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Being Muslim in the Media Age: Muhammadiyah Students' Identity in the Midst of Celebrity Culture

Rina Sari Kusuma*

Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Indonesia

Maryadi

Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Indonesia

Palupi

Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Indonesia and University of Leeds, United Kingdom

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This study explores how Muslim students at Muhammadiyah universities in Indonesia navigate their religious identity amid exposure to global celebrity culture. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines a quantitative survey of 194 undergraduate students with qualitative interviews of eight participants to analyze the influence of religiosity and celebrity culture on Muslim identity formation. Results indicate that religiosity significantly predicts the strength of Muslim identity, while celebrity culture has minimal direct impact. Interestingly, the study finds a positive correlation between religiosity and selective engagement in celebrity culture, suggesting that Muslim students actively curate media content in accordance with Islamic values. The qualitative findings further reveal strategies of identity negotiation, including selective media consumption, the use of social media as a hybrid space, and the role of family and campus communities in reinforcing religious boundaries. This research highlights the agency of Muhammadiyah students in critically responding to popular culture without compromising their Islamic identity, offering insights into the lived experiences of moderate Muslim youth in the media age.

Keywords: Muslim youth identity; celebrity culture; Muhammadiyah; religiosity

*Correspondence: Rina Sari Kusuma, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Indonesia
rk148@ums.ac.id



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INTRODUCTION

Celebrity culture is often used as a reference for teenagers in shaping their identity and lifestyle, thus influencing the way they think and act (Banister and Cocker 2014; Makgosa 2010). This can be seen in the fashion trends, social behaviours, and music choices they follow. By studying celebrity culture, adolescents can find inspiration and aspirations that align with their identities. The development of social media has changed the nature of celebrity interactions, encouraging parasocial relationships between celebrities and their fans (Marwick and Boyd 2011). These interactions not only reinforce existing behaviours but also encourage new forms of expression and identity exploration among adolescents, as they navigate representations of themselves in relation to their idols (Kanai 2015).

Students at Muhammadiyah colleges are in a unique position, balancing their religious identity with the influence of popular culture. Research shows that students from colleges with religious backgrounds may have difficulty reconciling their faith with the values and norms presented in pop culture, leading them to re-evaluate their values when faced with secularised pop culture influences (Farrow and Coaxum III 2023). For example, a study exploring how Muslim college students interact with K-Pop culture revealed that while they may appreciate aspects of pop culture, they also attempt to navigate the complexities of maintaining their religious values (Inayatussahara and Hasan 2023).

They often face a dilemma between following modern trends and staying true to the values taught in their environment. It is important for Muhammadiyah, as an institution focused on Islamic character building, to understand how the influence of celebrities can affect or synergise with campus values. The role of educational institutions in shaping these experiences

cannot be ignored, as it can help students navigate the challenges posed by religious diversity and pop culture (Rockenbach et al. 2015).

Celebrities are part of the DNA of popular culture (Ward 2011). The role of celebrities in society is not due solely to physical appearance, expertise, or charisma, but also to their ability to create narratives that resonate with people's lived experiences (Marshall et al. 2015). They can articulate feelings and expectations that are often difficult for fans to express, making them the voice of a generation seeking identity. As such, celebrities serve not only as entertainment, but also as a mirror for the aspirations and challenges faced by society, especially the younger generation (Allen and Mendick 2013).

As a sign system in popular culture, celebrities symbolise various motifs of life (Ward 2011). They become icons that represent courage, resilience, and at times, vulnerability, to which fans feel emotionally connected. On the other hand, celebrities are thought to represent the spiritual decay of contemporary society, linked to materialism and consumerism (Alexander 2010), which are often perceived as diverting focus from the deeper values of spirituality (Tomkinson 2024). Lifestyles that often go against cultural and religious values can lead to moral erosion, especially among the younger generation (Gbadamosi 2020).

However, this view is debatable, as many celebrities use their platforms to spread positive messages and inspire social change (Tse et al. 2018). They act as agents of change, leveraging fame to raise awareness about important issues such as the environment (Chaturvedi et al. 2022; Park 2020), mental health (Franssen 2020; Gronholm and Thornicroft 2022; Nelson 2019), and social justice (Deflem 2023). In the academic literature, the argument that celebrity culture will overtake religion is

common (Ward 2011); however, there are also views that celebrity culture can serve as a complement (Zaid et al. 2022), not a substitute, for existing spiritual and moral values.

Literature Review Muhammadiyah Students in Indonesia

Muhammadiyah, as Indonesia's largest modernist Islamic movement, has built an extensive higher education network comprising 164 Muhammadiyah-'Aisyiyah higher education institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Muhammadiyah-'Aisyiyah/PTMA*) across Indonesia (Bhisma 2026). The organisation, founded in 1912, manages 12,000 primary to secondary schools and 23,000 early childhood education institutions. In addition, Muhammadiyah consistently rejects extremism and supports the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) and Pancasila, making it one of the main actors in promoting Islamic moderation in Indonesia.

Islam in Indonesia develops within the framework of a multicultural society that prioritises moderation (*wasathiyah*), in which religious values combine with local traditions and the spirit of nationalism. *Wasathiyah*, derived from the Quranic term "*ummatan wasathan*," which refers to maintaining a middle path that avoids extremes (Quran, 2:143) (Muhtar 2023). This principle has led to a unique blend of Islamic teachings and local customs, fostering a moderate form of Islam that respects Indonesia's vast cultural diversity. The *Wasathiyah* of Islam has been described as the value of moderation in Islam, emphasising justice, balance, and tolerance (Helmy et al. 2021).

One of the distinctive characteristics of Muhammadiyah as a modernist Islamic movement in Indonesia is its commitment to the principle of moderation in Islamic thought and social praxis (Ztf 2021). This moderation is not just a response to the development of contemporary discourse,

but has been an integral part of Muhammadiyah's identity since its inception. In the field of Islamic law, Muhammadiyah applies the principle of balance between purification (purifying teachings of elements not grounded in argument) and dynamization (adjustment to social reality). This approach is seen in Muhammadiyah's different attitudes towards worship, which tends to be scripturalist, and *muamalah*, which is more flexible and contextual. This moderation is also institutionalised in the Tarjih Council through the Manhaj Tarjih methodology, which prioritises *ijtihad*, openness, tolerance, and non-fanaticism towards certain madhhabs.

One tangible proof of Muhammadiyah's moderate character can be found in the product of the Philosophical Islamic Moral Treatise prepared by the *Tarjih* Assembly at the 2020 National Conference. This treatise shows that Muhammadiyah's moderation is present on two levels: theoretically, by combining classical Islamic scholarly sources (such as al-Ghazali and Ibn Miskawaih) and modern Western thought (such as Heidegger and Peter Berger); and practically, through the formulation of ethical responsibilities that include individuals, families, communities, countries, and the world. This approach reflects moderation, balancing Islamic normative values with contemporary challenges. In the context of Indonesian society, which is plural and often faces threats of extremism, Muhammadiyah's moderate approach is highly relevant. This attitude makes Muhammadiyah not only a *da'wah* actor but also an important actor in maintaining social harmony and building an inclusive civilisation.

Muhammadiyah students are an important part of the *da'wah* and *tajdid* movement carried out by Muhammadiyah. Their personality is formed through education and coaching that emphasise the

integration of Islamic, scientific, and human values. Based on the official formulation derived from the Association's values, five main characteristics characterise the personality of Muhammadiyah students (Suara Muhammadiyah 2024). First, they have strong fighting power in building peace and prosperity, including the ability to engage in dialogue over differences, resolve conflicts constructively, and be active in social movements grounded in progressive Islamic values. Second, Muhammadiyah students are required to expand social networks through the practice of *ukhuwah Islamiyah*, *basyariyah*, and *wathaniyah*, which trains them to be tolerant of diversity while adhering to Islamic principles.

Third, they are instilled with the value of obedience to Islamic teachings and compliance with the law, by upholding *tawhid* and making integrity a moral guide in action. Fourth, Muhammadiyah students are expected to actively uphold *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* and serve as role models (*uswah hasanah*) in academic, organisational, and community life. They are also encouraged to contribute to contextual da'wah, scientific development, and leadership. Fifth, they are formed to be fair and wisely corrective, that is, able to conduct constructive self- and social evaluations while upholding Islamic values. These five characters reflect Muhammadiyah's vision in producing young people who are religious, progressive, tolerant, and responsible for themselves, society, and the nation. With this personality, Muhammadiyah students are expected to become agents of change who can address the challenges of the times while remaining rooted in progressive Islamic values.

As the object of research, Muhammadiyah students represent a young generation educated in wasathiyah Islamic values and the spirit of organisational independence. They not only inherit

Muhammadiyah's scientific tradition but also engage in contemporary discourse on democracy, tolerance, and global challenges such as radicalism or technological disruption. The study of Muhammadiyah students thus provides an overview of how the moderate Islamic movement in Indonesia responds to modernisation while maintaining its religious identity.

Media as an Arena for Negotiating Religious Identity

Media and popular culture are important arenas in the process of religious identity formation in adolescents (Maskulin 2023). Audiences cannot be viewed as passive recipients of media messages, but rather as active actors who use media to shape, negotiate, and express their identities in a symbolically and socially complex society.

The constructionist view of religious identity emphasises that identity is not absolutely inherited, but actively shaped through social, symbolic, and cultural interactions—including through media consumption (Maskulin 2023).

Within the framework of Giddens' reflexive modernity theory, this process reflects a change in how individuals define themselves: no longer as part of a homogeneous collectively, but as subjects who actively choose and internalise values that fit the contexts of their lives. Individuals are not simply recipients of media messages; they actively process, evaluate, and incorporate these messages into their personal frameworks (Cheema 2020). As a result, religious narratives do not stand alone but compete with and blend into popular culture narratives, creating a space for adolescents to respond to, harmonise with, or even contest both.

Steven Bailey (2006) offers the concept of the hermeneutic social subject, which describes audiences as social subjects capable of self-reflection and the

reinterpretation of the meaning structures they encounter. His framework provides a path for understanding the multiplicity of interpretations that media can elicit—interpretations that reflect the audience's social identities and cultural positions (Gallant and Boone 2021). In line with Bailey, John Fiske views media as sites of meaning production where audiences have communicative agency—the ability to critically interpret and respond to media messages in the context of existing institutional power (Rozanova 2006; Turner 2021).

In the context of Muslim adolescents living amid global celebrity culture, this agency-based approach becomes particularly relevant. They not only face potential conflicts between religious values and popular culture, but also develop strategies to selectively reinterpret media content to fit their religious identity and cultural values. Thus, Muslim youth identity formation is not the result of passive media absorption, but rather an active, reflective, and contextualised process that negotiates values from multiple social and symbolic sources.

Conceptual Frameworks

This study seeks to answer two main objectives: (1) to analyse the effect of religiosity level on Muslim students' attachment to celebrities; and (2) to investigate the role of celebrity culture in shaping Muslim students' identity. Four hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Religiosity has a positive effect on adolescent Muslim identity.

Religiosity plays a central role in self-identity formation, especially in communities with strong religious values. According to Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman (2010), religion is a major source of social identity that offers a framework of values, norms, and life goals. Individuals who are highly involved in religious

activities are more likely to form their self-identity around religious values.

Research by Koenig, McGue, Krueger, & Bouchard (2005) shows that religiosity is positively associated with the formation of a strong religious identity, especially during adolescence, when identity search is intensive. In the context of Muslim adolescents, Peek (Peek 2005) found that Muslim adolescents in the United States make Islam a central pillar of their self-identity, even amidst the pressures of popular culture and the challenges of globalisation.

H2: Celebrity culture has no significant effect on adolescent Muslim identity.

Muslim teens engage with celebrity culture, including social media influencers and pop culture figures, but their religious beliefs serve as an important filter in how this engagement affects their identity. For example, Muslim micro-celebrities on Instagram actively construct and promote a modern Muslimah identity aligned with Islamic law, modest dress, and positive religious content, suggesting that celebrity culture can strengthen Islamic identity rather than undermine it (Dewi, Yunizar, and Fuady 2024; Shariffadeen and Manaf 2019).

Popular culture, including music, movies and social media, plays an important role in shaping the identity of Muslim youth, blending Islamic traditions with modern global influences. This dynamic creates a fluid and evolving Muslim identity rather than a static one, illustrating that pop culture influences but does not erase religious identity (Azzahra 2024)

Studies on Muslim early adults who are K-Pop fans show a significant negative correlation between religiosity and celebrity worship, indicating that higher religious commitment tends to reduce the intensity of celebrity worship (Mirodzi and Kusumaningrum 2024). This suggests that

religious values may limit the extent to which celebrity culture influences Muslim youth behaviour and identity. Muslim celebrities and influencers who openly express their faith and promote Islamic values on platforms such as Instagram play an important role in shaping the religious identity of Muslim youth. Their presence helps foster a positive Islamic identity and encourages adherence to religious norms such as modesty and a halal lifestyle.

While global cultural phenomena such as the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) influence Muslim youth, religious commitment remains a relevant factor in guiding consumer behaviour and lifestyle choices, helping Muslim youth navigate cultural trends without compromising their faith (Primanto and Rachma 2023).

H3: Religiosity is significantly positively related to engagement in celebrity culture among Muslim adolescents.

Religiosity has been considered as a factor that "protects" individuals from engaging in popular culture, especially celebrity culture, which is considered contrary to religious values (Ysseldyk, Matheson, and Anisman 2010). However, the development of social media and digital culture has created a space where celebrities and religious values can coexist. Selective exposure theory (Zillman and Bryant 1985) states that individuals do not passively receive all media content, but rather actively select content that aligns with their values, beliefs, and identities. In this context, religious Muslim adolescents may still engage with celebrity culture. Still, that engagement is selective: they choose to follow celebrities who represent positive values, spirituality, or images perceived as in line with Islamic norms.

H4: Celebrity culture does not mediate the relationship between religiosity and adolescent Muslim identity.

For celebrity culture to be a mediator, there must be a significant influence from religiosity on celebrity culture and from celebrity culture on Muslim identity. But in many cases, celebrity culture is not strong enough to shift the influence of established religiosity, so the mediating role does not occur. Research by (Krause 2003) shows that religious practices tend to shape social identity directly and stably. Hence, the influence of the media or popular culture plays only a minor, if any, role.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants were recruited using a two-stage sampling procedure combining convenience and random sampling. Convenience sampling was used at the initial access stage: the research site and eligible cohort were fourth-semester undergraduate students of the Communication Studies Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta who met the eligibility criteria below. Within this accessible cohort, random sampling was used to determine which eligible students were invited to complete the questionnaire, thereby reducing selection bias in survey distribution. For the qualitative phase, the eight semi-structured interview participants were selected from among the 194 survey respondents through voluntary self-selection, i.e., participants who indicated their willingness to be interviewed after completing the survey. Eligible participants were required to be between 18 and 23 years old, to be active undergraduate students in the Communication Studies Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Indonesia, and to identify as Muslim. Data was collected using a Google Form questionnaire, and all participants provided written informed consent before participation. The study comprised 194 participants (M age = 19.96 years, SD = 0.74), all fourth-semester undergraduate students. Of the total participants, 115 identified as women and 79 identified as

men. From the survey sample, 8 participants ultimately agreed to participate in the semi-structured interview stage.

Research Instruments

The first stage of the research employed a survey questionnaire that included questions on participants' general demographic details, their favourite celebrity, and three standardised scales: the Muslim Religiosity-Personality Inventory (MRPI), the Muslim Identity Expression Scale (MES), and the Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS). The data collected in this phase were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 29) employing descriptive statistics, correlation tests, and mediation analysis with the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (Hayes 2022). Specifically, Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was used to test the bivariate associations proposed in H1–H3, appropriate given the ordinal, non-normally distributed nature of the Likert-based composite scores; H4 was tested using Hayes's (Hayes 2022) PROCESS macro (Model 4, simple mediation, single mediator), with bias-corrected bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals used to evaluate the significance of the indirect effect.

Muslim Religiosity-Personality Inventory Scale

The Muslim Religiosity-Personality Inventory (MRPI) was developed by Krauss et al. (2005, 2006) to understand Islamic religiosity among Malaysian Muslim youth. This inventory conceptualises religiosity in terms of two main constructs: the Islamic Worldview and the Religious Personality. The Religious Personality consists of three subdimensions: (1) Self (humility, modesty, and courage), (2) Social (family, community, and societal interactions), and (3) Ritual (prayer, fasting, and other religious obligations). The revised MRPI contains 99 items with internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of .86 for the Islamic

Worldview and .94 for the Religious Personality scale (Krauss et al. 2005).

In later adaptations (Krauss, Hamzah, and Idris 2007), MRPI was modified for use across multiple religious communities (Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus) in Malaysia by adjusting or generalising Islam-specific language. This adaptation retained the 99-item structure and organised the Religious Personality into three universal behavioural domains: Pro-social behaviours, Ritual behaviours, and Anti-social behaviours, while maintaining high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .93).

For this study, the MRPI was administered using a five-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from "Never" to "Always," reflecting the frequency or intensity of religious attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. Scoring is designed so that higher levels of agreement or frequency indicate stronger religiosity. Where necessary, items were linguistically adapted to fit the specific sample context, ensuring cultural and religious relevance while preserving the inventory's core conceptual framework.

Muslim Identity Expression Scale

The Muslim Identity Expression Scale (MIES) was developed by Amalia, Muluk, and Milla (Amalia, Muluk, and Milla 2023) to understand Muslim identity expression as a multidimensional construct that captures how individuals express their religious identity across various life domains. This scale focuses on two main functional categories: identity consolidation and identity mobilisation. The final validated scale comprises 34 items designed to measure expressions of Muslim identity, spanning both private and public behaviours. The items were developed based on social identity performance theory (Klein, Spears, and Reicher 2007), literature review, and empirical data,

ensuring theoretical and contextual relevance.

The four subscales demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) showing good model fit ($\chi^2 = 1793.805$, $df = 521$, $p < .01$; $RMSEA = 0.066$, $CFI = 0.945$, $TLI = 0.94$) and all items loading significantly on their respective factors (Amalia et al. 2023). For this study, we used a 7-point Likert scale with response options ranging from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree. Scoring was uniform across items, with higher agreement indicating stronger identity expression. The scale was specifically developed and validated for use in the Indonesian Muslim context, ensuring cultural and religious appropriateness for assessing both personal and collective expressions of Muslim identity.

Celebrity Attitude Scale

The Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS) was developed by McCutcheon, Lange, and Houran (McCutcheon, Lange, and Houran 2002) to understand celebrity worship as a multidimensional construct reflecting individuals' varying levels of psychological involvement with celebrities. This scale focuses on three main levels of celebrity attitudes: entertainment-social, intense-personal, and borderline-pathological. The scale contains 22 validated items (originally developed from a larger 34-item pool) designed to capture the different forms and intensities of celebrity worship. The items were grounded in prior theoretical models, including parasocial interaction theory (Horton and Richard Wohl 1956) and the absorption-addiction model (McCutcheon et al. 2002), and were empirically validated through factor analyses.

The three levels of celebrity attitudes are divided into distinct subscales. The Entertainment-Social subscale (10 items) reflects social aspects of celebrity admiration, such as enjoyment in

discussing celebrities with friends and following celebrity news for entertainment. The Intense-Personal subscale (9 items) captures deeper personal feelings, such as obsessive thoughts and emotional attachments, in which the individual may feel a special or unique connection to the celebrity. The Borderline-Pathological subscale (3 items) reflects extreme or potentially harmful attitudes and behaviours, such as a willingness to engage in illegal acts or to spend excessive amounts of money on items linked to the celebrity.

The three subscales demonstrated good internal consistency: Cronbach's alpha was .88 for entertainment-social, .85 for intense-personal, and .73 for borderline-pathological (Maltby et al. 2004). For this study, we used a 5-point Likert scale with response options ranging from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5). Scoring was uniform across items, with higher levels of agreement indicating stronger celebrity worship tendencies. The CAS was designed to assess attitudes toward any celebrity selected by the respondent, making it flexible for use across diverse cultural and entertainment contexts.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Following the initial phase of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 participants to explore how Muslim university students use religiosity as a protective shield against the influences of celebrity culture and how they express their religious identity as a result. The interviews were designed to investigate the personal, social, and cultural strategies students employ to uphold their religious values amid widespread media exposure.

Open-ended questions were developed to capture students' reflections on the role of religiosity in their everyday lives, such as: "Can you describe how your religious beliefs or practices help you navigate the temptations or trends

promoted by celebrities?" and "In what ways does your faith help you decide which media content or celebrity figures to engage with or avoid?" These questions aimed to reveal how students consciously apply Islamic teachings as internal filters or moral compasses when engaging with popular culture.

To understand the expressive dimension of religious identity, participants were asked: "How do you express your Muslim identity in public spaces, online, or among friends?" and "Can you share examples of how your religious identity influences the way you dress, speak, or present yourself on social media?" These questions sought to uncover the outward expression of Muslim identity. These questions sought to uncover the outward signs and performances of religious identity in both physical and digital environments.

Finally, the interviews included questions about social support and community influence, such as: "Who or what gives you the most support in staying true to your religious identity?" and "How do your family, friends, or religious community influence the way you relate to celebrity culture?" These were intended to examine the broader social environment that reinforces or challenges students' efforts to maintain their religious commitments.

This qualitative approach, using flexible, open-ended questions accompanied by follow-up probing where appropriate, was expected to provide rich, nuanced insights into how Muslim students actively maintain and express their religious identity in the context of globalised celebrity culture. Interview transcripts were analysed following Braun and Clarke's (Braun and Clarke 2022) a six-phase framework for thematic analysis that includes familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of

candidate themes, review of themes against the coded extracts, definition and naming of themes, and production of the final analytic account, to identify recurring patterns, tensions, and strategies in participants' experiences.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Findings

Descriptive Statistics

This study involved 194 Muslim teenagers as respondents, consisting of 79 males (40.7%) and 115 females (59.3%). Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 23 years, with a mean age of 19.96 years ($SD = 0.74$) (Table 1).

Table 1. Gender Frequency Distribution

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	79	40.7%
Female	115	59.3%

Source: Authors' own primary survey data, 2026

The mean religiosity score (MRPI) was 360.83 ($SD = 29.42$), with a range of 243-473, indicating a relatively high level of religiosity. The level of engagement in celebrity culture (CAS) had a mean score of 60.04 ($SD = 16.87$), showing variation in respondents' engagement with celebrity culture. For Muslim identity (MIES), a mean score of 150.69 ($SD = 24.39$) was obtained, reflecting a fairly strong level of Islamic identity (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max
MRPI (Religiosity)	360.83	29.42	243	473
CAS (Celebrity Culture)	60.04	16.87	22	103
MIES (Muslim Identity)	150.69	24.39	46	215
Age	19.96	0.74	18	23

Source: Authors' own primary survey data, 2026

Hypothesis Testing

The Spearman correlation analysis showed a statistically significant positive relationship between religiosity and the strength of Muslim identity, with a correlation coefficient of 0.378 ($p < 0.001$), supporting H1. The implicit R^2 of 0.143 (14.3%) indicates that religiosity explains only a small portion of the variation in Muslim identity, suggesting that other factors, such as social environment, education, and cultural influences, also play an important role (Ysseldyk et al. 2010). This modest but statistically significant explanatory power does not contradict social identity theory; rather, it is consistent with it. Social identity does not posit religiosity as the sole or dominant basis of social identity, but rather as one among several possible bases, alongside social environment, education, and cultural belonging, through which individuals construct group-based self-understanding (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Accordingly, a significant positive association between religiosity and Muslim identity, even one that accounts for a relatively small share of total variance, supports the theoretical expectation that religious beliefs and practices provide one salient (though not exclusive) framework for personal and social identity formation, particularly in institutional settings such as a Muhammadiyah university where religious norms are strongly and consistently reinforced (Ysseldyk et al. 2010).

Based on the Spearman correlation test results, the relationship between engagement in celebrity culture and Muslim identity was very weak and insignificant, $rs(194) = 0.125$, $p = 0.082$, confirming H2. This finding suggests that participation in celebrity culture does not have a meaningful impact on Muslim identity formation. Possible explanations include selective media consumption, where Muslim adolescents may only adopt elements of celebrity culture that are in line with Islamic

values, and stronger influences from social environments such as family, school, and religious communities.

Spearman correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between religiosity (MRPI) and engagement in celebrity culture (CAS), $rs(194) = 0.267$, $p < 0.001$, confirming H3. This result suggests that engagement with celebrity culture persists even among adolescents with high levels of religiosity. This phenomenon can be explained through the selective exposure approach, where adolescents tend to choose celebrity content that is in line with their religious values (Zillman and Bryant 1985), so that cultural engagement does not necessarily reduce their religious commitment.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix between Variables

Variable	1	2	3
MRPI	—	.267**	.378**
CAS	.267**	—	.125
MIES	.378**	.125	—

Source: Authors' own primary survey data, 2026

Note. MRPI = Muslim Religiosity Personality Inventory; CAS = Celebrity Attitude Scale; MIES = Muslim Identity Expression Scale. ** $p < .001$

The results of the mediation analysis using the PROCESS Macro confirm H4: celebrity culture (CAS) does not mediate the relationship between religiosity and Muslim identity. The indirect effect of religiosity on Muslim identity through celebrity culture was insignificant (0.0043; 95% CI $[-0.0231, 0.0375]$). Although religiosity significantly predicted celebrity culture (coefficient 0.1534; $p = 0.0002$), the effect of celebrity culture on Muslim identity was not significant (coefficient 0.0280; $p = 0.7698$). The overall model explained 22.33% of the variance in Muslim identity ($R^2 = 0.2233$), with religiosity as the main

predictor. Thus, celebrity culture does not serve as a relevant mediator in this relationship.

Qualitative Findings

Most respondents in the present study have developed conscious strategies to engage with celebrity culture while negotiating its potentially conflicting values with their Islamic religious commitments. Their religious identity plays a central role in shaping how they interact with media content, whether through selective exposure, filtering, or critical reflection. While young Muslims today live in a media environment saturated with global celebrity influences, being an active media consumer still seems to require internal negotiations to maintain religious integrity.

Indeed, the participants interviewed in this project demonstrated how strategies of selective engagement emerged in their daily lives, shaped by personal faith, family influence, and communal contexts. When cultural texts or trends from celebrity culture enter their media landscape, they actively assess how these align with or diverge from Islamic teachings and how they should (or should not) be incorporated into their consumption practices. This process of meaning negotiation and value filtering is particularly salient for Muslim audiences who aim to maintain their religious boundaries while navigating global media.

This chapter presents findings on how Muslim respondents employ strategies to engage with celebrity culture in ways that safeguard their religious identity. The results highlight how respondents position religion as an internal "filter," distinguish between entertainment and moral guidance, and use selective consumption mechanisms, not merely because of external rules but because of internalised religious values. Furthermore, the findings show how social supports such as family, peers, and

religious communities strengthen their ability to resist potentially negative celebrity influences, allowing them to enjoy media content without compromising their Islamic commitments.

"Being Muslim is Who I am": Everyday Expressions of Muslim Identity

For participants in this study, being a Muslim is not merely a matter of religious status, but a lived identity continuously expressed, performed, and affirmed through everyday actions, decisions, and environments. Across different narratives, participants consistently demonstrated that their Muslim identity is embedded in daily life not only through visible religious symbols and ritual practices, but also through the moral boundaries they uphold, the communities they belong to, and the guidance they internalise from family and education.

One of the most prominent expressions of identity was the decision to wear the hijab. Participants like Dina and Ana did not merely describe it as clothing. Still, as an outward declaration of their Muslim identity, "a boundary" that guided their behaviour, distinguished them from others, and reminded them of their religious values. This embodied expression of faith was complemented by ritual practices such as daily prayer, Qur'an reading, and attendance at Islamic study groups. Donna, who attended a pesantren, recalled these practices as spiritually intense and emotionally grounding.

Campus-based religious activities further deepened these expressions of identity, especially for those who had not grown up in strictly religious households. Participants like Tara found in Islamic study groups (*kajian*) a community that supported both religious learning and social belonging. Family also played a crucial role: Reni recalled learning Islam in her family 'since kindergarten,' while Ana highlighted

the moral authority of her grandmother. These influences cultivated a form of religiosity that was personal, rooted in affection and habit rather than fear or pressure.

In addition, participants' Muslim identity was expressed through active moral boundary-making in response to popular culture. Despite their enjoyment of music, drama, and fashion, they emphasised the importance of self-regulation, drawing limits on behaviour, consumption, and imitation based on what they considered appropriate for a Muslim. These narratives demonstrate that the participants did not treat being Muslim as a static label but as an identity that is consciously inhabited and shaped in everyday life.

The centrality of the hijab in participants' narratives suggests that Muslim identity in this study functions less as an ascribed status than as a continuously declared identity, achieved and reaffirmed through visible, embodied practice (Peek 2005). Rather than experiencing veiling and ritual observance as external impositions, participants such as Dina and Ana described the hijab as a self-chosen boundary marker that organises conduct and signals belonging. Donna's description of a pesantren-based ritual as spiritually intense and emotionally grounding further suggests that religious practice operates simultaneously as an embodied habit and as a resource for identity stabilisation amid the pressures of celebrity and popular culture examined elsewhere in this study.

At the same time, participants' accounts point to Muslim identity as something actively performed and re-performed across everyday interactions, rather than fixed at a single moment of religious declaration. This performative dimension is visible in the moral boundary-work participants undertook around music, drama, and fashion, where enjoyment of popular culture was continually negotiated

against self-imposed limits rather than resolved once and for all. Family and campus communities emerge as key sites where this performance is learned and reinforced: Reni's account of internalising Islam "*since kindergarten*" and Ana's invocation of her grandmother's moral authority illustrate how religious identity is transmitted through relational, intergenerational socialisation, while campus study groups (*kajian*) extend this socialisation into a chosen peer community for participants like Tara. These patterns resonate with social identity performance theory (Klein et al. 2007), which frames identity expression as a strategic, situated accomplishment shaped by the audiences and normative communities to which individuals orient themselves.

"I Enjoy, But I Choose": Selective Media Consumption as an Active Strategy of Identity Preservation

The Muslim students in this study demonstrate that engagement with popular media is not passive or indiscriminate. Their narratives reveal a conscious, reflective, and strategic selection process, in line with the framework of selective media theory. These young audiences not only choose what they watch (selective exposure), but also interpret content through the lens of religious values (selective perception) and remember or discard information based on its alignment with their identity commitments (selective retention).

Participants consistently emphasised that they enjoy celebrity content, such as K-pop concerts, music videos, and drama series, strictly for entertainment. Dina and Fara, for example, stated that while they find K-pop aesthetically and musically engaging, they consciously skip or avoid content that portrays alcohol consumption, sexualized imagery, or lifestyle choices that contradict their Islamic principles. '*It's visual enjoyment,*' Dina explained, '*I skip*

the rest if it feels too much.' Such statements reflect a deliberate form of selective exposure guided by personal ethics.

Many participants, including Kila and Donna, admire celebrities for their work ethic, discipline, and creativity, but consciously filter out behaviours they consider morally inappropriate. Kila articulated this distinction clearly: *'I take their energy, not their lifestyle.'* Donna, who has a pesantren background, actively avoids scenes with LGBTQ+ content, such as BL (boys' love) dramas, because they conflict with her religious understanding. What stands out is the autonomous nature of these mechanisms: Wendi stated, *'I just know where the line is,'* reflecting an ingrained sense of what is acceptable and what must be avoided.

Despite high exposure to global celebrity culture, the participants' Muslim identity remains firm and unaffected due to three protective factors. First, their conscious awareness of halal and haram in media allows them to differentiate between content that can be enjoyed as entertainment and behaviours that should not be imitated. Second, supportive environments such as pesantren, Muhammadiyah schools, religious families, or campus study groups reinforce their internal filters. Third, religion functions not merely as a symbolic identity but as a practical guide shaping everyday decisions. These young Muslims position themselves not as passive consumers, but as active agents navigating media culture with moral clarity and religious confidence.

The apparently automatic, pre-reflective quality of this filtering suggests a selective form of parasocial engagement in which admiration for celebrities is deliberately decoupled from behavioural imitation. This pattern is consistent with Mirodzi and Kusumaningrum's (2024) finding, in a separate sample of early-adult Muslim K-pop fans, that higher religious

commitment is associated with lower intensity of celebrity worship; the present qualitative data help illuminate the mechanism behind that association by showing religiosity operating not as a blanket suppressor of fan engagement, but as a selective filter that permits admiration while withholding uncritical devotion. This echoed with Shariffadeen and Manaf's (2019) finding that Muslim influencers on Instagram actively construct a modern Muslimah identity that blends fashionable, globally-inflected aesthetics with visible religious markers. This selective media consumption strategy is a part of a wider, socially patterned repertoire of religious media practice observable across multiple Indonesian Muslim youth populations engaging with global celebrity and Hallyu culture.

Social Media as a Hybrid Space for Identity Negotiation

The findings of this study illustrate that social media serves not merely as a platform for entertainment or fandom participation but as a hybrid space where Muslim youth negotiate their dual identities as devout individuals and fans of global popular culture. For many participants, platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube are dynamic arenas where expressions of religiosity and fandom coexist, intersect, and sometimes even reinforce one another. Dina, for example, shared that while she follows K-pop idols and participates in fan content, she also uses her account to post hijab selfies or Islamic quotes.

Other participants echoed similar strategies. Kila emphasized that she consciously curates her media feed to include both fandom-related content and Islamic reminders. Donna and Ana maintained parallel engagements by actively following both celebrity accounts and *dakwah* pages. Through such practices, participants demonstrate reflective agency

as the capacity to self-regulate their exposure and expression in digital spaces according to religious values. For them, social media becomes a negotiated terrain where neither fandom nor faith is excluded.

This capacity to maintain dual engagement is also evident in how participants perceive parasocial interactions as one-sided emotional bonds formed with celebrities through media. Although participants admitted to feeling emotionally connected to their idols, they did not consider these feelings as threats to their religious identity. Dina and Kila acknowledged the excitement and emotional support they derive from following idols, but emphasised that these interactions are 'illusions' of closeness, not real relationships. Their awareness that these are simulated connections, rooted in entertainment rather than spiritual truth, allows them to compartmentalise such feelings without guilt or moral conflict.

Fara and Tara even described online fan communities as spaces where fellow Muslim fans remind each other to maintain religious boundaries, turning fandom into a potentially supportive rather than corrosive social environment. Drawing on identity negotiation theory, participants demonstrate that they are not passive recipients of cultural influence. Instead, they operate as active agents capable of distinguishing between mediated fantasy and religious reality. Social media, in this sense, functions not as a threat to Muslim identity but as a platform for selective performance, reflection, and balance.

Participants' practice of curating a single feed to hold both fandom content and Islamic reminders side by side illustrates what Campbell (2012) terms "networked religion," in which religious identity online is characterised by "storied identities," which are narratives of the self that are continuously assembled, layered, and made visible across a single digital profile rather

than confined to a dedicated religious space. Dina's simultaneous posting of hijab selfies and K-pop fan content, and Donna's and Ana's parallel following of celebrity and *dakwah* accounts, extend this pattern from institutional religious actors to ordinary young users. This is notable because existing research on Muslim social media use in Indonesia has largely documented this kind of identity-blending at the level of religious authorities and micro-celebrities. Zaid et al. (2022) found that Muslim social media influencers actively reimagine religious authority by presenting Islamic teachings alongside lifestyle and entertainment content to reach younger audiences, while Dewi et al. (2024) also documented similar hybrid self-presentation among Muslim women on Instagram, blending fashionable aesthetics with visible religious markers. The present findings suggest that this same hybrid curatorial logic is practised by ordinary Muslim youth as a routine, largely unremarkable way of managing an integrated online self.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Muhammadiyah students, as representatives of the young generation of Muslims in a moderate Islamic educational environment, can negotiate their religious identity reflectively amid exposure to global popular culture such as K-pop. The quantitative approach reveals that most students still use Islamic values as a moral and ethical framework when consuming popular culture content, especially regarding the limits of *aurat*, time, and content type. The qualitative approach reveals the existence of internal dynamics in which students develop personal strategies for interpreting fandoms to remain in line with their religious beliefs, including reinterpretations of entertainment value, content selection, and the formation of fan

communities deemed morally and spiritually safe.

The combination of data from both approaches shows that Muhammadiyah students are not passive consumers of media, but active subjects who use their religious and intellectual agency to navigate their cultural lives. Their engagement with celebrity culture through the media does not necessarily shift their religious identity, but rather becomes a new arena for negotiating identity, expressing affection, and forming a community that supports the values of progressive Islam. Thus, this research underscores the important role of Muhammadiyah students as moderate Islamic actors who can respond critically to cultural changes without losing their religious identity.

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