

When Ritual Becomes Content: Platform Culture and the Algorithmic Reformatting of Islamic Practice

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ABSTRACT

Existing studies explained digital religion through changes in communication, authority, identity, and community, but did not sufficiently clarify how Islamic ritual was reorganised when religious practice became platform content. This study examined how platform culture reformatted the temporal, embodied, authoritative, and participatory dimensions of Islamic practice. It used a qualitative literature review with conceptual and thematic analysis of English, Indonesian, and Malay publications issued between 2020 and 2026. The findings showed that ritual became platform legible through temporal compression, the separation of devotional fragments from their initial settings, and the selective presentation of bodies, voices, and sacred spaces. Platform visibility changed how religious guidance was encountered by making some figures and interpretations easier to find, although repeated exposure and visible metrics did not automatically create religious authority. Authority remained dependent on recognised learning, institutional ties, prior trust, and the judgments of Muslim publics. User participation extended ritual through sharing, reuse, discussion, and digital coordination, but these forms differed in depth and could not all be treated as complete ritual participation. The study proposed platformed ritual reformatting as a recursive process through which Islamic practice was reshaped during content production, visibility, and later reuse without being fully determined by platform technology.



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INTRODUCTION

Islamic ritual now appears in forms that were not designed by mosques, study circles, households, or pilgrimage routes alone. A prayer movement can be isolated as a tutorial, a Qur'anic recitation can circulate without the gathering in which it was first heard, and a pilgrimage image can remain active long after the body has left the sacred site. Muslim creators on TikTok likewise negotiate religious identity through bodily, discursive, and performative choices shaped by the platform's technical possibilities (Hotait & El Sayed, 2025). The issue is not simply that religion has entered digital media. Once ritual becomes content, its duration, *framing*, visibility, and possible audience begin to change.

Mediation explains how religion travels through media, but it does not fully explain what happens to the practice itself. Islamic ritual is shaped by sequence, repetition, bodily discipline, timing, and relations of instruction. Platform content is shaped by other pressures. It needs to be seen, found, watched, and circulated. These pressures do not operate in the same way on every platform, nor do they erase the prior form of the ritual. They do, however, make some parts easier to display than others. A long devotional act may be reduced to one recognisable moment, while a gesture, voice, or phrase

acquires a separate life through replay and reuse. This relation between media, the senses, and religious experience is constitutive rather than merely decorative (Evolvi, 2022).

This change belongs within the anthropology of Islam because ritual is never only a symbolic message (Kadir, 2025). It is learned through bodies, corrected through social relations, and sustained through repetition. Its meaning also depends on material settings, sensory experience, and the authority of those who teach or witness it. Work on lived religion has already shown that religious life takes shape in ordinary practice rather than doctrine alone (Knibbe & Kupari, 2020). Digital platforms extend this problem. The screen does not simply record what has happened elsewhere. It can enter the practice before publication, when a reciter chooses a passage, when a pilgrim anticipates the photograph, or when a preacher shortens an explanation because viewers may not stay. These choices do not prove that algorithms determine religious life. They show that ritual increasingly develops within an environment where religious intention, practical knowledge, audience expectation, and technical design meet. What changes, therefore, is not only the public image of devotion but also some of the practical decisions through which devotion is made present.

The distinction between online and offline religion is therefore no longer sufficient. Recent work on Indonesian digital religion describes social media as a hybrid environment in which religious practice, mediation, and everyday participation cross online and offline settings (Rohmawati et al., 2025). Platformed environments also organise visibility through formats, circulation patterns, and user interaction. Even so, these arrangements do not explain by themselves what changes inside a ritual when it is prepared for recommendation, repetition, or short-form circulation. The difficulty is sharper in Islamic practice because religious acts may carry rules of sequence, intention, and bodily correctness that cannot be reduced to communication alone.

Empirical work on digital Islam already reveals this tension, although the findings remain scattered. Studies of Muslim influencers in the Gulf show that lay actors combine everyday experience, lifestyle narration, and religious guidance in ways that rework both authority and Islamic practice (Zaid et al., 2022). Research across several religious traditions similarly finds that social media users negotiate authenticity, inequality, and pious self-fashioning rather than simply reproducing established religious roles (Marei, 2024). These findings do not support a simple story of religious decline. Platform use can widen access and sustain devotion, but it may also reduce the pauses, corrections, and social relations through which ritual is ordinarily learned. Most studies remain tied to one practice, one platform, or one public. As a result, the internal reorganisation of ritual remains underdeveloped as a comparative problem, especially where duration, bodily display, authority, and audience response are shaped before and after publication.

This article *examines* how Islamic practices are reformatted when they become platform content. It asks which parts of ritual are amplified, shortened, detached, or made newly visible, and how creators and audiences negotiate those changes. The study uses a qualitative literature review and conceptual analysis of accessible scholarship published between 2020 and July 2026. Formal rituals are compared with broader devotional practices, although their different normative weight is kept in view. The aim is not to decide whether a digital practice is valid in theological terms. It is to explain how ritual form is altered, extended, or contested within platform environments and why similar technical conditions do not always produce the same religious outcome.

The article develops the concept of platformed ritual reformatting to describe this process. The term refers to adjustments that make a religious practice easier to display, circulate, recommend, and reuse without assuming that its earlier form disappears. Reformatting may compress time, isolate a bodily sign, separate sacred speech from its first setting, or draw audiences into later acts of comment and imitation. It can also affect who becomes visible as a religious guide. This emphasis follows a constructivist view of mediatization in which media become entangled with the practical organisation of social and cultural life (Effendi et al., 2026). By locating these changes within lived Islam, the article connects anthropology, digital religion, and platform studies without treating technology as an independent force. Ritual does not merely enter a platform. Some of its practical conditions are reorganised through the very arrangements that allow it to appear there.

The urgency of this study arises from the growing role of platform design in shaping how Muslims encounter, learn, and assess ritual practice. Research on digital Islam may overlook important changes when online ritual is treated only as a form of religious communication. Sequence, bodily

display, authority, and participation can already be altered before content reaches an audience and may change again after circulation. Accordingly, this study aims to explain how platform culture reformats Islamic practice and how these changes affect the recognition of religious guidance and the later use of ritual content. It also develops *platformed ritual reformatting* as a comparative concept for reading different practices and platforms without assuming that the same technical conditions always produce the same religious outcome.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative literature review. Conceptual analysis guided the interpretation of how ritual practice, platform culture, religious authority, and audience participation were understood across the selected publications. Literature reviews can function as research designs when their questions, selection logic, and analytical procedures are made explicit, while conceptual articles require a clear account of how theories are combined and used (Paul & Criado, 2020; Jaakkola, 2020). The unit of analysis was not the article as a whole, but the empirical findings and conceptual arguments that described changes in Islamic practice within digital platforms. This design was appropriate because the study aimed to explain recurring patterns and conceptual relationships within contemporary Muslim religious life rather than measure statistical effects.

Relevant publications were identified through purposive searches in Google Scholar, DOAJ, Garuda, and university repositories. The review covered studies published from 2020 to 2026. Sources in English, Indonesian, and Malay were included when they *examined* an Islamic ritual or devotional practice and treated a digital platform as an important part of the analysis. Studies dealing only with general Islamic communication were excluded when they did not explain changes in ritual form, learning, visibility, authority, or participation. Search terms combined Islam, ritual, digital piety, social media, platform, algorithm, authority, and participation. Each source was recorded in a matrix containing its context, object of study, platform, method, and main findings.

The selected material was analysed thematically. Relevant passages were read closely, coded, and grouped into broader themes that answered the research questions. Thematic analysis provides a flexible procedure for identifying patterned meaning across qualitative material and for comparing recurring or contrasting patterns in the selected publications (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Initial attention was given to changes in ritual form, religious authority, and audience participation, although new themes were retained when they emerged from the literature. Patterns were compared across practices and platforms, while contradictory findings were preserved to show the limits of general claims. A finding was described as recurring only when it appeared in more than one study or context. Evidence reported by a single source was treated as context-specific. This procedure allowed the study to develop the concept of platformed ritual reformatting without assuming that all Islamic practices or platform environments produced the same outcome.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Making Ritual Platform Legible

Before a ritual is recorded, it already has an order that matters. Qur'anic recitation is learned through pronunciation and correction, while *dhikr* depends on repetition that is not easily reduced to a single moment. Pilgrimage also joins prescribed acts to bodily movement in a particular place. These elements are not decorative. They shape whether a practice is understood as proper. A platform cannot carry all of this at once. What appears on screen is usually a selected part of the practice, and that selection becomes the point from which viewers recognise it.

Digital preaching makes this selection visible. Weng (2024) shows that popular preaching in Indonesia packages religious messages through familiar cultural styles and persuasive cues rather than transmitting them in an untouched form. Within platform environments, similar pressures can encourage creators to foreground a recognisable passage while leaving preparatory explanation or slower repetition outside the frame. The result is not simply a shorter version of an unchanged practice. Temporal compression matters because a brief clip may help someone recall a prayer or revisit a difficult passage, yet it may also be mistaken for sufficient knowledge of a practice whose meaning depends on sequence. Longer formats, including livestreams or linked series, can restore some context. Compression therefore reflects choices made within a platform rather than an unavoidable technical effect, and those choices can alter how competence is judged. This tension is also visible in TikTok-

based Islamic learning, where short videos can widen access to ritual instruction while leaving guided correction and sustained repetition outside the screen (Abdusshomad, 2024).

A recognisable religious practice can also acquire new meanings when it is presented through formats familiar to younger audiences. Jannah (2022) shows how Qur'anic recitation by The Bros Team moves through YouTube and Instagram alongside elements of popular culture that make pious performance recognisable to contemporary Muslim youth. The movement from recitation to shareable content does not necessarily dissolve religious meaning, but it changes how that meaning is encountered. A recitation can be replayed, detached from its first gathering, or used as part of another devotional routine. This portability is better understood as devotional modularity than as simple loss of context. What remains stable is not the original event, but the capacity of a religious fragment to be recognised and reused within another setting.

A pilgrim's body enters the frame through a different selection. Fauzia and Mojopahit (2023) show how Indonesian celebgrams turn pilgrimage posts into forms of spiritual testimony, self-representation, and commodified religious visibility. The photograph does not turn pilgrimage itself into a complete visual object. It frames one bodily relation to a sacred site, while clothing, pose, background, and caption help viewers recognise the religious event. The body has not become less important. It has become selective. Waiting, physical strain, hesitation, and the ordinary interruptions of pilgrimage are easier to leave outside the frame, whereas composed gestures and sacred landmarks remain visible. Selective embodiment is therefore not necessarily deception. The problem lies in the distance that can emerge between a polished sign of devotion and the uneven bodily process through which religious experience is actually formed. Research on virtual Hajj further distinguishes mediated access from physical pilgrimage, especially where demographic and geopolitical constraints shape participation (Niu, 2023). Instagram studies of Hajj and Umrah likewise connect platform circulation with self-representation and commercialization (Mawardi et al., 2024).

Visual legibility can also be cultivated through design rather than simple reduction. Fabriar and Sulthon (2025) show that Hanan Attaki's digital da'wa changes in format, message, and audience interaction as religious communication moves across YouTube, Instagram, and other digital spaces. The case complicates any assumption that platform adaptation simply removes context. Digital formats can create new routes into religious teaching while also favouring styles that are immediately accessible to younger audiences. The analytical issue is therefore not whether a platform necessarily cheapens religious expression, but how format changes the parts of a practice that become easiest to notice, remember, and repeat.

2. Algorithmic Visibility and the Reconstitution of Religious Authority

Visibility becomes religiously consequential only when it changes whom Muslims treat as a credible guide. Research on the Sabilul Huda Islamic boarding school shows that social media can extend the authority of a pesantren and its kyai by linking digital preaching to an already recognised institutional setting (Kuswana & Puzian, 2023). Repeated exposure may make a teacher familiar, but familiarity alone does not establish the right to correct a recitation, explain a ritual, or answer a normative question. Recognition becomes authority when users connect a visible figure with knowledge, reliable transmission, and an accepted religious role.

The clearest evidence for algorithmic mediation comes from YouTube rather than from creators' own accounts of strategy. A quasi-experimental study using twenty-five test accounts and 1,250 video observations found that recommendations became more relevant as viewing histories developed, suggesting that repeated interaction narrows what users are likely to encounter (Wahyudi et al., 2025). This does not show that the algorithm grants religious legitimacy. It does show that some voices can become easier to retrieve because the system learns from prior viewing. For ritual learning, that difference is practical (Kadir, 2026a). A user seeking guidance on prayer or Qur'anic recitation may repeatedly meet the same style of explanation before comparing it with other traditions or teachers. Over time, availability can look like consensus even when the feed reflects only a personalised sequence. Personalised exposure changes the field in which religious guidance is found, while judgments about correctness remain social and religious. Studies of the digital ummah similarly describe algorithmic environments as reshaping religious practice and authority rather than functioning as neutral channels (Alfi et al., 2025).

Visible metrics add another layer, although follower counts cannot be treated as a direct measure of authority. Numbers can signal that an account has attracted attention and may encourage an initial click. They do not reveal why users remain, whether the teaching is accepted, or how competing claims are judged. Platform metrics therefore make popularity visible, but religious authority requires a more demanding process of authentication. Users still compare sources, evaluate the standing of teachers, and decide whether accessible communication is accompanied by sufficient knowledge. The distinction becomes particularly important when a short explanation is easier to retrieve than a longer lesson grounded in an established teaching relationship. Research on state religious counsellors in West Sumatra likewise shows that digital literacy has become part of how established religious actors maintain authority in algorithmically mediated environments (Khusairi et al., 2025). Research on digital Qur'anic exegesis also shows authority being negotiated across individual and collective platforms in relation to audiences and algorithms (Rhafik et al., 2026).

Different trajectories are clearer when institutional and influencer cases are placed beside one another. Among *teungku inong* in Aceh, Instagram extends authority already formed through teaching, *sanad*, proximity to senior ulama, and participation in formal religious bodies (Maulina et al., 2026). The platform gives that standing a durable visual form and carries it beyond the immediate *majelis*. Salafi missionaries studied in Sweden follow another route, using Instagram's visual and branding conventions to fashion religious authenticity and missionary authority (Sorgenfrei, 2022). These cases should not be collapsed into one model. The Acehnese educators use digital media to amplify recognised credentials, whereas influencer-style actors can gain attention through communicative and visual skill that is not itself proof of religious learning. This difference becomes consequential when the content concerns prayer, fasting, or pilgrimage, where attractive presentation cannot settle questions of correct sequence, intention, or bodily performance.

Wider access therefore does not amount to an equal distribution of authority. Female ulama may gain a public channel through new media while remaining less visible than male figures or those who adopt more platform-adapted modes of presentation. A study of technology acceptance and female ulama in Indonesia found that access to new media did not automatically overcome older patterns of limited recognition (Subchi et al., 2022). For ritual learning, visibility matters when it makes one explanation easier to find, replay, and imitate than competing guidance. Whether that convenience becomes authority still depends on credentials, prior trust, and the judgments of particular Muslim publics. The platform changes the route to a teacher, not the criteria by which every community accepts one.

3. Distributed Rituality and Contested Participation

A click or brief comment cannot be read as devotion without further evidence. The same action may express prayer, courtesy, curiosity, or routine platform use. A study of one hundred Instagram posts and their comments found that digital prayer expressions retained culturally patterned forms of request and politeness, showing that public platform language can still carry an explicitly devotional orientation (Atikoh & Ma'nawi, 2025). What matters is not the button used but the relation users establish between an action and a religious purpose in a particular setting. Participation becomes analytically significant when users or the studies themselves connect it to remembrance, learning, or practice carried out later. TikTok narratives of Tahajud prayer further show that digital participation can be narrated as an explicitly devotional and transcendental experience (Syaifuddin et al., 2025).

The circulation of Qur'anic verses offers stronger evidence of devotional continuation than a comment viewed in isolation. A mixed-method study of 2.6 million tweets found that users shared verses as supplication, remembrance, moral counsel, solidarity, and continuing charity (Abokhodair et al., 2020). Some respondents believed that an enduring post could keep producing religious benefit after death, although this belief concerns perceived digital permanence rather than any technical guarantee that the platform will preserve the material. Taken together, the findings suggest that sacred speech can enter new situations and acquire another devotional use. The process does not gather dispersed users into one complete ritual, nor does it preserve the original meaning without change. It allows a fragment to be heard again and linked to a later need, while leaving the first sender with little control over how the verse is understood or why it is shared.

Disagreement also changes how religious material is received, though the evidence is stronger for contested interpretation than for direct ritual correction. Molenaar (2022) found that young Dutch

Muslims on Marokko.nl tested claims through references to scholars, Arabic competence, mosque ties, and other Islamic sources. Their replies altered the terms of the discussion, but the study did not show that comments routinely produced revised ritual tutorials or corrected bodily practice. Participation can therefore expose religious claims to public authentication and sometimes to dismissal without necessarily creating a new ritual form.

Digital participation also creates a different moral tension because visible piety can become socially assessable. Among urban Muslim youth in Yogyakarta, social media exposure intensified pressures for recognition while sharpening concern that public religious expression might be read as *riya* (Achfandhy & Rohmatulloh, 2025). The ambiguity cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between sincere worship and display (Kadir, 2026b). Visibility can encourage discipline and shared religious practice, while the same visibility allows others to judge how devotion is presented. Users therefore negotiate how much religious practice should become public rather than treating platform exposure as morally neutral. This matters for distributed rituality because the continuation of a practice depends not only on circulation, but also on judgments about when participation remains devotional and when public recognition begins to alter its meaning.

Table 1 summarises the relationship among ritual form, platform visibility, and participation identified across the reviewed studies.

Table 1 Thematic Synthesis of Platformed Ritual Reformatting

Analytical dimension	Recurring pattern	Religious implication	Limit of claim
Ritual form	Selection, shortened duration, modular fragments, and selective bodily display	Makes practice easier to recognise, replay, and teach through platform formats	Reformatting does not always remove context or religious meaning
Visibility and authority	Personalised exposure, repeated recommendation, and the extension of established authority	Changes which guide or explanation becomes easiest to encounter	Visibility and metrics do not by themselves establish religious legitimacy
Participation and continuity	Response, circulation of sacred material, and digital coordination of practice	Extends ritual through later learning, remembrance, and collective organisation	Not every interaction constitutes devotional or normatively valid ritual participation

Source: Authors' synthesis of the reviewed literature, 2026.

Distributed rituality refers to this uneven continuation of ritual elements beyond the first event, not to the ritual status of every click or comment. Its value lies in bringing together forms that earlier studies usually treated separately. A practice is first selected and reformatted for the screen. Platform visibility then affects which version becomes easier to find and whose guidance appears credible. Users subsequently reuse, debate, or organise practice around what they encounter. Participation therefore completes a recursive cycle of platformed ritual reformatting. Once ritual fragments enter later acts of learning, remembrance, or coordination, their form is no longer shaped only by the original performer. The platform has become part of how the practice continues.

CONCLUSION

The reviewed literature shows that Islamic ritual changes when it is prepared for platform circulation. Parts of a practice are selected, shortened, framed, and made easier to recognise, while other elements such as correction, repetition, or social context may become less visible. Platform visibility then affects which explanations and religious figures are easiest to encounter, although repeated exposure does not by itself create authority. Users further extend ritual content through sharing, reuse, discussion, and digital coordination. These processes do not produce one uniform outcome. They may support learning, memory, and collective discipline, but they can also simplify practice, weaken context, or intensify concern about sincerity and public display.

The concept of *platformed ritual reformatting* captures this process as recursive rather than linear. Ritual is reshaped when it becomes content, shaped again through recommendation and visibility, and altered once more when users interpret or organise later practice around what they encounter. Platforms therefore influence the practical conditions of Islamic ritual without fully determining its meaning or validity. Religious knowledge, prior trust, community norms, and moral judgments remain decisive. Because this study is based on published literature, its findings identify recurring patterns rather than a universal model of Muslim digital life. Further comparative ethnography is needed to *examine* how platform use enters everyday ritual learning and how Muslims decide which parts of practice should remain visible, adaptable, or protected from public circulation.

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