

REINTERPRETATION THE MEANING OF THE VEIL ON INSTAGRAM: STIGMATIZATION, IDEOLOGICAL CONTESTATION AND POPULARITY

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the use of the veil symbol on social media, as well as how the veil is interpreted by society in relation to trends, self-identity, and ideology. Social media, as part of new media, has become the main platform for individuals to express religious beliefs through symbols. However, the meaning of the veil in digital spaces is often reductive, as a complete reflection of religious practice without considering more complex contexts. This research uses a qualitative-descriptive method with a virtual ethnography approach to explore the phenomenon of using the veil symbol on Instagram in posts with the hashtag #cadar. Geertz's Symbol Theory is used to understand the role religious symbols play in shaping perceptions and social interactions in cyberspace. It was found that the veil narratives displayed contained many meanings and various expressions. First, the veil is used as a tool to seek popularity and commercialization, and the spread of socio-religious values. Second, the veil shows religious self-existence. Third, the veil on Instagram reflects digital identity rather than comprehensive religious practice. Fourth, the veil represents and reproduces the existence of Islamic groups and movements, especially communities oriented towards more conservative values, which often lead to stigmatization.

Keywords: veil, symbol, trend, instagram

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penggunaan simbol cadar di media sosial, serta bagaimana cadar diinterpretasikan oleh masyarakat dalam kaitannya dengan tren, identitas diri, dan ideologi. Media sosial, sebagai bagian dari new media, telah menjadi platform utama bagi individu untuk mengekspresikan keyakinan agama melalui simbol. Namun, pemaknaan cadar di ruang digital sering kali bersifat reduktif, sebagai refleksi utuh dari praktik beragama tanpa mempertimbangkan konteks yang lebih kompleks. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif-deskriptif dengan pendekatan etnografi virtual untuk menggali fenomena penggunaan simbol cadar di Instagram dalam postingan dengan hastag #cadar. Teori Simbol Clifford Geertz digunakan untuk memahami simbol agama berperan dalam membentuk persepsi dan interaksi sosial di dunia maya. Ditemukan bahwa narasi cadar yang ditampilkan mengandung banyak makna dan beragam ekspresi. *Pertama*, cadar digunakan sebagai alat untuk mencari popularitas dan komersialisasi, dan penyebaran nilai-nilai sosial-keagamaan. *Kedua*, cadar menunjukkan eksistensi diri yang religius. *Ketiga*, cadar di instagram lebih merefleksikan identitas digital daripada praktik beragama yang komprehensif. *Keempat*, cadar merepresentasikan dan mereproduksi keberadaan kelompok dan gerakan Islam, terutama komunitas yang berorientasi pada nilai-nilai yang lebih konservatif, yang sering kali menimbulkan stigmatisasi.

Keywords: cadar, simbol, tren, instagram

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a key platform for individuals to express themselves, share

their views, and shape their social and cultural identities (Mawardi et al., 2024; Trysnes & Synnes, 2022). In this context, religious symbols are often used as part of self-expression and social communication based on the symbols displayed (Geertz, n.d.). The veil as part of the Islamic religious symbol originated from Arabic culture, so in the Indonesian context, the veil is considered a process of Arabization of Muslim women in Indonesia (Nisa, 2022), and faces negative stigmatization (Pangestu, 2021). The veil is one of the most popular Islamic religious symbols on Instagram. The visibility of veil use on Instagram continues to increase, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. However, people's understanding of religious symbols on social media is often reductive, seeing them as a complete reflection of religious practice, without taking into account the complexity and context behind the use of these symbols. In fact, symbols must be seen from the purpose of the user, the social context, and the culture that influences it. Therefore, the use of religious symbols can vary. Religious symbols such as the peci, sarong, and jilbab worn by traders in Bali serve as self-recognition or identity as a Muslim (Idris & Pradana, 2023). Religious symbols are also often used as campaign attributes to attract supporters who share the same identity as us in order to gain more votes (Yunus, 2022).

The function of wearing a veil is to cover part or all of the face as a source of beauty to prevent it from being admired by many people, as was done by the wives of the Prophet Muhammad (Huda & Permadi, 2019). However, the reality on social media shows that the hijab has recently been used to showcase beauty on social media as a veiled woman, with 1.6 million posts using the hashtag #cadar on Instagram. Social media has become a platform for hyper-religiosity, forcing users to alter social norms (Saumantri, 2023), in this case transforming the use of the veil from an ideological function into a form of self-expression through religious symbols. Social media also serves as a platform to showcase one's best image, as it allows users to present a different identity from their real-life reality (Flew, 2002).

Previous studies on the use of the hijab symbol have primarily focused on its meaning and function in the real world. For example, the study conducted by Vivi Sartika and M. Yusuf titled "Bercadar Itu Pengakuan: Reproduksi Makna Cadar di Kalangan Pengguna". This study examines the production and reproduction of the meaning of the veil among female students who wear the veil at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang. Using a qualitative method with in-depth interviews, this study applies Antony Giddens' structuration approach to explore how female students who wear the veil interpret the veil in an educational context. The findings reveal that the hijab is interpreted as a form of religious doctrine and a symbol of self-protection, as well as an expression of power for these female students. The study concludes that the meaning of the hijab is shaped through social practices carried out by hijab-wearing women within an educational structure that both constrains and liberates them (Sartika & Yusuf, 2020).

The second study was conducted by Sholihul Huda and Iman Permadi with the title "Fenomena Cadar dalam Perspektif Mahasiswa Universitas Muhammadiyah Surabaya." This study aimed to identify students' views on the phenomenon of the veil on campus and to categorize these views. Using a qualitative method with descriptive analysis, this study applied phenomenological and sociological knowledge theories to understand students' perspectives in interpreting the veil. The results of the study revealed three types of perspectives: (1) Islamic-Transformative Perspective, held by students with high social sensitivity, who view the veil as an expression of belief aligned with the Islamic vision of mercy for all creation; (2) The Islamic-Normative Perspective, which holds a textual view in accordance with religious teachings; and (3) The Liberal-Islamic Perspective, which emphasizes rationality and flexibility in understanding the veil as a personal expression

without being bound by religious obligations (Huda & Permadi, 2019).

The third study was conducted by Surawan, Najib Kailani, and Aziz Muslim, titled "The Veil: A Phenomenon of Urban Society and Religious Identity." This study highlights the phenomenon of the veil in urban society as a symbol of religious identity and a complex social phenomenon. Using a sociological approach, this study explores the dual meaning of the veil, which functions not only as clothing but also as a profound symbol of religious identity, modesty, and devotion. The results of the study indicate that the veil in an urban context plays an important role in shaping individual and collective identity, as well as highlighting the social challenges that arise from the diversity of veil practices. This study provides insights into how urban communities wear the veil in relation to social cohesion and integration, as well as how the veil has become an important element in the discourse of religious expression and cultural diversity in contemporary society (Surawan et al., 2023).

The three previous studies have made significant contributions to understanding religious symbols and identity in society, particularly in the context of the use of the veil and hijab. However, there are differences that constitute a research gap between those studies and this study, namely the focus on the role of social media in shaping and changing the meaning of religious symbols in the digital space. More specifically, this study aims to uncover the meaning and purpose of posts about the veil on social media as a religious symbol and form of self-expression. This is to reveal the reduction of the meaning of the veil on Instagram, which is interpreted as a symbol of radical or extreme Islam. This study is significant for comprehensively examining the motives behind the veil as a symbol on social media in relation to media trend analysis, self-identity, and individual and community ideologies. Therefore, this study seeks to answer several questions: 1) How is the veil used and interpreted on social media? 2) How do people interpret the veil on social media as a representation of trends, self-identity, or ideology? 3) Do religious symbols on social media reflect a complete understanding of religious practices? Thus, this study is significant because it offers a new perspective on how religious symbols on social media not only represent identity and beliefs but also become part of more complex social dynamics, including media trends, self-identity, and identity politics in virtual spaces.

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research method used is descriptive qualitative research, with a virtual ethnographic approach, thus falling under *field research* (Moleong, 2018). Etnografi comes from Greek, combining the words "ethos," meaning the people of a nation or society, and "graphein," meaning writing or artifact (Lambropoulos, 1997). According to Cristine Hine (2000), virtual ethnography is a methodology used to investigate the internet and explore how entities (users) interact using the internet (Hine, 2000). Virtual ethnography also reflects the implications of communities mediated by the internet. This study analyzes the phenomenon of symbols in the form of image posts, videos, and comments on posts with the hashtag #cadar on Instagram. Instagram was chosen as the main platform for collecting data, taking advantage of its ease in searching and mapping content through hashtags (Taufiq et al., 2022). Instagram also provides features to analyze popular content with specific hashtags, so it is considered representative of society. Primary data was collected from posts with the hashtag #cadar accessed using the Explore feature on Instagram. Content was searched using the Explore feature on the Instagram platform by entering the keyword #cadar. The feature offers two content alternatives: Top Posts, which includes content with the highest *engagement* (*likes*, *views*, and *comments*), and Most Recent, which consists of the most recently uploaded content. This approach allows the study to analyze dominant trends and the evolving dynamics of narratives in *real-time* among users. From the total of 1.6 million posts with the #cadar hashtag, the researchers analyzed the captions

and images in the top posts and recent posts displayed as self-expression on Instagram, and analyzed the comments to understand the digital community's responses to the hijab on Instagram.

This study uses Clifford Geertz's theory of symbols. Symbols function as "vehicles of meaning" that convey meaning and interpret cultural practices. Geertz views symbols as vehicles of meaning that carry specific meanings recognized by members of a culture. These symbols encapsulate collective experiences and connect real entities with intangible values and beliefs. Geertz defines culture as a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms through which humans communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge and attitudes toward life. This perspective emphasizes that culture is not merely internalized knowledge but is expressed through external symbols (Geertz, n.d.).

Symbols, in Geertz's perspective, are like flags, national anthems, or monuments that evoke feelings of patriotism and ownership. Rituals and ceremonies, ceremonial events such as weddings, funerals, and initiation rites are significant markers of life transitions. Empirical refers to that which is observable and experienced directly, in its material form, including objects and actions. Symbolic, this is the layer of meaning that empirical entities carry within a culture. The focus is not on the physical object itself, but rather on the symbolic representation it embodies for individuals. For instance, when one observes a wedding ring, it is empirically evident that the object is a piece of jewelry. However, when considered symbolically, the ring signifies profound concepts such as love, commitment, and the social institution of marriage (Geertz, 1976).

Symbols as social interactions can include greetings, body language, and everyday language that convey social norms and expectations. Cultural identity, how individuals and groups define themselves through symbols. Intercultural communication, the role of symbols in facilitating or hindering understanding between different cultures. The symbolic value of brands and products in influencing purchasing decisions. Clifford Geertz's analysis of symbols in cultural analysis offers a deep understanding of how meaning is constructed and communicated in society. Symbols are not merely passive reflections of culture; they actively shape our perceptions of reality and our interactions with others. By recognizing the power of symbols, we can better understand the complex tapestry of human culture and the subtle nuances that govern our social world (Geertz, 2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Meaning of the Veil from Local Symbol to Digital Identity

The increasing visibility of the hijab on Instagram highlights an intriguing evolution in its meaning and function, particularly when viewed through Geertz's theory of symbols. While the hijab traditionally holds deep religious and cultural significance, its presence on platforms like Instagram introduces new layers of interpretation that often diverge from its more conservative original purpose.

The hijab, originating from Arab culture, is fundamentally understood as a garment designed to cover a woman's face, embodying principles of modesty and protection from unwanted gaze. In many traditional contexts, and as noted in the paper referencing the wives of the Prophet Muhammad, its primary function was to protect beauty from public display, ensuring it was reserved for those permitted to see it. In Indonesia, the adoption of the hijab is often viewed as a process of "Arabization," sometimes leading to negative stigmatization due to its perceived foreignness or association with certain ideologies.

In research on religious symbols in the Indonesian context, particularly regarding how religious symbols acculturate with local cultural contexts. However, there are significant differences in the dynamics of symbol meaning between physical and digital spaces. While symbols in traditional culture tend to maintain stable core values despite adaptation, such as

the function of the Demak Mosque as a center for preaching (Fadila Eka Gustina et al., 2025) or *Sedekah Laut* tradition as an expression of gratitude (Azis & Firdausi, 2021), the phenomenon of the veil on Instagram demonstrates far more extreme flexibility in meaning. On social media, the hijab does not merely acculturate; its meaning can shift drastically from its original purpose as a symbol of modesty to a tool for increasing popularity or even commercialization. This difference highlights that the interaction of symbols with digital culture produces more fluid and pragmatic reinterpretations, where symbols can be detached from comprehensive religious practices and transformed into part of a digital identity construction oriented toward trends and public engagement.

However, Instagram, as a "new media" platform, deeply recontextualizes this traditional understanding. It transforms the veil from a symbol of concealment into a visual statement in a highly public, image-based environment. This shift is clearly evident in the large number of posts using the hashtag #cadar, with 1.6 million occurrences recorded. This massive digital presence indicates a deviation from the hijab's original function of reducing visibility.

Referring to studies by Ternikar (2009) and Karen Tranberg (2004), the phenomenon of the hijab on Instagram can be understood as part of the broader dynamics of the meaning of the hijab in the era of globalization. El Guindi highlights how the hijab functions as a "flexible symbol," whose meaning continues to adapt to social and political contexts. Far from a static meaning, the hijab is often reinterpreted by younger generations, especially those in the diaspora or who interact with global media, as a way to assert their identity. This is not just about religious compliance, but also about cultural, personal, and even resistance to stereotypes (Hansen, 2004; Ternikar, 2009).

This study found that on Instagram, the veil is undergoing a similar shift. Rather than being an isolated symbol, it has become part of a multidimensional visual narrative. Wieringa shows that global trends, such as the hijabi lifestyle on social media, often influence local interpretations. Hijab users in Indonesia, for example, may see fashion models from abroad on Instagram and adapt them, combining religious requirements with modern aesthetics. Thus, the hijab on Instagram becomes an arena where traditional meanings interact with global trends, producing a hybrid representation that reflects both local values and digital cultural influences.

In analyzing the phenomenon of the hijab on Instagram, this study is fundamentally grounded in Clifford Geertz's theory of symbols, which views culture as a system of meaning expressed through symbols. Geertz emphasizes the importance of "thick description," an approach that not only records the existence of symbols (empirical) but also delves into the layers of meaning, interpretation, and the surrounding socio-cultural context (symbolic) (Geertz, 2008, p. 25). More than just passive "vehicles of meaning," symbols, in Geertz's view, are active constructions that shape human perceptions of reality and social interactions. In the context of Instagram, this means that the hijab is not merely seen as a physical object or piece of clothing, but as a complex narrative whose meaning is constantly negotiated by its users and digital audience. Our analysis seeks to go beyond superficial observations of hijab use on social media, such as hashtags or the number of *likes*, to understand how values, beliefs, and even pragmatic goals (such as popularity or commercialism) are internalized and expressed through the visual representation of the hijab. We seek to uncover *how* traditional meanings of the hijab intersect, shift, or even conflict with the "hyper-religious" and "stage-like" contexts of social media, ultimately shaping multifaceted digital identities (Saumantri, 2023).

This phenomenon demonstrates that symbolic meanings are not merely passively reproduced but actively constructed and negotiated in online interactions. The hijab, in this

context, is a living symbol that continues to evolve alongside the ways users interact with it, whether for commercial purposes, self-expression, or participation in virtual communities.

Contestations of Meaning: The Hijab as a Tool for Popularity and Commercialization

The intrinsic design and behavior of Instagram users effectively "reduce" or alter the traditional religious meaning of the hijab. Rather than being solely a symbol of complete religious devotion or a means to preserve beauty, it often becomes a tool for other purposes, sometimes unintentional in its traditional interpretation.

Beyond expressions of belief, religious symbols are used as masks for self-identity and political identity. Religious symbols on social media, such as crosses, headscarves, skullcaps, and long beards, are used by individuals not only as expressions of religious belief but also as tools to emphasize personal identity. These symbols are often displayed to affirm religious affiliation within virtual communities, either as a form of self-representation or as part of identity politics.

According to Geertz, religious symbols are often used to indicate a person's religious affiliation. For example, the hijab and turban can be clear identifiers in Muslim communities, while the cross can signify Christian identity. The use of these symbols on social media allows individuals to openly express their beliefs and build connections with others who share similar views. The veil on Instagram is expressed to illustrate.

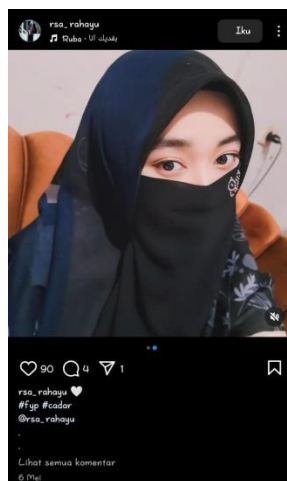


Figure 1. #cadar post on Instagram

Source: Instagram (2025)

In posts such as @rsa_rahayu, who paired #cadar with #fyp (For Your Page). The inclusion of #fyp, a hashtag designed specifically to increase the visibility of content and reach a wider audience on Instagram, signifies a strategic move towards maximizing engagement and popularity. This shows that the hijab, in this context, is not only an expression of faith but also a means to attract likes, comments, and followers. This directly contradicts the idea of the hijab as a symbol of isolation or modesty that limits public attention.

This shows that the hijab on Instagram is often represented as a tool to increase engagement and gain popularity. Unlike its traditional function as a covering that protects oneself from public view, on Instagram the hijab has become a visual object that attracts attention. Users deliberately include popular hashtags such as #fyp along with #cadar. The use of #fyp is a clear digital strategy to expand the reach of content, make posts easier to find by Instagram's algorithm, and ultimately attract more viewers, likes, and comments. This indicates that the intent behind some hijab posts is not solely to express beliefs but also to participate in the dynamics of social media popularity, where visibility and interaction serve as measures of success. In this context, the hijab transforms into "viral-worthy" content capable of attracting digital public attention.

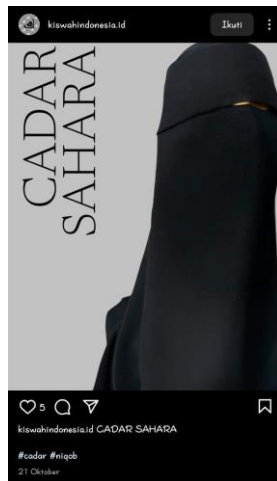


Figure 2. *#cadar post on Instagram*

Source: Instagram (2025)

The post by @kiswahindonesia.id using the #cadar hashtag to market products such as *niqabs* and other Islamic clothing demonstrates the commercialization of symbols. Here, the cadar becomes a product for sale, and the hashtag serves as a marketing tool to reach potential customers interested in such items. This transforms a religious symbol into a commodity, linking it to consumer trends rather than pure spiritual practice.

That is, the hijab on Instagram is represented as a product that can be commercialized and an element for brand image. This platform has become a visual marketplace where religious symbols like the hijab are not only worn but also bought and sold. Business accounts use the hashtag #cadar to promote various Muslim fashion products, including the hijab itself, niqabs, and hijabs. In this context, the hijab is reduced from its spiritual meaning to a commodity. The use of the hijab in commercial posts aims to attract consumers who have an affiliation or interest in a particular Muslim lifestyle. The hijab, traditionally associated with simplicity and spirituality, is now part of the fashion and lifestyle industry, where its value is also measured by its appeal in the digital market and its ability to build a strong brand identity.

As highlighted, "religious symbols are used not only as expressions of belief but also as tools for self-image, brand image, and identity politics." Instagram allows users to carefully curate their online personas. Therefore, the hijab can be used to project a certain self-image, one of piety, adherence to religious teachings, or even a particular aesthetic. This aligns with Geertz's idea that symbols are "vehicles of meaning" that can be used to communicate and construct identity (Geertz, 2008). However, in the digital realm, this construction can be more fluid and less tied to comprehensive religious practices. These platforms allow individuals to present an idealized or curated version of their religious identity, potentially prioritizing visual appeal over deep theological adherence.

The hijab on Instagram is represented as a construction of self-image and digital identity. In the virtual world, individuals have complete control over how they want to be seen. The hijab, in this case, functions as a powerful visual symbol to project a certain identity. This could mean presenting oneself as a devout Muslim woman, or even as part of a broader hijrah trend where religious lifestyles are adapted to modern aesthetics. Users choose to post photos or videos of themselves wearing a hijab not only as an expression of their beliefs but also as a way to build a digital persona that aligns with their personal aspirations or the expectations of their virtual community. The veil has become part of the "stage" on Instagram to show "who I am and what I believe in," allowing individuals to curate their

religious identity to fit the narrative they want to convey in a highly visual and image-centric digital space.

In posts with #cadar on Instagram, the first post from the account @rsa_rahayu shows that the veil has been refunctioned from a symbol or garment to cover part or all of a woman's face in order to remain modest, to a medium for generating *engagement* on Instagram. This can be seen in image 1, which shows #cadar alongside #fyp, meaning *for your page*, which is usually used to increase the popularity of posts recommended by Instagram so that they have the potential to reach more viewers. The second post on the @kiswahindonesia.id account shows that #cadar is also used as a platform for selling cadar, niqab, hijab, and other Islamic religious accessories. The use of hashtags in social media posts, particularly on Instagram, has the potential to be seen by people with similar interests to the hashtag (Halim et al., 2019).

In some captions or descriptions of posts, the use of #cadar also indicates that religious symbols are used as a way to visually represent oneself. Individuals often upload photos or content featuring these symbols to show who they are and what they believe in. In virtual communities, these symbols help build social networks among individuals with similar religious backgrounds. This creates a space for discussion and support among community members.

Thus, the use of religious symbols on social media reflects the complexity of interactions between personal beliefs and broader social-political and business dynamics. These symbols serve as important tools in shaping individual and collective identities in the digital age.

However, despite its "reductive" aspect, Instagram simultaneously serves as a powerful platform for freedom of expression. Users utilize the Instagram platform to: 1) affirm religious affiliation. For many people, displaying a veil on Instagram is a sincere act to affirm their religious beliefs and show their affiliation within a virtual community. This allows individuals to openly express their faith and connect with others who share similar views, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity. 2) building social networks. By sharing visual representations of their faith through the hijab, individuals can build and strengthen social networks with like-minded people. This creates a digital space for discussion, mutual support, and the reinforcement of shared religious values. 3) Sharing personal experiences. Captions accompanying hijab posts often include personal stories, motivations, and affirmations. This allows users to share their individual journeys with the hijab, emphasizing it as a positive expression of self-identity and a means of self-preservation, rather than a symbol of radicalism. This challenges negative stereotypes and promotes a more nuanced understanding of its use.

Thus, while Instagram's visual and interactive nature may simplify or shift the traditional meanings of the hijab by transforming it into a tool for engagement, commerce, or self-presentation, it also provides an unprecedented platform for individuals to express, affirm, and reconstruct its meanings in diverse and personal ways within the digital landscape. This dynamic interaction between traditional significance and digital reinterpretation makes the hijab phenomenon on Instagram a rich area for symbolic analysis.

Symbolic Ambiguity: The Digital Community's Response

Digital communities are active and responsible in choosing media to meet their needs. This includes interactivity, democratization, and asymmetry in communication, which allows users to interact directly between religious figures, influencers, and followers through Instagram (Al-Hakim, 2021). The comment section feature on social media platforms is often used as a public interaction medium to discuss and respond to posts or other comments.

According to Norman Fairclough, this can be seen as a representation of digital society on social media (Mawardi et al., 2022; Norman, 2010).

The content of the comment section in posts with the hashtag #cadar mostly consists of praise from fellow hijab users as a form of motivation and encouragement for other women connected within the virtual community of hijab users. However, in public spaces, which are free for anyone and everyone, some comments also include posts from men praising the beauty or attractiveness of the account owner or user. This ambiguity in the use of the hijab arises because it can attract comments that respond to the beauty exposed on Instagram. In fact, the beauty of women who wear the hijab is not meant to be displayed, but rather covered and restricted to those who are halal and permitted to see it.

Table 1
Comments on Posts with the #cadar Hashtag on Instagram

Account	Comments	Post Date
@zulli9986	Sis, just letting you know that a hijab isn't a toy for followers. If you're not serious about wearing a hijab, it's better not to.	May 18, 2025
@shilsya_2	Wearing a hijab to attract followers, right?	June 6, 2025
@andrianiindraanna	May I ask, my husband insists that I remove my hijab, claiming there's something to hide. But I don't want to, I've been wearing it for nearly four years, and Alhamdulillah, I feel comfortable with my current situation. What should I do? Please advise.	May 5, 2025
@santi_sar_a	Is it permissible for a hijab-wearing woman to share photos in public spaces?	May 11, 2025
@he.riyanto1855	Assalamualaikum, Ustadz	August 2, 2025
@hakimalzakim	May you remain steadfast, sister	June 23, 2025
@fikiapsion	Subhanallah, may Allah bless you. You're so beautiful, servant of Allah.	July 4, 2025

The comment table shows ambivalence and diversity in the digital community's response to the phenomenon of the hijab on Instagram. These comments reflect how the hijab is understood not only as a religious symbol but also as part of social interaction and the contestation of meaning in the digital space.

Comments from the accounts @zulli9986 and @shilsya_2 explicitly criticize the use of the hijab as a tool to gain popularity or followers. The comments "Sis, I'm just saying that the hijab isn't a toy for followers" and "Wearing a hijab to attract followers, huh?" reveal an ideal norm among some members of the digital community about how the hijab should be used, namely as an expression of pure piety, not for pragmatic or personal branding purposes. This criticism reflects the tension between the traditional meaning of the hijab (privacy and piety) and the demands of social media (visibility and popularity).

Comments from the account @andrianiindraanna show that Instagram also functions as a safe space to seek support and validation. These comments are not merely responses, but an outpouring of feelings and a request for advice about personal conflicts related to the use of the veil. This shows that the veil is not only a public symbol, but also part of an individual's spiritual and emotional journey. Through hijab-related posts, Instagram has become a platform for users to share experiences, seek solutions, and connect with communities that may have similar experiences.

A comment from the account *@santi_sar_a*, "Is it permissible for a female religious teacher wearing a hijab to share photos like this in the public domain?" indicates uncertainty and confusion among digital citizens regarding the ethics of using religious symbols in digital public spaces. This question reflects that norms regarding modesty and privacy that apply in the real world have not yet been fully established in the virtual world. Users are seeking guidance from authoritative figures (religious scholars) about appropriate boundaries, indicating that they are actively trying to define new social norms in the digital age.

Comments from the accounts *@heriyanto1855* and *@hakimalzakim* social and moral support to remain *istiqomah* in wearing the veil. "*Istiqomah*" is a reflect positive responses in the form of support and motivation. These comments serve to strengthen a sense of community among hijab users, validate their choices, and create a supportive environment. This shows that Instagram also serves as a platform for the hijab community to support one another. However, comments from the account *@fikiapsion* "you're so beautiful" reveal ambiguity. While the praise for beauty may be sincere, it could also inadvertently undermine the primary purpose of the hijab, which is to cover beauty from public view. This response reinforces that on Instagram, the hijab is often viewed through an aesthetic lens rather than solely as a religious symbol.

Thus, the comment section on Instagram is not merely a passive space for responses but an active arena where the meaning of the hijab is discussed, contested, and negotiated, making it a symbol with dual meanings that continues to evolve in line with the dynamics of social media.

Reconstructing the Meaning of the Hijab

The symbolic meaning of the hijab on Instagram is constructed based on diverse foundations and purposes. Therefore, negative perceptions and interpretations of the hijab as a symbol of extreme Islam must be dismantled. As Geertz argues, symbols are shaped by their functions and the cultural constructions that influence them, and one such influence is the prioritization of religious symbols as symbols of religion. Thus, religious symbols originate from local culture and are then linked to religious beliefs as symbols of a particular religion. Therefore, there is a need to reconstruct the meaning of the veil on Instagram to raise awareness that the veil is not evil but depends on who wears it. Because symbols are merely products of human culture.

A campaign explaining the meaning and purpose of wearing the veil in a broader cultural and religious context is needed. This can be done through infographics, videos, or articles discussing the history and philosophy behind the veil. This also serves as a counter-narrative to radical content on Instagram. The comment section, as a representation of society, can also be used to encourage open dialogue on Instagram about various views on the veil, involving religious leaders, academics, and the general public to provide diverse perspectives.

Hashtags can also be utilized, such as those emphasizing positive values like *#CadarBersahabat*, *#CadarKreatif*, or *#CadarUntukKebaikan* to shift focus away from negative stereotypes. Sharing content showcasing women wearing the hijab in various positive roles, such as professionals, artists, or social activists, to highlight the diversity of their identities. Some accounts in posts with *#cadar* also share positive narratives in the form of stories, motivations, and acknowledgments that the veil is a form of expression that is in line with their beliefs to protect women, and not a symbol of radical Islam.

This study found that religious symbols on social media not only function as expressions of religious beliefs but also play an important role in shaping digital identity, ideological contestation, and the self-image of individuals and communities. In the context of Giddens' structuration theory, the use of religious symbols on social media can be seen as a form of action that is continuously reproduced by users through digital interactions. Social media users actively monitor and manage their use of religious symbols to adapt to social expectations, virtual community norms, and emerging

trends in the virtual world. This shows that religious symbols are part of a social structure that simultaneously limits and enables the expression of identity on social media.

Like the hijab-wearing users in the educational setting mentioned by Sartika and Yusuf, agents on social media also deliberately create meaning through the use of religious symbols as tools for self-presentation and identity politics (Sartika & Yusuf, 2020). Religious symbols on social media serve as a means to display a certain identity, highlight beliefs, or even attract ideological sympathy from the audience. In the digital space, users have greater control over how they present religious symbols, and the social structure of social media provides resources such as audience control and the ability to interact in a global space that is not limited by physical location. This process allows religious symbols to be interpreted and modified according to the interests and goals of users, giving rise to a unique and flexible digital identity dynamic.

Furthermore, this study also found that religious symbols on social media are often part of identity politics involving ideological contestation. As Huda and Permadi found that the meaning of the veil on campus is influenced by diverse social perceptions, users of religious symbols on social media also experience similar dynamics where interpretations of symbols can clash with the views of other groups (Huda & Permadi, 2019). This contestation shows how religious symbols can be politicized and influenced by social stigma, whether in the context of radicalism, extremism, or other negative labels. This adds complexity to the meaning of religious symbols on social media, which serves as a public arena for various ideologies to meet, clash, and influence one another.

Additionally, this study found that religious symbols on social media are often adopted as part of a lifestyle or trend, such as the hijrah phenomenon, which involves changes in clothing, cosmetic choices, business, and even cuisine. This phenomenon indicates that religious symbols have merged into a lifestyle that adapts to digital trends, rather than merely being a manifestation of religious doctrine. In this case, social media users do not only act as agents who reproduce the religious meaning of symbols, but also as agents who adapt religious symbols into a lifestyle that is relevant to digital norms and trends. This shows how religious symbols on social media have become elements of popular culture that transcend religious identity boundaries, forming a new culture that combines aspects of religion and modern lifestyle.

Finally, this study reveals that the structure of social media itself not only facilitates the expression of religious symbols but also regulates user interactions through features such as "like," "share," and "comment," which allow users to participate in interactive discussions about religious symbols. Thus, social media is not merely a platform for expressing religious symbols, but also a space where new norms about religion are developed, disseminated, and accepted by a wider community. This is in line with Giddens' view that social structures can both constrain and empower actions, where social media users gain the power to uphold or even challenge existing religious norms.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the veil on Instagram functions not only as an expression of religious belief but also as a symbol of self-identity and identity politics, where users display their religious affiliations and build social networks in virtual communities. The digital community's response to this symbol varies, ranging from support to aesthetic comments that sometimes create ambiguity about the purpose of the veil. Additionally, the meaning of the hijab continues to undergo reconstruction on social media; positive campaigns through hashtags and constructive narratives contribute to changing public perceptions, presenting the hijab as a symbol of identity diversity that encompasses inclusive personal and cultural values. This study found that the hijab on Instagram functions as a symbol of self-identity and

identity politics that reinforces users' religious affiliations within virtual communities. The use of popular hashtags such as #cadar and #fyp shows that the veil is not only interpreted as a religious symbol but also as a means to attract interaction, increase engagement, and promote sharia-compliant fashion products. The digital community's response to this symbol is diverse, ranging from support and motivation to aesthetic comments that sometimes create ambiguity in the purpose of using the veil as a cover for the aurat. The hijab on Instagram has undergone a reconstruction of meaning from a mere religious symbol to a part of the dynamic diversity of women's identities, where positive narrative campaigns through hashtags for help change public perception. Thus, social media plays an important role in shaping a more positive and inclusive view of the hijab, making it an expression of identity that is relevant to today's digital culture.

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