

## REDEFINING ‘IDOLATRY’: The Discursive Reconciliation of K-Pop Fandom and Muslim Identity on YouTube

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**Abstract:** This study examines how Muslim K-pop fans in Indonesia navigate their religious identity in the digital sphere through the YouTube channel LearningByFasting. Using Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis approach and Gary R. Bunt’s *Cyber-Islamic Environments* framework, this study explores the relationship between language, ideology, and power in *da’wah* content that combines Islamic values with Korean popular culture. The results reveal a hybridity of discourse, where Islamic terms, such as tauhid and syirik, interact with fandom jargon, including idol, healing, and inspiration. This phenomenon reflects a symbolic negotiation between piety, modernity, and cultural globalization. Audience responses reveal a pattern of moderate digital *da’wah*, with 29% expressing religious inspiration, 17% criticizing moral issues, and the rest displaying a balanced dialogical attitude. This study concludes that the digital space serves as an arena for creative and inclusive reconstruction of religious identity, while affirming the potential of digital media as an empathetic means of *da’wah* that strengthens moderate Islam in the global era.

**Kata kunci:** Religious identity, K-Pop, critical discourse analysis, moderate Islam, YouTube, digital culture.

**How to Cite:** Nur Afifah and Vahit Gökteş, “Redefining ‘Idolatry’: The Discursive Reconciliation of K-Pop Fandom and Muslim Identity on YouTube,” *Journal of Digital Religion and Contemporary Society* 1, no. 1 (June 2026): 60–95, <https://doi.org/10.0000/xxxxx>.

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**Article history:** Received: January 23, 2026 | Revised: May 14, 2026 |

Available Online: June 15, 2026

## Introduction

The development of digital media has created new spaces for increasingly fluid religious expression, where Islam, entertainment, and popular culture intersect to form a distinct and evolving religious landscape. Popular culture, such as Korean Pop (K-pop), has become an arena for complex identity contestation, especially for young Muslim communities who must navigate between traditional religious values and the appeal of transnational entertainment. This phenomenon reflects cultural hybridity in which Muslim individuals, especially women, often face tensions between self-expression through fandom and the demands of Islamic orthodoxy, as seen in identity negotiations on social media and digital content platforms.<sup>1</sup> In Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, the Korean Wave (Hallyu) has not only influenced cultural consumption patterns but has also sparked debate about the compatibility of K-pop elements, such as lifestyle, fashion, and performance, with Islamic principles, which are often considered to be contrary to religious values.<sup>2</sup>

This contradiction is further exacerbated by the digital space, where self-representation can easily become the target of conservative preaching or social criticism, creating a dynamic tension between global inclusivity and religious exclusivity.<sup>3</sup> In general, the intersection between popular culture and religious identity highlights how cultural globalization can be a catalyst for identity reconstruction, but also a source of internal and external conflict for Muslim individuals in an increasingly virtually connected society. Although existing literature has explored the negotiation of Muslim identity

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<sup>1</sup> Teguh Wijaya Mulya, "Faith and Fandom: Young Indonesian Muslims Negotiating K-Pop and Islam," *Contemporary Islam* 15, no. 3 (2021): 337–55, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-021-00475-1>; Sunny Yoon, "K-Pop Fandom in Veil: Religious Reception and Adaptation to Popular Culture," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 13, no. 1 (June 2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2019.13.1.1-20>.

<sup>2</sup> Nur Azka Inayatussahara and Noorhaidi Hasan, "Between Hallyu and The Qur'an: Everyday Life of Female Santri in Yogyakarta," *Ulumuna* 27, no. 2 (2023): 501–28, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v27i2.736>; Wan Kamal Mujani, Yoan Rou Seung, and Kim Keum Hyun, "The Cultural and Religious Conflict between Korean Wave and Islamic Values," *Islamiyyat* 44, no. 1 (n.d.): 193, <https://doi.org/10.17576/ISLAMIYYAT-2022-4401-17>.

<sup>3</sup> Aysha Agbarya, "Audience Perception and Religious Identity Among Social Media Users: The Case of Muslim Arab Women in Israel," *International Journal of Communication* 17 (2023): 4346–63; Musa Ibrahim, "Being Muslim at the Intersection of Islam and Popular Cultures in Nigeria," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 34, no. 2 (2022): 205–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2022.2060193>.

in the context of popular culture, there is a significant gap in understanding how digital spaces, particularly platforms such as YouTube, have become a specific field of contestation for Muslim K-pop fans.

Previous studies, such as those conducted by Mulya (2021) and Yoon (2019), highlight the various positions of Muslim K-pop fans' subjectivity, ranging from total opposition to harmonious integration, but tend to focus on offline contexts or general social media, without delving into critical discourse analysis of podcast content involving da'wah (proselytizing) such as Learning By Fasting.<sup>4</sup> In addition, research on Muslim women in Islamic minority or majority regions, as discussed by Agbarya and John (2023) and Kayikci and D'Haenens (2017), emphasizes the role of social media in identity management and social relations, but fails to capture the specific tensions in Indonesia where K-pop is often associated with conspiracy or threats to popular Islamism.<sup>5</sup> This gap becomes even more apparent when considering the contradiction between the aspirations of global modernity through K-pop and religious obligations, where Muslim fans face a dilemma between "strategic disobedience" to Islamic norms and cultural adaptation, as illustrated in a study of female Islamic boarding school students.<sup>6</sup> and value conflicts in Malaysia.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, this specific context highlights the need for a more in-depth approach to digital discourse that mediates the tension between fandom and faith.

In this context, the theory of *Cyber-Islamic Environments* (CIE) introduced by Gary R. Bunt (2009, 2018, 2024) is important for explaining how digital spaces function not only as a medium of communication but also as a space for the production of religious meaning. Bunt views the online world as an ecosystem in which Islamic authority, worship practices, and Muslim identity are continuously negotiated through algorithms, social interactions, and digital content. This approach helps to understand how

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<sup>4</sup> Wijaya Mulya, "Faith and Fandom"; Sunny Yoon, "K-Pop Fandom in Veil: Religious Reception and Adaptation to Popular Culture," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 13, no. 1 (2019): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2019.13.1.1-20>.

<sup>5</sup> Romario, "K-Pop: Islamisme Populer Anak Muda Muslim," *Jurnal Dakwah* 23, no. 2 (August 2022): 12–24, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jd.23.2.22.2>; Md Azalanshah Md Syed, "K-pop, Aspirasi Kemodenan dan Ketidakpatuhan Strategik dalam Kalangan Wanita Melayu," *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication* 35, no. 2 (June 2019), <http://ejournal.ukm.my/mjc/article/view/30114>.

<sup>6</sup> Inayatussahara and Hasan, "Between Hallyu and The Qur'an."

<sup>7</sup> Mujani, Seung, and Hyun, "The Cultural and Religious Conflict between Korean Wave and Islamic Values."

channels such as YouTube have become a new locus for da'wah and the formation of young Muslim identity, including in the case of K-pop fans who negotiate spiritual values through fandom practices. Thus, CIE becomes a conceptual lens for reading the phenomenon of religious-cultural hybridity in the digital realm. This study is academically relevant because it contributes to the fields of cultural studies, communication, and Islamic studies by applying Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis perspective to unravel the layers of power, ideology, and resistance in digital content.

Practically, these findings can provide insights for educators, scholars, and policymakers in understanding how digital spaces can be tools for inclusive dialogue, rather than polarization, amid the contestation between global culture and local values.<sup>8</sup> This relevance is increasingly important given the increased use of social media by young Muslims to build communities and challenge hegemonic narratives, as observed in the context of Muslim minorities in Australia and the United States,<sup>9</sup> as well as cultural adaptation in Nigeria.<sup>10</sup>

Through the Cyber-Islamic Environments (CIE) framework developed by Gary R. Bunt (2009, 2018, 2024), this study examines how online spaces reshape Muslim religious authority, practices, and identities. This concept is crucial for understanding YouTube channels as arenas for the production and negotiation of Islamic meaning in the era of algorithmic content. This theory highlights how online spaces reshape religious authority, Islamic practices, and the ways in which Muslims interact, negotiate, and construct religious identities in the virtual world. Thus, this approach helps to understand how the contestation of discourse and religious identity among Muslim K-poppers on YouTube occurs not only at the symbolic level but also within the broader context of the digital

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<sup>8</sup> Ai Fatimah Nur Fuad et al., "The Popularity of Korean Culture among Indonesian Millennial Muslims: Between Cultural Globalization and Religious Values," *AIP Conference Proceedings* 3148, no. 1 (December 2024): 030008, <https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0244930>; Hauwa Mohammed Sani, "Television Series, Identity of Contemporary Muslim Women and Socio-Cultural Contestations: The Case of Arewa 24's 'Mata A Yau' (Contemporary Women)," *African Identities*, ahead of print, Routledge, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2024.2395947>.

<sup>9</sup> Nasya Bahfen, "The Individual and the Ummah: The Use of Social Media by Muslim Minority Communities in Australia and the United States," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 38, no. 1 (2018): 119–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2018.1434939>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibrahim, "Being Muslim at the Intersection of Islam and Popular Cultures in Nigeria."

ecosystem.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, this research not only enriches the theoretical discourse on identity hybridity but also offers practical implications for reducing the stigmatization of Muslim K-pop fans, who are often faced with accusations of religious deviation.<sup>12</sup>

Based on this background, this study aims to explore how Muslim K-Poppers navigate their religious identity through their responses to religious content on the YouTube channel LearningByFasting. The analysis aims to examine the intersection, competition, and transformation of religious discourse and popular culture in the digital space. The main issues include the contradiction between fandom expressions that are considered “non-Islamic” and efforts to maintain religious identity, which often give rise to subtle forms of resistance or anomie.<sup>13</sup> The purpose of this study is to analyze the content using Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis framework, focusing on the dimensions of text, discourse production processes, and socio-cultural contexts, in order to reveal the dynamics of power and identity negotiations among Indonesian Muslim K-poppers.

The significance of this study lies in its ability to fill a gap in the literature by highlighting the digital space as a hybrid arena where religious identity is not static but is constantly negotiated amid global and local contestations. By integrating findings from various contexts such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Western countries,<sup>14</sup> This study emphasizes that identity negotiation can be a creative form of popular Islamism, in which K-

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<sup>11</sup> “Gary R. Bunt. *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. Xiii + 358 Pages, Screenshots, Diagrams, Tables, Glossary, Endnotes, Index. Cloth US\$65 ISBN 978-0-8078-3258-5,” *Review of Middle East Studies* 44, no. 1 (July 2010): 73–75, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2151348100001130>; Gary R. Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Gary R. Bunt, *Islamic Algorithms: Online Influence in the Muslim Metaverse* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2025).

<sup>12</sup> Badrul Redzuan Abu Hassan and Raja Widya Novchi, “Kepeminatan dan Kemodenan dalam Pembentukan Identiti Komuniti K-Popers Pekanbaru,” *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication* 35, no. 1 (March 2019), <http://ejournal.ukm.my/mjc/article/view/31736>; Banowati Azelia Putri Yuliawan and Ganjar Eka Subakti, “Pengaruh Fenomena Korean Wave (K-Pop Dan K-Drama) Terhadap Perilaku Konsumtif Penggemarnya Perspektif Islam,” *Jurnal Penelitian Keislaman* 18, no. 1 (July 2022): 35–48.

<sup>13</sup> Mujani, Seung, and Hyun, “The Cultural and Religious Conflict between Korean Wave and Islamic Values.”

<sup>14</sup> Agbarya, “Audience Perception and Religious Identity Among Social Media Users”; Syed, “K-pop, Aspirasi Kemodenan dan Ketidakpatuhan Strategik dalam Kalangan Wanita Melayu.”

pop is used for proselytizing or criticism, rather than simply as a threat.<sup>15</sup> Thus, this study not only enriches the field of Islamic and media studies but also affirms the importance of digital space as a field for preaching and negotiating an inclusive identity for young Muslims amid the tide of cultural globalization.

This research employs critical discourse analysis (CDA), which views discourse as a form of social practice that is inherently non-neutral. In Norman Fairclough's view, language is not only a tool for representing reality, but also a means of forming, maintaining, and negotiating power relations and ideologies in society.<sup>16</sup> Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) views discourse as a social practice laden with interests, ideologies, and power relations. Language does not merely describe reality, but also shapes it through processes of representation, domination, and resistance. Fairclough explains that discourse is always dialectically related to social structures: texts are influenced by social contexts, while also being capable of changing them.<sup>17</sup> The CDA framework consists of three dimensions of text analysis, discourse practices, and social practices that enable researchers to read language not as neutral symbols, but as a field of meaning production related to power, ideology, and society.

In the study on "Negotiating the Religious Identity of K-Poppers in the Digital Space," CDA was used operationally in three steps. First, textual analysis is conducted on videos and comments on YouTube LearningByFasting to identify vocabulary choices, narrative styles, visual symbols, and rhetorical strategies that represent the relationship between Islam and K-pop culture. Second, discourse practice analysis examines how content and comments are produced, circulated, and received, including the influence of YouTube algorithms, creators, and audiences on the dissemination of meaning. Third, social practice analysis connects these findings to the ideological context of Indonesian Muslim society, specifically how K-pop discourse is positioned as either a challenge or an opportunity in religious practice. Through these three stages, the study systematically examines how young Muslim identities are negotiated at the intersection of digital da'wah and popular culture, leading to various forms of religious

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<sup>15</sup> Fuad et al., "The Popularity of Korean Culture among Indonesian Millennial Muslims"; Romario, "K-Pop."

<sup>16</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, 2nd Ed (New York: Routledge, 2013), 17-24.

<sup>17</sup> Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 45-51.

resistance, adaptation, or reinterpretation in the online space.<sup>18</sup> Here is the theoretical mapping:

Table 1. Mind Mapping Table

Stages	Focus of Analysis	Objectives
Textual Analysis (Description)	Examining the linguistic structure, vocabulary, style, and visual symbols in the text (YouTube video and comments <i>LearningByFasting</i> ).	Identifying how Islamic values and K-pop culture are represented linguistically and visually.
Discourse Practice Analysis	Tracking the production, distribution, and consumption of text on digital platforms, including the roles of algorithms, creators, and audiences.	Understanding how meaning is formed and negotiated in interactions between creators and audiences.
Analysis of Social Practice	Linking the results of interpretation to the social, ideological, and cultural context of Indonesian Muslim society.	Revealing how social structures and religious ideologies influence, and are influenced by, digital religious discourse.

### Profile of the YouTube Channel “Sepulang Sekolah”

The YouTube channel “Sepulang Sekolah” (@sepulangsekolah) is one of Indonesia’s most popular educational and discussion platforms, featuring personal stories that cover a wide range of topics, from lighthearted to profound, including life experiences, pop culture, and social and religious issues. The channel was founded and is managed by Koi, a content creator known through his Instagram account @koiyocabe. According to the latest data, the channel has around 2.17 million subscribers, more than 898 videos uploaded, and a total of hundreds of millions of views.

<sup>18</sup> Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 87–89.



Figure 1. Sepulang Sekolah YouTube profile

This channel joined YouTube in the early 2010s, with its base in Indonesia (as seen from the business contact number +62 in Koi's Instagram bio). The channel description emphasizes “after-school” content, describing itself as a relaxed space for learning and sharing stories, often with a personal and relatable narrative approach. Koi, as the main host, presents a casual, humorous, and introspective speaking style, making the content easy to digest for young audiences, especially teenagers and young adults who are interested in issues of self-identity, pop culture, such as K-pop, and religious exploration.<sup>19</sup>

Koi (@koiyocabe) is the central figure behind this channel. According to his Instagram profile, he has approximately 490,000 followers, with more than 1,000 accounts followed and 667 posts. His Instagram bio explicitly states “Known as SEPULANG SEKOLAH,” complete with business contact information for collaborations (+62 812-8411-9414 via @qanitapiw) and a direct link to his YouTube channel.

<sup>19</sup> “Sepulang Sekolah,” YouTube, accessed October 22, 2025, [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfQHauBD0oEBH\\_FRyHE5qIg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfQHauBD0oEBH_FRyHE5qIg).



Figure 2. Koi's Instagram profile

Koi's profile picture is typically an artsy illustration or a personal photo, featuring a cartoonish or minimalist aesthetic. His Instagram highlights feature his daily life, behind-the-scenes YouTube production, and promotions for his latest videos. His latest posts are often teasers, memes, or light discussions on current issues, including interactions with K-pop fans and religious themes. As a Muslim, Koi is known for being respectful and open when discussing interfaith topics. His neutral, reflective communication style that encourages critical thinking makes his dialogue space inclusive for a multicultural audience.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to in-depth main content, the *Sepulang Sekolah* channel has various series and thematic playlists that discuss adolescent psychology, social relationships, pop culture, and self-care. This content curation demonstrates Koi's commitment to presenting material that is relevant to young people's lives, combining elements of entertainment, personal reflection, and cultural insight in a light yet insightful format.

<sup>20</sup> "KOI (@koiyocabe) • Foto dan video Instagram," accessed October 22, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/koiyocabe/>.

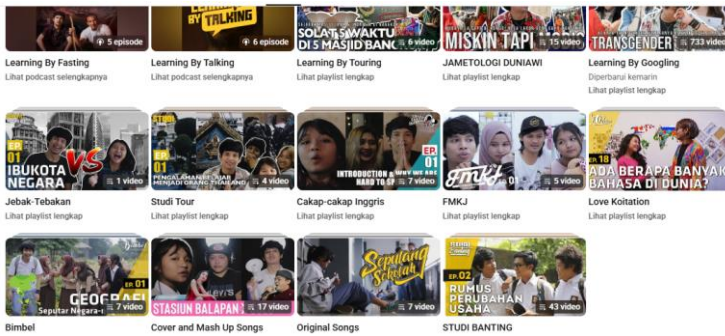


Figure 3. segments of the After School channel

Some of the popular segments include “LearningByFasting,” a special Ramadan series that combines the concepts of learning and fasting as a form of self-reflection and spiritual learning during the holy month; “LearningByFasting,” which presents casual and in-depth discussions on various social and cultural issues, as well as life values through light-hearted but meaningful conversations; and “LearningByFasting,” which takes the audience on a journey to explore various places while reviewing new insights about life and culture directly in the field.<sup>21</sup> Among these series, “LearningByFasting” is a special segment that appears seasonally, particularly during the month of Ramadan.

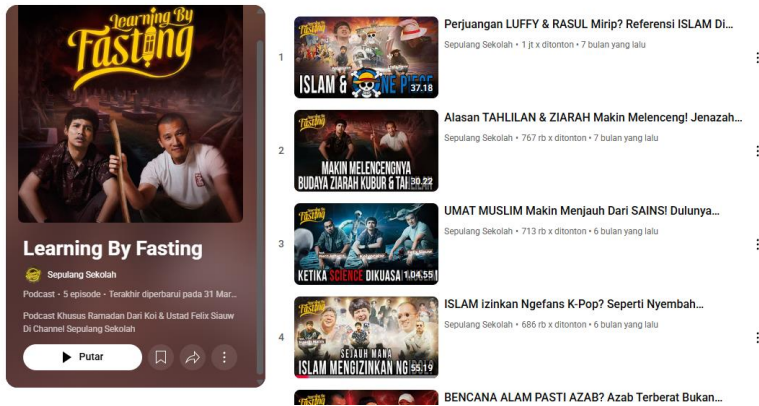


Figure 4. LearningByFasting Segment

In the LearningByFasting series, Koi combines the concepts of learning and fasting as metaphors for self-reflection and the search for new

<sup>21</sup> YouTube, “Sepulang Sekolah.”

meaning. The episodes, which usually air in March–April with the hashtag #learningbyfasting, invite the audience to “fast” from bad habits while enriching their knowledge of spirituality, psychology, and pop culture. With a warm and personal delivery style, the series feels like a chat with a close friend rather than a lecture. Content duration varies from 5 to 30 minutes, and together with other segments in *Sepulang Sekolah*, it forms a holistic content ecosystem that combines entertainment, education, and self-reflection for Indonesia’s younger generation.<sup>22</sup>

### Faith, Fandom, and Idolatry

This content features a discussion between Felix Siau and Fuadh Naim on the phenomenon of K-pop fanaticism and fandom from an Islamic perspective, particularly during the month of Ramadan. They discuss issues such as the perception of idolizing artists as idolatry and how fandom can influence a person’s life, sometimes providing a sense of purpose or helping to overcome mental health issues.



Figure 5. YouTube Content

The discussion also touched on the personal experience of one of the speakers, who is a fan of Japanese music, highlighting how fandom communities can create strong social bonds, even sparking business opportunities and inspiring positive values for fans who feel marginalized. Overall, they concluded that the line between entertainment and worship lies in whether someone loses self-confidence or hope without their idol, emphasizing the importance of treating entertainment as true entertainment.<sup>23</sup> In a special Ramadan discussion on Learning by Fasting,

<sup>22</sup> *ISLAM Izinkan Ngefans K-Pop? Seperti Nyembah BERHALA? |LearningByFasting Ft Felix Siau, Fuadh Naim*, directed by Sepulang Sekolah, 2025, 55:19, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCnTDVvca74>.

<sup>23</sup> YouTube, “Sepulang Sekolah.”

speakers, including a J-pop fan YouTuber and Fuad Naim, highlighted the phenomenon of K-pop fandom as a reflection of human dynamics, not just light entertainment.

This research explores the essence of whether Islam allows K-pop fandom, or equates it with idol worship, "shirk." The transcript underscores that such admiration is permissible, provided it does not exceed the boundaries of emotional dependence that replaces God, as emphasized in the hadith *Al-mar'u ma'a man ahabba*, "A person is with those he loves," which highlights the positive influence of idols.<sup>24</sup> This content illustrates fandom as a temporary "clinic" that fills existential voids such as depression or loss of direction through inspirational values such as perseverance, for example: Stephen Curry's 98% failure rate in pursuit of success. The source shares personal experiences: her love for the band Scandal, which she has had since 2007, has encouraged her to search for her purpose in life, build a global community, and even start a business, all without interfering with her worship. This aligns with the Islamic view that idolizing someone is permissible, as it is part of human nature, as long as the idol brings goodness and does not become the ultimate goal or object of worship. Unlike idolatry, which involves direct supplication to statues or inanimate objects, K-pop fandom is more like admiring a pious role model, as long as it is limited so as not to neglect prayer or moral values, such as praying for the idol's guidance while performing tawaf at the Kaaba, which actually strengthens spiritual bonds.

Although permitted, sources warn that fandom can become a chronic illness if one becomes completely dependent on it, similar to idolizing a soccer player, which can trigger family disputes or elections, potentially becoming a form of hidden shirk because hopes are pinned on a creation. The views of scholars such as Ustaz Abdul Somad emphasize that it is permissible to like K-pop, but to prioritize noble idols, such as the Prophet Muhammad, so that admiration is directed towards the afterlife rather than hating religion due to harsh judgment. Potential haram elements, such as nudity, promiscuity, or the promotion of sex in content, must be avoided and replaced with positive imitations, such as imitating modest clothing styles or learning languages for da'wah. For K-pop fans who feel judged, Islam encourages empathy: accompany them with patience, as the Prophet Muhammad accompanied wounded souls, so that fandom becomes a bridge

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<sup>24</sup> *ISLAM Izinkan Ngefans K-Pop?*

to a balanced life, not a barrier to paradise.<sup>25</sup> Islam does not absolutely forbid being a K-pop fan. It is permissible as entertainment that motivates creativity and positive community, but it is forbidden if it resembles idolatry through emotional dependence that replaces Allah.<sup>26</sup>

The transcript emphasizes transformation: After “recovering” from emptiness, internalize the idol’s values of perseverance and creativity, then direct them toward the ultimate goal of the afterlife. Final message: Make fandom a temporary hospital, not a permanent home; learn the science behind it to empower others, so that future generations will love with awareness, not as an escape from spiritual emptiness.

### **Presentation of Netizen Comments on Content**

The audience response to the discussion video about K-pop on the Sepulang Sekolah channel shows an interesting diversity of views. Some viewers assess K-pop positively, seeing it as a means of entertainment and inspiration, while others are critical, highlighting its negative impact on Islamic values. Between the two, there are also moderate voices that emphasize the importance of balance between entertainment and spirituality. Positive comments highlight how K-pop can have a positive impact if enjoyed with awareness and clear boundaries. Accounts such as @jwijel and @EJASUKASUKA see fandom as a temporary phase that can motivate someone to work, learn languages, and even bring them closer to religious values. For them, the experience of being a fan can be a life lesson. Similarly, @serenao\_de and @hasnamzd emphasize positive values such as hard work, big dreams, and creativity that can be taken from the world of K-pop without losing spiritual direction.

On the contrary, critical comments highlight the problematic side of this entertainment industry. Accounts such as @xiangni8796 refuse to support idols or brands associated with pro-Israel products as a form of solidarity with Palestine. Meanwhile, @1004Hind\_6 criticizes the term “idol” as being contrary to Islamic teachings because it has the potential to lead to the worship of humans. Several other users also mention the presence of “satanic” symbols and values that are considered incompatible with Islamic morals, so they choose to stay away from K-pop in order to maintain consistency in their faith. On the other hand, there are also neutral and balanced comments from viewers who try to view K-pop proportionally.

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<sup>25</sup> *ISLAM Izinkan Ngefans K-Pop?*

<sup>26</sup> *ISLAM Izinkan Ngefans K-Pop?*

Accounts such as @Div\_ya284 believe that enjoying K-pop music is fine as long as it does not interfere with one's obligations as a Muslim. For @achitarius, K-Pop was once a source of encouragement during difficult times, but now it is just a pleasant memory. Meanwhile, @IchaIcha-q7c9o emphasizes the importance of tolerance and guidance for young fans so that they learn to balance entertainment and faith.

There were also many comments praising the content and speakers. Many viewers, such as @meutiafadhilla6793 and @pichul, appreciated the presentation style of Ustaz Felix and Fuadh Naim, which they considered wise, relevant, and non-judgmental. They felt that the relaxed yet in-depth approach made the discussion about K-pop fanaticism feel lighter and more acceptable, especially to Muslim teenagers. Comments like these highlight the importance of a communicative and humanistic approach to preaching in the digital space. Furthermore, comments with spiritual undertones show that viewers associate the topic of K-pop with the strengthening of religious values. Accounts such as @Kholis\_alhanan remind us that the Prophet Muhammad SAW is the true idol, while @masrui505 encourages us to increase our remembrance of God and prayers to shift our focus away from the world of entertainment. There is also @IslamByChoice1, which emphasizes the importance of seeking religious knowledge to discern entertainment that aligns with Islamic values.

Finally, lighthearted and off-topic comments also enrich the atmosphere of the comment section. Some viewers make jokes, share nostalgia, or even discuss other topics such as global issues. For example, @sayur-w7v jokingly said that Ustaz Felix looks like an "older version of Boboho," or @zack9397 suddenly suggested a discussion about the Zapatista rebellion. This kind of interaction shows that the comment section is not only a place for serious discussion, but also a warm and open social space. Based on an analysis of around 120 comments that appeared on a video discussion about K-pop and Islam on the Sepulang Sekolah channel, there appears to be a diversity of views that reflect the dynamics of Muslim netizens' thinking and religiosity in the digital space.

Of all the comments, the majority, or around 54%, showed a positive and balanced attitude towards K-pop. This group believes that the positive aspects of popular culture can be embraced as long as they are accompanied by an awareness of religious boundaries and responsibilities. Many of them shared personal experiences of how K-pop has brought excitement to their lives, helped them learn Korean, and expanded their social networks,

without having to sacrifice their spiritual values. Meanwhile, around 17% of comments were critical, highlighting the problematic aspects of the K-pop industry that are considered contrary to Islamic values. These criticisms generally relate to moral issues such as satanic symbols and the normalization of LGBT values, as well as socio-political issues such as support for pro-Israel products and genocide in Palestine.

These comments show a high level of social and religious awareness, with some viewers even deciding to stop following K-pop as a form of moral and religious commitment. Furthermore, around 8% of comments focused on religious values and spirituality, emphasizing the importance of shifting attention from human idols to the Prophet Muhammad as the true role model. Comments in this category often contained calls to increase worship, recite salawat, and deepen one's religious knowledge so as not to become overly attached to excessive idolization. Additionally, several comments praised the content and delivery of the video. Viewers appreciated the relaxed, non-judgmental style of discussion, which was relevant to the lives of today's Muslim teenagers. The communicative approach of Ustaz Felix, Fuadh Naim, and the *Sepulang Sekolah* team was considered capable of bridging the gap between the world of entertainment and Islamic values in a proportional manner.

### Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis

Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) views language as a social practice that is neither neutral nor objective, but rather a means of forming, maintaining, and negotiating power and ideology. Through the use of language, values, beliefs, and identities are produced, contested, and negotiated within specific social contexts. Therefore, discourse is understood as a space where linguistic practices are always closely related to the social structures and power relations that surround them.<sup>27</sup>

#### A. Textual Analysis

Within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) developed by Norman Fairclough, the textual dimension (description) focuses on observing the micro elements that form discourse, including linguistic structure, vocabulary choice, style, and visual symbols that support

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<sup>27</sup> "Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis," [www2.Internationalinsurance.Org](https://www2.internationalinsurance.org/GR-8-08/pdf?title=fairclough-critical-discourse-analysis.pdf&trackid), accessed November 5, 2025, <https://www2.internationalinsurance.org/GR-8-08/pdf?title=fairclough-critical-discourse-analysis.pdf&trackid>.

the construction of meaning. This analysis is applied to a YouTube video titled "ISLAM izinkan Ngefans K-Pop? Like Worshiping IDOLS? | LearningByFasting ft Felix Siau, Fuadh Naim," uploaded by the LearningByFasting channel. The primary data source is a transcript of verbal dialogue, representing religious discourse in digital format, supplemented by visual observations through video clips and the context of audience responses, as captured in online comments. The purpose of this analysis is to identify how Islamic values such as tawhid, fitrah, and the limits of shirk interact with elements of popular culture such as fandom, community, and K-Pop inspiration, thereby shaping the negotiation of religious identity in the contemporary digital space.<sup>28</sup>

### 1. Linguistic Structure

The linguistic structure in the video transcript shows a dialogic-educational discursive pattern, typical of modern religious podcast formats on YouTube. The conversation opens with a problematic introduction regarding the phenomenon of excessive idolization of K-pop artists, which is often seen as a form of idolatry (modern idol worship), then develops through personal reflection and theological argumentation, and concludes with a moral conclusion that emphasizes the principle of balance between cultural appreciation and steadfast faith. The thematic structure is progressive, covering: an introduction to the issue of K-Pop fanaticism among Muslims; a psychological and social exploration of the function of fandom as a means of channeling meaning in life and solidarity; and a normative conclusion that underlines the importance of religious boundaries in expressions of fandom.

Transitional phrases such as "although permitted, there are still limits" and "it is okay to admire, as long as it does not replace the position of Allah" become rhetorical strategies that steer the discussion from the problem to a moral solution. Through this structure, Islamic values are represented as an inclusive yet principled ethical system, while K-Pop culture is constructed as a human phenomenon that can be interpreted spiritually, as long as it does not violate tawhid.

### 2. Vocabulary

The vocabulary used in the discourse reveals a mixture of religious terms and pop culture jargon, which together create a hybrid semantic field signifying the process of negotiation between Muslim identity and

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<sup>28</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, 2. ed., [Nachdr.] (London: Routledge, 2013)3-8.

participation in global culture.<sup>29</sup> Religious vocabulary includes terms such as *syirik*, *berhala*, *fitrah*, *tauhid*, *hidayah*, as well as the hadith quote *al-mar'u ma'a man aḥabba* “A person will be with those he loves”. These terms emphasize the function of Islam as a moral framework that guides fans in determining spiritual boundaries. In contrast, popular cultural vocabulary such as fandom, fan, idol, global community, and entertainment business presents a discourse of modernity and creativity. The collocation of these two domains, for example, in the phrase “it’s okay to be a fan, but don’t deify your idol,” reflects an ambivalent identity construction: religiously devout yet active in the global cultural space.<sup>30</sup>

In audience comments, lexical patterns show ideological variations, including: A). Positive towards K-Pop: “K-Pop teaches hard work, as long as it’s not excessive.” B). Critical towards K-Pop: “This is just an excuse, K-pop is full of immodesty!” C). Neutral/Moderate: “Enjoy it in moderation, but don’t forget to pray.” D). Spiritual: “The Prophet Muhammad is the true idol.” The combination of slang terms such as “mantap ustadz” (great, teacher) or “relate banget” (I totally relate) with religious terms illustrates how the digital Muslim community has formed a distinctive religious-popular language register, blurring the boundaries between the sacred and the profane.

### 3. Style of Language

The style of language used in this video is persuasive, analogical, and inclusive, with a gentle and reflective educational tone. The pronouns “we” and “someone” are often used to create emotional closeness and avoid sounding patronizing. This strategy builds a more participatory and relevant discourse for young audiences. Metaphors and analogies are used to normalize sensitive topics. For example, fandom is likened to a “temporary hospital for empty souls,” describing K-pop as an emotional therapy space for individuals seeking meaning or psychological stability.<sup>31</sup> This analogy

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<sup>29</sup> Hijriah Hijriah Arsyad, “Di Balik Hijab: Interaksi Antara Ikhwan dan Akhwat Anggota Wahdah Islamiyah,” *Emik* 3, no. 2 (December 2020): 223–40, <https://doi.org/10.46918/emik.v3i2.684>.

<sup>30</sup> Kompasiana.com, “Pengaruh Budaya Pop Terhadap Praktik Keagamaan Muslim Kontemporer: Studi Sosiologis,” *KOMPASIANA*, November 25, 2024, <https://www.kompasiana.com/azkackp5516/6744842cc925c473a223ad72/pengaruh-budaya-pop-terhadap-praktik-keagamaan-muslim-kontemporer-studi-sosiologis>.

<sup>31</sup> Benedicta Audrey Putri Trisnadewi and Shofwatun Amaliyah, “K-Pop Sebagai Mekanisme Regulasi Emosi Pada Remaja,” *Jurnal Psikologi* 21, no. 1 (March 2025): 59–71.

indicates that discourse does not reject popular culture outright, but rather directs its meaning to be in harmony with spiritual values.

Quotes from hadith and references to scholars such as Ustaz Abdul Somad reinforce religious authority, while Koi's personal experience as a former J-Pop fan provides experiential authenticity. This combination reinforces the ethos of the discussion, presenting Islam as a religion that is adaptable to the times without compromising its fundamental principles.

#### 4. Visual Symbols

The visual symbols in this video play an important role in reinforcing the message conveyed verbally.



Figures 7. discussion forum in content

It appears that the visual mise-en-scène was carefully arranged to create an atmosphere of reflective and egalitarian discussion.<sup>32</sup>

The background and layout of the video are dominated by neutral colors such as gray, dark blue, and natural wood, creating a warm and contemplative atmosphere. The three speakers sit side by side on a blue sofa, signifying equality in the dialogue. Soft lighting highlights their faces without creating harsh shadows, reinforcing the impression of peace and spiritual focus. The wooden stairs in the background add visual depth while symbolizing *climbing the ladder*, a metaphor for reaching a higher level of religious understanding.

As for fandom artifacts as material symbols in the video content, at the 30-minute mark, one of the speakers displays several J-Pop albums by the group Scandal and K-Pop light sticks on a round wooden table. These objects serve as material markers of fandom identity, and their presence in the context of religious discussion has deep semiotic meaning. Fandom artifacts are presented not merely as visual props, but as symbolic mediators

<sup>32</sup> Studio Antelope, "Memahami Mise En Scène Dalam Film | Blog," *Studio Antelope*, February 16, 2023, <https://studioantelope.com/apa-itu-mise-en-scene/>.

between the profane and sacred worlds. The albums and light sticks represent the emotional aspects, memories, and commitment of fans, while the religious and minimalist discussion space symbolizes a spiritual awareness that reflects the meaning of ownership of these objects. From Fairclough's perspective, this is a form of material mediation, in which concrete objects become a bridge between popular cultural practices and religious ideology.

Thus, the visual symbols in this video not only enhance the appearance but also convey an implied narrative about the effort to balance spirituality and modernity. The fandom artifacts displayed in the middle of the preaching room are a concrete representation of the negotiation of young Muslim identity in the digital age, where fandom is no longer a form of worship but a space for searching for meaning.

### ***B. Discourse Practice Analysis***

Within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed by Norman Fairclough, the dimension of discourse practice focuses on the process of producing, distributing, and consuming texts in specific social contexts. In this study, the text refers to the video content of the YouTube channel *Sepulang Sekolah*, specifically the *LearningByFasting* segment, which explores the theme of religious identity negotiation among K-Pop fans (K-Poppers) in the digital space. This analysis traces how these three processes involve the roles of creators, platform algorithms, and audiences, and how discursive meanings such as the dichotomy between the concepts of "idol" and "idol," the limits of entertainment in Islam, and the integration of popular culture with spiritual values are formed and negotiated through interactions between creators and viewers. Based on available comment data, these discursive practices reveal the dynamics of the digital space as an arena for negotiating the religious identity of young Muslims, which occurs within a spectrum ranging from moderate acceptance to critical rejection.<sup>33</sup>

#### *1. Text Production Process: The Role of Creators in Shaping Initial Discourse*

The text production process began with the *Sepulang Sekolah* channel's creative team, led by host Koi Koiyocabe, featuring guest speakers Ustaz Felix Siau and Fuadh Naim. The video was produced as part of *LearningByFasting*, a segment designed to raise contemporary issues such as K-Pop fandom from an Islamic perspective during Ramadan, with the aim of making da'wah more relevant and accessible to the younger generation.

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<sup>33</sup> Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2. ed., 78.

The relaxed, empathetic presentation style, interspersed with humor such as the host's personal anecdotes as a former J-Pop fan, the opening of a memorabilia box, and light-hearted jokes about the names of idols, creates a non-judgmental atmosphere of discourse. This approach differs from the traditional, normative style of da'wah, so the creators consciously build a discourse of negotiation, suggesting that K-pop can be a means of emotional healing as long as it does not cross the boundaries of shirk and remains directed towards Islamic values, as exemplified by the example of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>34</sup>

In this context, creators act as mediators who integrate elements of digital pop culture, such as references to BTS concerts or prayers for idols at the Kaaba, with Islamic teachings, producing hybrid texts that invite audience participation.<sup>35</sup> For example, Ustaz Felix Siau's view on the importance of "accompanying" fans rather than judging them reflects a production strategy that is sensitive to the digital context in which Muslim teenagers often experience identity conflicts between global fandom culture and local religious norms.<sup>36</sup> This production process also includes technical aspects, such as video editing to maintain the narrative flow, the use of hashtags (#learningbyfasting, #koiyocabe), and links to social media that expand the discourse's reach. Thus, the initial meaning constructed is a discourse of preaching that is open, empathetic, and contextual to the digital lives of young Muslims.

## *2. Text Distribution Process: The Role of Algorithms and Platforms in Discourse Dissemination*

The text is distributed via the YouTube platform, which uses recommendation algorithms to deliver content to potential audiences. The provocative video title "ISLAM izinkan Ngefans K-Pop? Seperti Nyembah BERHALA?" (Does Islam allow K-Pop fandom? Is it like worshipping idols?) is optimized with keywords such as "Islam mengizinkan K-Pop" (Islam allows K-Pop), as detected from the URL parameters, so that YouTube's algorithm promotes the content to users who are interested in religious and popular culture issues. With 693,785 views, 12,507 likes, and around 1,000 comments based on the latest data, the distribution of this content shows how the algorithm prioritizes videos that trigger engagement,

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<sup>34</sup> *ISLAM Izinkan Ngefans K-Pop?*

<sup>35</sup> Arsyad, "Di Balik Hijab."

<sup>36</sup> "Fandom K-Pop Yang Tetap Shaleh," Kolom, *IslamRamah.Co*, September 7, 2021, <https://www.islamramah.co/2021/09/7071/tetap-shaleh-walaupun-fandom-k-pop.html>.

especially controversial topics such as the debate between “idols” and “idols”. The use of hashtags and cross-platform links further expands the discourse’s reach to Muslim communities in Indonesia and abroad, especially among teenagers who are active on digital media.<sup>37</sup>

YouTube’s algorithm functions as a “gatekeeper” that is not entirely neutral, as its recommendations are based on user search patterns and interactions. This has the potential to create an echo chamber, where Muslim K-pop fans find validation or challenges to their identity. Distribution is also influenced by the temporal factor, as the video was uploaded on March 21, 2025, coinciding with the month of Ramadan, a strategic moment for thematic preaching related to spiritual reflection. Thus, the meaning of discourse, such as the acceptance of K-pop as “halal with restrictions” entertainment, is distributed dynamically and contextually, influencing how audiences from various backgrounds interpret and respond to the text.

### 3. *The Process of Text Consumption: The Role of the Audience in Meaning Negotiation*

The most obvious manifestation of text consumption can be observed through audience interaction in the comments section, where viewers not only receive the message conveyed by the creator but also negotiate and reproduce meaning according to their personal experiences and religious views. Based on the categorization of comments, audience responses are divided into three main spectrums, namely positive responses, critical responses, and balanced responses. The following is a table classifying netizen comments on the YouTube content “Islam Allows K-Pop Fans? Like Worshiping Idols? Learningbyfasting Ft Felix Siau, Fuadh Naim.”

Table 2. Comment analysis table

Category	Number of Comments	Percentage	Example Comments
Positive towards K-Pop	35	29%	“K-pop inspires language learning, hard work, and becomes a source of motivation in life.”
Critical of K-Pop	20	17%	“K-pop is against Islam, has satanic symbols, and

<sup>37</sup> *ISLAM Izinkan Ngefans K-Pop?*

			is associated with boycott products.”
Neutral/Balanced	30	25%	“It’s okay to like K-Pop as long as it’s not excessive and you still prioritize worship.”
Praise for Content/Speakers	25	21%	“Relaxed, relatable, and non-judgmental discussions, perfect for K-pop fans.”
Spiritual/Religious	10	8%	“The true idol is the Prophet Muhammad, focus on worship and remembrance.”
Miscellaneous (Humor, Off-Topic)	10	8%	“Ustaz Felix looks like Boboho wearing sunglasses!”

In addition, the audience also broadened the creators’ discourse through personal reflections, such as @serenao\_de, who highlighted the moral values in song lyrics without excessive idolization, and @esanurmufidah804, who left the fandom due to satanic symbolism in the entertainment industry. Other comments, such as those from @meutiafadhilla6793, who praised Ustaz Felix’s empathetic approach, reinforce the legitimacy of the creator’s discourse. Meanwhile, spiritual comments, like those from @Kholis\_alhanan, who affirmed the Prophet Muhammad as the “true idol,” demonstrate the transformation of religious meaning in the digital space. These interactions demonstrate how the comments section serves as a dynamic discursive arena, where likes and replies function as indicators of meaning amplification. This pattern of interaction enables the formation of a moderate collective discourse, with an emphasis on striking a balance between fandom expression and religious commitment. Thus, the process of text consumption is not passive, but rather becomes an active and participatory space for identity negotiation.

Overall, the discourse practices in the *LearningByFasting* content demonstrate how meaning is formed through the interactive cycle of

production, distribution, and consumption within the digital ecosystem. Creators begin with the construction of moderate and empathetic discourse, algorithms distribute it to thematically relevant audiences, and viewers negotiate it through digital interactions that reflect personal identity struggles. The result is a flexible hybrid discourse, where concepts such as “boundaries” in fandom are collectively negotiated to negotiate the position of young Muslims in global culture. However, this analysis also highlights the discourse’s dependence on the algorithmic logic of the platform, which has the potential to reinforce polarization if not balanced with adequate digital literacy. Thus, digital space can be understood not merely as a passive medium for preaching, but as a discursive arena that allows for the contextual and inclusive reformulation of Islamic values, in line with the dynamics of popular culture and the religious practices of the contemporary Muslim generation.

### *C. Analysis of Social Practices*

In the third stage of Norman Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis, specifically social practice analysis, the focus is on explaining how the discourse described and interpreted in the previous stages relates to broader social structures.<sup>38</sup> Here, the digital da’wah discourse in the YouTube content *LearningByFasting* with the implicit title “Does Islam Allow K-Pop?” and its comments are analyzed as part of social practices that reproduce, reinforce, or challenge the social structures, religious ideologies, and cultural contexts of Indonesian Muslim society. This analysis links the results of interpretations, such as the negotiation of identity between K-pop fandom and Islam, to the social context, which encompasses the hegemony of moderate Islam, the influence of cultural globalization, and geopolitical issues, including Palestinian solidarity. The aim is to reveal the reciprocal dynamics: how social structures and religious ideology shape the discourse of digital da’wah, and how this discourse influences and modifies these structures in Indonesian Muslim society, which is undergoing digital modernization.

#### 1. Linking Interpretation Results to the Social, Ideological, and Cultural Context of Indonesian Muslim Society

The interpretation of the comments shows the negotiation of religious identity in the digital space, where Indonesian Muslim K-Poppers try to balance the worldly pleasures of global entertainment with their Islamic spiritual obligations. At the level of social practice, this negotiation

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<sup>38</sup> Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 8-9.

reflects the social context of Indonesia as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, where Islam is not only a personal religion but also a collective identity that is integrated with the national culture.<sup>39</sup> This social structure is characterized by cultural pluralism influenced by globalization, where Korean pop culture (K-Pop) has penetrated Muslim youth through digital platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. However, this clashes with the dominant religious ideology, namely Islam Nusantara, a form of moderate Islam that emphasizes tolerance, cultural adaptation, and a balance between the worldly and the spiritual, as promoted by organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah.<sup>40</sup>

In this context, positive comments, such as those from @jwijel and @EJASUKASUKA, which highlight the inspirational aspects of K-pop, including motivation to learn languages or enthusiasm for creativity, illustrate how the social structure of urbanization and education in Indonesia encourages young Muslims to adopt global elements as a means of self-empowerment. This is in line with the ideology of "progressive Islam" that has developed in Indonesia since the 1998 Reformation, where digital da'wah has become a means of reforming religious identity to be more inclusive of pop culture.<sup>41</sup> Conversely, critical comments such as those from @xiangni8796 and @1004Hind\_6, who reject K-pop due to issues such as pro-Israel boycotts, "satanic" symbols, or LGBT support, reproduce conservative religious ideologies influenced by transnational movements such as global Islamic solidarity (ummat). In Indonesia, the Palestinian issue has been an ideological symbol since the New Order era, where support for Palestine strengthened the national Muslim identity as a form of resistance against Western imperialism. This discourse not only reflects the social context of geopolitical conflict, but also Indonesian culture, which is sensitive to issues of morality, where K-pop is seen as a threat to heteronormative norms and anti-capitalism advocated by radical Islamic groups such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), albeit in a more moderate form in the digital space.

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<sup>39</sup> Hj Maryam, "Islam Dan Nasionalisme: Kontribusi Sejarah Islam Terhadap Identitas Bangsa Indonesia," *PILAR* 15, no. 2 (December 2024):43, <https://doi.org/10.26618/ey5je987>.

<sup>40</sup> Maryam, "Islam Dan Nasionalisme."<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Aris Munandar, *Reposisi Gerakan Islam Modern di Tengah Perubahan Sosial dan Politik di Asia Tenggara*, 9 (2025).

Neutral/balanced comments from @Div\_ya284 and @achitarius and spiritual/religious comments from @Kholis\_alhanan and @masrui505 demonstrate the social practice of “religious moderation” promoted by the Indonesian government through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, in which digital da’wah, such as this content, serves as an arena for negotiation to avoid polarization.<sup>42</sup> This relates to the cultural context in which Indonesian Muslims, especially Generation Z and millennials, face a “hybrid identity” as a result of digitalization: they are both consumers of global culture and inheritors of local religious traditions. Complimentary comments towards speakers such as Ustaz Felix from @meutiafadhilla6793 indicate how the “contemporary” ideology of preaching—which is relaxed, empathetic, and non-judgmental—reproduces social structures in which digital clerics become influencers, replacing the traditional role of kyai in Islamic boarding schools. Meanwhile, humorous comments from @sayur-w7v reflect Indonesia’s relaxed and meme-oriented digital culture, where YouTube comment sections serve as an extension of “hanging out over coffee” or informal discussions, thereby strengthening communal social bonds in a society that still values mutual cooperation.

Overall, this interpretation links the discourse to the context in which Indonesian Muslims are undergoing a transition from traditional Islam to digital Islam, influenced by social factors such as urbanization, increased internet access among young people, ideological tension between moderation and puritanism, and the cultural influence of the Hallyu wave since the 2010s, which reached its peak during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 2. Revealing How Social Structures and Religious Ideologies Influence, and Are Influenced By, Digital Da’wah Discourse

The discourse of digital da’wah in this content and its comments shows the reciprocal dynamics between social/religious ideological structures and discursive practices in the digital space. First, the influence of social structures on discourse: Dominant religious ideologies in Indonesia, such as the emphasis on monotheism and moral character, shape this discourse by promoting narratives of “balance” and “shifting focus to Islam.” For example, the patriarchal and conservative social structures in Indonesian Muslim society influence critical comments that reject LGBT elements in K-pop, reflecting how laws such as the Pornography Law (2008) and anti-

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<sup>42</sup> Kemenag, “Moderasi Beragama: Pilar Kebangsaan dan Keberagaman,” <https://kemenag.go.id>, accessed November 5, 2025, <https://kemenag.go.id/kolom/moderasi-beragama-pilar-kebangsaan-dan-keberagaman-MVUb9>.

LGBT discourse from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) reproduce heteronormative ideology through digital da'wah. Additionally, the social context of the Palestinian issue, where Indonesia officially supports Palestine through its foreign policy, influences the boycott discourse, as seen in the comments of @xiangni8796, where digital da'wah becomes a tool to strengthen solidarity among the ummah, influenced by global movements such as the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement.<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, this discourse of digital preaching is reshaping social structures and ideologies. Content such as this, produced by the Sepulang Sekolah channel in a relaxed and inclusive style, challenges rigid traditional religious ideologies by promoting a more adaptive "cool da'wah" that is more attuned to global culture. This modifies social structures by empowering Muslim K-Poppers to negotiate their identities, thereby making moderate Islamic ideology increasingly hegemonic among young people and reducing the influence of radicalism.<sup>44</sup> For example, positive and balanced comments promote the ideology of Islam *rahmatan lil alamin*, or "Islam as a blessing for the universe," which the government presents as a counter-narrative to extremism, thereby contributing to the formation of a more tolerant Indonesian Muslim society that is more accepting of pop culture. However, this also has the potential to reinforce social inequality, where access to digital da'wah is limited to the urban middle class with internet access, leaving marginalized groups in rural areas behind.

In terms of purpose, this analysis reveals that digital da'wah discourse is not merely a reflection of social structures, but rather an active agent of change. It is influenced by religious ideology to preserve Islamic norms, but at the same time influences these structures by encouraging hybridity of identity, so that Indonesian Muslim society becomes increasingly integrated with globalization without losing its religious roots. In a broader context, this illustrates how platforms like YouTube have become ideological arenas where the hegemony of moderate Indonesian Islam competes with Western/Eastern cultural influences, contributing to the evolution of social practices in the digital age.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Munandar, *Reposisi Gerakan Islam Modern di Tengah Perubahan Sosial dan Politik di Asia Tenggara*.

<sup>44</sup> YouTube, "Sepulang Sekolah."

<sup>45</sup> 2 182 648 X. Ditonton 4 Tahun Yang Lalu, "Sepulang Sekolah," YouTube, accessed October 22, 2025, [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfQHauBd0oEBH\\_FRyHE5qIg;Kemenag](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfQHauBd0oEBH_FRyHE5qIg;Kemenag), "Moderasi Beragama."

### Analisis Perspektif Cyber-Islamic Environments (CIE) Gary R. Bunt

The *After School* channel is a concrete example of Cyber-Islamic Environments (CIE) as defined by Gary R. Bunt in *iMuslims* (2009), *Hashtag Islam* (2018), and *Islamic Algorithms* (2025). This channel illustrates how non-traditional digital spaces provide opportunities for Muslims to interact, negotiate their identities, and establish religious authority in a flexible manner. Through a casual narrative format, reflective dialogue, and integration of pop culture, *After School* presents everyday Islamic practices that are relevant to a young audience. The hybrid nature of the content, particularly in the *LearningByFasting* series, underscores the blending of religious values with psychology, K-Pop fandom, and social dynamics.<sup>46</sup> The shift in religious authority is also evident in Koi's position as a facilitator that enables collaborative authority between hosts, speakers, and audiences, while figures such as Felix Siauw appear in the context of "digital familiarity." Additionally, this channel employs provocative titles, hashtags, and algorithm-friendly editing, suggesting that the dissemination of Islamic discourse is now heavily reliant on platform mechanisms. This aligns with Bunt's idea that algorithms are new actors that determine the visibility and direction of contemporary Islamic discourse.<sup>47</sup>

Audience interaction through comment columns demonstrates the function of CIE as a space for negotiating diverse and dynamic Muslim identities. Discussions about idolatry, K-Pop fandom, religious motivation, and emotional reflections show a contestation of meaning that reflects the plurality of interpretations within the digital Muslim community. Visual representations such as light sticks, albums, and room decorations also shape spiritual meaning through pop culture artifacts, as Bunt explains regarding digital materiality in *iMuslims*.<sup>48</sup> This entire process makes *Sepulang Sekolah* a space where young audiences redefine values, piety, and their position amid the tension between moderation and conservatism, digital creativity and theological norms. Thus, this channel not only serves as a means of educational entertainment but also as a social laboratory where Islamic

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<sup>46</sup> Gary R. Bunt, *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2009); Bunt, *Hashtag Islam*; Bunt, *Islamic Algorithms*.

<sup>47</sup> Bunt, *iMuslims*.

<sup>48</sup> Bunt, *Hashtag Islam*.

identity and authority are negotiated and redefined by a generation living in an algorithmic ecosystem.<sup>49</sup>

Table 3. CIE Analysis Table by Gerry Bunt

CIE Aspects (Gary Bunt)	Findings on the Sepulang Sekolah Channel	Explanation / Analysis
1. Non-Traditional Religious Digital Space	After School is not a formal channel for preaching, but rather a space for storytelling, casual dialogue, and spiritual reflection.	In accordance with the CIE concept, where digital space allows for religious practices that do not have to follow institutional formats.
2. Digital Islamic Hybridity	Combining religious themes with pop culture, psychology, and life experiences (e.g., LearningByFasting).	Bunt refers to the Islamic digital space as a hybrid arena where religion mixes with popular culture and everyday life.
3. Everyday Islam	A “light” form of Islam, relevant and close to everyday life, emerges in conversations about K-pop fandom, family, and mental health.	Demonstrating a flexible form of daily Islamic practice that is responsive to the context of the younger generation.
4. Changes in Religious Authority	The host (Koi) acts as a facilitator, not a religious teacher; authority emerges collaboratively with the speakers and audience.	In line with the concept of <i>soft religious authorities</i> —new authorities based on experience and emotional closeness, rather than formal positions.
5. Distributed and Participatory Authority	Felix Siau’s presence signifies that formal authority still exists, but it is positioned in a familiar and non-hierarchical manner.	Islamic authority in the digital space is fluid; it is formed through community interaction and participation.
6. The Role of Algorithms	Strategy of provocative titles, hashtags (#learningbyfasting), and adaptive editing style with algorithms.	Algorithms act as “actors” that distribute Islamic discourse, as discussed by Bunt in the concept of <i>Islamic Algorithms</i> .

<sup>49</sup> “Gary R. Bunt. iMuslims.”

7. Negotiating Identity in Comments	Discussion about idolatry, fandom, spiritual motivation, and emotions.	CIE as a space for contesting meaning—plurality of interpretations, value conflicts, and negotiations of young Muslim identity.
8. Digital Materiality & Visuality	Light sticks, albums, and room decorations emerged as cultural artifacts that framed religious discussions.	Visual objects serve as symbols that connect religious experiences with pop culture.
9. CIE as an Arena for Social Change	The channel produces inclusive, reflective, and adaptive Islamic narratives, but still highlights the tension between moderation and conservatism.	CIE is a dynamic space where Islamic values, identity, and authority are constantly being reshaped.

Through the perspective of Cyber-Islamic Environments (CIE), *Sepulang Sekolah* appears as a digital laboratory where the Islam of the younger generation is negotiated, practiced, and represented in new ways. This channel not only presents reflective content about spirituality but also embodies a hybrid form of Islam that is directly connected to pop culture, emotional experiences, and algorithmic dynamics. In line with Bunt’s analysis, *Sepulang Sekolah* is a concrete example of the changing landscape of religious authority and practice in the digital age—a space where the meaning of Islam is not singularly determined but continuously co-created by creators, contributors, and the community. Thus, this channel affirms that CIE is not merely a medium for disseminating discourse but an active arena for social and spiritual transformation that shapes Muslim identity in the age of algorithms.<sup>50</sup>

### Islamic Moderatism and K-Pop Fans’ Identity Negotiation in the Digital Space

<sup>50</sup> “Islamic Algorithms: Online Influence in the Muslim Metaverse,” accessed November 20, 2025, [https://scholar.google.com/citations?view\\_op=view\\_citation&hl=en&user=PQkILbEAAAAJ&ccstart=20&pagesize=80&citation\\_for\\_view=PQkILbEAAAAJ:bnK-PCRlPrsC](https://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=en&user=PQkILbEAAAAJ&ccstart=20&pagesize=80&citation_for_view=PQkILbEAAAAJ:bnK-PCRlPrsC).

As a moderate Muslim, my view on the issue of religious identity negotiation in the context of K-pop in the digital space is that Islam encourages its followers to respect cultural diversity as part of the sunnatullah, or natural law, created by Allah SWT. The Qur'an, in Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 13, emphasizes that differences in ethnicity and nationality are intended to enable people to get to know and respect one another, rather than reject one another. In Indonesia's multicultural Muslim society, appreciating Korean culture through K-pop, such as the hard work and creativity shown by idols, can be a positive means of learning and entertainment, as long as it does not exceed the limits of Sharia law. This aligns with the principles of Islam Nusantara, which are adaptive to global culture, where digital da'wah, such as YouTube content, can serve as a bridge for intercultural dialogue without compromising the essence of faith.<sup>51</sup>

Respecting other cultures means taking wisdom and positive values from K-pop, such as motivation to learn foreign languages or develop artistic talents, while remaining critical of elements that may conflict with Islamic values. For example, K-pop songs that inspire perseverance can be a tool to strengthen the spirit of worship, just as the Prophet Muhammad encouraged his followers to seek knowledge even as far as China, a metaphor for openness to knowledge from anywhere. However, this moderate attitude requires us to avoid fanaticism and excessive idolization that could resemble shirk, and to choose content that aligns with noble morals. In the digital age, this allows Muslim K-pop fans to contribute to the global community while upholding tolerance, as taught in Islamic principles that respect cultural pluralism.<sup>52</sup>

However, respecting other cultures should not compromise Islamic identity, which is the main foundation in the life of a Muslim. This identity encompasses a commitment to monotheism, worship, and Islamic ethics, where we must filter out foreign cultural influences to avoid conflict, such as supporting values that contradict Sharia law, for example, LGBT issues or negative symbolism in some K-pop content. A moderate perspective

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<sup>51</sup> "Cultural Diversity in Islam," accessed November 2, 2025, <https://muslim.sg/articles/cultural-diversity-in-islam>.

<sup>52</sup> sufyan, "What Role Does Culture Play in Islam?," *SeekersGuidance*, December 20, 2013, <https://seekersguidance.org/answers/general-counsel/what-role-does-culture-play-in-islam/>; Md. Arifur Rahman, *Understanding Cultural Diversity within the Muslim Ummah* (2025), <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.15151.65444>.

emphasizes balance, where we can enjoy entertainment as a “healing” during difficult times, but always return our focus to the Prophet Muhammad as the true idol. This reflects Islam’s flexible teachings regarding customs as long as they do not violate religious law, so that Islamic identity remains strong amid the tide of globalization.<sup>53</sup>

Holistically, this moderate view promotes harmony between respecting other cultures and maintaining Islamic identity, which ultimately enriches the spiritual and social lives of Muslims. With this approach, K-Poppers in Indonesia can become agents of positive change, promoting universal values such as empathy and hard work while strengthening solidarity among Muslims through digital da’wah. This is not just about tolerance, but also about self-transformation towards becoming better Muslims, where cultural diversity is viewed as a blessing from Allah, facilitating mutual learning. Ultimately, this attitude fosters a peaceful and inclusive society, where religious and cultural identities coexist harmoniously without negating one another.<sup>54</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

This study confirms that the negotiation of Muslim K-pop fans’ religious identity in the digital space is a complex form of *discourse practice*, in which religious expression and popular culture interact in a dialectical manner. An analysis of the LearningByFasting segment on YouTube reveals that language is the primary arena for the intersection between Islamic values and K-pop culture. Through Fairclough’s framework, a hybridity of discourse is evident—the use of Islamic terms, such as tauhid and syirik, alongside fandom jargon, including idol, healing, and inspiration. This process reflects a symbolic negotiation between piety and modernity, between faith and entertainment.

In the context of Islamic moderation, this negotiation does not lead to a clash of values, but rather gives birth to a moderate form of empathetic da’wah, utilizing popular culture as a bridge for communication across identities. The analysis of comments reveals the formation of a tolerant

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<sup>53</sup> Asmanidar Asmanidar, “Diversity and Humanity in Islam: A Perspective of Religious Moderation,” *Abrahamic Religions: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 3, no. 2 (September 2023): 302, <https://doi.org/10.22373/arj.v3i2.20416>.

<sup>54</sup> Hilal Wani, Raihanah Abdullah, and Lee Wei Chang, “An Islamic Perspective in Managing Religious Diversity,” *Religions* 6, no. 2 (June 2015): 642–56, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel6020642>.

digital space, where 29% express spiritual inspiration, 17% highlight moral tensions (including the Palestinian issue and idolatrous lifestyles), and the rest display a balanced, dialogical attitude.

Thus, the digital space functions as a *social laboratory* for the creative and adaptive reconstruction of Muslim identity. Through the integration of positive K-pop values—such as hard work and solidarity—with the Islamic ethos, Indonesian Muslim K-pop artists have become representatives of *progressive Islam* that values plurality without losing sight of the roots of tawhid. This research not only enriches the study of Islam and digital culture but also affirms the potential of *Cyber-Islamic Environments* as an inclusive arena for da'wah, transforming stigma into empathy and making cultural diversity a manifestation of Allah's mercy in a connected global world.

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