

The Transformation of Religious Identity in the Public Sphere: A Phenomenological Study of the Hijrah Movement among Urban Millennials

Abdullah Safei*

Institut Ilmu Al-Quran (IIQ) Jakarta

Agus Handoko

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam PTDI, Indonesia

Correspondence e-mail: abdullahsafei@iiq.ac.id

Abstract

The phenomenon of the *hijrah* movement among urban millennials has transformed the landscape of religiosity in the urban public sphere. This study aims to analyze the transformation of religious identity among urban millennials and examine how they negotiate that identity within the context of urban modernity. Employing a qualitative method with Alfred Schutz's phenomenological approach, this research explores the subjective experiences of *hijrah* participants in major Indonesian cities (Jakarta and Bandung) during the period from January to December 2025. Data were collected through offline participant observation within *hijrah* communities, in-depth interviews with six key informants, and netnographic research conducted on Instagram and TikTok. The findings reveal three major themes. First, the transformation of religious identity is driven by *because-motives* rooted in social anomie and *in-order-to motives* oriented toward the search for moral certainty. Second, religious identity has shifted from the private to the public sphere through forms of religious aesthetics that are integrated into the lifestyle of the Muslim middle class. Third, the netnographic findings confirm that digital technology has fostered the emergence of *digital piety*, in which the validation of religious devotion increasingly takes place within virtual spaces. This study concludes that the *hijrah* movement among urban millennials represents a dynamic adaptation of Muslim identity, giving rise to a new subculture that integrates religious orthodoxy with capitalist modernity while simultaneously reinforcing the process of desecularization in the urban public sphere.

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Introduction

Urbanization in Indonesia represents far more than demographic migration or the physical expansion of urban corridors. More fundamentally, this urban transformation has generated profound sociological implications, including the restructuring of social order, shifts in cultural values, and radical changes in the religious landscape of society. Major Indonesian cities such as Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya have become epicenters of modernity, offering material advancement while simultaneously generating intense psychosocial pressures for their inhabitants. Urban Muslim communities, particularly millennials who came of age during the technological transition, stand at the forefront of experiencing this existential disruption. On the one hand, they are expected to adapt to the fast-paced, individualistic, and highly competitive rhythms of capitalist society. On the other hand, they experience spiritual alienation resulting from the erosion of traditional value systems that were once cultivated within rural communities or the nuclear family.

In classical sociological theory, a condition in which individuals lose normative direction due to rapid social change is referred to as anomie (Durkheim, 1951). In urban settings, this condition manifests itself in the form of existential emptiness, identity crises, and moral disorientation amid the hedonistic lifestyle of metropolitan life. Contrary to the predictions of classical secularization theory, which anticipated the gradual decline of religion with the advancement of modernity (Weber, 1930), the Indonesian experience demonstrates the opposite trajectory. Religion has re-emerged within urban spaces not merely as an outdated doctrine practiced privately or through rigid rituals in peripheral mosques. Instead, it has evolved into a dynamic instrument for the search for meaning while simultaneously serving as a strong anchor of identity for millennials navigating the complexities of urban life (Hasan, 2013: 12).

The rapid development of digital technology has further reinforced the transformation of religiosity among urban communities. Expanding access to the internet and social media has enabled individuals to acquire religious knowledge through various digital platforms without spatial or temporal limitations. This development has shifted the transmission of religious knowledge from predominantly formal religious institutions to more open, accessible, and diverse channels. At the same time, such accessibility has introduced new challenges through the proliferation of religious authorities and diverse Islamic perspectives circulating in digital spaces. Consequently, society is increasingly required to possess adequate religious literacy to critically evaluate and navigate the vast amount of religious information available online.

This transformation has given rise to a more personal and contextual form of religiosity. For urban Muslims, particularly millennials, religion is no longer understood solely as a set of ritual obligations but also as a source of psychological well-being, moral guidance, and a means of constructing meaning amid the complexities of modern life. The growing participation in *hijrah* communities, Islamic study circles (*kajian*), and the consumption of digital Islamic content illustrates that modernization does not necessarily lead to the weakening of religion. Instead, religion has adapted by utilizing new media and social spaces, thereby maintaining its relevance in addressing the spiritual needs of urban society.

From the perspective of the sociology of religion, these developments indicate that urban religiosity is undergoing transformation rather than decline. Religion continues to function as a source of social integration, a foundation for collective identity, and a mechanism through which individuals adapt to the pressures of contemporary life. Therefore, the growing religious consciousness among urban Muslim communities should be understood as a response to ongoing social transformation, in which religious values are continuously reinterpreted to meet the challenges of changing times while preserving their essential role as a guide for individual and social life.

The Hijrah Movement among the Urban Muslim Middle Class

One of the most significant and compelling empirical manifestations of the resurgence of urban religiosity is the growing *hijrah* movement among the urban Muslim middle class. From a theological perspective, the term *hijrah* refers to the migration of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) from Mecca to Medina. However, within the context of contemporary Islamic

sociology, the concept has undergone a significant semantic and practical expansion. Today, *hijrah* is understood as a personal commitment to comprehensive spiritual transformation a transition from a past lifestyle perceived as less Islamic, secular, or even "sinful" toward a way of life that is fully grounded in *sharia* and practiced in a *kaffah* (comprehensive) manner. This movement has attracted considerable sociological attention because it is not led by traditional *santri* communities in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools). Rather, it is driven by young professionals, creative industry practitioners, students from secular universities, and urban public figures who possess substantial economic and cultural capital (Nadhir, 2016: 45).

This process of identity transformation has given rise to a new sociological entity commonly identified as the modern Muslim community. A defining characteristic of this group is its rejection of the rigid dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. Urban millennials who embrace *hijrah* do not withdraw from modernity or isolate themselves within ascetic communities. Instead, they appropriate various instruments of modern life including contemporary fashion trends, café culture, fitness activities, and modern financial management and infuse them with Islamic values. This phenomenon demonstrates that contemporary religious identity is no longer negotiated by abandoning the secular world but rather by Islamizing elements of urban popular culture itself (Fealy & White, 2008: 88). From the perspective of the sociology of religion, this phenomenon illustrates religion's capacity to adapt to social transformation without losing its fundamental role as a source of values and moral guidance. Consequently, the *hijrah* movement represents a process of negotiation between modernity and religiosity, in which urban Muslim identity is constructed through a synthesis of technological advancement, popular culture, and commitment to Islamic teachings (Fealy & White, 2008: 88).

The Hijrah Movement among the Urban Muslim Middle Class

One of the most significant and compelling empirical manifestations of the resurgence of urban religiosity is the strengthening of the *hijrah* movement among the urban Muslim middle class. From a theological perspective, the term *hijrah* refers to the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina. However, within the context of contemporary Islamic sociology, the concept has undergone a significant semantic and practical transformation. Today, *hijrah* is understood as a personal commitment to comprehensive spiritual transformation a transition from a past lifestyle perceived as less Islamic, secular, or even "sinful" toward a way of life that is fully grounded in Islamic law (*sharia*) and practiced in a comprehensive (*kaffah*) manner. This movement has attracted considerable sociological attention because it is not spearheaded by traditional Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) communities. Rather, it is driven by young professionals, creative industry practitioners, students from secular universities, and urban public figures who possess substantial economic and cultural capital (Nadhir, 2016: 45).

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Contestation and the Desecularization of the Public Sphere

he massive construction of religious identity among urban millennials has ultimately triggered a tangible wave of **desecularization** within the urban public sphere. Public spaces, which were once envisioned in classical sociological theories of modernity as neutral arenas free from religious attributes, are now increasingly characterized by the visible presence of Islamic symbols. Shopping malls no longer exclusively showcase the latest Western fashion trends but are also filled with internationally recognized *modest fashion* outlets. Contemporary cafés have become common gathering places for *hijrah* communities, where discussions on Islamic business ethics and *riba*-free financial practices take place over cups of Arabica coffee. Even high-rise office buildings in Jakarta's central business district regularly host exclusive Islamic study sessions (*kajian*) during lunch breaks.

The growing visibility of these expressive religious symbols has inevitably generated contestation and resistance from other segments of society. Some critics argue that the commodification of religion within the public sphere represents a form of "spiritual cosmetics" that reduces the transcendent essence of religion to little more than a consumer trend and a marker of social status. For its proponents, however, this phenomenon constitutes a legitimate form of identity negotiation. They reject being positioned as second-class citizens who must conceal their religious identity in order to appear modern or professional. Instead, they seek to demonstrate that Islamic identity can coexist with contemporary lifestyles and professional success. Consequently, a continuous dialectic emerges between religious compliance adherence to religious doctrine and the desire to remain socially relevant, fashionable, and recognized within the increasingly globalized urban environment.

The desecularization of the public sphere demonstrates that modernization does not necessarily entail the diminishing role of religion in social life. Rather, religion has adapted by utilizing various public spaces as platforms for expressing religious identity and disseminating religious values. From the perspective of the sociology of religion, this development illustrates that the public sphere is a dynamic arena in which multiple social identities are continuously produced, negotiated, and maintained through interactions among different social groups. The widespread presence of Islamic symbols in shopping centers, workplaces, educational institutions, and digital media reflects the extent to which urban religiosity has become embedded in everyday social practices, extending far beyond places of worship or the private domain. Consequently, desecularization should not be understood as a rejection of modernity but rather as a process through which religious values become integrated into various dimensions of contemporary social life.

At the same time, these developments reveal that the public sphere has become an arena for the ongoing negotiation of religious identity. Urban Muslims seek to express their religious commitments without relinquishing their position as members of a modern society actively engaged in education, professional careers, and the creative industries. Religious identity is therefore manifested not only through visible symbols but also through patterns of consumption, lifestyle choices, economic activities, and social interactions guided by Islamic values. Accordingly, the desecularization of Indonesia's public sphere can be understood as a transformation of religiosity that demonstrates religion's capacity to adapt to social change while maintaining its relevance as a source of moral values and a foundation for identity formation amid globalization and the expansion of popular culture.

Operational Definitions of Key Concepts

To minimize interpretive bias and ensure theoretical clarity, the following operational definitions of the three key concepts employed in this study are provided:

1. **Urban Anomie:** Refers to the psychological and sociological condition in which individuals experience alienation, a loss of meaning, and normative disorientation as a consequence of the structural pressures of urban life characterized by individualism, materialism, and intense competition. In this study, urban anomie is operationalized as the

point of departure for the existential crisis that motivates urban millennials to seek spiritual certainty through the *hijrah* movement.

2. **Digital Piety:** Refers to the expression, performativity, and articulation of religious values mediated through digital technologies and social media platforms. This concept extends beyond the passive consumption of religious content to encompass the ways individuals construct and present visual representations of themselves as pious Muslims in digital spaces in order to obtain social recognition and validation.
3. **Desecularization:** Refers to the process through which religious values, symbols, and practices re-enter the public sphere after a period of secularization. Within the context of this study, desecularization is operationalized as the increasing use of urban public spaces such as shopping malls, cafés, and digital platforms as arenas for the expression of religiosity and the construction of identity among urban Muslim millennials.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the significance of this study lies in its attempt to uncover the deepest structures of consciousness underlying the experiences of individuals participating in the *hijrah* movement through a rigorous phenomenological approach. Rather than viewing *hijrah* merely as a superficial phenomenon reflected in changes in clothing or outward social appearance, this research examines how the interrelationship among the body, the public sphere, digital technology, and spirituality contributes to the formation of a new urban subculture. It is expected that this study will make a meaningful contribution to the development of the sociology of urban Islam and the sociology of development in Indonesia, while also offering a fresh perspective on the transformation of civil society in the contemporary era.

Method

Research Design: Alfred Schutz's Social Phenomenology

This study employs a qualitative research design using the social phenomenological approach developed by Alfred Schutz. The selection of Schutz's phenomenology is based on the premise that the *hijrah* movement constitutes a form of meaningful social action consciously constructed by individuals within their everyday lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*). Unlike Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, which primarily emphasizes the essence of pure consciousness, Schutz's phenomenological framework shifts the analytical focus toward the ways individuals interact with one another and construct shared meanings within social reality (Schutz, 1967: 54).

In examining the subjective experiences of urban millennials who have embraced the *hijrah* movement, Schutz's analytical framework offers a powerful conceptual tool by distinguishing between two fundamental motives underlying human action:

1. **Because-Motive (*Weil-Motiv*)**

This refers to the objective factors rooted in an individual's past experiences that motivate the decision to undertake *hijrah*. Such factors may include experiences of urban anomie, career failure, emotional distress following the end of a romantic relationship, or prolonged exposure to digital environments that shape one's worldview and spiritual awareness.

2. **In-Order-To Motive (*Um-zu-Motiv*)**

This refers to the future-oriented goals, aspirations, or projected outcomes that individuals seek to achieve through the act of *hijrah*. These objectives may include attaining psychological peace, becoming part of a religiously supportive social circle free from immoral influences, or pursuing ultimate salvation in the Hereafter.

Through this analytical framework, the researcher is able to reconstruct the structures of consciousness underlying the experiences of the participants and to understand how the intersubjective meaning of "being a pious Muslim in an urban environment" is collectively constructed and continuously reproduced within *hijrah* communities.

Research Participants and Informant Selection Technique

The participants in this study consisted of urban millennials residing in two major Indonesian cities, namely Jakarta and Bandung. These cities were selected because they are widely recognized as representative epicenters of the urban Muslim middle-class *hijrah* movement,

characterized by the rapid growth of youth-based *hijrah* communities. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on a set of clearly defined inclusion criteria to ensure that the participants possessed experiences relevant to the objectives of the study.

The inclusion criteria were as follows:

1. Participants were members of the millennial generation, aged between 22 and 40 years at the time of the study.
2. Participants had consciously identified themselves as having undergone *hijrah* and had been actively involved in an offline *hijrah* community for a minimum of two years.
3. Participants were intensive users of social media, spending at least three hours per day on digital platforms, and actively shared religious content or expressed their religious identity through their personal social media accounts.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings and to minimize inconsistencies commonly encountered in qualitative research, the study involved **six key informants** who met all of the established inclusion criteria. The demographic profiles of these participants are presented transparently in Table 1 below:

Tabel 1. Profile Matrix of the Key Research Informants

No	Initials	Age (Years)	Occupation	Location	Hijrah Community	Duration of Hijrah	Primary Digital Platform(s)
1	RH	28	Graphic Designer	South Jakarta	Pemuda Hijrah Jakarta	3 Years	Instagram
2	ND	25	<i>Content Creator</i>	Bandung City	Shift Pemuda Hijrah	2 Years	TikTok & Instagram
3	ZH	32	Finance Manager	Central Jakarta	Kajian Musawarah	4 Years	Instagram & YouTube
4	RK	27	Culinary Entrepreneur	Bandung Regency	YukNgaji Bandung	3 Years	Instagram
5	AM	30	Architect	South Tangerang	Terang Jakarta	2,5 Years	Instagram
6	FD	24	Master's Student	Bandung City	Kajian Sabtu Keren	2 Years	TikTok

Data Collection Techniques: Methodological Triangulation

Field data were collected over a period of one full year, from January to December 2025, in order to capture the consistency of participants' behavior and the depth of changes in their psychological experiences over time. Three primary data collection techniques were employed to achieve robust methodological triangulation:

1. **In-depth Interviews** In-depth interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online using a semi-structured interview guide. Each participant was interviewed three to four times, with each interview lasting approximately 60–90 minutes. The interviews focused on participants' life histories, existential crises prior to embracing *hijrah*, the process of behavioral transformation, and their experiences of negotiating religious identity within urban public spaces. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim (word-for-word) for analysis.
2. **Participant Observation** The researcher immersed themselves in the offline activities of the *hijrah* communities to which the participants belonged. This included attending weekly Islamic study circles (*kajian*) held in urban mosques, participating in community service activities, and joining informal gatherings with community members at cafés following religious study sessions. This approach was essential for observing participants' nonverbal

expressions, authentic social interactions, and the ways in which they embodied and performed their religious identities within everyday public settings.

3. **Netnography** Given the central role of digital media in the *hijrah* phenomenon, this study employed a netnographic approach adapted from Robert Kozinets (2010). Netnographic data were collected through immersive online participant observation of the participants' personal social media accounts as well as the official accounts of the *hijrah* communities to which they belonged. The collected data included photographs, short-form videos, captions, hashtags (e.g., #YukHijrah and #ShiftMedia), and patterns of interaction within comment sections throughout the research period. These digital artifacts provided valuable insights into how religious identity was constructed, communicated, and negotiated within online environments.

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Data Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness and credibility of this study were ensured through two primary strategies. First, source and methodological triangulation were employed by cross-checking data obtained from in-depth interviews with findings from offline participant observations and digital netnographic analysis. For example, when an informant stated during an interview that they had abandoned a consumerist lifestyle after embracing *hijrah*, the researcher verified this claim by examining the informant's digital activities on Instagram. Second, member checking was conducted by returning the interview transcripts and preliminary analytical findings to all six informants for review and confirmation. This process ensured that the researcher's interpretations

accurately reflected the participants' intended meanings and experiences, thereby minimizing researcher subjectivity and enhancing the credibility of the findings.

Result and Discussion

The Construction of Urban Muslim Identity in the Public Sphere

The transformation of religious identity among urban millennials does not occur in a social vacuum; rather, it emerges from a complex dialectical process between traditional religious values and the dynamic lifestyle of urban society. Amid the pressures of modernity, millennials frequently experience existential crises that compel them to redefine their position within the broader social structure. This phenomenon demonstrates that religion continues to serve as a significant factor in shaping individual identity and character, even within environments that are highly exposed to globalization.

The *hijrah* movement has consequently emerged as an adaptive mechanism through which millennials seek certainty and stability of identity amid the condition of urban anomie, characterized by individualism and social fragmentation. Social anomie in metropolitan areas often generates feelings of alienation and isolation, making commitment to religious values an important source of belonging and collective identity within newly formed communities. This finding is consistent with the argument that, in the midst of rapid modernization, individuals tend to seek refuge in collective identities that provide both moral certainty and emotional security (Hasan, 2013: 45).

Urban public spaces, once widely perceived as predominantly secular domains, are now experiencing a clear process of desecularization. Religious symbols are no longer confined to private spheres or places of worship but have increasingly permeated shopping malls, cafés, office buildings, and other public venues. This transformation illustrates that the boundary between the sacred and the profane has become increasingly blurred as urban millennials seek to integrate spirituality into their everyday activities. Visually, this religious identity is expressed through highly aesthetic and contemporary forms. Symbols such as fashionable *shar'i* clothing and the frequent use of Islamic expressions in everyday conversations have become part of a new religious **aesthetic**. Contemporary urban religiosity often functions as a visible expression of identity closely intertwined with popular culture, where piety and lifestyle are no longer perceived as contradictory but rather as mutually reinforcing dimensions of modern Muslim identity (Fealy & White, 2008: 102).

Information technology, particularly social media, has become the primary catalyst accelerating this process of identity construction. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok function not merely as communication tools but also as virtual public spheres where *hijrah* narratives are continuously produced, disseminated, and validated by online audiences. Through algorithmic recommendations and viral content trends, urban millennials increasingly consume religious knowledge in formats that are concise, visually appealing, and easily shareable. Consequently, digital platforms have contributed to the emergence of new standards regarding what it means to be an "ideal" Muslim in the digital era (Sunesti et al., 2018: 33).

The emergence of a new urban Muslim middle class has further reinforced this transformation. This social group possesses relatively high levels of education, considerable purchasing power, and broad access to information technology and digital media, positioning it as one of the principal actors shaping contemporary religiosity in Indonesia. Unlike previous generations, who tended to practice religion primarily as a normative obligation, the urban Muslim middle class increasingly integrates Islamic values into various dimensions of modern life, including consumption patterns, career choices, modes of dress, business activities, and the development of social networks. Religion is therefore understood not merely as a system of belief but also as a form of social identity reflecting one's values, social status, and life orientation within contemporary urban society.

This group no longer perceives religion as an obstacle to progress or as something fundamentally incompatible with modernity. Instead, religion is embraced as an integral

component of a modern lifestyle that can be expressed through various forms of popular culture. This tendency is reflected in the growing popularity of Muslim fashion, the consumption of halal products, participation in *hijrah* communities, and engagement with professionally produced Islamic digital content tailored to the preferences of younger generations. Religious expression is no longer confined to ritual observance but is increasingly embodied through lifestyle choices that signify both commitment to Islamic values and identification as a modern Muslim.

As a consequence, capitalism and religiosity no longer function as opposing forces but instead have become increasingly intertwined, giving rise to a rapidly expanding Islamic economic ecosystem in urban areas. The growth of the halal cosmetics industry, Muslim fashion, halal tourism, Islamic banking and investment, Sharia-compliant financial technology (*fintech*), and *riba*-free housing demonstrates that religious values have become an influential factor shaping consumer behavior. From the perspective of economic sociology, this phenomenon suggests that religion functions not only as a normative system governing spiritual life but also as a form of cultural capital that shapes market preferences, creates new economic opportunities, and stimulates business innovation designed to meet the needs of Muslim consumers. Consequently, urban religiosity extends beyond the realm of personal spirituality to become a significant social and economic force that actively contributes to the transformation and development of contemporary urban society.

Structures of Consciousness and the Dual Motives of *Hijrah* (Because-Motive vs. In-Order-To Motive)

Drawing upon Alfred Schutz's phenomenological framework, the decision of urban millennials to undertake *hijrah* can be understood through two underlying structures of consciousness: the because-motive, which is rooted in past experiences and causal conditions, and the in-order-to motive, which is future-oriented and directed toward specific goals and aspirations. Based on in-depth interviews with the participants, a consistent pattern emerged, demonstrating that urban anomie functioned as the principal causal factor motivating their decision to embrace *hijrah*.

Informant RH (28 years old), a graphic designer employed at a multinational advertising agency in South Jakarta, explicitly described the **because-motive** that shaped his decision:

"My life used to revolve around work meeting deadlines, working overtime, and then escaping on weekends by going to nightclubs or drinking with friends. From the outside, I looked successful. I earned a good income. But strangely, every time I returned to my apartment at three in the morning, I felt completely empty an emptiness beyond words. It was as if the city had drained my soul. I felt disconnected from myself, directionless, and no longer understood what I was living for. The environment around me was extremely individualistic; no one cared if you were falling apart." (Interview, March 12, 2025).

RH's narrative vividly illustrates the lived experience of urban anomie. The accelerated rhythm of metropolitan life generated existential disorientation in which material prosperity failed to produce psychological well-being or inner peace. It was precisely this condition of alienation—the because-motive (*Weil-Motiv*) that prompted him to search for a new moral and spiritual orientation through the *hijrah* movement.

Conversely, participants also articulated in-order-to motives (*Um-zu-Motiv*), reflecting the future-oriented aspirations that guided their actions. Informant RK (27 years old), a culinary entrepreneur from Bandung, explained the objectives that motivated his *hijrah*:

*"I decided to join the YukNgaji study community with a very clear purpose. I wanted to build a business free from *riba* (usury), to marry a righteous wife who could build a pious family, and above all, I wanted the rest of my life to become an investment for the Hereafter. I was tired of being judged only by the brand of my car or the size of my monthly revenue in urban social circles."* (Interview, May 18, 2025).

For RK, *hijrah* represented a conscious effort to reconstruct his future in both worldly and spiritual dimensions. His aspirations extended beyond establishing a *riba*-free business and an Islamic family toward the pursuit of eternal reward in the Hereafter. His narrative also reflects a rejection of the secular standards of success that dominate urban society, replacing material achievement with religiously defined notions of fulfillment and purpose.

Viewed through Schutz's phenomenological lens, the intersubjective integration of these individual motives gradually crystallizes within *hijrah* communities. These communities function as provinces of meaning (*provinces of meaning* or *meaning enclaves*) that provide members with alternative systems of relevance through which they reinterpret their lived experiences. Feelings of alienation, moral uncertainty, and existential anxiety that were once experienced individually within the secular urban environment are collectively validated and redefined within the community. Through continuous interaction, shared narratives, and common religious practices, these communities foster a new collective consciousness that ultimately forms a distinctive subculture of urban Muslims.

The Alignment of Religious Aesthetics and the Urban Public Sphere

Once the *hijrah* identity had been constructed within the participants' internal consciousness, the next stage involved projecting that identity into the public sphere. It is at this point that an intensive process of visual negotiation took place. Urban millennials who embraced *hijrah* deliberately rejected religious appearances that they perceived as outdated, unattractive, or incompatible with contemporary lifestyles. Instead, they developed a new synthesis between the orthodoxy of Islamic dress and the aesthetic preferences of the modern urban middle class.

Informant ND (25 years old), a fashion content creator based in Bandung, described how she redefined her visual identity after embracing *hijrah*:

"At first, I was worried that wearing a long shar'i hijab would make me look like an older woman or even cause clients to label me as radical. So I found another approach. I chose trendy earth-tone colors, premium fabrics, and minimalist yet stylish designs. When I wear them to meetings in cafés or shopping malls in downtown Bandung, I still feel confident. Religion doesn't require us to look outdated. We can remain shar'i while also being aesthetic and fashionable." (Interview, June 5, 2025).

ND's statement illustrates a strategy of aesthetic negotiation. The body is no longer understood merely as a medium for demonstrating obedience to religious law but also as a site for representing social class, cultural taste, and modern identity. The choice of earth-tone colors, minimalist tailoring, and premium materials functions as a cultural bridge that renders religious symbols more socially acceptable and transforms them into elements of contemporary urban fashion. Consequently, religious expression is not perceived as incompatible with modern aesthetics but rather becomes integrated into the visual culture of urban middle-class society.

A similar perspective was expressed by informant AM (30 years old), an architect living in South Tangerang. He emphasized that urban public spaces should be infused with spiritual values without undermining their recreational and social functions:

"Hanging out is part of urban life. That's why, after attending our Terang Jakarta study sessions, my friends and I don't go straight home. We usually move to a café, have coffee, discuss architecture projects, and at the same time talk about how to apply environmentally friendly principles of Islamic architecture. For our community, the boundary between the sacred space of the mosque and the secular space of the café has become very fluid." (Interview, August 22, 2025).

AM's account confirms the emergence of what may be described as liquid desecularization within the urban public sphere. Cafés are no longer perceived as neutral spaces detached from religious discourse. Through the physical presence and everyday practices of urban millennials who have embraced *hijrah*, these secular environments undergo a process of functional re-sacralization while preserving their modern characteristics. Rather than replacing the recreational function of public spaces, religious values are seamlessly incorporated into them, allowing spirituality and modern urban lifestyles to coexist. This phenomenon further illustrates how the commodification and utilization of public spaces are harmoniously negotiated through the lifestyle practices of the urban Muslim middle class, where religious commitment, consumer culture, and contemporary aesthetics are no longer regarded as mutually exclusive but as complementary dimensions of everyday life.

Netnographic Findings: The Performativity of Digital Piety

A key recommendation raised during the review process emphasized the importance of presenting concrete findings derived from the planned netnographic approach. Based on **virtual**

immersion conducted over a one-year period through systematic observation of the participants' personal social media accounts and those of their respective *hijrah* communities, the findings reveal that digital space functions not merely as a medium for disseminating religious messages but also as the primary arena for the performative enactment of piety (*performative piety*).

Informant ZH (32 years old), a finance manager based in Central Jakarta, actively managed his personal Instagram account as a representation of his *hijrah* identity. A netnographic analysis of one of his Instagram posts, uploaded on September 14, 2025, revealed a highly structured pattern of digital piety. The post featured a premium-brand laptop placed on a desk within a luxurious co-working space in Jakarta's Sudirman business district. Visible through the large glass windows were the city's skyscrapers, while a pastel-colored pocket prayer book and a cup of coffee were carefully positioned beside the laptop. The accompanying caption read:

"Pursuing halal sustenance in the concrete jungle of Jakarta. Remembering Him amid stacks of financial reports. May every drop of sweat be counted as an act of worship. #KajianMusawarah #ProfessionalMuslim #CareerHijrah #NoRiba"

This post received more than 1,200 likes and dozens of comments, most of which praised ZH's consistency in maintaining his spirituality while pursuing a demanding corporate career. From the perspective of digital phenomenology, this online performance can be interpreted as an act of self-affirmation, through which ZH demonstrated his ability to reconcile a prestigious professional identity with religious devotion. The inclusion of the pastel-colored prayer book alongside modern lifestyle objects such as a laptop and a cup of coffee illustrates an aesthetic adaptation in which sacred religious symbols are visually harmonized with the material culture of contemporary urban life.

A similar pattern emerged in the case of informant FD (24 years old), a master's student in Bandung, who utilized TikTok as the primary platform for expressing his digital religiosity through short-form video content. FD regularly produced 15-second videos under the theme "*A Day in My Life as a Hijrah Student*." Netnographic analysis of his TikTok account revealed the strategic use of trending audio combined with visual footage of himself reading the Qur'an on a digital tablet before attending classes. This combination of contemporary audiovisual elements with religious practices illustrates how Islamic values are repackaged to align with the communicative preferences of younger digital audiences.

During the interview, FD explained the motivations underlying his digital content production:

"On TikTok, if you create rigid or overly formal religious content, nobody will watch it. That's why I package it using an aesthetic that appeals to young people smooth video transitions, calming yet stylish background music, and short captions that resonate emotionally. Why do I keep posting? Because if we don't fill people's For You Pages (FYP) with positive content, young people's feeds will simply be dominated by immoral content. Honestly, the positive comments from viewers motivate me to remain steadfast on my hijrah journey." (Interview, October 4, 2025).

FD's experience demonstrates that digital piety relies heavily upon continuous feedback generated within the digital ecosystem. Interactive features such as likes, comments, and shares function as a social mirror, validating the actor's religious identity and reinforcing their commitment to the *hijrah* movement. In this context, piety is no longer solely a private spiritual experience but becomes an intersubjective digital phenomenon, in which recognition from followers plays a significant role in sustaining one's religious identity amid the pressures of globalization and secular modernity.

Nevertheless, the netnographic findings also reveal an important vulnerability within the digital *hijrah* movement. A relatively rigid visual standard has emerged regarding what constitutes the image of an "ideal" *hijrah*. Individuals who are unable to conform to prevailing aesthetic expectations such as possessing the latest technological devices, wearing branded Muslim fashion, or producing professionally edited digital content often perceive themselves as being excluded from the movement's central social circles. These findings suggest that the digital *hijrah* movement is not entirely free from the dynamics of commodification and capitalist social stratification. While

digital media democratize access to religious expression, they simultaneously reproduce new forms of symbolic distinction and social hierarchy, where visibility, aesthetic appeal, and digital influence become increasingly intertwined with the public performance of religious identity.

Conclusion

"The Three Pillars" of the Transformation of Urban Millennial Religiosity

This phenomenological study successfully identifies and formulates three fundamental pillars that constitute the foundation of the transformation of religious identity and the negotiation of public space among urban millennials participating in the *hijrah* movement. The integration of these three pillars provides a comprehensive explanation of the dynamics of contemporary religiosity in Indonesia.

The Three Pillars of the Transformation of Urban Millennial Religiosity

Pillar I: Existential Reorientation

- a. Overcoming Urban Anomie (*Because-Motive / Weil-Motiv*)
- b. The Restructuring of Critical Consciousness toward Urban Hedonism

Pillar II: Spatial-Aesthetic Negotiation

- a. Harmonizing Islamic Orthodoxy with Urban Middle-Class Lifestyles
- b. Liquid Desecularization within Urban Public Spaces (Cafés, Shopping Centers, and Workplaces)

Pillar III: The Performativity of Digital Piety

- a. The Reconstruction of Religious Identity through Netnography and Social Media
- b. Intersubjective Validation of Piety through Digital Visual Aesthetics

1. First Pillar: Existential Reorientation in Response to Urban Anomie. The transformation of religious identity consistently begins with an internal confrontation between the individual and the sociological condition of urban anomie. The decision to embrace *hijrah* is initially driven by because-motives, rooted in experiences of spiritual emptiness amid the material abundance of secular urban life. These experiences subsequently evolve into in-order-to motives, reflecting the search for a new and stable moral framework within the shared meaning structures provided by religious communities.
2. Second Pillar: Spatial-Aesthetic Negotiation within the Public Sphere. The integration of a pious Muslim identity with the identity of a modern urban individual is negotiated through the emergence of new standards of religious aesthetics. Religious symbols and practices are harmoniously combined with popular cultural trends and middle-class lifestyles, resulting in a process of liquid desecularization within public spaces such as shopping malls, workplaces, cafés, and other urban recreational settings. This process demonstrates that religious identity is no longer confined to private or sacred spaces but has become an integral part of everyday public life.
3. Third Pillar: The Performativity of Digital Piety. Virtual space has become the principal arena in which participants develop, communicate, and reinforce their newly constructed religious identities. Through the application of netnographic analysis, this study demonstrates that piety is increasingly constructed through visual and textual representations on social media in order to obtain intersubjective validation from digital audiences. This process blurs the traditional boundaries between the sacred and the profane while simultaneously positioning the commodification of religion as an inseparable component of the contemporary urban Muslim subculture.

Research Limitations and Recommendations

This study is subject to several limitations. First, it focuses exclusively on urban middle-class millennials with relatively stable economic conditions residing in Jakarta and Bandung. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to working-class Muslims whose *hijrah* experiences may be shaped by more limited economic resources, digital access, and social capital.

In light of these limitations, future research is encouraged to explore the *hijrah* phenomenon across different socioeconomic groups in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary Islamic religiosity in Indonesia. Furthermore, future studies should critically examine the psychological consequences of the growing demand for the performativity of digital piety, particularly its implications for the mental health and well-being of individuals navigating the *hijrah* movement in the post-truth era.

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