



## THE EXISTENCE OF VEILED WOMEN IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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### Abstract

This research explores the experiences of veiled women in the digital era, particularly in Surabaya. Using Alfred Schutz's phenomenological approach, this research examines how veiled women express their identity and respond to social stigma through social media. Digital platforms become an important space for them to share their beliefs, build communities, and redefine how society perceives them. However, these platforms also bring challenges in the form of negative stereotypes and discrimination, both directly and indirectly. The research data was obtained through in-depth interviews with veiled women who actively use social media. The results showed that social media became an important space for veiled women to build positive narratives, expand social networks, and counter negative stereotypes. However, they also face challenges in the form of online discrimination, negative comments, and social pressure. Each subject shows different strategies: some utilize social media for da'wah, some are cautious in sharing content, and some are more selective in showing their veiled identity. The findings emphasized the role of social media as a dynamic space for negotiating social identity, as well as the importance of lifeworld, intersubjectivity, and typification in this process. The novelty of this research lies in exploring the experiences of veiled women in digital spaces, which extends previous studies that focus more on physical social interactions. The results of this study are expected to enrich the literature on gender, religion, and technology, as well as provide practical insights for religious moderation efforts and empowerment of veiled women's groups in the digital era.

**Keywords:** Women, Veil, Social Media, Phenomenology, Moderation

## INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media and online platforms have become important spaces for building and expressing social identities (Meidina 2023). This transformation provides opportunities for individuals to connect with communities, share experiences, and expand their space beyond physical boundaries. However, for veiled women, the digital space also presents new challenges that are inseparable from the stigma and stereotypes of the community towards veiled identity (Mahfudhoh 2024). As a religious symbol that is often debated in the Indonesian social and cultural context, the veil is often associated with certain views that can marginalize women who wear it.

The urgency of this research on the existence of veiled women in the digital era is because the development of digital technology has brought significant social changes and influenced the interpretation of the identity of veiled women in Indonesia. The veil, as a religious symbol, is now faced with various interpretations in an increasingly complex society in the digital era. Social media platforms provide opportunities for veiled women to express their identities to a wide audience, but also open opportunities for stigma and discrimination.

In Indonesia, religious moderation is an important issue to prevent social conflict and strengthen the cohesion of a pluralist society. Data from (Wahid Foundation 2022) shows that religious-based intolerance is still a significant challenge, where around 40% of Indonesians have potentially intolerant attitudes towards certain religious groups, including groups with religious appearances that are considered different, such as veiled women. The stigma against the veil is often associated with perceptions of radicalism, such as the suicide bombing case in Surabaya in 2018 and terrorism cases involving veiled women, thus exacerbating stereotypes against this group. On one hand, digital platforms open up space for dialog and more inclusive representations of identity. However, on the other hand, social media can also reinforce negative stereotypes and create psychological pressure for individuals who are considered "different" (Fatminadila & Rasyid, 2024). Veiled women are often faced with negative perceptions in Indonesian society.

Research shows that the presence of veiled women has not been fully accepted by society, with negative perceptions related to the use of the veil. This research offers novelty by exploring the existence of veiled women in the digital era and focusing on their subjective experiences in cyberspace, different from previous studies that tend to center on physical social interactions, social stigma, and motivations in wearing the veil.

In Riksa Pratiwi and Martiarini's (2020) research, veiled women build self-identity through social support and community amid negative perceptions, the gap between Riksa and Martiarini's research is that it only discusses how veiled women build their self-identity through social support and community without mentioning how digital aspects can also play a role in shaping this identity. Meanwhile, Hyangsewu et al (2022) examined social interactions in the campus environment, especially the challenges of veiled students in adapting physically on campus, this is different from the purpose of this study which focuses on how veiled women live their lives on social media.

This study enriches previous studies by combining feminist and phenomenological approaches to understand the experiences of veiled women in the digital world, where they face challenges and stigma in a different form from physical life. In addition, this study also differs from a recent study conducted by Fatminadila and Rasyid (2024) on the social perception of Medan residents towards veiled women on TikTok highlighting the community's response to veiled content on social media.

This study aims to explore the experiences of veiled women themselves in expressing identity in cyberspace. Other journals such as Risti et al (2022) and Ilhami et al (2022) also highlighted the attitudes, motivations, and challenges of veiled women in physical or sociocultural contexts, but did not extend the analysis to experiences in the digital world. The study by (Lafmejani, Rezaei, and Hashemi 2022) provides an understanding of how the wearing of the hijab (veil) can cause social anxiety for female students at the Islamic Azad University of Karaj, this is relevant but different from the focus of this research because it does not discuss how digital space affects the formation of student identity. By using Alfred Schutz's phenomenological theory approach, this research aims to understand how veiled women in Surabaya interpret their experiences in digital space. In Schutz's view, the lifeworld is an intersubjective space where individuals interact and give meaning to their experiences.

Social media, as part of the veiled women's lifeworld, becomes an important space to build identity, face stigma, and negotiate social representation. Through interactions on social media, veiled women face various responses, both support and stigma, which shape their meaning of self-identity. Stock of knowledge also plays an important role, encompassing information and experiences used to interpret interactions in digital spaces (Barber 2024). This includes an understanding of online norms, as well as how to deal with digital stigma or discrimination.

In this case, the research results are expected to provide a deeper understanding of how veiled women in Surabaya interpret their identities in digital spaces and negotiate with social perceptions that develop through their individual experiences. This research also has practical relevance in supporting religious moderation efforts by providing insights into the importance of digital space as a medium to promote tolerance and social inclusion. In the digital era, social media and online platforms have become important spaces for building and expressing social identities (Meidina 2023).

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## **METHODS**

This research is designed as a qualitative study with a feminist perspective to provide space for the voices of veiled women who are often marginalized or misunderstood. A feminist perspective is used to examine the gender dynamics experienced by veiled women in digital spaces, including the challenges and opportunities they face in expressing their identities. The phenomenological approach forms the basis of the research method, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences of veiled women in utilizing digital media and how they deal with diverse social perceptions. This research was conducted in Surabaya, which is known as a city with high social, cultural and religious diversity. This location was chosen for its relevance in the context of religious moderation, given that this diversity creates dynamic interactions between various social groups, including veiled women. In addition, Surabaya, which in the past few years has often experienced conflicts or related cases, such as suicide bombings in churches that have become news topics. Surabaya also has a high level of digital media usage, making it an ideal context to study the experiences of veiled women in the digital space

The subjects in this study were purposively selected based on certain criteria, namely veiled women who actively use social media, are willing to share their experiences, and have variations in the context of using the veil (both for daily and situational purposes). In addition, to enrich the data, researchers took some Muslim women subjects from South Korea. A total of four subjects who met these criteria were selected as participants. Three subjects have different experiences in wearing the veil and utilizing social media as part of their daily lives and one subject was chosen to deepen

data on the existence of veiled women in Seoul, South Korea. The characteristics of the subjects are as follows:

Subject Name	Subject Age	Educational Background	Islamic Background
Kanza H	20 years	Currently undergoing undergraduate studies	Living in Surabaya since birth, in a fairly religious family, has undergone education in an Islamic Boarding School that is veiled. Actively uses Instagram social media.
Naila K	21 years old	Currently pursuing undergraduate studies	She has been educated in a Salafi Islamic Boarding School since she was a child, and is currently undergoing her undergraduate studies at an Islamic University in Surabaya, and is active in an online Muslimah community in Surabaya.
Zahra F	23 years old	Bachelor	Has a Salafi family background and currently teaches at one of the Islamic educational institutions in Surabaya and actively uses social media on a daily basis.
Fitria	27 years old	Bachelor	NU cultural and there is salafi tarbiyah. Her husband is a devout Muslim and now works in a restaurant in South Korea. Eventually fitria joined her husband and children to live and work in Seoul, South Korea.

The data in this study is primary, where the main data is obtained through in-depth interviews, while additional data comes from observations of the subjects' digital activities, including uploaded content, interaction patterns, and responses received on social media, and literature analysis of digital media. The data collection process was conducted through several stages. The first stage was the identification and selection of subjects based on predetermined criteria. Once the subjects were selected, in-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to provide flexibility in exploring various aspects of their experiences. The interviews were conducted both online and offline, according to the subject's preferences and conditions. During the interviews, the main focus was on exploring their experiences in building identity in the digital space, facing social stigma, navigating society's perception, as well as their strategies in negotiating their gender identity. In addition, observations were made on the social media content they uploaded to complement the interviews with visual and contextual data regarding their digital activity patterns, such as content themes, interactions with other users, and audience responses. The data collected was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques without the aid of software. The analysis process began with an initial coding stage to identify relevant units of data from the interviews and observations. The codes were then grouped into key themes, such as the identity dynamics of veiled women in digital media, their strategies in dealing with social stigma, and gender representation in digital spaces. After the key themes were identified, the interpretation process was carried out to understand the relationship between themes as well as the broader meaning based on the subjective experiences of the informants. This analysis seeks to dig deeper into how veiled women utilize digital space to build and maintain their identities

By using Alfred Schutz's Phenomenological Approach, where the main concept of Alfred Schutz's phenomenology includes several important interrelated elements, namely lifeworld, intersubjectivity, and typification. Each of these concepts provides a framework for understanding how individuals interact with their social world and how meaning is constructed in that context.

Lifeworld is a concept that refers to the everyday experiences of individuals within their social and cultural context. It is the arena where individuals interact, communicate, and construct meaning from their experiences. In the lifeworld, individuals not only function as observers, but also as actors involved in various social relationships.



Schutz emphasizes that the lifeworld is the basis of all social experience and that an understanding of social reality must start from the subjective experience of the individual.

In research, the lifeworld concept can be applied to explore how individuals understand and interpret their experiences in a particular context. For example, in a study of veiled women, researchers can investigate how such women experience their daily lives, social interactions, and how they construct identities within a broader cultural and social context. Intersubjectivity is a concept that refers to shared understandings constructed through social interactions between individuals. Schutz argues that social understanding cannot be separated from the presence of others; individuals always operate in the context of relationships with others. In this sense, intersubjectivity creates a space where individuals can share experiences, construct meaning, and understand each other. In research, intersubjectivity can be used to analyze how individuals interact and build social relationships. For example, in the context of veiled women, researchers can explore how such women interact with friends, family, and society, and how these interactions affect their understanding of their identity and role in society.

This research may include in-depth interviews or observations to capture the dynamics of social interactions. Typification is the process by which individuals categorize experiences and interactions based on existing knowledge and norms. Schutz explains that individuals use social types to understand and interpret the actions of others, as well as to respond to social situations. This process allows individuals to make generalizations about social behaviors and interactions, which helps them navigate the complexities of social life.

In research, typification can be applied to understand how individuals categorize their experiences and how these categories influence their actions. In the study of veiled women, researchers investigate how these women categorize their experiences with stigma or prejudice, as well as how they use these categories to construct positive narratives about their identity.

This research can involve narrative analysis or case studies to explore how veiled women construct meaning from their experiences. In this study, the researcher applied Schutz's phenomenological theory using qualitative methods to explore individuals' subjective experiences. In the study of veiled women, researchers conduct in-depth interviews to understand how these women experience daily life, how they interact with

others, and how they construct identities in a broader social context. Researchers may also use observation to capture the dynamics of social interaction and how veiled women navigate stigma on social media. By using Schutz's phenomenological framework, researchers can provide deeper insights into how veiled women construct their meanings and identities in complex social contexts, as well as how their experiences are influenced by interactions with others and existing social norms. This approach allows for a more holistic understanding of individual experiences in social contexts, as well as how meaning is constructed and maintained in everyday life.

This research is expected to provide deeper insights into the experiences of veiled women in utilizing digital spaces to build their identities, face the challenges of social stigma, and expand the discussion on the relationship between gender, technology, and social representation in the digital era. The findings are also expected to enrich feminist and phenomenological studies, especially in understanding the role of digital media as a space for identity expression for groups of women who are often marginalized.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Results**

**Subject's Experience in Wearing the Veil**

Subject (subject's name is changed for privacy and convenience)	Subject Statement
1. KH (20 years old)	This point is really important to me, because it reminds me of the vibes of the cottage when I was in high school. I felt that high school was very different from the high school of most teenagers outside. In my pesantren environment, the majority wear the veil because they are very deep in Islam. When I started wearing the veil, I felt really comfortable, like there was a sense of security and not just anyone could see my face. The negative views about the veil that I used to believe were wrong, and I realized that many people don't understand its true meaning.

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| 2. NK (21 years old) | I decided to wear the veil after graduating from high school. I was hesitant at first, especially because of people's responses. But after I started wearing it, I felt calmer and more protected. It felt like there was extra protection that made me focus more on worship and positive things.   |
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| 3. ZF (23 years old) | I usually wear the veil for family events or special occasions. The first time I tried wearing it, I felt a bit awkward, but on the other hand, I also felt more comfortable because it was more covered. The most memorable thing is the sense of security that I get. But on the other hand, people respond differently. Many of my friends were surprised when they found out that I had worn a veil, but I consider it normal. |
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The subject's experience in wearing the veil shows different dynamics, but has a common thread related to the influence of the social environment, family, and digital space. KH (20 years old) was introduced to the veil at a pesantren, where the environment where the majority of students wore the veil made her feel comfortable and protected. However, after entering higher education, she faced challenges from the negative stereotypes of society that her mother was concerned about. Observations show that KH's digital activities tend to be selective, focusing on religious and positive content to maintain her identity.

In contrast to KH, NK (21 years old) decided to wear the veil consistently after graduating from high school, driven by a desire to protect herself and deepen her worship. Initially, her family, especially her mother, doubted her choice, but NK managed to convince them by showing that the veil did not limit her activities. NK is active on social media, sharing positive experiences related to wearing the veil, which is a way to inspire the Muslimah community and build solidarity. Observations show that NK actively uses social media to overcome stigma and expand her positive influence.

Meanwhile, ZF (23 years old) chose to use the veil situationally, such as at family events or formal moments. She felt awkward at first, but also found comfort in maintaining privacy. However, she is not ready to wear the veil consistently due to the

mixed responses from the community, ranging from admiration to surprise. Observations show that ZF rarely discusses the veil on social media and maintains more privacy, reflecting her cautious attitude towards public perception.

The three subjects showed that the veiling experience was influenced by interactions with the social environment, the role of family, and adaptation strategies in the digital space. Observations of their social media activities support the results of the interviews, revealing patterns of interaction and how they navigate their veiled identity amidst the challenges and opportunities that exist.

**The Influence of Social Media and Social Responses on Identity as a Veil User**

Subject (subject's name is changed for privacy and convenience)	Subject Statement
1. KH (20 years old)	I use Instagram more often. Sometimes when I share stories or experiences, there are positive comments like, "Masha Allah, now you're wearing a veil." But I realize there might be others who think differently, they just don't say it directly. And of course I'm picky in posting something related to my veil or anything else. If I let everything out, there must be people who are not suitable or comfortable with what I share.
2. NK (21 years old)	I use Instagram the most. Sometimes people ask me questions about the veil, and some are even curious and want to know more. Therefore, I feel quite comfortable using social media, even though my circle of friends on Instagram is not too big.
3. ZF (23 years old)	I use Instagram more often. On social media, I rarely share photos wearing the

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veil because I'm afraid of my friends' responses.

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Interview data shows that the experiences of veiled women in using social media reflect complex dynamics in their efforts to maintain their identities in the digital space. Subjects KH, NK, and ZF all use Instagram as their main media, but their approach in sharing content is different. KH is more cautious in sharing experiences related to the veil because she realizes that there are various perceptions in society, both positive and negative. She chooses to filter the content so as not to trigger discomfort for her audience. In contrast to KH, NK utilizes social media as a tool for da'wah and education. She feels comfortable sharing her experiences and answering the public's curiosity about the veil, even using the platform to showcase the positive side of her identity as a veil user. Meanwhile, ZF shows a more selective approach by rarely sharing photos or stories about the veil. Concerns about stereotypes and negative responses from friends and the wider community make her limit the expression of her veiled identity on social media. These three subjects reflect how veiled women face challenges and opportunities in the digital space, with customized strategies to maintain their identity while managing societal perceptions. This data supports the research objectives by providing an overview of the personal experiences, meanings of veiled identity, and challenges faced by veiled women in bridging their values with the dynamics of the digital world.

**Things that make an impression from the experience of wearing the veil**

Subject (subject's name is changed for privacy and convenience)	(subject's	Subject Statement
4. KH (20 years old)		The most memorable thing about being in that environment was that I felt "guarded" from everything bad, whether it was from the evil of someone's intentions or their views. I felt like I always wanted to be close to and obedient to God because of the effect of hanging out with people who

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were tawadhu and pleased with God. People respond differently. For example, my own mother was a bit uncomfortable with my sister because she minimized the bad views of the surrounding community. And even though I'm no longer in that environment, there are things that still carry over and influence me until now. The most important thing is that even though I'm no longer in that environment, I still have to take care of myself. To be an expensive woman who is not easily seen and touched by just any man.

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5. NK (21 years old)

The most memorable thing is that I feel more "guarded," both from bad looks and people's bad intentions. My family was skeptical at first, especially my mother. But over time, I tried to show them that the veil does not limit my activities.

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6. ZF (23 years old)

The most memorable thing is the sense of security that I get. But on the other hand, people respond differently. Many of my friends were surprised when they found out that I had worn the veil, but I consider it normal.

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The experience of wearing the veil left a deep impression on the three subjects, both in terms of the values they hold and how they live their daily lives. Subject KH revealed that her time wearing the veil in the pesantren environment taught her to maintain her honor as a Muslimah. She felt "protected" from the bad intentions or negative views of others, and this experience motivated her to be closer and obedient to Allah. Although her mother did not agree with her decision to wear the cadarniqab because she was worried about how the community would view her, KH still upholds the values from her

experience, such as taking care of herself and being an "expensive woman" who is not easily seen or touched by just any man. She continues to carry these values even though she is no longer in the pesantren environment or does not always wear the cadarniqab.

Subject NK sees the veil as a symbol of serenity and protection. She feels that the veil helps her focus on worship and life goals, even when in an environment that does not support its use. For NK, the veil is not just an appearance, but also a means to get closer to Allah. Meanwhile, Subject ZF admitted that although she only wore the veil in certain situations, the experience provided a sense of security and comfort. This experience also taught her to respect the decisions of other women who consistently wear the veil, even though ZF herself is not ready to do so. All three subjects showed how the experience of wearing the veil influenced the way they viewed themselves and the environment, and how they still hold these values in their daily lives. This supports an understanding of the meaning of the veil as part of their identity amidst the challenges.

## **Discussion**

### **The Existence of Veiled Women in Digital Space**

This study found that veiled women in Surabaya utilize social media as a space for identity expression and a tool to deal with social stigma. Wearing the veil is one of the clothing choices for Muslim women. Although making this choice will have consequences on the views of acceptance and rejection among the community (Pohan 2021). In Indonesia, the use of the veil is becoming increasingly prevalent, especially among young people who embrace an Islamic lifestyle. This phenomenon can be attributed to the influence of social media and the internet, which have emerged as legitimate sources of interaction for women who wish to interact with veiled women (Mawarni, and Windi Baskoro 2023). Social media, particularly Instagram, becomes a dynamic space that allows them to build positive narratives, expand their social networks, and deconstruct negative stereotypes. However, digital spaces also present challenges in the form of negative comments, stereotypes and social pressure that affect their freedom to express their identities. In Indonesia, where the majority of the population is Muslim, many still view the veil negatively. Muslim women who wear it can be said to be a minority community in the majority of nations in the world. This minority picture is evident from some data that the full-body veil (in the sense of burqa) is rare even in most Muslim countries and it is estimated that 90% of Islamic women do not wear the burqa (Ali 2021). The three research subjects showed different adaptation patterns in wearing

the veil. KH is cautious in sharing content to avoid public discomfort, NK actively uses social media to preach and build solidarity, while ZF chooses a selective approach, avoiding discussing the veil too much due to concerns over negative responses. Their experiences demonstrate the tension between opportunities for self-expression and the challenges of dealing with public perceptions, both in digital and physical spaces. Through Alfred Schutz's phenomenological approach, this study reveals how veiled women interpret their experiences on social media as part of their lifeworld. This research highlights how motives of action, intersubjectivity, and typification shape the way they build digital identities and face challenges in the digital era. The findings illustrate their efforts in maintaining personal values while conforming to broader social norms. The role of social media for veiled women has a very fundamental impact on their lives, even beyond basic needs such as clothing, food, and shelter. Especially in urban areas, in this case in Surabaya, where rapid mobility is important, the dependence on smart phones that are directly connected to the internet is increasing. Social media has become a second part of their lives and a means of social interaction with other communities. This is also evident in the use of social media platforms such as Instagram by veiled women. Despite the assumption that they maintain exclusivity in their online activities, it shows that they are still affected by social media in their daily lives (Zulfa and Junaidi 2019). Because of the bad stereotypes that emerge in society, there are many factors behind veiled women being cautious in expressing their identity in their community and family. The prohibition of niqab by parents is done through the process of normalizing the perception of niqab as a negative thing (Mohammad, M.I 2023) as experienced by subject KH who said that her mother restricted her from showing her veiled identity to the public because she was worried about the bad public perception of veiled women.

This research shows some similarities and differences with previous studies that have been conducted on veiled women. The main similarity is seen in the exploration of identity and social stigma faced by veiled women, as described by (Rahman and Syafiq 2017). Their research highlights the coping strategies that veiled women use to deal with stigma, such as creating positive narratives and explaining their decision to the community, which is also found in this study. In addition, the importance of social support for veiled women, as expressed in research (Riksa Pratiwi and Martiarini 2020), is also one of the relevant findings. The support of the online Muslimah community, as experienced by the subjects in this study, provides an important sense of validation and solidarity. Another similarity is seen in the discrimination experienced by veiled women,



both in physical and digital contexts. The study (Hyangsewu et al. 2022) revealed discrimination in the campus environment, while this study found a similar pattern in the negative responses that appeared on social media. However, these studies also have some significant differences. The main focus of this study is how veiled women construct and manage their identities in the digital space, a dimension that is not discussed in detail in the studies of (Lafmejani et al. 2022) and (Hyangsewu et al. 2022), which are more centered on physical social interactions. This study also differs from the study of (Fatminadila and Rasyid 2024) which highlighted the public perception of veiled women's content on TikTok, but did not explore the subjective experiences of veiled women in expressing themselves on social media. This study places veiled women as the main subjects, exploring the subjective meanings they create and how they navigate their identities in the digital space, thus enriching the literature with new perspectives in the context of the digital era.

This study aims to understand how veiled women in Surabaya interpret their existence in the digital space, face social stigma, and utilize social media as a means to express identity. The findings of this study reveal various dimensions of the complex experiences of veiled women, reflecting the interaction between identity, technology, and social norms. Social media becomes an important space for veiled women to navigate their identity. In interviews, participants stated that digital platforms such as Instagram allow them to express religious values and personal beliefs that are often difficult to do in physical spaces due to societal stigma. Social media provides a more flexible space to build a positive narrative about the veil. By sharing their personal experiences, they not only create a new, more inclusive image but also establish solidarity with communities that share similar values.

However, the digital space also presents challenges in the form of online discrimination and stigma. Veiled women often face negative responses, both through direct comments on social media and in the form of deep-rooted stereotypes in society. In the interview, one participant mentioned that she has to be very selective in sharing veil-related content to avoid unwanted reactions. This challenge shows that while social media offers great opportunities for expression, it also reinforces social pressures that exist in the real world. In addition, this study found that veiled women develop creative strategies to manage their digital identity. Some participants used social media as a means of da'wah by sharing religious educational content, positive experiences, or Islamic lifestyles. This strategy not only helps them overcome stigma but also strengthens their

position as active and productive individuals in the digital space. The veil users on Social Media try to present the view that someone who is veiled can appear in public and is not confined as their clothes are all closed (Basri 2021). For example, one subject actively uses Instagram to answer questions about the veil, deconstruct stereotypes, and motivate other Muslim women to strengthen their identity. The experiences expressed by the subjects also show the important role of social environment in shaping their perspective on identity. The family environment is often the initial challenge that must be faced, especially when the family has concerns about the views of the surrounding community. However, support from the online community provides a sense of security and encouragement for veiled women to continue living their choices. The online community became a source of emotional strength that helped them face stigma and discrimination.

This research also highlights how veiled women utilize digital spaces to negotiate their identities. They attempt to maintain a balance between maintaining religious values and conforming to broader social norms. This negotiation process can be seen in the way they limit or choose the content uploaded on social media. Some participants intentionally did not post photos of their faces or veils to avoid negative perceptions from a wider audience. The resilience of veiled women is evident in the way they face challenges in the digital space. They are able to manage social pressure while continuing to create meaning for their identity. The positive narratives they build through social media not only impact themselves but also the larger online community. This shows that veiled women have the capacity to adapt and utilize technology as an empowerment tool. Overall, the results of this study reveal the complexity of veiled women's experiences in the digital era. Social media, despite bringing new challenges, remains a significant space to express identity and confront stigma. The findings enrich the understanding of how technology, gender, and identity interact with each other in an evolving social context.

### **Religious Moderation in Indonesia**

Religious moderation, according to the Ministry of Religious (Ministry of Religious Affairs Compilation Team 2019) Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, is a religious perspective, attitude, and practice that emphasizes justice, balance, and respect for diversity. This concept is rooted in religious teachings that call for peace, tolerance and avoidance of extremism, both radicalism and excessive liberalism. In a social context, religious moderation acts as a mechanism to maintain harmony in a multicultural and multireligious society. Sociology of religion figures, such as Clifford Geertz (1960), also

highlight the importance of diversity in religious practice as an element that enriches social cohesion. In Geertz's view, moderation is the essence of religion that is able to integrate society through inclusive and tolerant practices (Tago, 2017). Religious moderation has several important dimensions that shape the way people view religion, including in the context of veiled women. The first dimension is justice, where religious moderation promotes equal treatment of every religious group, including minority or stigmatized groups, such as veiled women. This ensures that they get equal opportunities in social and political life without discrimination. The second dimension is balance, which emphasizes the importance of harmony between religious belief and social responsibility. In the context of veiled women, this balance is reflected in the way they express their religious identity without disrupting social harmony in society. The third dimension is tolerance, which is one of the main manifestations of religious moderation. This attitude of tolerance encourages people to respect differences in religious beliefs and practices, and not to judge a person's personal choices, such as wearing the veil, as long as they do not violate applicable legal and social norms (Riady, 2021). The implementation of religious moderation can also be seen in various aspects of social life. Education has an important role in shaping moderate attitudes, through a curriculum that promotes diversity and interfaith dialogue from an early age. group identities and their accompanying symbols. The culture of the people in Indonesia is so diverse, ranging from ethnicity, race, religion, and various other groups that give rise to negotiations to tolerate each other. Although Islam is the majority in Indonesia, Indonesia is not the land of Islam. The majority does not guarantee that everything about Islam can be accepted unconditionally. Some symbols are still a topic of negotiation between religious culture and social culture, in this case the use of the veil for Muslim women. In fact, it is not the symbol that is the problem, but the events that have accompanied the symbol. In the minds of the public, this concern has become a labeling that identifies the veil with terrorism. As a result, veiled Muslim women who do not mean the same as the label are in controversy (Istaka 2019). Social media is a digital space that can be used to spread inclusive narratives, prevent the spread of hate speech, and reduce negative stereotypes against certain groups, including veiled women. In addition, public policy also plays a big role by encouraging the practice of religious moderation through regulations that protect religious freedom and prevent discrimination based on religion or religious appearance. (Munir et al. 2020)

However, the concept of religious moderation has some weaknesses in its definition and application. One of them is the lack of uniformity in the definition, where religious

moderation is often interpreted differently by various parties, leading to inconsistencies in its implementation. What is considered moderate by one group may be considered extreme by another. Another weakness is the limitation in implementation, where religious moderation often only becomes a normative discourse without concrete steps to ensure its application in society. For example, there are still few programs that focus on empowering veiled women to fight stigma in the digital space. Finally, there is the potential for misuse of the concept of religious moderation, where in some cases, the term is used to suppress certain groups on the grounds of maintaining social harmony, which can actually contradict the essence of moderation itself. By understanding the dimensions, implementation, and weaknesses of religious moderation, this research aims to provide deeper insights into how the concept of religious moderation can shape the experiences of veiled women in the digital era, especially in the Indonesian social context. Things like negative stereotypes towards veiled women have destabilized religious moderation in Indonesia. The spread of dichotomous stereotypes, such as those relating to villains and victims, terrorists and the terrorized, serve as strategic tropes in Western public discourse. The use of these tropes, which are associated exclusively with gendered Muslim bodies, is a central feature of Western public discourse around Muslim life (Beydoun and Sediqe 2023).

### **The Existence of Veiled Women and Religious Moderation in South Korea**

In countries other than Indonesia, Muslims are a minority religion in their country. One of them is South Korea. The existence of veiled and hijab-wearing women in South Korea and Surabaya shows different social and cultural dynamics. In South Korea, Islam is a minority religion, while in Surabaya, the majority of the population is Muslim. This difference affects how veiled women navigate their identity and face social challenges. Social media portrays the Hijab as a symbol of religious devotion and cultural identity that has been used as a visual marker to depict Muslim and non-Muslim communities, perpetuating ideas of division and separation (Ayu et al. 2020). Studies by (Eum 2017) and (Koo 2018) show that Islamophobia in South Korea stems from cultural homogeneity and global perceptions of Islam as a threat. Veiled women are often targeted for discrimination because the veil symbol is perceived as conspicuous in a very homogeneous cultural context. Popular conceptions of Islam in Korea are heavily influenced by perceptions of Islamophobia and general ignorance of the country's historical and cultural relationship with Islam and its adherents. These misperceptions

contribute to the social exclusion that Korean Muslims experience within the general society (Sheikh 2019). The term "Islamophobia" is defined as a form of racism that targets manifestations of Islamicness or perceptions of Islamicness. This conceptualization of Islamophobia as racial and religious bias finds resonance with many who experience it, similar to the way in which anti-Semitism is often perceived (Yaghi and Ryan 2022). While there are no extreme forms of discrimination such as physical violence, social pressure is seen in skeptical views, requests to remove the veil, and ostracization. In South Korea, there is one city, Seoul, which is the center of the Muslim community. In 1962, the Malaysian government had proposed an allocation of US\$33,000 for the construction of a mosque in Seoul; however, this initiative was ultimately unsuccessful due to inflation. It was only in the 1970s, when South Korea's economic ties with various Middle Eastern countries were well established, that there was a resurgence of interest in Islam. This was facilitated by the conversion of several Koreans working in Saudi Arabia to Islam, and their support upon their return to Korea, along with the support of a number of indigenous Muslims, led to the construction of the Seoul Central Mosque in the Itaewon neighborhood of Seoul in 1976 (Mauludi 2024). Today there are also mosques in Busan, Anyang, Gwangju, Jeonju and Daegu. According to Lee Hee-Soo (Yi Hui-su), President of the Korea Islam Institute, there are about 40,000 registered Muslims in South Korea, and about 10,000 are estimated to be very active adherents (Sunar 2022). Although the number of Muslims in South Korea is growing, they are still a very small minority. Muslims in South Korea, including hijab-wearing women and even veiled women, generally say that they rarely face direct discrimination or humiliation in their daily lives. South Koreans tend to be quite tolerant of other religions, with people rarely taking offense or showing anger towards different faiths. However, the reality online is very different. Muslims are often the target of hate speech on social media. The dominant image of Islam in South Korea, often exposed through Christian-dominated American media and culture, is one of terrorism, war and conflict. This perception is supported by a 2016 survey by professor Kim Su-wan of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, which showed that many South Koreans associate Islam with danger and conflict. Unfortunately, this view still persists today for most people. A clear example is the experience of Kim Jae-han, a Korean convert to Islam two years ago. He has never faced verbal attacks directly, but is often bothered by malicious comments on social media. Kim said that he often sees a lot of swearing saying that Islam is an evil religion and a group of terrorists. Besides Kim, hijab influencers such as Ayana Jihye Moon, Bianca Kartika,

Xaviera, and other Muslim women living in South Korea expressed their challenges in facing stereotypes in their lives in South Korea as hijab-wearing women. However, individuals like these have helped change society's perception through public education efforts. By speaking openly about Islam or their hijab through their YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok channels, they are slowly changing the views of their family and friends around them or their social media audience by showing that Islam is a peaceful and inclusive religion.

In contrast, in Surabaya, religious moderation plays an important role in maintaining community harmony. Despite the majority Muslim population, veiled women often face negative stereotypes, especially after a series of terrorism incidents involving veiled individuals. These stereotypes create great challenges for veiled women to navigate their identity in public spaces. However, religious moderation in Surabaya provides space for tolerance and harmony. Interfaith programs, such as interfaith dialogue, joint recitation, and inclusive education, help reduce stigma against veiled women. Social media is also used by veiled women to deconstruct these stereotypes. They utilize digital platforms to share stories and education, showing that the veil is not a symbol of extremism, but rather a peaceful and personal religious expression. A comparison between Muslim minority countries such as South Korea and Surabaya shows the role of cultural context in shaping Muslim experiences. In South Korea, tolerance towards Islam is more visible in in-person interactions, although prejudice remains strong online. In contrast, in Surabaya, religious tolerance has a stronger foundation, supported by a tradition of community-oriented religious moderation. Both show that tolerance and moderation depend not only on government policies but also on community and individual initiatives. In South Korea, efforts such as those made by Muslim influencers and converts such as Kim Jae-han can inspire a change in perception. Meanwhile, in Surabaya, a community-based approach shows how tolerance can be strengthened through cooperation and inclusive dialog. These learnings confirm that social media, cross-cultural dialogue and public education play an important role in promoting religious moderation and reducing prejudice, both in countries with majority and minority Muslim populations.

However, other countries with Muslim populations, such as Malaysia, show strong religious moderation. Religious moderation in Malaysia is carried out through various programs and initiatives to create harmony and unity in a society that is diverse in terms of ethnicity, culture and religion. One of the main efforts is the establishment of

the Wasatiyyah Institute on January 17, 2012. The institute is tasked with promoting the concept of Wasatiyyah, the principle of moderation in Islam. Through education and socialization programs, the institute encourages people to live religious and social life in a balanced and moderate manner. In addition, the Global Movement of Moderates (GMM) was established as an information center and campaign to combat extremism. GMM works with the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the international community to address the issue of radicalism and violence as a whole. Malaysia also frequently organizes seminars and conferences to strengthen people's understanding of moderation. For example, the National Seminar on Understanding Wasatiyyah and 1Malaysia discuss ways to integrate the value of moderation into daily life and governance. In addition, programs such as Bantuan 1Malaysia demonstrate the principles of equality and social justice, where assistance is given to people in need regardless of religious or ethnic background. These measures emphasize the importance of inclusive social justice and foster unity among diverse communities." (Mujani, Rozali, and Zakaria 2015)

The concept of Wasatiyyah itself emphasizes balance, justice and simplicity in various aspects of life. Balance means living a religious life reasonably, without extremes or exaggeration. Justice requires everyone to be fair in actions and decisions, respecting the rights of all parties without discrimination. Tolerance and respect for religious and cultural differences are also an important part of this concept, where people are invited to respect the right of each individual to practice their beliefs according to the constitution. Wasatiyyah is not just a concept, but also applied in daily life, such as in interacting with others, making decisions, and managing economic affairs. These values are in line with Islamic teachings that emphasize peace, unity and cooperation. An example is the Medina Charter drafted by Prophet Muhammad, which highlights tolerance and harmony between different groups. Through formal education and socialization programs, Wasatiyyah values are instilled in all levels of society, resulting in a peaceful and harmonious life. These efforts demonstrate Malaysia's commitment to ensuring that its citizens, despite their different backgrounds, can coexist peacefully by respecting differences, and placing justice and shared prosperity as top priorities. (Meerangani et al. 2022).

### **Analysis Using Alfred Schutz's Phenomenological Theory**

This research focuses on the existence of veiled women in Surabaya in the digital era, with the aim of exploring how they interpret their subjective experiences, motives for

action, and interactions on social media. Using Alfred Schutz's phenomenological approach, this research examines how veiled women build digital identities, face social challenges, and create meaning for their existence in an increasingly complex digital space. Schutz's approach provides a foundation for understanding the subjective meanings formed through veiled women's daily experiences on social media, which are now part of their lifeworld. Through concepts such as lifeworld, "because" and "in order to" motives, intersubjectivity, typification, and stock of knowledge, this study links the empirical findings with the main objective of the study, which is to understand the dynamics of identity and social interaction of veiled women on social media.

In the context of this research, social media functions as an extension of the lifeworld of veiled women, where they live their daily lives, build their identities, and interact with the outside world. Digital space provides great opportunities for veiled women to voice religious values, expand their social networks, and redefine their identities in society. As revealed by Subject NK, social media is the main medium for preaching and spreading religious messages. Through uploading positive content, she tries to build a new narrative that elevates the image of the veil as a symbol of faith and freedom of expression. This is in line with the research objective, which is to understand how veiled women utilize digital space to create an authentic and meaningful digital identity. However, for some veiled women in Surabaya, social media is also an obstacle for them to express themselves freely. They are still afraid of society's response to their identity as veiled women in their daily lives. From a sociocultural perspective, hijab has the potential to be accepted by some people; however, this is not the case with the veil. After various acts of terrorism that have occurred, veiled women face new limitations, not only having to accept their 'nature' as women, but also face new forms of discrimination, both explicitly and implicitly. As a result, veiled women experience multiple discrimination, both explicitly and implicitly (Wahidah and Nuranisah 2020). Therefore, the lifeworld of veiled women on social media is not always harmonious. Subject ZF faced challenges in the form of negative comments and stereotypes that discredit the veil. She feels that social media is a space that requires them to negotiate with stigma, as well as a place to find a supportive community. The results of this study indicate that the subjective experiences of veiled women on social media are inseparable from the tension between opportunities for self-expression and social challenges, which is relevant to the purpose of exploring how they face challenges in the digital space.



This research explores the in order to motive and because motive of veiled women in using social media, which is relevant to the purpose of understanding the subjective meaning and motivation behind their actions.

1. "(in order to)" motive

This motive relates to the background that underlies their decision to veil. Subject KH explained that her religious experience at the pesantren made her feel that the veil was part of her spiritual commitment. Subject NK revealed that the veil is an expression of obedience to religious orders and a symbol of self-protection. Subject ZF emphasized that her decision to veil arose from social experiences that made her feel more respected.

2. "(because)" motive

These motives reflect the goals they want to achieve through their actions on social media. Subject NK uses social media to deliver da'wah messages and build solidarity with other Muslimah communities. Subject KH wants to create a positive narrative about the veil to counter negative stereotypes in society. Subject ZF, although more cautious, admits that she wants to maintain a positive image of herself in the eyes of her friends who are not veiled.

This combination of "because" and "in order to" motives provides deep insights into how veiled women not only construct digital identities, but also create meaning for their presence in digital spaces. This is in line with the research objective to explore how they navigate their identities and face challenges on social media.

Schutz's concept of intersubjectivity explains how the meaning of the veil is shaped through social interactions on social media. Veiled women experience various forms of interaction that reflect society's response to their identity. The first is community support, Social media allows veiled women to build a supportive community, as experienced by Subject NK, who felt validated and encouraged by the online Muslimah community. Secondly there is Stigma and Stereotypes, Conversely, they also face negative comments and discriminatory views. Subject KH often faces the stereotype that the veil is a symbol of extremism, and Subject ZF who is still afraid to show her "veiled" identity on social media, which affects how they present themselves digitally. The process of typification, where individuals categorize experiences based on existing stock of knowledge, helps veiled women understand and respond to the social reality they face on social media. Judging from the majority of subjects who prefer to limit their digital activities to avoid conflict with dominant social norms.

One of the main objectives of this study is to explore how veiled women create subjective meanings and construct their digital identities. This study found that social media is a dynamic space where veiled women can redefine their identities, both through the positive narratives they create and through interactions with other users. The digital identity of veiled women is formed through a combination of personal narratives, identity visualization, and their engagement in online communities. In this case, Subject NK shows how social media becomes an important tool to deconstruct negative stereotypes about the veil, by displaying relevant and inspiring content. However, this identity-building process is not free from challenges. Like some other subjects who feel that social pressure in the digital space affects their freedom of expression in the digital space. They are forced to adjust how they present themselves to maintain a balance between personal identity and social acceptance

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The results of this study have far-reaching implications, both practically and academically, in understanding the experiences of veiled women in the digital era. Practically, this study shows that social media plays an important role as a space of expression for veiled women in building positive narratives, although they still face strong social stigma. The findings can serve as a reference to raise public awareness about the importance of respecting individual choices, including the choice to wear the veil, without viewing it as a threat or symbol of certain stereotypes. In addition, this study shows the need for people to better understand the role of social media as an empowerment tool and a communication bridge to bridge differences in values in society.

The findings are also relevant for policy makers, educational institutions, and social communities to design more inclusive programs, especially in supporting veiled women who are often targeted for discrimination. Digital literacy programs based on the value of inclusivity can be developed to help veiled women use social media more effectively, both to express their identity and to face the challenges of online discrimination. Religious moderation-based campaigns, which emphasize the importance of respect for diversity and dialogue between identities, can be one of the concrete steps to reduce stereotypes and build social harmony amid the diversity of Indonesian society. From an academic perspective, this research makes a significant contribution to the literature that discusses the interaction between gender, religion and technology, especially in the context of Indonesia, which has complex social dynamics. By using a phenomenological approach,

this research fills a gap in previous studies that tend to focus on the physical experiences of veiled women, without highlighting their experiences in the digital space. The findings provide a new understanding of how veiled women utilize digital spaces to build identities, navigate the challenges of social stigma, and create narratives that contradict dominant stereotypes in society. This research also emphasizes the important role of social media in reshaping the identity of minority groups in the digital era.

Based on the results of the study, several recommendations can be made. First, it is important for government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and online communities to promote digital literacy programs that not only teach the use of technology, but also insert values of tolerance and respect for differences. This program can help vulnerable groups, including veiled women, to be more confident in using social media while educating the public about the importance of respecting diversity. Second, educational institutions and religious institutions can utilize social media as a platform to spread more positive and educative narratives about veiled women, so as to counter stereotypes that are often associated with radicalism or extremism. Third, the religious moderation campaign needs to be strengthened by involving social media as the main communication tool, given its wide reach and impact in shaping public opinion. For future research, it is recommended to expand the scope of the topic by examining other community groups that face similar stigmas. Studies that examine identity dynamics across different social, cultural and religious contexts can provide new insights into how individuals and communities deal with the challenges that arise in the digital age. In addition, research that explores the interconnections between technology, gender and social representation in different regions can also enrich understanding of the global dynamics of building inclusive narratives. Through the results of this research, it is hoped that the public, academics, and policy makers can better understand the challenges and opportunities faced by veiled women in the digital era, while encouraging the creation of a digital space that is more inclusive, tolerant, and empowering for all community groups.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research highlights how veiled women in Surabaya and South Korea utilize social media as a space to build identity, face social stigma, and deconstruct negative stereotypes. The veil is often perceived as a product of Arab culture, or even the veil is often associated with radical groups that are associated with acts of rioting. This is largely

due to its association with terrorist organizations. Despite the religious significance of the veil, its adoption is still controversial in Indonesia's predominantly Muslim society. This is largely due to the fact that Indonesia has a majority Muslim population but the preference of using the veil among Muslim women in Indonesia, especially in Surabaya, is still minimal (Pasa and Yaqin 2024). Social media, particularly Instagram, serves as a lifeworld where they create subjective meanings, share experiences, and navigate social challenges.

Using Alfred Schutz's phenomenological approach, this study explores the subjective meanings and motivations of veiled women's actions in an increasingly complex digital space. The results show that veiled women adopt various strategies to manage their identities in the digital space. Some use social media to preach, build solidarity, and spread religious values through educational content. This strategy allows them to present the positive side of the veil as a symbol of faith while inspiring other Muslimah communities. On the other hand, there are veiled women who are more selective in sharing content, limiting online activities to avoid negative responses and social pressure arising from strong stereotypes. Social media provides great opportunities for veiled women to redefine their identities, both through the positive narratives they create and through interactions with other users. However, digital spaces also present challenges in the form of online discrimination, negative comments, and social stigma that reinforce old stereotypes. Veiled women utilize online interactions to gain support from the Muslimah community that reinforces their identity, despite having to continuously adapt to dominant social norms. This process shows that social media becomes a negotiation space between religious values and the need to be accepted in society.

The novelty of this research lies in the exploration of the experiences of veiled women in digital space, extending previous studies that have focused more on physical social interactions and have not focused on one region, in this case Surabaya. The findings show that social media is an important tool for deconstructing stereotypes of radicalism, although challenges in the form of social pressure remain. The resilience of veiled women is reflected in their ability to create meaning for their existence in the digital era.

Theoretically, this study makes a significant contribution to the phenomenological literature by highlighting the dynamics of interaction between gender, religion and technology in the digital era. Practically, the findings provide insight into the importance

of supporting veiled women in utilizing digital space as a tool for self-empowerment. Social media can be a means to build inclusive narratives and strengthen community solidarity, which is relevant to reducing negative stereotypes through campaigns based on religious moderation and digital literacy. This study also has limitations in the number of participants and geographical focus that only covers Surabaya.

For future research, it is recommended to expand the coverage area and dig deeper into the influence of social media algorithms on the representation of the identity of veiled women. Thus, this research is expected to pave the way for a broader understanding of the complex relationship between identity, gender, religion, and technology in the digital era.

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