These findings resonate with Hannan and Mursyidi's analysis regarding the fragmentation of religious authority in Indonesian social media, while extending it by showing that fragmentation does not necessarily lead to greater interpretive freedom. In diasporic contexts, fragmentation multiplies the actors involved in moral policing, placing individuals under simultaneous normative pressure from communities of origin and broader digital publics.[29] Beyond user interactions, social media algorithms also play a significant role in intensifying religious trauma. Digital preaching content that foregrounds themes of sin, punishment, and moral deviance tends to receive heightened visibility due to its emotional and confrontational appeal. Continuous exposure to such content amplifies feelings of religious guilt and spiritual anxiety, as reflected in one user's comment: "Every time I open TikTok, it's full of sermons that scare me. Eventually, I get tired of religion." [30] This illustrates how algorithmic circulation contributes to the affective reproduction of religious trauma within everyday digital religious encounters.

This finding extends Caruth's conceptualisation of trauma as an experience shaped by narrative repetition by demonstrating that, in the digital age, algorithms function as key mechanisms through which religious trauma is repeatedly circulated and reinforced. Consistent with Rizwan et al., trauma in this context does not emerge from a single traumatic event but from sustained exposure to normative religious narratives that exert cumulative affective pressure over time.[31]

Digital space thus performs an ambivalent role in relation to religious trauma. On the one hand, it operates as a site for the reproduction of trauma through hate speech, stigmatisation, and the delegitimisation of religious identity. On the other hand, digital media also enables the emergence of counter-spaces that facilitate articulation, reflection, and recovery. This dynamic is evident in long-form reflective content on platforms such as YouTube, where members of the Muslim diaspora share personal narratives of religious trauma while affirming that they have not abandoned their faith, but are instead seeking more sustainable and life-affirming relationships with religion.

A similar dynamic can be observed in online support communities, such as closed discussion forums and Telegram groups, which provide comparatively safer environments for sharing experiences without immediete moral judgement. These spaces illustrate the dual role of digital religion: on the one hand, as a source of psychospiritual harm, and on the other, as a medium for healing through solidarity, mutual validation of lived experiences, and more contextual and empathetic reinterpretations of religious teachings.[32]

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[29] Alison Downie, 'Christian Shame and Religious Trauma', *Religions*, 13.10 (2022), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13100925>.

[30] User comments in the comment section of *daʿwah* content on TikTok (2025), anonymized and used as qualitiative data for this study.

[31] Muhammad Rizwan Sarfraz and others, 'Influence of Internet Language Hate Speech on Young Adults Mental Health and Its Detection Method', *Pakistan Journal of Medical and Health Sciences*, 16.7 (2022), 315–16 <https://doi.org/10.53350/pjmhs22167315>.

[32] Jessica L Hamilton and others, 'Leveraging Digital Media to Promote Youth Mental Health: Flipping the Script on Social Media-Related Risk', *Current Treatment Options in Psychiatry* (Springer Science and Business Media Deutschland GmbH, 2024), 67–75 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40501-024-00315-y>.

Accordingly, religious trauma in the digital age cannot be attributed solely to religious teachings themselves. Rather, it must be understood as the outcome of complex interactions among fragmented forms of religious authority, the operational logic of social media algorithms, and a digital communication culture that often privileges exclusivity over nuance.[33] Within this framework, digital media emerges as a central locus for analysing how religious trauma is produced, sustained, and simultaneously negotiated by the Indonesian Muslim diaspora as they navigate the tensions between global values and Indonesian Islamic traditions.[34]

Diaspora Strategies for Identity Negotiation and Recovery

Although digital spaces have become central to the production and reproduction of religious trauma, the findings of this study demonstrate that the Indonesian Muslim diaspora is not merely a passive recipient of normative pressure.[35] Rather, diasporic actors actively develop a range of discursive strategies and social practices to negotiate religious identity and to repair their psychospiritual relationship with religion. Recovery in this context does not unfold in a linear, uniform, or universal manner. Instead, it emerges as a gradual and highly contextual process of reflection shaped by personal experiences, social relationships, and ongoing efforts to reconstruct the meaning of religiosity amid migration and global digital connectivity..[36] Drawing on contemporary trauma theory, recovery is understood here not as the erasure of traumatic memories or a return to a prior state of

"normalcy," but as the capacity to re-signify painful experiences and integrate them into a continuously negotiated sense of self. For the Indonesian Muslim diaspora, this process is further complicated by the simultaneous pressures of unresolved religious experiences, demands for social adaptation, and normative expectations imposed by communities of origin and global digital publics. Religious trauma thus emerges as a fundamentally relational experience, embedded within broader social structures, power relations, and the digital communication ecosystem.[37]

One of the most prominent strategies of recovery involves the articulation of personal narratives in digital spaces. Social media and video-sharing platforms are employed to recount experiences of religious diversity that are perceived as oppressive or emotionally injurious. In a public YouTube interview, for instance, GS stated, "I did not abandon Islam. I am simply searching for a way to practise my faith that does not hurt me."[38] This narrative illustrates how digital platforms function as sites for reclaiming agency and reframing religious commitment in ways that prioritise emotional and spiritual well-being. This statement reflects a deliberate effort to distinguish between Islamic normative values and religious social practices experienced as restrictive or repressive.[39] Such narratives operate as mechanisms of meaning-making, through which individuals reconstruct their relationship with religion in light of their lived experience. Social recognition of these narratives is particularly significant, as religious trauma is often intensified when individual experiences are denied, delegitimised, or

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[33] Hannan and Mursyidi.

[34] Hardiantama Rizki Putra, Annas Fajar Rohmani, and Luqman Abdulhakim, 'Empowering Muslim Adolescents through Progressive Islamic Digital Literacy to Combat Cyberbullying', *Multicultural Islamic Education Review*, 3.1 (2025), 53–62 <https://doi.org/10.23917/mier.v3i1.9916>.

[35] Mubin Syahrul, 'Pengaruh Globalisasi Terhadap Identitas Keagamaan Dalam Kalangan Pemuda Muslim', *Jurnal Religion: Jurnal Agama, Sosial, Dan Budaya*, 1.2023 (2020),1093–1104, <https://kompasiana.com/syahrulmubin/5e4bb2ce097f36

66bf04d932/pengaruh-globalisasi-terhadap-identitas-nasional>.

[36] Herman.

[37] Caruth.

[38] User comments in the comment section of *da'wah* content on TikTok (2025), anonymized and used as qualitative data in this research.

[39] Prosiding Seminar and others, 'Tradisi Lokal Sebagai Penanda Identitas : Respon Keagamaan', 3.2 (2025), 169–78.

even pathologised within normative religious communities.[40]

Beyond narrative articulation, recovery also occurs through the formation of alternative online communities that offer greater psychological safety. This study finds that some members of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora actively create or participate in closed discussion forums, supportive comment sections, and non-hierarchical digital networks. One user, responding to a reflective post, remarked, "You are not alone. Many Muslims still have faith but are tired of being judged."[41] Such interactions highlight how digital solidarity can foster emotional validation and a renewed sense of belonging. At the same time, recovery through digital spaces is not automatic; it depends on individuals' capacity to engage with the digital ecosystem selectively and reflexively, distinguishing between spaces that reproduce harm and those that enable healing.[42]

In addition to narrative articulation, recovery also unfolds through the pursuit of alternative communities that offer greater psychological security. This study finds that some members of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora intentionally create or join online communities characterised by reflective dialogue, non-hierarchical structures, and non-judgemental engagement.[43] Such spaces enable individuals to sustain their religious identities without submitting to homogeneous and exclusionary moral pressures. In this sense, digital space functions not only as an arena for the reproduction of trauma but also as a medium for cultivating solidarity and psychosocial resilience.[44]

This pattern reinforces existing scholarship on the fragmentation of religious authority in the digital age, in which religious legitimacy is no longer monopolised by formal institutions or charismatic figures but is continuously negotiated through horizontal interactions among individuals.[45] Within this context, the Indonesian Muslim diaspora does not simply submit to established forms of authority; rather, they actively select religious sources, communities, and narratives that resonate with their psychological needs and lived realities.[46] While such fragmentation is often framed as a crisis of religious authority, this study demonstrates that it can also function as a crucial precondition for recovery from religious trauma.

At the religious level, psychospiritual recovery strategies frequently involve the reinterpretation of Islamic teachings through a social interpretation approach. The findings indicate that participants often draw on Qur'anic verses that emphasise values such as wisdom (*ḥikmah*), gentle exhortation *(mawʿiẓah ḥasanah)*, dialogical engagement, and the prohibition of ridicule or insult, most notably in QS al-Naḥl:125[47] and QS. al-Ḥujurāt:11.[48] These verses are reinterpreted as ethical foundations for communication and social relations that are responsive to digital and diasporic contexts. This interpretive move enables diasporic individuals to distinguish between Islam's normative values as *raḥmatan lil-ʿālamīn* and religious social practices previously experienced as repressive or emotionally harmful.[49]

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[40] Hannan and Mursyidi.

[41] Sarfraz and others.

[42] Sarah Perry, 'Religious/Spiritual Abuse, Meaning-Making, and Posttraumatic Growth', 2024.

[43] Rizqa Ahmadi and Muhammad Muntahibun Nafis, 'Sense of Community Dan Fragmentasi Identitas Diaspora Muslim Indonesia: Studi Kasus AIMF-ACT Dan IMCV Di Australia', *Refleksi: Jurnal Kajian Agama Dan Filsafat*, 23.2 (2024), 301–24 <https://doi.org/10.15408/ref.v23i2.41351>.

[44] Arif Akbaş, 'Filistin Diasporasının Sosyal Medyada Kimlik İnşası: Dijital Etnografi Çalışması', *Journal of Islamicjerusalem Studies*, 25.1 (2025), 39–68 <https://doi.org/10.31456/beytulmakdis.1616144>.

[45] Ariadne Driezen, Gert Verschraegen, and Noel Clycq, 'Negotiating a Contested Identity: Religious Individualism among Muslim Youth in a Super-Diverse City', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 82 (2021), 25–36 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2021.03.003>.

[46] Hamilton and others.

[47] Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al- Misbah: Pesan. Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an, Vol. X* (Lentera Hati, 2002).

[48] Ibnu Katsir, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Adẓim, Terj. M. Abdul Goffar, Jilid 5* (Dar al-Tayyibah, 2004).

[49] Wahbah Az-Zuhaili, *Tafsir Al-Munir, Terj. Abdul Hayle Al-Kattani Dkk, Jilid 6* (Gema Insani, 2008).

This approach demonstrates that social interpretation operates not only as a normative–theological framework but also as a mechanism of psychospiritual recovery. By placing sacred texts in dialogue with lived experiences, social interpretation enables individuals to reconstruct their relationship with religion in more reflective, humane, and context-sensitive ways.[50] Within this framework, religion is no longer positioned primarily as a source of fear or coercion, but as an ethical space that remains open to ongoing negotiation and meaning-making.

Conversely, Indonesian Islamic values, characterised by collectivist orientations and deeply embedded traditions, play an ambivalent role in processes of recovery. In certain contexts, values of togetherness, social harmony, and mutual cooperation provide emotional support that fosters belonging and mitigates social isolation.[51] In other contexts, however, these same values intensify mechanisms of social control and constrain individuals' capacity to autonomously negotiate religious identities. This ambivalence underscores that recovery from religious trauma cannot be disentangled from the power relations and normative structures that shape the lived realities of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora.[52]

Recovery from religious trauma is defined here as a shift away from rigid, normatively imposed religiosity toward a psychospiritual framework that is reflective and oriented toward well-being. Rather than a linear transition, this process is characterized by continuous negotiation across multiple dimensions, including personal experiences, diasporic social communities, religious interpretations, inherited cultural values,

and the socio-technical dynamics of the global digital ecosystems.[53]

This research challenges the individualistic focus of much existing literature on religious trauma by proposing an intersectional model that accounts for diaspora and digital dynamics. It argues that, for Indonesian Muslims, religious trauma is often a social product of identity negotiation and algorithmic influence rather than a simple consequence of doctrine.[54] By introducing the concept of "digitally mediated religious trauma," the study highlights how psychospiritual well-being is shaped by cross-cultural tensions and dispered forms of digital authority. Ultimately, this framework provides a more nuanced, non-binary lens through which to examine the complexities of modern religious life.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that religious trauma among the Indonesian Muslim diaspora is fundamentally a social experience mediated through digital interactions, rather than simply an individual psychological condition or a direct outcome of religious doctrine. Such trauma emerges through recurring practices of moral policing, online stigmatisation, and the symbolic delegitimisation of religious identity within transnational digital spaces. Social media serves as a central arena in which norms of piety are continuously produced, negotiated, and enforced, often rendering in diasporic life choices and expressions of faith being frequently interpreted through normative and ahistorical frameworks.

The findings further show that the fragmentation of religious authority in digital media does not necessarily produce greater

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[50] Shihab.

[51] Gerlov van Engelenhoven, 'From Indigenous Customary Law to Diasporic Cultural Heritage: Reappropriations of Adat Throughout the History of Moluccan Postcolonial Migration', *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law*, 34.3 (2021), 695–721 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-020-09781-y>.

[52] Fajri M Kasim and Abidin Nurdin, 'Study of Sociological Law on Conflict Resolution through Adat in Aceh Community According to Islamic Law', *Samarah*

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[53] Astrid Mattes and others, 'Religion and Politics of Belonging in Digital Times: Youth Religiosity in Focus', *Frontiers in Political Science*, 6.January (2024), 1–11 <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2024.1476762>.

[54] Sugeng Pujiono, 'Dakwah Islam Di Era Mondial : Digitalisasi , Media Baru , Dan Strategi Komunikasi Global', *Liwaul Dakwah: Jurnal Kajian Dakwah Dan Masyarakat Islam*, 15.1 (2025), 176–91.

interpretive freedom. In diasporic contexts, it instead expands sites of moral surveillance and intensifies symbolic pressure on individuals whose religious practices and life choices deviate from dominant communal norms. At the same time, the Indonesian Muslim diaspora emerges as active agents who strategically confront these pressures by reconstructing religious identities and pursuing psychospiritual recovery through personal narratives, supportive digital communities, and empathetic, contextually grounded reinterpretations of Islamic teachings.

At the theoretical level, this article advances the concept of "digitally mediated religious trauma," defining trauma as a relational effect of ongoing religious identity negotiation at the intersection of diasporic experience, contested religious authority, and the algorithmic governance of digital media. By foregrounding affective, symbolic, and relational dimensions, this concept makes a decisive contribution to the study of religious trauma and digital religion, offering a more robust framework for analysing the lived religious experiences of Indonesian Muslims in the global-digital era.

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