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Islamic Education and Urban Middle-Class Muslim Identity: Religious Habitus among Students in Public Universities

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of urban Muslim religiosity in Indonesia indicates that students' religious expressions can no longer be understood merely as individual spiritual practices, but must also be examined in relation to middle-class dynamics, digital culture, and social identity. This article examines the relationship between Islamic Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam* or *PAI*) and urban middle-class Muslim identity among students in public universities, with particular attention to the formation of religious habitus. The study employs a qualitative library research approach with a critical-theoretical orientation. The literature examined includes studies on urban religiosity, *hijrah* culture, the Muslim middle class, digital religiosity, and *PAI*. The analysis draws on Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, particularly the concepts of habitus, field, and symbolic capital. The findings indicate that *PAI* functions not only as a medium for transmitting religious knowledge but also contributes to shaping students' religious habitus through discourses of religious moderation, social ethics, and modern Muslim professionalism. At the same time, students' religiosity operates as symbolic capital that generates social legitimacy and contributes to the negotiation of Muslim identity within the university environment.

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Introduction

The transformation of urban Muslim religiosity in Indonesia over the past two decades demonstrates that the religious expressions of younger generations can no longer be understood solely as matters of individual belief or personal spiritual awareness (Rofhani, 2026). The rise of *hijrah* culture, the expanding consumption of digital *da'wah* content, the

increasing visibility of Islamic symbols in public spaces, and the growth of the halal lifestyle industry indicate that contemporary religiosity is deeply intertwined with broader social transformations within Indonesian Muslim society, particularly the expansion of the urban middle class in the post-Reformasi era (Farchan & Rosharlianti, 2021; Rakhmani, 2016). In this context, Muslim identity is expressed not only through ritual practices, but also through lifestyles, moral orientations, patterns of consumption, and the construction of self-image within modern social spaces. Research by Wasisto Raharjo Jati shows that the *hijrah* phenomenon among Indonesia's Muslim middle class has developed not merely as a form of personal spiritual transformation, but also as a means of constructing social identity and symbols of public piety in contemporary urban society (Jati, 2023).

These transformations have occurred simultaneously with shifts in the landscape of religious authority in the digital era (Millie & Baulch, 2024). Social media, YouTube, *da'wah* podcasts, and online religious communities have broadened young people's access to various sources of religious knowledge beyond formal institutions. Religious authority is no longer fully monopolized by educational institutions, mainstream religious organizations, or traditional *ulama*, but is instead dispersed across more fluid and competitive digital networks (Lim, 2013). Studies on digital religiosity in Indonesia suggest that new media have become important arenas for the production and distribution of Islamic discourse, while simultaneously shaping forms of religiosity among urban Muslim youth that are increasingly personal, visual, and closely connected to modern middle-class culture (Alam et al., 2023). In this situation, students no longer derive their religious understanding primarily from formal classroom settings, but rather from a combination of communal experiences, digital media culture, and social networks that they engage with in everyday life (Nurdin, 2017).

Public universities have consequently become important arenas where these different sources of religiosity and identity intersect and are negotiated (Bernstein, 2000). Universities are not merely academic institutions that transmit knowledge, but also social spaces in which identities, lifestyles, and symbolic legitimacy are shaped through interactions among students and between students and institutional structures (Jati, 2023). The growth of campus *da'wah* communities, the increasing popularity of Islamic study circles, the use of religious symbols in campus social life, and the widespread discourse of *hijrah* among students demonstrate that religiosity has become an important dimension of contemporary urban student life (Jati, 2016). From Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, the university can be understood as a social field in which various forms of capital and legitimacy are contested and negotiated (Nash, 1990). Within this field, particular expressions of piety may acquire symbolic value and function as sources of social recognition, moral image construction, and cultural legitimacy among students.

Within these dynamics, *PAI* in public universities occupies a significant yet complex position. Normatively, *PAI* is classified as a General Compulsory Course (*Mata Kuliah Wajib Umum* or *MKWU*) designed to cultivate students' moral integrity, spirituality, and religious character, as mandated by the national education system (Muhaimin, 2009). In practice, however, *PAI* no longer operates within a homogeneous and stable social environment. Students enter the classroom carrying religious experiences shaped by digital media, religious communities, student organizations, and the religious culture of the urban middle class (Jati, 2015a, 2015b). Consequently, PAI cannot be understood merely as an instrument for transmitting religious knowledge. It is also one of the institutional arenas in which students' religious dispositions are shaped, negotiated, and legitimized.

Nevertheless, most studies on *PAI* in higher education continue to be dominated by pedagogical and normative approaches. Existing scholarship generally focuses on learning effectiveness, character education, strategies for internalizing religious values, or curriculum development based on religious moderation (Daria, 2022; Hanafi, 2016; Muhaimin, 2001, 2009, 2015). While such approaches remain important, they tend to position *PAI* primarily as

a moral and pedagogical instrument rather than as a social phenomenon connected to identity formation and the symbolic reproduction of urban Muslim religiosity. On the other hand, studies on Indonesia's Muslim middle class have largely concentrated on *hijrah* culture, urban religiosity, the consumption of Islamic symbols, and the transformation of digital religious authority, without sufficiently connecting these developments to higher education institutions, particularly *PAI* in public universities (Safei & Handoko, 2026). Research by Greg Fealy and Sally White, for example, demonstrates that the growth of Indonesia's Muslim middle class is closely associated with new forms of piety linked to consumption, lifestyle, and middle-class social identity (Fealy & White, 2008). Yet the relationship between these dynamics and the role of *PAI* in higher education remains relatively underexplored from a sociological-critical perspective.

Departing from this gap, this article examines the relationship between *PAI* in public universities and urban middle-class Muslim identity among university students. Rather than treating *PAI* as a direct producer of identity, the article understands it as an institutional arena that contributes to the formation and negotiation of students' religious habitus. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's framework, particularly the concepts of habitus, field, and symbolic capital, the analysis examines how *PAI* interacts with students' urban religious culture through the formation of particular religious dispositions, the legitimization of certain forms of piety, and the cultivation of religious orientations compatible with the ethics of modern middle-class professionalism. In this article, urban middle-class Muslim identity refers not simply to socioeconomic status, but to forms of Muslim self-identification articulated through religious commitment, lifestyle, moral orientation, educational aspirations, professionalism, and social distinction within contemporary urban settings. The purpose of this article is therefore not to judge the authenticity of students' religiosity, but to understand how *PAI*, religious habitus, and broader urban middle-class Muslim culture intersect in shaping and negotiating Muslim identity within higher education.

Method

This study employs a qualitative library research approach with a critical-theoretical analytical orientation. This approach was selected because the primary focus of the study is not to empirically measure the effectiveness of PAI learning, but to critically examine the relationship between PAI, religious habitus, and urban middle-class Muslim identity among students in public universities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Musonif et al., 2026; Parinda et al., 2026). Accordingly, this research positions PAI not merely as a pedagogical practice, but as a social phenomenon that interacts with contemporary religiosity, the transformation of religious authority, and the culture of Indonesia's urban Muslim middle class.

The literature review in this study is not employed merely to collect descriptive information, but serves as the foundation for constructing an analytical reading of the relationship between religious education, social identity, religious habitus, and urban Muslim religiosity (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The literature analyzed is divided into two major categories. First, literature concerning the Indonesian Muslim middle class, *hijrah* culture, urban religiosity, and the transformation of religious authority in the digital era. This category includes journal articles, monographs, and book chapters discussing transformations in religious expressions among urban Indonesian Muslims in the post-Reformasi period. Second, literature on PAI in public universities, particularly studies related to curriculum, PAI learning practices, character education, religious moderation, and the position of PAI as an MKWU within Indonesia's higher education system (Keputusan Direktur Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi

Kementerian Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia Nomor 84/E/KPT/2020 Tentang Pedoman Pelaksanaan Mata Kuliah Wajib Pada Kurikulum Pendidikan Tinggi, 2020).

The selection of literature was conducted purposively based on three primary considerations. First, thematic relevance to the focus of the study, particularly works discussing the relationship between education, religiosity, religious identity, and the urban Muslim middle class. Second, analytical depth, with preference given to works that not only describe phenomena but also examine the social and cultural processes underlying them. Third, argumentative positioning, such that the analysis does not rely solely on literature supporting the article's central argument, but also incorporates studies offering different perspectives in order to identify the boundaries, tensions, and complexities within existing academic debates.

The analysis draws on Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, particularly the concepts of habitus, field, cultural capital, and symbolic capital. This framework is used to examine how PAI practices and discourses interact with the religious culture of urban middle-class Muslim students. The concept of habitus is used to interpret the formation of students' religious dispositions through educational experiences and broader social environments. The concept of field is applied to understand the university as a social arena in which different forms of religious authority, legitimacy, and capital intersect and are negotiated. Meanwhile, cultural capital and symbolic capital are used to analyze how particular forms of religious knowledge, practices, and expressions acquire social value and legitimacy within contemporary university environments.

The analytical process was conducted in three stages. The first stage involved a critical reading of the selected literature on PAI, urban Muslim religiosity, and the Muslim middle class in order to identify recurring patterns of argumentation, dominant assumptions, and methodological tendencies. The second stage involved conceptual reconstruction through a dialogue between the literature on urban Muslim religiosity and Bourdieu's theoretical framework. At this stage, the concepts of habitus, field, cultural capital, and symbolic capital were contextualized within the dynamics of higher education and the religiosity of contemporary Indonesian students. The third stage involved developing an analytical interpretation of how PAI contributes to the formation and negotiation of religious habitus and, more broadly, to the construction of urban middle-class Muslim identity among students in public universities.

This study does not aim to produce empirical generalizations regarding all PAI practices or all Muslim students in Indonesian universities. Rather, it seeks to offer a sociological-critical interpretation of the position and function of PAI within transformations in contemporary urban Muslim religiosity. Accordingly, the primary contribution of this article lies in broadening prevailing perspectives on PAI, which has predominantly been understood as a pedagogical and moral instrument, by interpreting it as an institutional arena that contributes to the formation of religious habitus, the negotiation of Muslim identity, and the reproduction of symbolic legitimacy among urban middle-class Muslim students.

Results and Discussion

1. Transformation of Urban Student Religiosity and the Shift of Religious Authority

The transformation of Muslim religiosity in post-Reformasi Indonesia has occurred alongside changes in the social structure of urban society, particularly the growth of the Muslim middle class, the expansion of higher education, and the development of digital media

as new arenas for religious discourse and identity formation (Fealy & White, 2008). In this context, the religiosity of younger generations can no longer be understood merely as a private expression of individual spirituality, but rather as a social practice closely connected to lifestyle, class aspirations, and the search for moral legitimacy in the public sphere. The increasing popularity of *hijrah* culture, the expansion of the halal industry, the rise of Islamic study circles among youth, and the growing use of religious symbols in urban social spaces indicate that contemporary Muslim identity is increasingly intertwined with the dynamics of Indonesia's Muslim middle class (Jati, 2015b). Fealy and White (2008) argue that the rise of the Muslim middle class in the post-New Order era has been accompanied by new forms of religiosity that are more visible, consumptive, and integrated into modern urban culture. Under these circumstances, religiosity functions not only as a spiritual orientation, but also as a marker of social identity through which individuals negotiate their position within modern society.

The *hijrah* phenomenon among urban university students represents one of the clearest manifestations of this transformation. *Hijrah* is no longer understood merely as an individual moral transition toward a more religious life, but has also become a means of negotiating social identity and expressions of public piety. Jati (Jati, 2023) demonstrates that among Indonesia's Muslim middle class, *hijrah* has developed as an expression of identity seeking associated with moral aspirations, the need for community, and the desire to gain social legitimacy within competitive urban environments. Consequently, practices such as wearing particular forms of religious attire, participating in *da'wah* communities, consuming Islamic content, or using religious expressions on social media cannot be interpreted solely as personal spiritual acts (Jati, 2023). These practices also contain symbolic dimensions through which students construct self-image, social affiliation, and moral recognition within their social networks.

These transformations have been further accelerated by the expansion of digital media as new spaces for the production and circulation of religious authority. Whereas religious authority in earlier periods was relatively concentrated within formal institutions such as *pesantren*, Islamic organizations, and educational institutions, the era of social media has generated a more fluid and fragmented religious landscape. Students are now able to access diverse sources of religious knowledge through YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, *da'wah* podcasts, and online communities without being tied to a single religious tradition or authority. Alam et al. (2023) show that the urban religiosity of young Indonesian Muslims is increasingly shaped by digital media culture, which emphasizes visual, personal, and emotional dimensions of religious experience. In such a landscape, religious authority is determined not only by scholarly depth or institutional legitimacy, but also by the ability to create emotional closeness, cultural relevance, and visual appeal within digital spaces.

As a consequence, students no longer enter university classrooms as subjects whose religiosity is shaped entirely by formal educational institutions. They arrive with religious habitus already influenced by digital media experiences, *hijrah* communities, *da'wah* organizations, and the culture of the urban Muslim middle class that they encounter in everyday life. It is within this context that the university becomes an important arena where different forms of religiosity intersect, are negotiated, and gain social legitimacy. From Bourdieu's perspective, the university can be understood as a social field, namely an arena in which various actors bring their cultural and symbolic capital in seeking recognition and legitimate social positions (Bourdieu, 1984). Students' social relations are shaped not only by

academic achievement, but also by their ability to display moral identities and religious symbols that are recognized as valuable within campus culture.

The growth of campus *da'wah* communities, the increasing popularity of Islamic studies among students, and the strengthening use of religious symbols within campus social life demonstrate that religiosity has become an important element in the formation of symbolic hierarchies among contemporary urban students (Bruinessen, 2013). In many cases, particular forms of piety function as symbolic capital that generate moral legitimacy and social recognition within student environments. Students who are able to project religious identities perceived as "good," "moderate," "actively engaged in Islamic studies," or "moral" may acquire distinct social positions within campus interactions (Alam et al., 2023). At this point, religiosity operates not merely as a personal relationship with religion, but also as a mechanism of social distinction through which students negotiate their identities and positions within the social environment.

Amid these dynamics, *PAI* in public universities no longer functions within a neutral and stable social environment. *PAI* operates within a religious field already populated by diverse sources of authority, communities, and forms of religious expression competing for legitimacy. This condition means that *PAI* cannot be understood merely as a course transmitting religious knowledge in a one-directional manner from lecturer to students. Rather, it operates within a complex social context in which students already possess particular religious preferences, communal experiences, and moral orientations before entering the classroom. Therefore, understanding the position of *PAI* in public universities requires an analytical perspective that moves beyond purely pedagogical approaches. *PAI* can instead be understood as part of a social arena in which the religious habitus and Muslim identities of urban middle-class students are shaped, negotiated, and legitimized within the broader transformations of contemporary Indonesian religiosity.

2. PAI and the Formation of Students' Religious Habitus

The transformation of the religious landscape among urban students has placed *PAI* in a far more complex position than before. Within the classical paradigm of religious education, *PAI* was primarily understood as an instrument for transmitting religious values and knowledge (Keputusan Direktur Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi Kementerian Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia Nomor 84/E/KPT/2020 Tentang Pedoman Pelaksanaan Mata Kuliah Wajib Pada Kurikulum Pendidikan Tinggi, 2020; Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan Nomor 3 Tahun 2020 Tentang Standar Nasional Pendidikan Tinggi, 2020; Undang-Undang (UU) Nomor 12 Tahun 2012 Tentang Pendidikan Tinggi, 2012). In the context of contemporary religiosity, however, this function has become significantly more complex. Students do not enter the classroom as religiously "empty" subjects. Rather, they bring religious experiences shaped by family environments, social communities, digital media, *da'wah* organizations, and the urban middle-class culture they encounter in everyday life. Consequently, *PAI* learning does not occur through a one-directional relationship between institution and student, but through an ongoing negotiation between religious dispositions that students have acquired prior to formal learning and the religious orientations presented within the classroom.

Within Pierre Bourdieu's framework, habitus does not operate as a set of rules fully recognized by individuals, but rather as social dispositions that gradually shape how individuals think, feel, and act in everyday life (Bourdieu, 1977; Nash, 1990). Religious habitus, therefore, is not limited to theological knowledge, but also encompasses the ways individuals

understand piety, practice religion, build social relationships, and display moral identity in public spaces. In the context of public universities, *PAI* contributes to the formation and reinforcement of such dispositions through discourses on morality, religious moderation, social ethics, academic integrity, and students' professional responsibilities. Although often understood merely as a normative subject, the pedagogical practices and discourses of *PAI* also participate in defining which forms of religiosity are regarded as appropriate and legitimate within modern higher education environments.

This orientation can be observed in the ways *PAI* in public universities generally emphasizes forms of religiosity that are rational, moderate, tolerant, and compatible with modern professional life (Alam et al., 2023; Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019). Students are encouraged not only to become ritually observant individuals, but also Muslims who are productive, disciplined, ethical, open to diversity, and capable of adapting to the demands of the contemporary professional world. In this respect, *PAI* contributes to shaping a religious habitus that can coexist with the aspirations and social orientations associated with the modern urban middle class. Piety is not positioned as a rejection of modernity, but rather as an attribute that can coexist with professionalism, social mobility, and academic achievement.

At this point, *PAI* intersects with the culture of Indonesia's Muslim middle class that emerged in the post-Reformasi period. Rakhmani (2016) argues that urban middle-class religiosity in Indonesia tends toward forms of religious expression capable of integrating Islamic identity with modern lifestyles and professional aspirations. Within such a culture, being religious does not necessarily mean distancing oneself from modernity, but rather demonstrating the ability to be simultaneously pious, educated, professionally successful, and socially relevant. This orientation is compatible with contemporary *PAI* narratives that position Islam as a foundation for character formation, work ethics, and students' social responsibility. The intersection between these orientations provides a context in which religious habitus can become part of the formation and articulation of urban middle-class Muslim identity.

However, the relationship between *PAI* and the formation of students' religious habitus does not operate in a linear manner. *PAI* does not function within a socially neutral environment, but rather within a field already populated by various alternative forms of religious authority. Students frequently enter the classroom with particular religious preferences acquired from *da'wah* communities, social media, or digital religious figures they follow in everyday life. In such circumstances, the authority of *PAI* lecturers is no longer absolute. Religious knowledge presented in the classroom must coexist and sometimes compete with diverse interpretations of Islam that students have already encountered through digital spaces and social networks. Therefore, the formation of religious habitus through *PAI* is more accurately understood as a process of symbolic negotiation rather than unilateral value transmission.

This tension is particularly evident in the relationship between the discourse of religious moderation promoted by *PAI* and the tendency of some students to be more attracted to forms of religiosity that are emotional, populist, or identity-oriented within digital media. In many cases, students do not directly reject *PAI*, yet they also do not always regard the classroom as the primary source of their religious formation (Jati, 2015b). As a result, *PAI* operates as one arena of religious legitimacy among multiple arenas that influence the religious orientations of

contemporary urban students. Its significance therefore lies not in its exclusive control over students' religiosity, but in its capacity to introduce and legitimize particular religious dispositions within an already plural and competitive religious field.

Nevertheless, it is precisely this position of incomplete dominance that makes the social role of *PAI* sociologically significant. As a formal institution possessing state legitimacy and an official position within the higher education system, *PAI* retains symbolic power to define particular forms of religiosity as appropriate and legitimate within academic environments. Through discourses on moderation, tolerance, social ethics, and professional character, *PAI* participates in establishing symbolic boundaries concerning what it means to be a "good," "rational," and "appropriate" Muslim within the culture of modern universities. These boundaries do not determine students' identities in a straightforward manner, but provide categories of legitimacy through which particular forms of Muslim identity can be recognized and valued. Thus, the function of *PAI* extends beyond the transmission of religious knowledge: it contributes to the formation of religious habitus that interacts with the social logic of higher education and the aspirations associated with urban middle-class Muslim identity.

3. Piety as Symbolic Capital within Student Communities

Within the context of contemporary urban student religiosity, piety functions not only as an expression of individual spirituality, but also carries significant social and symbolic dimensions. Particular forms of religious expression may generate moral recognition, shape self-image, and become sources of legitimacy within students' social relations. At this point, religiosity operates not merely as a personal relationship between individuals and religion, but also as a social mechanism through which individuals negotiate their positions within their social environments. Bourdieu's perspective enables this phenomenon to be interpreted through the concept of symbolic capital, namely forms of social recognition that emerge when certain attributes or practices are considered valuable and legitimate within a particular social field (Bourdieu, 1986).

Within higher education environments, religious symbolic capital may appear in various forms. The use of religious symbols, involvement in *da'wah* communities, the ability to employ particular religious language, and the image of being a "pious," "actively engaged in Islamic studies," or "moral" student may generate social recognition within student interactions. In many cases, religious identity also becomes an important component in the formation of students' social reputations on campus (Rakhmani, 2019). Consequently, piety is not limited to an internal spiritual quality, but also becomes a socially recognizable dimension of identity that can be expressed, evaluated, and legitimized through everyday interactions.

This phenomenon has expanded alongside the strengthening visual culture of religiosity among urban Muslim youth. Social media plays a crucial role in this process because it enables religious expressions to appear more openly and performatively within digital public spaces. Activities such as attending Islamic study circles, adopting *hijrah*-related terminology, posting Islamic-themed content, and representing religious lifestyles on social media function not only as expressions of faith, but also as forms of self-presentation within student social environments. In this context, religiosity becomes increasingly connected to mechanisms of social representation and the negotiation of public identity (Rakhmani, 2016). Digital spaces therefore provide additional arenas in which particular forms of Muslim identity can become visible, recognized, and socially valued.

However, interpreting piety as symbolic capital does not imply that students' religiosity is inauthentic or merely a form of social performance. A sociological perspective does not seek to measure the authenticity of one's faith, but rather to understand how religious practices acquire particular social functions within specific historical and cultural contexts. In modern

urban society, religious expressions are closely intertwined with social relations, class structures, and mechanisms of symbolic recognition operating within them (Budak, 2018). The spiritual and social dimensions of religiosity therefore do not necessarily negate one another; rather, they may coexist within the same religious practices and forms of self-identification.

Within the culture of the urban Muslim middle class, religious symbolic capital is also closely related to the formation of social distinction. Bourdieu explains that particular social groups tend to develop tastes, lifestyles, and cultural practices that differentiate them from others (Bourdieu, 1984). In the context of urban Muslim students, such distinction can be observed in the emergence of forms of religiosity that are regarded as more legitimate than others. Religiosity that is rational, moderate, educated, and compatible with modern lifestyles may gain greater legitimacy within university environments than forms of religiosity perceived as excessively conservative, rigid, or incompatible with academic culture. As a result, students' religious identities become connected not only to spiritual commitment, but also to efforts to position themselves within a modern and educated urban Muslim middle class characterized by particular moral and cultural orientations.

In this situation, *PAI* represents one of the institutional contexts involved in the legitimization of religious symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Through discourses on religious moderation, tolerance, social ethics, and professional character, *PAI* not only teaches religious values normatively, but also contributes to defining forms of religiosity regarded as appropriate within higher education environments. Students who display religiosity compatible with prevailing academic and professional norms may more readily receive symbolic recognition within the university environment, while forms of religiosity perceived as overly exclusive or inconsistent with campus culture may receive less recognition. In this sense, *PAI* contributes to the symbolic environment within which particular forms of Muslim identity become intelligible and legitimate.

At the same time, the involvement of *PAI* in the legitimization of religious symbolic capital reveals an important limitation. As piety becomes increasingly connected to social image and public identity, religiosity may become more vulnerable to performative and symbolic forms. Under such conditions, religious expressions may be judged more readily through visual appearance, communal affiliation, or styles of religious communication than through intellectual depth or spirituality itself. This tendency cannot be attributed entirely to *PAI*, but rather emerges from broader interactions among digital culture, urban middle-class religiosity, and young people's pursuit of social recognition within increasingly competitive and visually oriented environments.

Therefore, examining *PAI* in relation to religious symbolic capital provides a broader understanding of the social function of religious education in public universities. *PAI* does not merely shape students' religious knowledge or dispositions, but also participates in a social field where particular forms of religiosity acquire recognition and legitimacy. Through this process, religious habitus, symbolic capital, and urban middle-class Muslim identity become interconnected. The significance of *PAI* consequently lies not in its exclusive ability to determine students' identities, but in its participation in shaping the symbolic conditions through which particular forms of Muslim religiosity can be recognized as valuable, modern, and compatible with the social orientations of the contemporary urban Muslim middle class.

4. PAI, Digital Religiosity, and the Crisis of Islamic Intellectual Depth

The transformation of urban students' religiosity in the digital era has generated significant consequences for the ways religion is understood, learned, and practiced within higher education environments. The expansion of social media has fundamentally altered the

relationship between younger generations and religious authority. Whereas processes of religious learning were previously tied relatively closely to formal institutions and stable face-to-face relations, digital media have created new religious spaces that are more open, rapid, and fragmented. Students can now access sermons, excerpts of Islamic lectures, *hijrah* motivations, and religious discussions through social media platforms operating according to the logic of attention and personal preference. In such circumstances, religious knowledge is increasingly encountered in forms that are brief, visual, emotional, and easily shareable (Nurdin, 2017).

These changes do not necessarily diminish students' religiosity. In many cases, there has instead been growing interest in religious practices, Islamic studies, and religious symbols among urban Muslim youth. Nevertheless, the forms of religiosity that emerge may develop through more immediate and fragmented patterns. Religious knowledge is often encountered through short quotations, brief videos, or fragmented sermon excerpts detached from broader intellectual contexts (Lim, 2013). As a result, students' relationships with religion may be shaped more by rapid, personal, and emotional religious experiences than by sustained and reflective intellectual engagement. Within a highly visual digital culture, the appeal of religious messages may be determined not only by the strength of their scholarly arguments, but also by emotional resonance, accessibility, and public visibility.

Within this context, the position of *PAI* in higher education becomes increasingly complex. As a formal educational institution, *PAI* operates through curricular structures, systematic learning, and relatively stable academic orientations. Digital religiosity, by contrast, develops through media logics that are rapid, fluid, and highly responsive to the preferences of younger generations. The tension between these two modes of religious learning means that *PAI* no longer functions as the sole or necessarily primary source shaping students' religious orientations. In many cases, classrooms encounter students who have already developed particular religious preferences through social media and digital religious communities. Consequently, the authority of lecturers and *PAI* materials must coexist and sometimes compete with digital religious figures who are perceived as more closely aligned with the communication culture of urban youth.

This condition points to a significant challenge for contemporary *PAI*: maintaining its intellectual and pedagogical relevance within an increasingly fragmented landscape of religious knowledge. *PAI* continues to possess formal legitimacy as part of the higher education system, yet formal legitimacy does not necessarily translate into symbolic dominance in shaping students' religiosity. Religious authority is now dispersed across digital networks that allow students to select and engage with forms of religiosity that they perceive as compatible with their personal preferences and social identities. In such a situation, the function of *PAI* as a medium for transmitting religious knowledge and values becomes increasingly complex because it operates amid multiple and constantly shifting sources of religious legitimacy.

At the same time, the development of digital religiosity presents an important paradox within the lives of urban Muslim students. Religious symbols have become increasingly visible within campus public spaces, while intellectual depth in religious reflection does not necessarily develop at the same pace. Students may express strong religious identities through *hijrah* discourse, affiliations with *da'wah* communities, or Islamic self-representations on social media, yet these forms of expression do not necessarily indicate sustained engagement with Islamic intellectual traditions. In this sense, religiosity may develop more rapidly at the level of identity and symbolic representation than at the level of critical reflection. Religion consequently risks becoming primarily a moral identity and social symbol through which students construct self-image, without always being accompanied by deeper intellectual engagement (Bourdieu, 1984).

This issue, however, cannot simply be reduced to individual student failure or treated as a negative consequence of social media alone. It is closely related to broader transformations in the social structure of religiosity in the digital era. New media culture tends to place knowledge within logics of speed, simplification, and visualization, and religious knowledge is not exempt from these pressures. The challenge facing contemporary *PAI*, therefore, is not solely how to deliver religious teachings effectively, but also how to cultivate spaces for intellectual reflection capable of responding to a digital culture characterized by immediacy and fragmented consumption.

Within these conditions, *PAI* faces a fundamental dilemma. On the one hand, it is expected to cultivate students who are religious, moderate, and morally responsible in accordance with the orientation of national higher education. On the other hand, it operates within a student religious culture increasingly shaped by digital media and the social orientations of the urban middle class. This tension raises a broader question about the relationship between religious habitus and intellectual depth. If religious identity can be constructed and publicly displayed through highly visible and accessible forms of digital religiosity, the role of *PAI* becomes not simply to reinforce religious identification, but to provide opportunities for students to develop deeper intellectual engagement with Islamic thought and its traditions. The central challenge of *PAI* in public universities therefore extends beyond the transmission of religious knowledge: it concerns its capacity to remain a meaningful space for intellectual reflection, critical consciousness, and deeper religious understanding amid the transformation of contemporary urban Muslim identity.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that urban Muslim student religiosity in Indonesia is shaped not only by individual spiritual practices but also by urban middle-class dynamics, digital culture, and the negotiation of Muslim identity. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's framework, the study conceptualizes Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as a social arena that contributes to the formation of religious habitus through discourses of moderation, tolerance, ethics, and professionalism. Rather than determining students' identities, PAI interacts with religious dispositions acquired through family, communities, digital media, and other social environments.

Religiosity also carries a symbolic dimension. Piety, religious affiliations, and digital representations of Islamic identity can function as symbolic capital that generates moral recognition and social legitimacy. However, the growing diversity of digital religious authorities and networks means that formal educational legitimacy does not automatically translate into symbolic dominance. This challenges PAI to move beyond the transmission of normative teachings by fostering critical reflection and deeper engagement with religious knowledge, rather than allowing religiosity to remain primarily a matter of symbolic representation.

Accordingly, PAI should be understood not merely as a pedagogical and moral instrument but as one of the social arenas in which religious habitus is formed, negotiated, and legitimized. This perspective does not reduce religion to a social phenomenon; rather, it situates religious education within the institutional, social, and digital contexts through which religious meanings are negotiated. The significance of PAI lies not in its ability to unilaterally determine Muslim identity, but in its participation in the ongoing formation of religious dispositions and the negotiation of what it means to be a Muslim student in contemporary urban society.

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