

Digital Beauty Standards and The Negotiation of Religious Identity: A Study of Hijab Practices Among Generation Z

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of digital beauty standards in shaping the negotiation of religious identity in the hijab practices of Generation Z. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this research was conducted on 10 female students of the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training at UIN Palangkaraya selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using interactive techniques with triangulation to ensure validity. The findings reveal that digital beauty standards circulating on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram significantly influence how Generation Z perceives and practices the hijab. Exposure to homogeneous beauty ideals triggers feelings of insecurity and encourages adjustments in appearance to meet perceived standards. Furthermore, hijab practices are not solely driven by religious motivations but are also shaped by aesthetic considerations, fashion trends, and self-representation in digital spaces. The study also identifies a process of religious identity negotiation, where individuals attempt to balance Islamic values with digital aesthetic demands through selective trend adaptation and mindful self-presentation. In conclusion, the hijab practices of Generation Z reflect a dynamic interplay between religiosity, modernity, and digital beauty standards, demonstrating that religious identity is continuously constructed and negotiated within contemporary digital contexts.

Keywords: Digital beauty standards, Religious identity negotiation, Hijab practices, Generation Z

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received

March 25, 2026

Revised

April 15, 2026

Accepted

April 17, 2026

Published by

Website

ISSN

Copyright



STAI Masjid Syuhada Yogyakarta

<https://journal.stainsy.ac.id/index.php/almanar/index>

2615-8879

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has transformed the patterns of social interaction among young people in Indonesia, particularly Generation Z, who have grown up within an interactive and algorithm-driven social media ecosystem. Social media has revolutionized the way Generation Z interacts, expresses themselves, and understands socio-religious issues. According to Basir et al., in this digital era, social media plays a significant role, particularly in shaping women's perspectives when determining beauty standards. Women are often influenced by the opinions or comments of others, which can lead to a decline in self-confidence regarding their appearance. Beauty standards refer to benchmarks used to define physical attractiveness. Although beauty standards may vary among individuals, in today's digital age, social media exerts a strong influence in shaping

these standards. Social media users are frequently affected by others' perceptions of beauty, resulting in a homogenization of beauty standards, even though ideally each individual should have their own unique standard (Basir et al., 2022).

Through platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, Generation Z acts not only as consumers of information but also as producers of social meaning through posts, comments, and discursive participation. Digital spaces serve as arenas where this generation expresses opinions, negotiates identity, and constructs beauty standards shaped by algorithms and visual trends. In this context, the negotiation of religious identity can be understood as the process by which individuals reconcile religious values with the social and aesthetic demands emerging in digital spaces. The practice of wearing the hijab is therefore not only perceived as a religious obligation but also as a form of self-representation influenced by digital beauty standards. Consequently, religion and modernity are no longer positioned as oppositional, but rather are integrated into a lifestyle that reflects an identity that is both "Islamic and modern". Conceptually, even when adopting a modern lifestyle, individuals are expected to remain aligned with Islamic values. However, although the hijab has a strong theological foundation in Islamic teachings, its practice in society is not always consistent with religious guidelines. According to Iqbal, the hijab can be simply defined as clothing that covers the entire body from head to toe, although it is often equated with a headscarf that only covers the head (Iqbal, 2021).

Among Generation Z, the phenomenon of wearing the hijab has evolved beyond a mere religious obligation. Growing up in an era of digitalization and globalization, this generation is exposed to various external influences that shape their understanding of the hijab. This includes the integration of hijab practices with evolving fashion trends, transforming it into a medium of personal identity expression and lifestyle (Aslama et al., 2025). For many young women in Generation Z, the hijab is now also perceived as a fashion symbol, with styles and models continuously changing in line with current trends. In this context, the hijab has become part of a dynamic fashion industry, offering diverse designs to accommodate individual preferences and social needs. However, this shift has also raised concerns among more conservative groups regarding the potential neglect of the hijab's essence as an act of worship and religious obedience (Aziz & Rahman, 2021).

Research conducted by Sartika and Astuti (2020) reveals that the meaning of the hijab has undergone a significant shift. It is no longer viewed solely as a religious obligation, but has also become an important element in fashion and a symbol of modern identity for Muslim women. One of the main factors driving this shift is the role of social media, particularly Instagram, which enables hijabers to present themselves, follow fashion trends, and build connections with a wider community. In this context, the hijab is not only a symbol of religious obedience but also an expression of personality, modern lifestyle, and a fashionable life choice.

Previous studies have highlighted the significant role of social media in shaping the religious identity of Generation Z and influencing hijab practices. Research by Izza and Mansyur (2026) shows that social media functions as an important space for shaping religious expression, both strengthening religiosity and triggering polarization and changes in religious practices (Izza & Mansyur, 2026). Amalia (2025) found that hijab use among Generation Z is influenced not only by religious values but also by digital trends and social interactions (Amalia, 2025). Fitri et al. (2024) demonstrated that the hijab serves not only as a religious symbol but also as part of a modern lifestyle and commodification within the digital fashion industry (Fitri et al., 2024). Margareta and Khadavi (2025) found that hijab use is associated with levels of religiosity and religious practice, as well as social interaction and digital media (Margareta & Khadavi, 2025). Similarly, Muliana and Dewi (2024) revealed that hijab practices are influenced by fashion trends, social media, and the social environment, with environmental factors being the most dominant (Muliana & Dewi, 2024).

These studies indicate that research on hijab practices among Generation Z generally focuses on the influence of social media, fashion trends, and social environments, as well as their relationship with religiosity and identity. However, these studies have not specifically examined how digital beauty standards shape the process of negotiating religious identity in the practice of wearing the hijab. Therefore, this study aims to analyze and understand the role of digital beauty standards in the process of negotiating religious identity in the practice of wearing the hijab among Generation Z. This research seeks to explore the dynamics of self-representation, motivations for wearing the hijab, and the reconstruction of religious meaning within digital spaces.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design aimed at understanding human experiences from the participants' perspectives. The phenomenological approach seeks to explore individuals' lived experiences, thoughts, and meanings as they are consciously perceived, providing insights into ontological aspects of social reality (Nasir et al., 2023). This study specifically aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and meanings of hijab practices among Generation Z, particularly in relation to how digital beauty standards influence the negotiation of religious identity.

This research is a field-based empirical study conducted at the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, UIN Palangkaraya. The research subjects consist of female students from Generation Z selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria, namely active social media users who wear the hijab. A total of 10 informants from different academic levels were involved to obtain diverse perspectives. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The phenomenological process involved stages of intuiting, analyzing, and describing the data to capture the essence of participants' experiences. The analysis focused on key aspects such as self-concept, motivation, and mindset related to hijab practices.

In scientific research, data refer to information or materials collected to answer research questions, validate hypotheses, or achieve specific objectives. Data sources refer to the subjects or entities from which the data are obtained. In this study, the data sources are divided into two types, namely primary data and secondary data, each of which has different characteristics and functions.

Primary data in this study were obtained from female students of the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training at UIN Palangkaraya. A total of 10 informants were involved, representing students from different academic levels, including three students from the fourth semester and four students from the sixth semester. The selection of these participants aimed to obtain diverse perspectives from different academic levels related to the research topic.

Secondary data refer to data obtained indirectly to support the primary data, such as books, academic journals, undergraduate theses, dissertations, internet sources, and other materials relevant to the focus of the study.

The research procedure was carried out through several stages, including data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data analysis employed an interactive analysis technique involving continuous processes of data reduction, data presentation, and verification or conclusion drawing throughout the research process. This approach enables the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study.

To ensure data validity, this study applied triangulation techniques, including source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Triangulation was conducted by

comparing data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure the consistency and validity of the findings.

This study has limitations, particularly in the relatively small number of informants and the limited research setting, which focuses only on a single institution. Therefore, the findings cannot be broadly generalized; however, they provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Digital Beauty Standards

Based on observations and field data, this study involved 11 Generation Z respondents who actively use social media. Data were collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire to examine how digital beauty standards influence hijab practices and how Generation Z negotiates their religious identity within the context of digital trends.

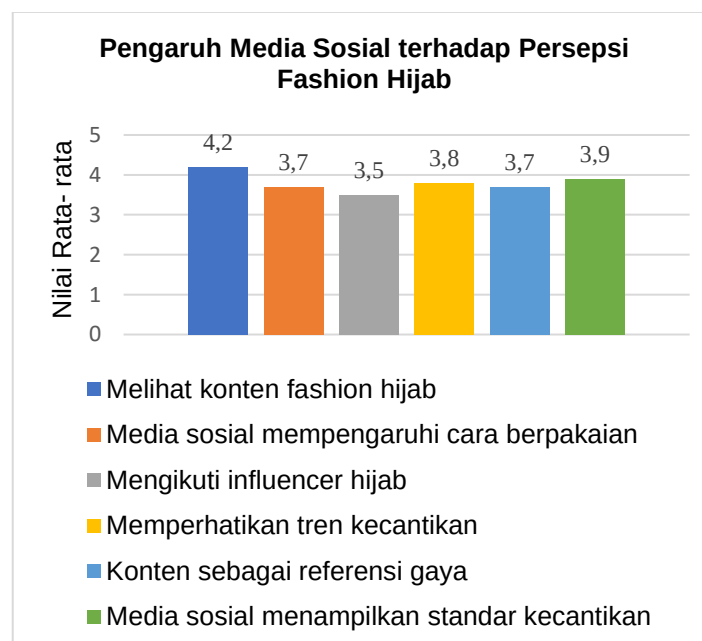


Figure 1. The Influence of Social Media on Generation Z Hijab Fashion References

The descriptive analysis shows that respondents generally agree that social media plays a significant role in shaping hijab fashion references. The statement regarding exposure to hijab fashion content obtained the highest mean score (4.2), indicating frequent engagement with such content. Additionally, a relatively high mean score (3.9) for the statement that social media presents beauty standards suggests that respondents are aware of its influence in shaping perceptions of appearance.

These findings are related to the concept of digital beauty standards, which refers to representations of “beauty” criteria widely displayed and popularized through social media such as Instagram and TikTok. Unlike beauty standards in the past, which were largely influenced by television or magazines, digital beauty standards develop rapidly due to technology, algorithms, and instant content-sharing culture.

In the digital era, beauty is often portrayed through certain characteristics such as fair skin, flawless facial appearance, proportional body shape, and trendy fashion styles. The presence of filters, photo editing features, and good lighting makes visual appearances seem more perfect than reality (Pohan, 2024). This indirectly shapes the perception that beauty must appear “perfect” on screen. The first generation significantly affected by these beauty standards is Generation Z, especially young women. They tend to believe that the more they

meet socially constructed beauty standards, the more “perfect” they become. This proves that beauty is not only about physical appearance but also a concept constructed by society (Norhidayah et al., 2025).

The “glow up” phenomenon and the social construction of beauty standards on TikTok have become crucial issues in the digital era, especially for Generation Z. TikTok, as a dominant social media platform, plays a central role in shaping and reproducing these standards. Its algorithm, which prioritizes visual appeal and content popularity, tends to promote homogeneous beauty representations such as fair skin, slim bodies, and symmetrical faces. This accelerates the development of uniform beauty standards, which ultimately affect self-image and confidence among young users. This study finds that exposure to such homogeneous content triggers insecurity among Generation Z, leading to pressure to change their appearance to match perceived ideals, even to the extent of altering nose shape, skin color, or undergoing cosmetic procedures (Mahanani et al., 2021).

Variations in hijab size among students also indicate differences in meaning and motivation in dressing. Smaller hijabs that only cover the head are often interpreted as symbolic fulfillment of the obligation to wear the hijab, such as sport hijabs or pashmina styles, which in current trends often only cover the hair without covering the chest (Ramadhan et al., 2025). At the same time, they represent an effort to adapt to popular fashion trends among youth. In contrast, larger hijabs that extend to cover most of the body can be viewed as an expression of stronger religious commitment. However, both forms are not entirely detached from popular culture, as even longer hijab styles are now presented in modern designs that align with contemporary aesthetic preferences. Thus, the form and size of the hijab represent a negotiation between Islamic values, aesthetics, and social demands in modern Muslim fashion (Masrur et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, Saviola (2024) emphasizes that the formation of adolescents’ digital identity is strongly influenced by communities or content creators that emerge organically on social media. In addition, influencers and content creators play a significant role in shaping these standards. Many social media users take public figures as references in dressing, makeup, and lifestyle. Digital beauty standards, therefore, are not only related to physical appearance but also to self-image and personal branding displayed in the digital public sphere (Ramadhanti et al., 2025).

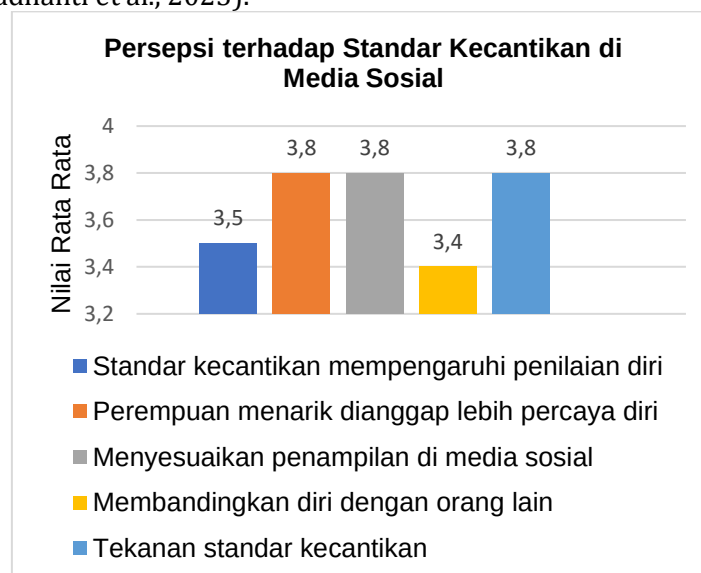


Figure 2. Generation Z Perceptions of Beauty Standards on Social Media

The results show that respondents are quite aware of the existence of beauty standards on social media. The mean scores for statements such as attractive women being considered more confident, adjusting appearance on social media, and pressure from

beauty standards are around 3.8, indicating agreement. This suggests that digital beauty standards influence how respondents perceive their appearance in social media spaces.

Digital beauty standards are also dynamic and follow trends. What is considered attractive today can change quickly. This condition makes some individuals, especially Generation Z, feel the need to continuously adapt to remain relevant and socially accepted. The pressure to gain validation through likes, comments, and followers further reinforces these standards (Sanjaya et al., 2025)

Thus, digital beauty standards are not merely about physical appearance but are socially constructed through technology, popular culture, and social media interactions. Understanding this concept is important to examine how women, including those who wear the hijab, negotiate their religious identity amid digital aesthetic demands. Beauty standards are not fixed or universal but are socio-cultural constructs shaped by media, popular culture, and social interaction (Maulina et al., 2023).

Forms of Religious Identity Negotiation

In the context of Generation Z who are active on social media such as Instagram and TikTok, this negotiation often occurs in clothing practices, particularly in wearing the hijab.

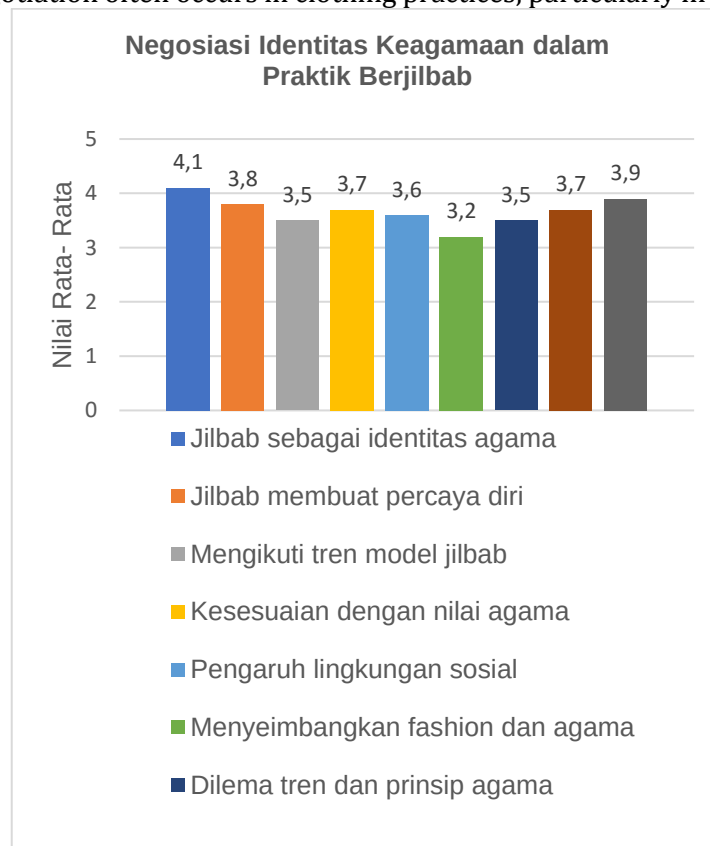


Figure 3. Religious Identity Negotiation in the Hijab Practices of Generation Z

In terms of religious identity, respondents show a relatively high level of agreement with the statement that the hijab represents religious identity, with a mean score of 4.1. This indicates that the hijab is viewed as an important part of religious identity. However, the lower mean score for balancing fashion and religious values (3.2) suggests that some respondents still face challenges in aligning fashion trends with religious principles.

In general, the identification process is an effort to align one's characteristics with others or groups based on solidarity and existence. Religious identity negotiation is the process by which individuals adjust how they present themselves without abandoning their religious values. Generation Z is the generation most actively using social media, especially

TikTok, which indirectly accelerates the development of beauty standards. This condition impacts women's self-confidence, as differences in beauty standards create pressure. Although beauty is often said to be relative, many people still believe in socially constructed beauty standards, leading to the homogenization of beauty ideals, even though beauty should inherently belong to each individual (Sagaragara & Tobing, 2025).

In the context of Generation Z who are active on social media such as Instagram and TikTok, the process of religious identity negotiation can be understood through Social Identity Theory, which explains that individuals construct and express their identity through interaction with social groups and social environments (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For Muslim women from Generation Z, social media becomes an important space where religious identity and personal appearance are continuously negotiated. The results of this study show that respondents are aware of digital beauty standards while still recognizing the hijab as an important symbol of religious identity. This finding indicates that social media functions not only as a platform for self-expression but also as a space where identity is shaped through interaction with digital culture. Furthermore, the findings can also be explained using Identity Negotiation Theory, which suggests that individuals continuously adjust their self-presentation in response to social expectations and cultural values (Ting-Toomey, 2005). In this study, respondents demonstrate this negotiation through their choices of hijab style, fashion preferences, and online self-presentation. Although they are exposed to digital beauty standards, they still attempt to maintain religious values by selecting trends that remain compatible with Islamic principles.

One form of negotiation appears in clothing practices, particularly in wearing the hijab. Respondents tend to follow certain fashion trends such as modern hijab styles, fashionable colors, or contemporary outfits while still ensuring that their clothing is considered modest according to religious teachings. This finding supports the idea that identity negotiation allows individuals to balance multiple identities simultaneously, including religious identity and social identity within digital culture. Another form of negotiation is seen in self-presentation on social media. Some respondents remain active in creating content but try to maintain boundaries in poses, expressions, and clothing. They realize that social media is a public space and therefore consider religious values in every post. In addition, negotiation also occurs through selective engagement with digital trends. Respondents do not follow every trend that appears on social media. Instead, they evaluate whether a trend aligns with their personal beliefs and religious values. If a trend is considered inappropriate or excessive, it is avoided. This finding strengthens the argument that identity negotiation involves reflection and adaptation rather than passive acceptance of social influence.

However, identity negotiation is not always easy. Some respondents experience dilemmas between the desire for social acceptance and the need to remain consistent with religious values. This condition shows that religious identity is dynamic and continuously shaped by social interaction, cultural expectations, and technological developments. Therefore, the findings of this study support existing theoretical perspectives which suggest that individuals actively negotiate their identity in social contexts. Generation Z Muslim women reinterpret and express their religious identity within the digital environment while still maintaining their spiritual values.

CONCLUSION

Based on field research conducted with 10 female students from the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training at UIN Palangkaraya, it was found that digital beauty standards circulating on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram influence how Generation Z interprets and presents hijab practices. Exposure to visual content that

emphasizes homogeneous beauty ideals such as fair skin, slim body shape, and fashionable appearance triggers feelings of insecurity and encourages individuals to adjust their appearance to align with perceived ideal standards.

The findings also show that hijab practices among participants are not solely based on religious motivation but are also influenced by aesthetic factors, fashion trends, and the need for self-representation in digital spaces. Variations in the size and style of the hijab reflect differences in meaning, ranging from symbolic compliance with religious obligations to expressions of stronger religious commitment. In addition, the study reveals a process of religious identity negotiation, in which participants attempt to balance Islamic values with digital aesthetic demands. This negotiation is manifested through selective engagement with trends, adjustments in clothing style to maintain modesty, and careful consideration in self-presentation on social media. Thus, hijab practices among Generation Z in this study demonstrate a dynamic interplay between religiosity, modernity, and the influence of digital beauty standards.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, UIN Palangkaraya, for providing support and facilities during this research. The authors also thank all participants who were willing to share their time and experiences, as well as colleagues who contributed valuable input to the completion of this study.

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