



Platform-Driven Misrepresentation of Muslim Women on Instagram: Religious Commodification in Indonesia's Beauty Industry

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Abstract

Instagram has become a major platform shaping the visibility of Muslim women in Indonesia's beauty industry, where aesthetic appeal, religious symbolism, and commercial promotion are closely connected. Existing studies have discussed Muslim women's identity performance, modest fashion, and influencer culture, but limited attention has been given to how misrepresentation is systematically produced through visual and discursive practices. This study aims to analyse how Muslim women are represented through the intersection of objectification and religious commodification within Instagram's influencer economy. Using qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis, this study examines Instagram posts from five Indonesian Muslim women influencers, including images, captions, and audience interactions. The analysis reveals that physical appearance and religious identity function simultaneously as marketable resources, positioning Muslim women as aesthetic objects and symbolic carriers of religiosity in promotional practices. Beauty, modest fashion, luxury consumption, and domestic roles dominate representation, while intellectual and socio-cultural contributions receive limited visibility. This pattern indicates that misrepresentation is driven by platform visibility regimes, algorithmic selection, and commercial imperatives that transform religiosity into digital labour and reinforce gender inequality in digital environments.



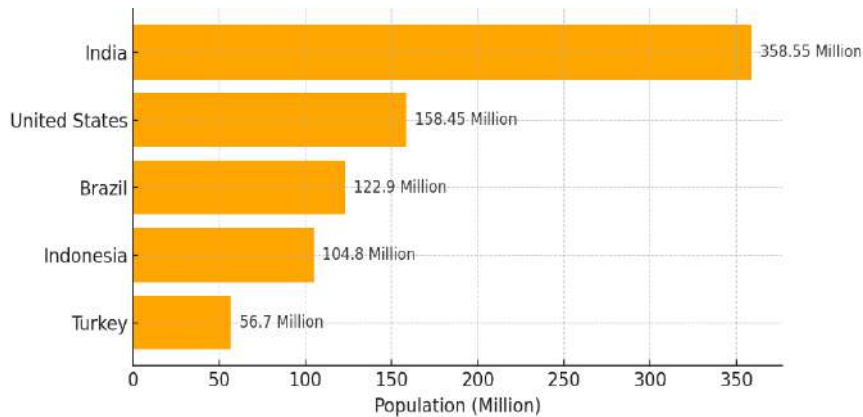
A. Introduction

The rapid expansion of Instagram has transformed Muslim women into one of the most visible social groups within Indonesia's digital economy. However, increased visibility does not necessarily translate into broader social recognition or empowerment. Rather, Muslim women are increasingly recognised through beauty, lifestyle performance, and marketable religiosity, while their intellectual, professional, and socio-cultural contributions receive comparatively limited visibility (Beta, 2019; Pribadi & Sila, 2023). This pattern is reinforced by platform-driven economies that reward physical attractiveness, lifestyle performance, and commercially marketable forms of religiosity, encouraging the reduction of complex identities into aesthetic and consumable representations (Tengku Kasim et al., 2024; Carah et al., 2023). This paradox is particularly significant in Indonesia, one of the world's largest Muslim-majority countries and among the countries with the highest numbers of Instagram users globally, where religious identity, consumer culture, and platform visibility intersect within a rapidly expanding influencer economy (Widarti et al., 2024; Carah et al., 2023; Duffy et al., 2019).

Figure 1 confirms Indonesia's strong position within global Instagram consumption, indicating the platform's significant role in shaping everyday social interaction and public representation. As one of the most widely used social media platforms, Instagram functions not only as a space for communication and self-expression but also as an important arena where cultural meanings, social identities, and consumer aspirations are continuously produced and negotiated (Widarti et al., 2024; Hasan, 2022; Rogers, 2021). In this environment, Muslim women influencers increasingly occupy central roles in shaping public visibility and consumer culture, while religious symbols such as the hijab are integrated into aesthetic and commercial narratives (Bishop, 2021; Widarti et al., 2024). Platform governance further determines which identities become visible, legitimate, and economically valuable through algorithmic selection and engagement metrics (Duffy & Meisner, 2022; van Dijck & Lin, 2022).

In this context, influencer visibility is not produced solely through self-presentation, but through continuous negotiation with platform algorithms that reward consistency, emotional intimacy, and commercially acceptable forms of femininity (Basri et al., 2025; Berryman & Kavka, 2017; Cotter, 2019). Consequently, visibility becomes a strategic economic resource rather than a neutral form of self-expression, shaping how Muslim women are represented, recognised, and circulated within digital culture. This

process influences which forms of identity become more visible and socially valued within platform environments.



*Figure 1. 5 Countries with the highest number of Instagram users worldwide
Source: Databoks (2024)*

Figure 2 shows that female users in productive age groups dominate Instagram usage, positioning the platform as a central space for gendered visibility and consumption practices. Within this environment, platform logics priorities aesthetic appeal, algorithmic engagement, and market value, where product promotion, luxury lifestyles, and symbolic religiosity are organised into a single visual-discursive structure (Ali et al., 2025; Gill & Orgad, 2022; Lee & Lee, 2022; Liang & Ye, 2025). Digital media environments do not operate as neutral spaces of self-expression but as structured communication environments where visibility, legitimacy, and recognition are shaped by technological systems and social evaluation processes (Suryawati et al., 2025).

As a result, Muslim women are more frequently represented through beauty, desirability, and aspirational consumption than through intellectual, professional, or socio-cultural contributions (Krasniqi & Kuqi, 2026; Chen & Kanai, 2022; Pribadi & Sila, 2023), reinforcing gendered visibility regimes based on aesthetic legitimacy rather than substantive recognition (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Duffy & Hund, 2019). Visibility therefore becomes a form of labour (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Duffy et al., 2019), where women must continuously perform authenticity, attractiveness, and relational accessibility in order to remain socially relevant and algorithmically visible (Fauziati, F., et al., 2025; Duffy & Hund, 2019; Toffoletti et al., 2023).

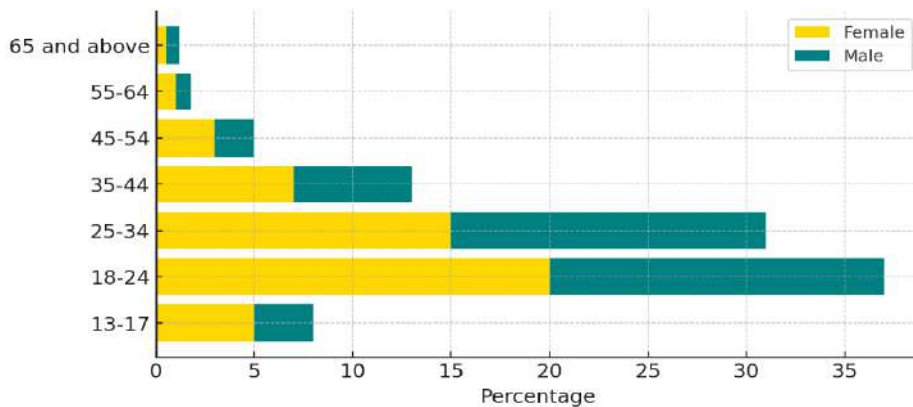


Figure 2. Instagram users by gender and age group
 Source: Databoks (2021)

Existing studies have examined Muslim women’s participation in social media through identity performance, modest fashion, piety, and influencer culture , while others have focused on religious commodification and influencer-driven consumption (Barizi et al., 2024; Hasan, 2022; Mahmudova & Evolvi, 2021; Raya, 2025). Figure 3 further shows that influencers are the dominant reference group shaping women’s beauty consumption choices, confirming their central role in structuring both consumer perception and public representation. However, these studies largely emphasise identity negotiation and branding practices, while giving limited attention to how representation itself is systematically produced through platform-specific visual and discursive mechanisms.

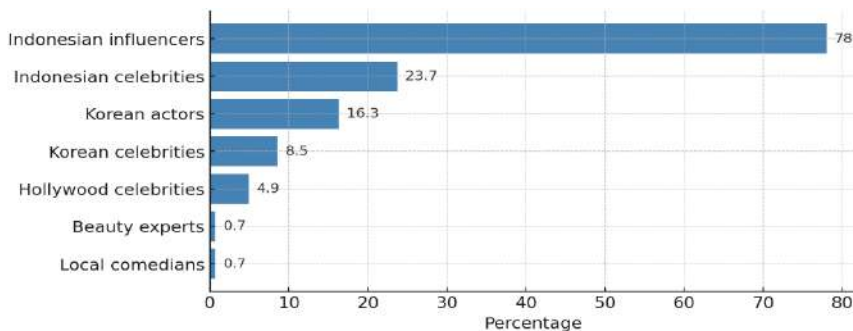


Figure 3. Proportion of influencer types affecting women’s choices in beauty products and services
 Source: Databoks (2023)

The research gap therefore lies not in the absence of studies on Muslim women and social media, but in the limited analysis of misrepresentation as a structured outcome of platform-driven visibility economies. Previous scholarship has not sufficiently explained



how visual composition, caption narratives, and endorsement structures operate together to produce reductionist representations that privilege aesthetic visibility over intellectual recognition. In addition, objectification and religious commodification are often discussed separately, rather than examined as interconnected mechanisms within influencer-driven digital environments. This limitation obscures how Muslim women's identities are simplified, stabilised, and circulated through everyday Instagram practices.

This study addresses that gap by examining how selected Indonesian Muslim women influencers in the beauty industry construct representation through recurring visual and discursive patterns. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, this study analyses images, captions, and endorsement practices as integrated units of meaning production to identify how Muslim women are positioned as aesthetic and consumptive subjects while their intellectual agency is marginalised. The study focuses on how objectification and religious symbolism operate simultaneously within platform-based representation rather than as separate phenomena. Therefore, this study asks how visual composition, caption narratives, and endorsement structures operate together to produce and stabilise the commodified representation of Muslim women within Instagram's platform-driven visibility economy.

This study makes two main contributions. First, it extends the discussion of objectification beyond the physical body by demonstrating symbolic religious commodification, where religious identity functions simultaneously as a marker of piety and a marketable resource. Second, it argues that misrepresentation on Instagram should be understood not merely as representational distortion, but as a platform-driven process shaped by visibility regimes, influencer economies, and aestheticized religiosity. By situating the Indonesian case within broader debates on gender, religion, and digital media, this study shows that increased visibility in platform environments does not necessarily produce empowerment, but may instead reinforce selective, commercialised, and reductionist forms of recognition.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative research design using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyse the representation of Muslim women within Instagram's beauty industry through visual and textual content. The study focused on Instagram posts that combined aesthetic presentation, product promotion, and religious symbolism.

The unit of analysis was an integrated visual-discursive Instagram post consisting of visual content (images or videos) and textual captions. This unit was selected because

representation on Instagram is constructed through the relationship between visual composition and narrative framing rather than through isolated elements. The analysis therefore examined how images and captions jointly produced meanings related to beauty, religiosity, and commercial value (Rogers, 2021).

The research subjects consisted of five Indonesian Muslim women influencers: @shellasaukiaofficial, @shandypurnamasari, @emyaghnia, @hamidahrachmayanti, and @indahnadapuspita. Purposive sampling was used based on four criteria. First, each account had more than one million followers, indicating high visibility within Instagram's platform environment. Second, the accounts were actively involved in the beauty and lifestyle industry, ensuring relevance to the study focus on aesthetic representation and commodification. Third, the accounts showed consistent posting activity, allowing recurring representational patterns to be identified. Fourth, the selected influencers regularly incorporated religious symbols such as the hijab within promotional content, making them analytically relevant for examining the intersection of gender, religion, and platform-based commodification.

Data were collected from Instagram posts published between January and June 2025 using digital documentation techniques, particularly screenshot archiving of images and captions. Posts were selected based on three inclusion criteria: product endorsement, lifestyle representation, and the presence of religious symbolism. Through this process, 25 posts were identified and included in the analysis. Only publicly accessible content was used to ensure consistency and transparency in data collection.

The analysis followed Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2018). First, text analysis examined visual composition, body positioning, clothing, symbolic objects, lexical choices, and promotional language in captions. Objectification was identified through the prioritisation of physical appearance, aesthetic framing of the body, and the alignment between bodily visibility and promotional emphasis (de Lenne et al., 2021; Santoniccolo et al., 2023). Religious commodification was identified using religious symbols, particularly the hijab, as aesthetic and branding elements within commercial narratives (Zulkifli & Rajandran, 2024).

Second, discursive practice analysis examined how posts were produced and circulated through endorsement structures, brand collaborations, and promotional caption strategies. This stage focused on how influencers positioned themselves as aesthetic subjects and commercial agents within Instagram's visibility economy.

Third, the analysis of social practices positioned these findings within wider structural dynamics, including platform capitalism, influencer-driven economies, and the

commodification of religious identity. At this stage, particular attention was given to how algorithmic visibility, engagement metrics, and market-oriented logics shape the selective portrayal of Muslim women in digital spaces (Carah et al., 2023). The study relied exclusively on publicly available Instagram posts, and ethical considerations were carefully maintained to minimise unnecessary exposure of personal information throughout the analytical process (Harrington, 2025). As this research did not involve any experimental procedures with human participants or animals, formal ethical approval was not required.

C. Results and Discussion


This section presents three recurring patterns of representation found across the analysed Instagram accounts: endorsement-based influencer representation, symbolic reference figure representation, and limited visibility of intellectual representation. Across the selected posts, Muslim women are most frequently represented through beauty promotion, lifestyle display, religious symbolism, and domestic roles, while intellectual and professional contributions receive less visible attention.




1. Results

a. Muslim women as influencers

Table 1 presents recurring patterns of content production across selected Instagram accounts, showing how Muslim women influencers are represented through endorsement-based visual content. Most posts focus on product promotion, particularly cosmetics, Muslim fashion, luxury goods, childcare products, and lifestyle services. The visual structure consistently places the influencer as the central element of the promotional post, while captions support product visibility through brand mentions, promotional phrases, and endorsement tags.

Table 1. Endorsement-based representation of Muslim women influencers on Instagram

No.	Image	Endorsed Commodity	Empirical Description
1.	 Image 1	Beauty Commodification	Image 1 shows the influencer wearing a hijab while promoting a cosmetics product, with brand tags and product mentions included in the caption.

No.	Image	Endorsed Commodity	Empirical Description
6.	 Image 6	Maternal Care Commodification	Image 6 shows the influencer holding a child while promoting a children's skincare product, with product details included in the caption.
7.	 Image 7	Luxury Lifestyle Promotion	Image 7 presents the influencer in a luxury villa setting, with promotional content related to accommodation services included in the caption.
8.	 Image 8	Entrepreneurial Lifestyle Branding	Image 8 shows the influencer in a café setting, with caption text indicating promotion of a business or commercial venue.

Source: Instagram

Image 1, Image 2, and Image 3 show repeated emphasis on physical appearance in relation to promoted products. In Image 1 (@emyaghnia), the influencer appears in close-up framing with focus on facial appearance while promoting a cosmetic product through caption tags and product mentions. Image 2 (@indahnadapuspita) presents full-body composition highlighting clothing details, accompanied by fashion brand tags and promotional hashtags. Image 3 (@hamidahrachmayanti) places the hijab as the main visual focus, supported by captions introducing a specific product line.

Image 4 and Image 5 show the expansion of endorsement content into shoes and luxury handbags. Although the promoted commodities differ, the visual arrangement remains similar. The influencer's body, outfit, and personal appearance remain the

main visual reference, while the products are attached through brand labels and caption descriptions. Promotional captions commonly include brand tags, product recommendations, and discount information.


Image 6 presents product promotion in a domestic setting. The influencer appears with a child while introducing children’s skincare products. The caregiving setting becomes part of the promotional content, while the caption provides product details and usage information. Image 7 and Image 8 extend endorsement patterns into lifestyle promotion, including villas, cafés, and business venues. These posts combine location-based visuals with promotional captions related to accommodation services and commercial spaces.

Three recurring patterns appear across these posts. First, product promotion is consistently supported by visual emphasis on the influencer’s appearance, clothing, and personal style. Second, captions function as direct promotional tools through brand mentions, endorsement statements, and persuasive commercial language. Third, lifestyle settings such as travel, family activities, and leisure spaces are presented together with product promotion, expanding endorsement beyond physical commodities into broader lifestyle consumption.

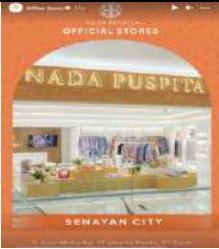




b. Muslim women as reference figures






Table 2 presents how Muslim women influencers are represented not only as product endorsers but also as reference figures for lifestyle, religiosity, family values, and social identity. The posts show recurring representations of entrepreneurial success, visible religious practice, domestic harmony, humanitarian concern, and family responsibility. These representations combine personal appearance, daily activities, and symbolic social roles within a single Instagram post.

Table 2. Representational patterns of Muslim women as reference figures on Instagram

No.	Representational Role	Image	Empirical Description	Sources
1.	Entrepreneurial Success	 <p>Image 9</p>	Image 9 shows the influencer presenting cosmetic products associated with her brand, with captions including product information and promotional elements.	@shandyputri rmasari



No.	Representational Role	Image	Empirical Description	Sources
2.	Fashion-Based Entrepreneurship	 <p>Image 10</p>	Image 10 displays the influencer wearing fashion items linked to her brand, with captions indicating ownership and promotion of a fashion business.	@indahndah apuspita
3.	Religious Devotion	 <p>Image 11</p>	Image 11 shows the influencer performing Hajj rituals, wearing pilgrimage attire, with captions referring to the pilgrimage experience.	@hamidahr achmayanti
4.	Modesty as Aesthetic Identity	 <p>Image 12</p>	Image 12 presents the influencer wearing a modest fashion outfit, with visual emphasis on clothing style and captions referencing outfit details.	@hamidahr achmayanti
5.	Idealized Domestic Life	 <p>Image 13</p>	Image 13 shows the influencer with family members in a domestic setting, with captions referring to daily family activities.	@emyaghni a
6.	Humanitarian Solidarity	 <p>Image 14</p>	Image 14 includes visual content related to Palestine, with captions containing messages of concern or support.	@hamidahr achmayanti

No.	Representational Role	Image	Empirical Description	Sources
7.	Charitable Mobilization	 <p>Image 15</p>	Image 15 displays donation-related content, with captions including calls for contribution or fundraising information.	@hamidahrachmayanti
8.	Moral Encouragement	 <p>Image 16</p>	Image 16 contains text-based or visual prompts encouraging charitable actions, with captions inviting followers to participate.	@hamidahrachmayanti
9.	Religious Participation	 <p>Image 17</p>	Image 17 shows the influencer attending a religious study session, with captions referencing participation in the activity.	@indahnadapuspita
10.	Family-Oriented Identity	 <p>Image 18</p>	Image 18 presents the influencer spending time with family members, with captions describing shared moments or activities.	@hamidahrachmayanti
11.	Filial Piety and Material Success	 <p>Image 19</p>	Image 19 shows the influencer presenting a house to her parents, with visual focus on the property and captions describing the occasion.	@shellasaukiaofficial

Source: Instagram

Image 9 and Image 10 present Muslim women as successful entrepreneurs through beauty and fashion businesses. In Image 9 (@shandypurnamasari), the influencer displays cosmetic products associated with her own brand, while the caption includes product descriptions and promotional information. Image 10 (@indahnadapuspita) similarly shows fashion items linked to business ownership, with captions indicating product promotion and entrepreneurial identity. In both images, professional achievement is presented together with visual emphasis on personal appearance and branded products.

Image 11 and Image 12 show visible religious representation through pilgrimage and modest fashion. In Image 11 (@hamidahrachmayanti), the influencer is shown performing Hajj rituals while wearing pilgrimage clothing, accompanied by captions describing the pilgrimage experience. Image 12 presents modest fashion styling with visual focus on clothing details and captions referring to outfit selection and religious appearance. Religious identity is displayed through clothing, setting, and textual references to spiritual activities. Across both posts, religious representation is communicated through the combination of visual religious markers and caption narratives that refer to worship practices, modest appearance, and spiritual experiences.

Image 13, Image 18, and Image 19 present family-oriented representation through domestic interaction and family responsibility. These posts show the influencer with family members in home settings, with captions describing emotional closeness, caregiving roles, and shared family activities. In Image 19 (@shellasaukiaofficial), the influencer presents a house to her parents, with visual focus on the property and family interaction. The caption explains the event as part of filial responsibility and personal achievement. Across these posts, family relationships are presented through images of togetherness, shared activities, and expressions of affection, while captions provide narratives that emphasise emotional bonds and family commitment.



Image 14, Image 15, and Image 16 show humanitarian and charitable engagement, particularly related to Palestine and donation activities. These posts include visual content associated with solidarity, donation campaigns, and public calls for participation. Captions contain fundraising information, moral encouragement, and invitations for followers to contribute to social causes. The visual content frequently incorporates symbolic images, campaign materials, or donation-related messages, while the accompanying captions provide information about fundraising mechanisms, campaign objectives, and opportunities for audience involvement.

Three recurring patterns appear across these representations. First, entrepreneurial identity is displayed through product ownership and business promotion. Second, religious identity is presented through visible worship practices, modest fashion, and spiritual activities. Third, family and humanitarian roles are shown through domestic care, charitable actions, and family responsibility. These patterns show recurring representations of Muslim women across commercial, religious, and social dimensions.





c. Dominance of lifestyle visibility and limited intellectual representation

The analysed Instagram posts reveal recurring patterns of representation that extend beyond product endorsement, religious expression, and family-oriented roles. Across the selected accounts, visibility is frequently associated with lifestyle display, material achievements, mobility, and everyday consumption practices, while references to intellectual activities and professional expertise appear less frequently. Table 3 presents recurring representations of luxury consumption, domestic roles, mobility, and symbolic lifestyle performance across the selected Instagram accounts. The posts show stronger emphasis on material success, family-oriented domesticity, and aspirational lifestyle display than on professional expertise, academic contribution, or intellectual engagement.

Table 3. Limited visibility of intellectual representation among Muslim women influencers on Instagram

No.	Representational Pattern	Image	Empirical Description	Source
1.	Luxury Consumption as Status Display	 <p style="text-align: center;">Image 20</p>	Image 20 features the account of Muslim woman influencer @shellasaukiaofficial showcasing her collection of luxury items.	@shellasaukiaofficial
2.	Domestic Space as Symbol of Economic Achievement	 <p style="text-align: center;">Image 21</p>	Image 21 features the account of Muslim woman influencer @shellasaukiaofficial displaying her luxury home.	@shellasaukiaofficial



No.	Representational Pattern	Image	Empirical Description	Source
3.	Global Mobility as Lifestyle Performance		Image 22 features the account of Muslim woman influencer @emyaghnia vacationing abroad.	@emyaghnia
4.	Fashion Visibility as Symbolic Capital		Image 23 features the account of Muslim woman influencer @indahnadapuspita attending an international fashion week event.	@indahnadapuspita
5.	Material Success as Visual Identity		Image 24 features the account of Muslim woman influencer @emyaghnia showcasing a recently purchased luxury car.	@emyaghnia
6.	Domesticity as Gendered Role Performance		Image 25 features the account of Muslim woman influencer @shellasaukiaofficial cooking for her family at home.	@shellasaukiaofficial

Source: Instagram

Image 20 and Image 21 show luxury consumption and domestic space as visual indicators of success. In Image 20 (@shellasaukiaofficial), the influencer displays a collection of luxury items, with a visual focus on branded commodities and personal

consumption. Image 21 presents a luxury home as part of self-presentation, where the domestic space appears as a symbol of economic achievement. Captions in both posts support the visual emphasis on ownership and material status.

Image 22 and Image 23 present global mobility and fashion participation as symbolic lifestyle performance. In Image 22 (@emyaghnia), the influencer appears travelling abroad, with captions referring to international vacation activities. Image 23 (@indahnadapuspita) shows participation in an international fashion week event, where clothing style, event presence, and public visibility become the focus. These posts present travel and fashion participation as visible markers of social status.

Image 24 and Image 25 further strengthen this pattern through material success and domestic role performance. Image 24 shows the influencer presenting a newly purchased luxury car, while the caption highlights ownership and personal achievement. Image 25 presents domestic activity through cooking for the family at home, where caregiving and household roles become central visual elements. Both posts emphasise symbolic success through consumption and domestic identity rather than professional or intellectual contribution.

Three recurring patterns appear across these posts. First, material success frequently appears through luxury goods, property ownership, and global mobility. Second, domestic roles remain visible through family care and household activities. Third, public representation is more strongly associated with lifestyle visibility and symbolic status than with academic expertise, professional reflection, or intellectual participation.

2. Discussion

This study argues that the misrepresentation of Muslim women on Instagram is not merely a problem of inaccurate representation, but a structural outcome of platform capitalism in which visibility is governed by commercial value. Instagram does not function as a neutral space for self-expression. Instead, it operates through algorithmic visibility, influencer economies, and branding imperatives that determine which identities become publicly visible and socially legitimate. Platform visibility is inseparable from aspirational labour, economic dependence, and algorithmic recognition, where identity becomes valuable only when it can be translated into engagement and profit (Abidin, 2020; Bucher et al., 2021; Christin & Lu, 2024; Duffy & Meisner, 2022). Platform governance also links recognition to commercial performance, making visibility itself a form of economic discipline rather than simple public presence (Gillespie, 2018; van Dijck

& Lin, 2022). In this study, Muslim women gain visibility primarily when their identities can be translated into aesthetic performance, aspirational consumption, and symbolic desirability. Misrepresentation, therefore, emerges not simply from individual choices, but from a platform structure that rewards market-compatible femininity and reduces recognition to commercial visibility.

This finding challenges a persistent assumption in digital gender scholarship that increased visibility necessarily signals empowerment. In many cases, platform visibility requires women to conform to aesthetic discipline and market expectations, so that what appears as empowerment is often shaped by structural demands for feminine self-commodification (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020; Dobson, 2015). Postfeminist visibility often rewards beauty performance, entrepreneurial femininity, and market-compatible confidence while concealing structural inequality behind narratives of individual choice (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Banet-Weiser et al., 2020; Gill & Orgad, 2022). Commodity feminism allows visibility to appear as liberation even when it reproduces the same hierarchies through new aesthetic forms (Banet-Weiser, 2018; McRobbie, 2020). While these perspectives help explain why women's social media participation is frequently interpreted as agency, this study shows that visibility is better understood as regulation rather than access. Muslim women's presence becomes valuable only when it aligns with beauty standards, luxury consumption, and consumable femininity. Conversely, intellectual authority, professional expertise, and socio-political participation remain less visible because they are less profitable within platform economies. Under these conditions, visibility functions less as liberation and more as disciplined participation in selective systems of recognition.

The central mechanism of this process is religious commodification. While previous studies have discussed body objectification and modest fashion branding as separate phenomena, this study shows that these processes operate simultaneously within Instagram's beauty industry. Muslim women's digital visibility is mediated through visual respectability, public piety, and moral legitimacy, where religiosity itself becomes part of symbolic exchange (Beta, 2019; Hasan, 2022; Nisa, 2023). Visible piety also functions as a form of mediated religious authority that strengthens trust, credibility, and consumer attachment within platform economies (Campbell, 2022; Moors, 2025; Nisa, 2023). The influencer economy, therefore, commercialises not only products but also intimacy, trust, and moral credibility, transforming religious legitimacy into symbolic value within digital markets (Berryman & Kavka, 2017). In this study, Muslim women are

positioned simultaneously as aesthetic objects and as carriers of Islamic legitimacy (Nisa, 2024; Pribadi & Sila, 2023). This dual positioning reflects how symbolic value operates within digital consumption practices, where visibility is attached not only to beauty and product promotion, but also to socially recognised forms of status, trust, and moral legitimacy (Liu et al., 2025). Physical appearance and religious symbolism work together as marketable resources that increase product credibility and consumer trust (Moors, 2025; Zulkifli & Rajandran, 2024). The hijab, visible piety, and moral respectability therefore function not only as cultural expressions but also as symbolic capital embedded in promotional economies. This finding extends objectification theory by showing that digital objectification is no longer limited to bodily exposure. Religiosity itself becomes part of commodity circulation and exchange value.

This mechanism becomes stable through the alignment between visual composition and discursive framing. Discourse does not merely reflect social reality but actively organizes legitimacy, authority, and social recognition (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2018). Visual and textual choices normalize certain identities while excluding others from public legitimacy, making visibility a selective cultural process rather than a neutral representation (Gill & Orgad, 2022; Machin & Mayr, 2023). In this study, beauty, domestic harmony, luxury lifestyles, and entrepreneurial success are repeatedly presented as coherent signs of ideal Muslim femininity. Captions reinforce these meanings through endorsement language, moral narratives, and aspirational storytelling. This alignment directs audience interpretation toward consumption-oriented readings and narrows alternative understandings of Muslim women's social roles. Instagram, therefore, functions as a disciplinary media structure in which femininity becomes intelligible only through commercially legible forms. Representation is not simply displayed but is regulated through repeated visual and discursive selection.

This study, therefore, takes a clear academic position that visibility-centred feminism is insufficient for explaining women's digital participation in platform economies. The problem is not whether Muslim women are visible, but who controls the terms of that visibility. Women's agency must be understood within structures of discipline, morality, and power, rather than reduced to liberal assumptions of individual choice (Abu-Lughod, 2016; Mahmood, 2009). In Muslim contexts, moral agency often operates through negotiation with social norms, religious expectations, and everyday ethical discipline, rather than through public exposure alone (Moors, 2025; Nisa, 2023). In this study, legitimacy depends on beauty performance, luxury signaling, and symbolic piety. Representation,

therefore, becomes a mechanism of reduction rather than recognition. Agency cannot be measured only through exposure, engagement metrics, or market success. Platform visibility can reproduce gender inequality precisely by appearing as freedom.

Although grounded in the Indonesian context, the findings reveal dynamics that resonate with broader transformations occurring across platform-based societies worldwide. Representation is governed not only by visibility itself, but by the social and economic conditions that determine which forms of visibility become legitimate, desirable, and commercially valuable (Bishop & Kant, 2023; Cotter, 2019). As one of the world's largest Muslim-majority digital markets, Indonesia represents a context in which influencer economies, consumer capitalism, and religious authority intersect intensely. Digital religion is increasingly shaped by media logics, allowing religious authority and legitimacy to circulate through visibility, accessibility, and platform interaction rather than through formal institutional structures alone (Bunt, 2024; Campbell, 2022; Nisa, 2023). In this context, Muslim women's online piety becomes part of public moral performance and economic legitimacy, where religious symbolism functions not only as cultural expression but also as symbolic value within endorsement systems. These findings challenge Western-centred theories of influencer culture that often separate religion from platform labour, demonstrating instead that religion is deeply embedded within digital capitalism and platform visibility economies.

These findings contribute to broader debates on digital capitalism by demonstrating how platform infrastructures increasingly shape the conditions under which identities become visible, recognized, and valued (Bishop & Kant, 2023; Cotter, 2019; van Dijck & Lin, 2022). While this study focuses on Muslim women influencers, the underlying mechanism extends beyond specific religious and cultural contexts. As platforms become central infrastructures of public life, recognition is increasingly tied to engagement, visibility, and economic performance. This suggests that the tension between representation and commodification may constitute a structural feature of contemporary platform societies rather than a phenomenon limited to Indonesia or Muslim communities alone. The findings therefore highlight a broader global challenge in which cultural, moral, and social identities are increasingly transformed into economically valuable forms of visibility and recognition.

At the level of governance, these findings indicate that platform power operates through soft regulation rather than direct control. Platforms govern visibility by shaping

what becomes discoverable, legitimate, and socially acceptable through algorithmic filtering and infrastructural selection (Gillespie, 2018; van Dijck & Lin, 2022). Algorithmic power works precisely because it appears invisible while continuously organizing attention, participation, and recognition (Bukido et al., 2025; Bucher et al., 2021; Duffy & Meisner, 2022). In this study, algorithms, engagement metrics, sponsorship structures, and visibility incentives silently determine which forms of Muslim femininity become legitimate and economically sustainable. Commercial visibility therefore functions as moral regulation. Muslim women influencers are required to perform “acceptable” femininity not only for audiences, but also for platform infrastructures themselves. Platform governance thus shapes not only content circulation but also the boundaries of socially recognized womanhood.

Taken together, these findings show that misrepresentation should be understood as a structural condition of platform society rather than a representational accident. The issue is not simply that Muslim women are portrayed through beauty and consumption, but that platform economies systematically make these forms of portrayal the most visible, legitimate, and profitable. Misrepresentation becomes normalized because platform systems reward simplification, repetition, and marketable identity performance, while alternative forms of representation remain structurally marginalized.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis is based on a limited number of Instagram accounts and may not fully capture the diversity of Muslim women’s representation across different class positions, regions, and socio-cultural settings. Second, the focus on visual and textual content does not include direct audience reception, which might provide a deeper understanding of how followers interpret, negotiate, or resist these representations. Third, Critical Discourse Analysis remains inherently interpretive and reflects the researcher’s analytical positioning, allowing for alternative readings through different theoretical frameworks.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the misrepresentation of Muslim women on Instagram is not incidental but is structurally produced through platform-driven visibility regimes, influencer economies, and algorithmic selection. These systems privilege aesthetic performance, symbolic religiosity, and commercial value over intellectual and socio-cultural recognition. Within this structure, Muslim women are consistently positioned as

aesthetic subjects and carriers of legitimised religiosity, where physical appearance and religious symbols operate simultaneously as marketable resources. This indicates that representation in digital environments is governed less by individual agency and more by the structural conditions of platform capitalism, where visibility is contingent upon alignment with engagement metrics, branding practices, and commercially viable forms of femininity.

The contribution of this study lies in repositioning misrepresentation as an outcome of platform logic rather than a mere distortion of reality. By integrating objectification theory and religious commodification within a single analytical framework, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of how gender, religion, and market forces intersect to shape digital representation. It challenges dominant binary perspectives that frame Muslim women either as oppressed subjects or empowered agents, showing instead that agency operates within conditions of structural constraint, negotiation, and visibility discipline. Ultimately, the study contributes to broader debates in digital gender and media studies by highlighting how platform-mediated visibility simultaneously enables participation while reproducing selective recognition and inequality.

Based on the limitations identified in this study, future research should expand the scope of analysis beyond Instagram by conducting comparative studies across platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, where different algorithmic architectures, content formats, and audience cultures may produce alternative patterns of representation. In addition, further studies should incorporate audience reception analysis to examine how followers interpret, negotiate, or potentially resist these representations, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of meaning-making processes within digital environments. Cross-cultural comparative research is also necessary to explore how Muslim women's representation varies across different socio-cultural and geopolitical contexts, particularly in distinguishing between localized forms of religiosity and globalized platform aesthetics. Such approaches would allow future research to move beyond platform-specific analysis toward a more holistic understanding of digital representation as a relational and context-dependent phenomenon.

Finally, the misrepresentation of Muslim women on Instagram should be understood not as a failure of representation, but as a structural condition of platform society, where visibility, legitimacy, and value are systematically shaped by algorithmic logic, commercial imperatives, and the commodification of both body and belief.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial or non-financial interests that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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