



BRILL

JOURNAL OF RELIGION, MEDIA AND DIGITAL CULTURE

13 (2024) 20–42



brill.com/rmdc

Islam, Visual Morality and Gender Identity in Cyberspace: The Agency, Controversy and Popular Piety of Ria Ricis

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Received 30 March 2022 | Accepted 10 August 2023 |

Published online 8 March 2024

Abstract

Hijab wearing women are often key players in the digital market ecosystem and popular culture in Indonesia, as well as being a battleground for discourse on contemporary relations between Islam and gender. By analyzing the controversy and development of Instagram celebrity and YouTuber Ria Ricis, this article discusses

sexual morality and visual culture in cyberspace that shows the latest developments in the use of hijab, popular piety, and the lifestyle of young millennial Muslim women. This article seeks to contribute to refreshing the literature on Islamic studies and gender studies in Indonesia with the intersection of Islam, gender, and digital media. This study argues that in the midst of the controversy over Muslim woman's sexual morality in Indonesian cyberspace, Ria Ricis shows her agency by positioning herself as a millennial hijabi woman with popular piety and participating in spreading Islamic messages according to the digital market ecosystem while maintaining a cheerful and sensational millennial identity and character.

Keywords

cyberspace – gender identity – Indonesia – popular culture – Ria Ricis – visual morality

Introduction

The rapid growth of the internet and social media in Indonesia has been accompanied by the emergence of cyberspace as a new arena of interrelation between religion, gender, and the economy. Youth become active agents in this digital movement with the flow of new popular culture that colors the creative social media industry. In Indonesia, new media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube have seamlessly integrated into the daily lives of the youth. These platforms serve as arenas for expressing and contesting religious discourses, frequently sparking turmoil in cyberspace—a new reality shaped by the dissolution of world boundaries through the virtual communities of media networks (Bell, 2003, p. 98).

The formation of Muslim youth identity in the millennial era is being significantly influenced by the growing proliferation of media and the digital market ecosystem. This emerging phenomenon is particularly notable within the Muslim world. The emergence of modern communication technology, commonly referred to as new media, has significantly impacted traditional mass media like radio, television, and print in shaping the public sphere within a democratic nation in Indonesia (Sujoko, et al., 2023). Millennial veiled women/hijabi women play significant roles in the media ecosystem and digital markets by expressing their religious identity and popular piety in Indonesia. The religious identity of hijabi is also a major part of the representation of young Muslim Youtubers and media influencers in Turkey (Çelebioğlu, 2022) and the Gulf region (Zaid, et al., 2022). They become a setting for discursive

battles on contemporary relations between Islam and gender. Women's bodies and behaviors remain in the spotlight in the digital public space.

Ria Ricis is an Indonesian YouTuber who has received widespread public attention for her hijabi identity's cheerfulness, excitement, and distinctiveness. Ricis actively creates cultural products through videos and images in the social media creative micro-industry. The sister of the famous *ustazah* Okky Setina Dewi, Ria Ricis has produced about 145 vlog videos since 2016 with a total of 201,877,704 viewers and she can earn around 100–130 million through Google AdSense ads on YouTube and endorsement of commercial products on her Instagram account (Syafar, 2017). In this context, Ria Ricis' actions and expressions are intriguing as she negotiates her gender identity. While adhering to Islamic moral boundaries for women, this aspect remains crucial to her sensational millennial persona. This has made her the center of public attention in cyberspace and a leading actor in the creative industry on Instagram and YouTube. The manifestation of selfhood and Islam in the millennial era is a contrast when compared to the rampant involvement of Muslim women in the radicalism movement today (M Dja'far et al., 2017).

This study will analyze the controversy of morality and gender identity surrounding visual culture in cyberspace that shows the latest developments in the use of the hijab, popular piety, and the lifestyle of young millennial Muslim women. Morality is a concern of contemporary studies of gender and sexuality in Indonesia. In early 2018, Platt, Davies, and Bennett (2018) started a critical theoretical discussion on the contestation of morality, gender, and sexuality in the public sphere in Indonesia. However, studies on the morality and identity controversies surrounding the phenomenon of millennial Muslim young women are still absent from the intellectual project. This research will fill that academic void.

Literature Review

Research on Ria Ricis was previously conducted by Wahyudi Akmaliah (Akmaliah, 2017). Unfortunately, the gender perspective is absent in the study conducted by Akmaliah which only focuses on popular culture and the digital economy. Additionally, Akmaliah authentically examines the hijab within the realms of gender identity and cultural-symbolic arenas. This exploration highlights the discipline of the female body and the noteworthy shift in the generation of young millennial Muslim women, distinguishing it from the contestation of the hijab in the previous generation. Studies on the hijab in Indonesia cannot be separated from the name Nancy Smith-Hefner. She argued

that the hijab was not an anti-modern reaction or a defense of traditionalism, but an ambiguous and complex position experienced by middle class young Muslim women with self-autonomy and Islamic commitment after the Soeharto regime, which banned the hijab (Smith-Hefner, 2007). Dewi Candraningrum (2018) provides a more contemporary analysis of the various meanings and uses of the veil, from the expression of piety, women's political empowerment in the post-conflict local elections, to capitalist commodification objects that emphasize a consumerist and superficial lifestyle, as well as the phenomenon of veiled transgender women. In a recent analysis by Hartono (2018), the focus was on the controversy surrounding the behavior of Muslim women and the emergence of the phenomenon known as the "sexy hijab" (*jilboob*) within the evolving landscape of the Facebook platform. This development gave rise to opposing groups, with some viewing *jilboob* as an initial step towards perfection in the journey of becoming a Muslim woman, while others expressed disapproval. The above studies have not targeted the hijabi phenomenon and how the meaning of the hijab as a cultural-religious symbol is contested in the digital public space.

Meanwhile, the issue of sexual morality, related to the female body or the issue of youth gender relations, is significant in contemporary gender studies in Indonesia. Suzanne Brenner (2011) examines how the women's body becomes a battlefield for liberal and conservative movements to master state legal instruments from intervening in the private sphere of women and families. Meanwhile, Lyn Parker and Pam Nilan (2017) are more focused on moral panic over youth delinquency and the phenomenon of free sex, the ethical foundations of Indonesian culture, and the limitations of sexual education and access to reproductive health provided by the Indonesian government. Regarding gender morality, Heryanto (2014) is targeting the moral panic of Indonesian society towards the K-Pop wave, which is very popular among middle-class young Indonesian women which brings new creativity in the world of art and music among Indonesian youth. Although the latter research has targeted the millennial generation and visual culture, the studies mentioned above have not yet penetrated the morality controversy surrounding the visual consumption and gender identity of young millennial Muslim women active in digital cultural productions.

Amidst this gap in literature, this article focuses on three research questions: (1) How do Ria Ricis' visual expressions collide with netizens' perceptions of morality about Ria Ricis' images and videos in cyberspace?; (2) What are the dynamics of netizen involvement in constructing and imposing challenges on Ria Ricis' gender identity online?; (3) How does Ria Ricis' popular piety describe the symbolic shift in the use of the hijab and the lifestyle of contemporary

young Muslim women when compared to previous generations? This article seeks to provide conceptual standing in understanding the contemporary phenomenon of creativity and identity of young millennial Muslim women who have received widespread public attention in cyberspace. Furthermore, this paper aims to refresh the literature on Islamic studies and gender studies in Indonesia with the intersection of women, Islam, youth, social media, and digital visuality.

Agency, Identity and, Sexual Morality

The theory used heuristically in this study is identity construction and sexual morality. The identity construction theory referred to in this study refers to the concept of Manuel Castells (2010, pp.8-9) in his book *The Power of Identity* which divides identity into three main categories. First is legitimizing identity, namely the dominant identity that dominant institutions emphasize to maintain societal power. Second, resistance identity is an identity constructed by social actors who are marginalized by the dominant power. Third, projecting identity, which is a new identity produced by social actors to redefine societal positions that impact the transformation of meaning and social structures, such as gender equality.

In this study, the first (legitimizing identity) and third (projecting identity) categories of identity are following the context of the discussion. Ria Ricis, as a millennial Muslim woman, is faced with disciplining the meaning of a dominant identity about how Muslim women should behave with politeness and body control, which is emphasized by many netizens. However, she shows her agency by positioning herself as a *shalihah* millennial Muslim woman with a commitment to wearing a hijab and participating in spreading the message of Islam, while also maintaining her cheerful and full-of-excitement millennial identity and character as a YouTuber and Instagram celebrity. This confirms her position that she can be a sincere Muslimah and, simultaneously, a millennial Muslim who is popular with many in the creative social media industry. This further discusses the intersection of Islam, modernity, and globalization.

The theory of sexual morality in this study is intended to review the contestation of women's bodies and clothes around the meaning of "moral Muslim" in the controversy over the content creator's behavior in cyberspace. The concepts of morality and piety that Hanny Savitri Hartono (2018, pp. 5–6) elaborated on can be borrowed in this context. Politeness, stylishness, and exciting appearance form a spectrum that cannot be emphasized only in black and white. In this case, Instagram is a discursive space between the moral

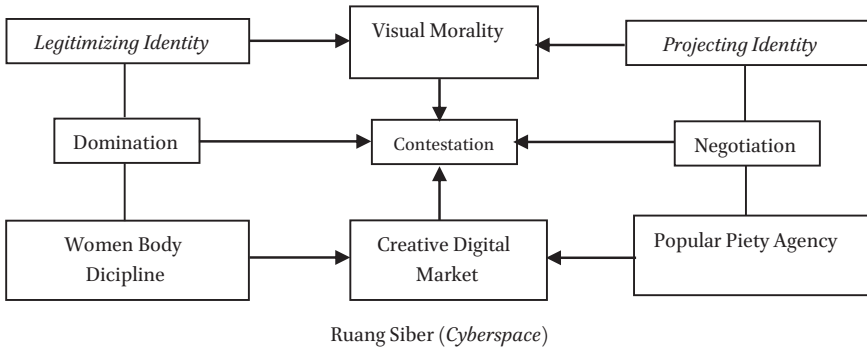


FIGURE 1 Theoretical Framework

ADAPTED FROM MANUEL CASTELLS, 2010, WITH MODIFICATIONS

judgment of netizens on the character of Ria Ricis, who dresses modestly while using social media to spread Islamic expressions. Beyond the scope of liberal feminism, Saba Mahmood's (2005) concept of women's agency in piety is relevant. It challenges the oversimplified idea that Muslim women should be rescued from a presumed uniform 'Islamic patriarchal structure,' which, in truth, lacks a monolithic nature. Mahmood encourages a more nuanced understanding, prompting acknowledgment of the intricate and varied dynamics in the relationship between women's agency and social structures within Islamic traditions. In this case, Muslim women can submit themselves to Islamic etiquette such as veiling/wearing hijab and Islamic morality while also being actively involved in social spaces, including popular piety and creativity in cyberspaces such as those done by Ria Ricis.

Methods

This research uses a qualitative methodology with a digital content analysis approach. Online content analysis studies are developing in socio-humanities studies, especially amidst a heated conversation about "Digital Humanities", which tries to understand modern phenomena related to social media that increasingly affect the socio-religious and economic-political landscape (Bell, 2003). Researchers collected cultural products created by Ria Ricis on her YouTube and Instagram platforms, in the form of text data, images or photos and online videos related to Islamic popular culture, the hijab and the morality controversy. In this case, researchers also focused on netizen comments on Ria Ricis' posts. In addition, researchers also collected data from television and non-commercial media YouTube channels, online mass media news, opinion articles, and relevant journal articles. Researchers also compared the

phenomenon of Ria Ricis' millennialism with historical, scientific works that recorded the rapid development of the hijab after the New Order ban.

Researchers applied the reception analysis method introduced by Hall (1980, pp. 125–126) to understand the collision of Ria Ricis popular culture products and netizens' (audiences) understanding of the text and media visuality. In this case, the researchers' analysis was aimed at decoding netizens who determined the extent of the reading position, which was divided into three reading positions. First is the dominant-hegemonic position, namely netizens receiving and reproducing the visual code and the same meaning as the message maker. Second, a negotiated position, namely a netizen's position that sometimes expresses contradiction in accepting and understanding the visual codes while also something changing and opposing them. Third is the oppositional position, which shows netizens' development of a completely different interpretation.

Muslim Women and Visual Morality in Indonesia

The Indonesian public sphere has transformed in a significant way with the growth of social media and the freedom of internet access that has further weakened state control over media. With the collapse of the Soeharto regime and the rise of freedom of expression, civil society has become more fully autonomous in manifesting their aspirations, expressions, and identities, including religious identities, especially with the availability of cyberspace. The debate on the compatibility of Islam and modernity seemed to collapse after the explosive rise of the internet and social media popularity among the Muslim community, who also adopted the lifestyle, millennial enjoyment, and the modern mindset brought by these technologies. Heryanto (2014, pp. 266–275) considers this phenomenon a post-Islamist generation that blurs the boundaries of "West versus East." This popular screen culture creates a hybrid identity with a cross between various global-local cultures that sparks a variety of creativity.

Social media has become a medium for millennials to manifest their sensitivity on social and religious issues. Youth in this process of seeking identity are often vulnerable to radicalization and being fooled by religious conservatism by certain religious authorities. Meanwhile, a growing wave of young people are interested in the issue of religious pluralism and gender equality (Epafras, 2016, pp. 1–18). The wave of Islamic popular culture is a continuing episode of the Islamization of public space in Indonesian history. The growth of Islamic public space in contemporary Indonesia cannot be

separated from the context of Islamic revival since the mid-1970s and the development of the education sector and the communication industry in Indonesia. This development stimulates the emergence of new preaching agencies that package Islamic messages according to popular consumption patterns. These messages tend to be tolerant, inclusive, and modern by adjusting to the composition of a cosmopolitan market (Hasan, 2009). The intersection of religion and media has the potential to foster a more inclusive comprehension of piety within the Indonesian public sphere (Hasan, 2009; Fannani and Kholish, 2022).

The rapid growth of Muslim women wearing the headscarf or hijab is also a portrait of the major social changes in Indonesian Muslims' post-Reformation landscape. The emergence of the *hijaber* trend in cyberspace today cannot be separated from the historical context since the Soeharto era when the headscarf became a sign of opposition to the authoritarian regime that tried to suppress the influence of Islamic political parties (Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018). As the Soeharto regime adjusted its stance towards political Islam in the 1990s, the adoption of veiling gained momentum concurrently with the rise of a free-market environment and increased consumer freedom. In this regard, the need to wear the hijab needs to be understood as a progressive development that shows the visibility of Muslim women as the consumer culture expands, rather than merely seeing it as a conservative tendency in maintaining Muslim femininity (Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018).

Hijaber is, among other things, a recent development for urban Muslim women with popular Islamic expressions who are active users of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and fashion blogs, which became a reference for Muslim women in making clothes and constructing their identity. Islamic cyberspace has gained popularity for addressing the challenges faced by Muslim youths in their daily lives, as they seek moral certainty, spirituality, and piety. This is often expressed through the consumption of hijab products, which serves as a means to articulate the identities of Muslim women (Beta, 2014, pp. 377–389). The internet also makes it possible to promote the appearance of a more closed Muslim woman using a veil. Salafi users of the veil mainly use the internet to fight against the many Muslim women who follow Islamic knowledge and interpretations that are considered liberal. Their online activities also work to counter the stigma attached to the veil as a sign of women's oppression and subordination and to express their capacity for agency (Nisa, 2013).

Social media has become a new arena for forming the Islamic public space. Contemporary da'wa episodes in Indonesia tend to be characterized by the presence of youth on social media platforms, where Muslim women occupy a very central position in this regard. Instagram is primarily an area

of contemporary online da'wa that involves pious Muslim women actively becoming influencers in reminding Muslim millennials to continue learning the actual teachings of Islam and to encourage them that being a devout Muslim requires a long effort. Through attractive Instagram visual strategies of posts and captions, Muslimah influencers especially encourage their Muslimah audience to wear the *syar'i hijab* and avoid free interaction between men and women. The online da'wa enables Islamic businesses to adapt to the needs of Muslim women and create a new generation of online consumers. The lucrative da'wa provides products that can help the millennial migration process, such as books and *hijab syar'i*, by depicting the image of spiritual happiness and the figure of a good Muslim woman (Nisa, 2018, pp. 68–99).

Ria Ricis' Career Growth

In 2020, Ria Ricis almost matched Atta Halilitar as the YouTuber with the most subscribers in Indonesia and was in second place with 24.8 million subscribers (Social Blade, 2020; Arifin, 2020). However, since 2021, with 28.3 million subscribers, Ricis dethroned Atta Halilitar. Until March, 2023, Ricis is still in the first rank with 31 million subscribers, 2,409 uploaded videos, and 5.7 billion viewers in total (Social Blade, 2023).

Ricis uploaded her first Youtube video on January 15, 2016, after many requests from fans who want to know Ricis' daily life. The first videos uploaded present funny content similar to the content previously found on her Instagram account. Later on, Ricis gained popularity as a YouTuber because






| Rank | Grade | Username | Uploads | Subs | Video Views |
|------|-------|--|---------|-------|----------------|
| 1st | B+ |  Ricis Official | 2,409 | 31M | 5,702,874,475 |
| 2nd | B+ |  AH | 2,050 | 30.3M | 4,237,586,048 |
| 3rd | B+ |  Jess.No.Limit | 2,003 | 26.2M | 3,264,170,243 |
| 4th | B+ |  Rans Entertainment | 3,505 | 24.9M | 6,222,256,909 |
| 5th | A- |  TRANS7 OFFICIAL | 85,528 | 24.6M | 13,707,239,837 |

FIGURE 2 Five YouTubers with the largest number of subscribers in Indonesia
SOCIAL BLADE, 2023

of the video content that reviews squishy toys. Several videos about squishy became trending on YouTube several times, inviting millions of viewers to watch the videos. In recent years, content types have been more diverse, with themes such as visiting celebrities' houses, game challenges, and youth dances (Mangkuto, 2019).

Ricis is the second sister of Oki Setiana Dewi, who is a popular writer, *ustazah* (religious teacher), and actress. Ricis, which translates to "beautiful" or "sweet," was born in Batam on July 1, 1995, and graduated from Pancasila University. She started her career by producing funny Instagram content and developing a sizeable fanbase. Apart from comedy content, she received endorsements for products promoted on her Instagram account. Ricis's Instagram account, @riaricis1795, is still highly active, with 33.3 million followers.

Due to her popularity, Ricis has also been offered to become an actress in several films and host on television station programs. Ricis' debut film is *Men Are from Mars, Women Are From Where?* Initially, Ricis did not feel confident in competing with celebrities who already knew the world of acting in the film industry (Retno, 2016). In the film, she plays the character Icha, who is similar to Ricis. She was also involved as a presenter of the talk show program "Kepoin" (nosy) on Trans7 with an Indonesian celebrity, Rangga Moela. In the program, with her cheerful and excited character, Ricis interviewed various invited celebrities as well as visited their homes to get a closer look at their lives.

Ria Ricis can gain hundreds to billions of rupiah monthly through her main YouTube account, Ricis Official. The substantial income generated through her main YouTube account, Ricis Official, reflects the immense attraction she holds in the online sphere. Data from Nox Influencer shows that every video uploaded on the Ricis Official account can generate income of around USD 13,810 or IDR 203,407,490. According to this source, Ricis Official earns a monthly income of around USD 93,870 to 328,550 or IDR 1,382,611,230 to 4,839,212,950 (Nox Influencer, 2021). Meanwhile, according to Social Blade data, through the Ricis Official account, Ricis gets income per month in the range of USD 29,800 to 476,700 or around IDR 438,766,260 to around 7 billion (7,018,787,790). According to the same source, the annual income of the Ricis Official account can range from USD 357,500 to 5.7 million or a range of 5 billion rupiah (5,265,152,750) to around 84 billion rupiah (83,955,300,000) (Social Blade Stats, 2021). Ria Ricis, as a hijab-wearing woman, not only commands a significant presence in Indonesia's digital market ecosystem and popular culture but also attains noteworthy popularity among netizens. This popularity is evident in the substantial engagement and viewership she garners, making her a central figure in contemporary discussions surrounding the interplay of Islam, gender, and social media.

Ria Ricis' Moral Controversies on Social Media

Ria Ricis often gets insults from netizens who do not like her attitude or behavior, which is considered too excited and sensational. Ricis recently stirred controversy with a TikTok video featuring her dancing in a veil, which she shared on her Instagram account on July 17, 2020. Following backlash and accusations of blasphemy, the upload was eventually removed. In the video, Ricis is seen donning a veil and robe, dancing to dangdut music in a shopping center. "I told you not to leave me," Ricis wrote in her post to express the humor. Below is a screenshot of Ricis' Instagram post that is still stored on the Grid portal (Chasanah, 2020).

Because of the upload, many netizens flooded Ricis with comments, scorns, or blasphemies. Some netizen comments that are still recorded by Chasanah (Chasanah, 2020) are below.

*Kak Ricis hargai cadarmu kak masak pakai cadar joget-joget gitu. @dea***
Tolong cadar bukan untuk tik tokan apalagi joget-joget hingga ditayangkan. pakailah sesuai syariatnya. Cadarnya kak. Tidak sepatasnya orang yang bercadar sambil goyang kek gitu. Kalau lagi proses hijrah tolong kalau ada video-video joget terus pake cadar. Plis jangan di publikasikan dong. Kasihan yg cadaran. @uland***
Heran. Lihat tingkahnya sekarang. @lilis****

In the comments above, netizens who question Ricis's post want to convey that it is inappropriate for veiled Muslim women to be dancing in public. Some even understand that Ricis' behavior above shows that she is still in the migrating stage or is still in the transition stage to become a devout Muslim, but her knowledge of Islam is insufficient. Therefore, Ricis is advised not to publish videos showing the incomplete *hijrah* period. In examining the online presence of Ria Ricis, it becomes evident that her evolving demeanor has sparked disappointment among certain followers who perceive her as becoming less polite. This characterization implies a departure from conventional or anticipated behavior, akin to a style reminiscent of *petakilan*, marked by playfulness or unconventionality. The discontent expressed by these individuals may stem from a misalignment between Ricis' evolving communication style and the expectations rooted in more traditional or formal norms. Moreover, the observation that her posts have unsettled some Muslim women who wear the veil for religious reasons suggests a complex interplay between social expectations, religious devotion, and the changing dynamics within the digital landscape.



FIGURE 3 Ria Ricis' TikTok controversy on her Instagram account, 17 July 2020
CHASANAH, 2020

Other netizens sneered at Ricis' demeanor, which is not much different from non-Islamic TikTok celebrities. Following is the controversy surrounding the hijab and Ria Ricis character (Wow Keren, 2020).

Apa ga pernah diajar dengan Ustadzah Oki? Atau emang ga ada didikan waktu kecil? @madlip***

Emang lebih mudah bicara tentang kesalahan orang. Lebih baik kita introspeksi diri masing-masing aja. Jangan saling menghakimi. @and***

Ini kok lucu ya, dari pertama muncul ricis emang dah bawa karakter cantik dan oon, terus masalahnya apa. @okt***

Harusnya kalo dikomen netijen atau hatters begitu bisa mikir ya.. tapi gimana lagi dia cari uangnya kan dari kayak gitu-gitu bisa sampe kebeli mobil-mobil mahal juga. @yul***

Ceria boleh tapi ga over kek gitu, petakilan banget ellah—" serah gue ya. Gue kan netizen, die aja serah die petakilan wkwkwk @cel***

Apart from often receiving scorn by netizens on certain uploads, Ricis' image as an overly excited influencer has sparked controversy about how Muslim women should be in the digital public space. In addition, some netizens criticized that Ricis' uploads were not educational and were only looking for popularity to gain rupiah. Apart from the controversy about what content Ricis

uploaded, the debate around Ricis' identity as an obedient Muslim woman and a super excited influencer illustrates social changes and digital culture regarding the role of young Muslim women in the digital space in Indonesia. It also provides further developments in the study of positions of hijab women and the struggle for the image of a "good Muslim woman" in the public sphere in Indonesia.

Ricis described her views on the hijab and her role as a YouTuber when talking with Aurel Hermansyah, a young Indonesian celebrity. Ricis explained that the hijab is indeed the obligation of a Muslim woman and cannot necessarily be associated with a person's morals depending on their respective character. This means that using the hijab does not mean that one must be hampered from carrying out creative activities, such as producing entertaining content on Instagram and YouTube. In principle, according to Ricis, a Muslim woman who wears the hijab does not hurt other people and maintains a relationship with God. Furthermore, the following is Ricis' explanation in her Q&A session on her YouTube channel about the hijab identity and female character, the turmoil of Muslim women, and expressions of popular piety.

Ka aku mau berhijab tapi belum siap?? Gimana ka.

Dicoba karena kita nggak akan tahu sejauh mana batas siap kita kalau kita mencoba jadi ada baiknya dicoba dulu. Semangat.

Apalagi pakai hijab syar'i, ketika buat salah langsung dicap buruk.

Iya sih jadi bikin orang tuh takut untuk berhijab syar'i, bikin orang takut untuk berhijab karena kalau salah dikit yang disalin hijabnya. Itu yang harus kita perbaiki bahwa akhlak dan hijab ada dua hal yang berbeda.

Pakai hijab dikata sok suci ka.

Lho ya nggak dong. Hijabkan kewajiban masalah suci atau enggak kan Tuhan yang menilai, Allah yang menilai. Jadi lebih baik pakai hijab jangan dengarkan orang-orang yang ngata-ngatain.

Kalau berhijab suka diomongin dibelakang soalnya sikapnya masih petakilan.

Apa bedanya sama yang ghibah kalau gitu, sama aja. Mendingan udah berhijab lillahita'ala, udah selesai. (Ricis Team Daily, 15 July 2020).

Ricis quite often creates content about hijab on her YouTube channel. She gave several celebrities the opportunity to try on the hijab and recorded it in her videos. Some of the famous figures invited were Anya Geraldine, a sensuous young celebgram, and Lu Cinta Luna, a queer celebrity. She often creates content to promote her waterproof hijab in a funny way, such as pouring water on her head or swimming in the sea wearing a hijab. Ricis also has a

business that specializes in selling hijabs, hijab equipment, and robes, named Ricisbykhayra (<https://www.ricisbykhayra.com>).

Controversies on Visual Morality and Gender Identity

Ria Ricis received scorn especially because her appearance is very Islamic in the *syar'i* hijab style, popular among the Muslim Tarbiyah group. Her appearance is perceived by some as contradicting her behavior in her YouTube videos, which are considered peculiar and do not portray 'good Muslim' behavior. She is often compared to her older sister, Oky Setiana Dewi, who is very Islamic in terms of appearance and behavior as a public figure. Ricis has emerged as a notable figure in Indonesia's digital history, consistently surrounded by controversy related to the identity and bodily practices of Muslim women. Her behaviors and expressions, often perceived as unconventional, remain a central topic in the discourse within the cyber space landscape.

In 2009, when the use of Facebook became popular, the fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) drew people's attention to the bad effects of Facebook on Muslims, especially Muslim women, in terms of sharing pictures, secrets, and personal information. Seven hundred scholars from various Islamic boarding schools in East Java are concerned about the dangers of virtual networks as a medium for committing various immoral acts, such as gossiping, flirting, spreading lies, asking intimate questions, or vulgar behavior, which can even damage domestic relationships and commit sin or *zina*. Although the East Java MUI does not prohibit Facebook, they do prohibit the use of Facebook for these deeds which are considered despicable. According to Hartono (2018), despite the fatwa, Muslim women still actively use Facebook as a medium to express their identity, piety, and religiosity. Muslim women acknowledge that embodying piety through the hijab involves a process of learning and requires time to shape their Islamic behaviors. Furthermore, Facebook serves as a platform for Muslim women to share and reinforce Islamic knowledge among themselves, fostering a sense of Muslim brotherhood.

Ricis also often reaps judgments and "social fatwas" from netizens who measure the level of her identity and commitment as a Muslim woman. Ricis' uproar and insulting style often becomes a source of blasphemy by clashing with certain Islamic ethics and morality. In this case, Ria Ricis' religious and gender identity is calculated and disciplined by the digital public, even down to how the Muslim woman's body should move along with the appropriateness of visual and discursive expressions that are emphasized. The case of Ricis as the subject of a trendy and controversial Muslim woman is not an entirely new

phenomenon. The *jilboob* phenomenon in mid-2014 also led to a similar debate about how women should express their bodies in the digital space. While *jilboob* shows the public debate about how trendy Muslim women should dress and express themselves, the Ricis phenomenon shows a new debate on the subject of submissive Muslim women in dressing according to existing Islamic social standards but with body expressions that are considered excessive. In this case, Ricis must adjust or defend herself from the power that is emphasized by the public regarding specific social identities and norms (legitimizing identity) based on a dominant, at the same time patriarchal view (Castells, 2010).

The *jilboob* phenomenon was once a trending topic on Twitter, causing a huge controversy around how women wearing hijabs should behave and appear on social media. *Jilboob* photos show images of Muslim women wearing headscarves and displaying their chests and bodies in tight clothing. Netizens who blaspheme *jilboob* appearance generally criticize *jilboob* users for misunderstanding their religious obligations and lecturing them to show better behavior according to Islamic teachings. In the case of *jilboob*, the headscarf depicts the complex relationship between Islamic identity and women's bodies in Indonesia, which is becoming increasingly amplified in the digital space (Beta, 2016, pp. 19–30).

According to Annisa R. Beta (2016), the identity of Muslim women is marked by their visibility. In the past, Muslim women who wore tight clothing earned the nickname the *jilbab gaul* and *funky hijabers* and they would be discussed in print media or in academic studies. In the contemporary internet landscape, the subject of Muslim women can be both present and absent. Their photos can be disseminated with recognition of their identity and subject as Muslim women and content producers. However, their identities and subjects can be absent and lost when their photos are disseminated freely and anonymously with various insults and judgments of their feminine bodies. Their profiles and virtual representations are missing due to the public's perception deeming them as deviating from the conventional image of Islam. This judgment overlooks the unique context and narrative behind why they captured certain photos, like the *jilboob* pose. The intersection between religiosity, social media, and pious feminine body image also depicts a meditated and digitally formed Indonesian public space and shows the blur and negotiation of public and private boundaries in Muslim societies.

The Ricis phenomenon describes a unique reality compared to the *jilboobs* case above. In contrast to *jilboobs*, Ricis presents the identity of Muslim women through the performative aspects of wearing a hijab and adhering to the prevailing standards for Muslim women. This elicits empathy from numerous netizens who appreciate Ricis for maintaining a religious appearance while

also entertaining others through jokes, responses, spontaneity, and humorous behavior. Ricis' character invited many to follow her via Instagram and YouTube. With this level of popularity, Ricis continues to skyrocket by becoming the YouTuber with the most subscribers in Indonesia. Thus, unlike the unpopular *hijabers* or *jilboobers*, Ricis' identity and agency seem to continue to exist and live even though her photos and videos are scattered all over cyberspace. Her own narrative about why she wears the hijab while maintaining her splashy character is also widespread with the help of her followers and the online media that cover her. The identity and subject of Ricis are also brought to life by her visual production team, which is professionally managed to fill her Instagram and YouTube accounts along with the cultural and economic capital she acquires.

Ricis' Popular Piety Expression and Millennial Woman Agency

Ria Ricis expresses her religious and gender identity while working on the creative economy in cyberspace. Ria Ricis' visual expression cannot be separated from visual popular culture in the social media ecosystem in Indonesia. Even though it tends to be excited or hazy, Ricis displays the image of a devout and pious Muslim woman using a long hijab and Muslim clothing that is considered to exceed the proper standard. She even encourages Muslim women who are her in social networks to wear the hijab with enthusiasm and understanding of the learning process to wear the hijab. In this case, the *hijaber* phenomenon shows an interesting social change in understanding Indonesian youth amid globalization of urban culture and popular piety, the combination of which conditions the dynamics of the Islamic creative industry in Indonesia. The popular *hijaber* shows the successful strategy of Muslim women in displaying religious symbols and expressions that are designed to be quite cosmopolitan and following the modern and religious sensibility of the Indonesian public (Beta, 2014, pp. 377–389).

In addition to sharing similar experiences with other Muslim women who wear the hijab, Ria Ricis' use of the hijab on social media has also made her more visible to a larger audience and subjected her to stigmatizing remarks and slurs. Some netizens criticize her for not adhering to Islamic dress codes and behaving inappropriately while wearing a hijab. Others defend her and suggest that people should focus on their own behavior and not judge her. Some suggest that her behavior is influenced by her desire to make money, while others appreciate her positive and cheerful demeanor. These divided

views on Ricis certainly cannot reflect the whole picture of her millennial Muslim identity.

Ria Ricis demonstrates a strong moral commitment to Islam by choosing to wear hijab despite the stigma attached to it. However, in the economic arena of attention, Ria Ricis cannot be separated from the process of objectifying herself by creating entertainment content that makes herself a cheerful, excited, and confident joke without being embarrassed. Ricis mobilizes a variety of professional visual content production resources and various creative and often ridiculous ideas to attract public attention and sympathy to gain huge profits and maintain her position as the YouTuber with the most subscriptions in Indonesia.

The visual production of social media users is closely related to the development of the selfie culture which can help us to understand Ria Ricis' expressions. Selfie as a part of a digital lifestyle has stimulated women who wear hijab to fulfill their desire for public attention with increasing followers on social media. Self-narratives built in private spaces are expressed in public spaces through digital visualization. On Instagram, the diverse digital protocols empower individuals to explore and navigate their identity, negotiating its representation in the public sphere amid a blend of freedom and moral expectations. Women who wear hijab on Instagram negotiate a ban on presenting themselves by continuing to appear pious in hijab, while also expressing their aesthetics by wearing tight clothes, wearing facial make-up, and designing styles that are fashionable. This pattern shows the expression of self-determination or free will with various self-decisions in determining poses, angles, expressions, hijab styles, and accessories. However, it also describes how Muslim women objectify themselves by being driven by platform features and the digital public scheme of Instagram (Kurniawati et al., 2020, pp. 31–42).

Ricis' millennial Muslim identity expresses the contradictory attitude between piety and self-objectification or self-commodification. On the one hand, Ria Ricis displays a strong moral commitment to her religion by choosing to wear hijab despite the negative attitudes and stigma attached to it. On the other hand, Ria Ricis is also heavily involved in the business of self-commodification, mobilizing various creative and often ridiculous ideas to attract public attention and sympathy. Despite the contradiction between piety and self-commodification, the fact that her Islamic identity does not prevent her from maintaining her cheerful and excited character highlights the unity of both aspects in her subjectivity. In a world where attention and entertainment hold great economic value, Ricis' ability to balance both her identity and popularity is a testament to her resilience and adaptability. This

raises questions about the intersection of piety and self-commodification in the digital age, and how individuals navigate the tensions that arise between these seemingly disparate aspects of life. Kristin Peterson (2016) addressed a similar problem by observing how Amena Khan, a British Muslim women media influencer, acts virtually between Islamic ethics and neoliberal values by employing aesthetic and affective means.

Since pursuing a creative business through Instagram, Ricis has also become an influencer who emphasizes the importance of hijab for a Muslim woman, along with the popular discourse and piety of hijabi women. In this case, Instagram has become the main platform for young Muslim women to educate each other to become pious Muslims (soft da'wa) and da'wa through business (lucrative da'wa). By becoming social media influencers, they can surpass the popularity of religious figures on television and become active agents in finding ways to become better Muslims in the context of a world increasingly mediated by technology (Nisa, 2018, pp. 68–99). To some extent, their popularity and influence can mobilize the Islamic public in certain electoral politics and socio-political controversies (Beta, 2019). Meanwhile, *hijabers* use Instagram as a medium to show their middle-class style and a medium of preaching, which they consider an obligation. With the image of the Muslim woman's body, *hijabers* become agents in designing Islamic body aesthetics that shape the popular culture of the Muslim middle class in cyberspace and position the aesthetics of the body as a form of Islamic knowledge. They are not only passive digital consumers, but they can create new publics in the cycle of production, circulation, and consumption of images of women and by women (Baulch & Pramianti, 2018).

Hijabers produce their own image with an idealized picture of the modern Muslimah in a tech-saturated world. In this regard, *hijabers* build religious knowledge and authority previously dominated by men by empowering themselves and other Muslim women with the power of technology to demonstrate their visibility and existence. Thus, digital platforms have conditioned the increasing fragmentation of Islamic authority with religious discourse that is no longer dominated by the religious elite, especially male clerics, and encourages the presence of Muslim women's voices. Muslim women are now reaping significant benefits from the swift advancement of technology and modernization. This underscores how the internet and social media platforms have evolved into crucial mediums for shaping their identity, extending beyond mere tools for consuming religious content online. (Nisa, 2019). As argued by Ehab Galal (2010) in the case of the television program of Arab Muslim beauty queens, Muslim women are not identical to selfless, obedient daughters as idealized by the Western and Islamist depiction.

They can challenge the religious authorities within and outside the Mosque by interpreting independently their selfhood and social roles.

As a result of her popular piety, Ricis has become a religious authority for young Muslim women in determining and recognizing the identity of the hijab, Islamic values, and Islamic openness with the millennial character that are outgoing and cheerful. Ricis has stated that even though many netizens blasphemed her character, she would not change. "Well, my family and I agreed that my obligation to use the hijab is because I had reached puberty. A person's character is different from the meaning of hijab. So even my family always said not to change to be liked by others. Just be yourself. But because we use the hijab, God willing, we can change ourselves in the future," she said (Johar, 2018). In this case, Ricis believes that the hijab is an obligation for Muslim women who are already pubescent. In addition, she received moral support from her parents so as not to change her character and identity. According to her, her cheerful and excited character does not conflict with her identity as a Muslim woman wearing a hijab. Thus, Ricis was able to produce an Islamic viewpoint and identity of her own. At this level, in Manuel Castells' terms, Ricis has formed a resistance identity in building her character and agency in the midst of patriarchal public discipline in terms of prohibiting her from expressing cheerfully and sensationally as a woman wearing a hijab. In addition, together with other *hijabers* in cyberspace, empowered with digital media technology, Ricis is building a projecting identity that reshapes the meaning of how hijab women should act morally and economically.

Conclusion

This research argues that Ria Ricis as a millennial Muslim woman deals with disciplining the meaning of dominant identity about how Muslim women should live with politeness and body control which is emphasized by a lot of netizens. Nevertheless, she asserts her agency by portraying herself as a pious millennial Muslim woman committed to wearing a hijab and actively disseminating the message of Islam. Simultaneously, she maintains a lively, sensational persona as a YouTuber and Instagram celebrity, exuding cheerfulness and excitement. This confirms her position that she can become a pious Muslimah while also being a millennial Muslim who is popular in the creative social media industry.

However, the conflicting attitudes between religiosity and self-objectification or self-commodification are expressed in Ricis' millennial Muslim identity. On the one hand, by choosing to wear hijab despite the stigma and unfavorable

perceptions associated with it based on the ideal of pious Muslim woman, Ria Ricis demonstrates a strong moral commitment to their faith. On the other hand, Ria Ricis is heavily engaged in the self-commodification industry, mobilizing various inventive and frequently absurd ideas to gain sympathy from the public. The fact that her Muslim identity does not prevent her from keeping her upbeat and enthusiastic personality, despite the conflict between piety and self-commodification, emphasizes the unity of both aspects in her subjectivity.

The results of this study are still limited in terms of focusing on analyzing digital data on the Internet, Instagram, and YouTube. A qualitative research approach that can directly interview Ricia Ricis and her production team is interesting for further research to produce richer data and understanding. Nonetheless, this research can provide a foundation and initial mapping that provides an exciting and systematic insight and analysis into the academic debates surrounding the visual morality and gender identity of young Muslim women in cyberspace. It is also essential to pay attention to Ria Ricis' creative process and the broader economic context of attention by understanding the characters, features, and logic of YouTube and Instagram algorithms. This is crucial in exploring further social media and the Islamic creative industry in Indonesia, which are still minimally discussed. Thus, critical analysis can also be carried out by examining the clash of Islamic identities and the obsession with gaining profit in social media platforms.

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