



Article Type: Research Paper

Ruqyah Practice and Commodification of Spirituality on Tiktok @Nyairosidah3 Account



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Abstract

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This article is available in:

DOI:10.35905/kur.v18i2.13733

Article history

Received: June 5, 2025

Revised: December 26, 2025

Accepted: December 31, 2025



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The rise of online ruqyah practices on TikTok reflects a broader transformation of religious rituals within platform-based digital environments. This study examines how ruqyah is performed, mediated, and interpreted through live-streaming sessions on the TikTok account @nyairosidah3, with particular attention to audience interactions and the commodification of spirituality. Employing a qualitative content analysis, this research analyzes 30 live-streaming sessions conducted between 1–30 March 2025, focusing on verbal exchanges, symbolic performances, visual cues, and platform features such as digital gifting. The findings reveal that online ruqyah operates through patterned interactions comprising supportive and skeptical comments, requests for spiritual intervention, practitioner responses, and ritualized visual symbolism. These interactions function as affective trust-building mechanisms that sustain spiritual legitimacy despite the absence of physical co-presence. At the same time, platform affordances such as visibility algorithms, audience engagement metrics, and monetization features transform ruqyah into a form of ritualized spiritual labor embedded within a digital economy. Theoretically, this study advances scholarship on digital religion by conceptualizing online ruqyah as a hybrid practice situated at the intersection of computer-mediated communication, affective trust formation, and platform-based commodification. Rather than treating digital ruqyah solely as mediated ritual or religious content, this research demonstrates how spiritual authority is negotiated through emotional performance, symbolic exchange, and economic logic in social media environments. These findings contribute to ongoing debates on digital religious authority, mediatized spirituality, and the commodification of faith in contemporary platform societies. This study reframes online ruqyah not merely as digital religious content, but as a form of affective labor through which spiritual authority is produced, circulated, and monetized within platform-based media systems.

Keywords: Commodification; CMC Theory Tiktok;, Ruqyah.

1. Introduction

Digital media platforms have increasingly become central spaces for the production and circulation of religious meaning. Social media no longer function merely as channels for information dissemination or entertainment but operate as socio-technical environments where religious practices are performed, negotiated, and transformed (Asif, 2024; Baygi et al., 2021; Otaiba, 2019). Live-streaming features, algorithmic visibility, and interactive affordances enable religious rituals to be enacted beyond conventional sacred spaces, allowing audiences to participate in spiritual experiences mediated entirely by digital technologies (Mudau & Tshifhumulo, 2025; Osler, 2024). This transformation has generated growing scholarly interest in how religion adapts to platform-based communication systems and how religious authority is reconfigured within digital publics (Hasanah & Baharun, 2025; Philips, 2025).

Within this context, religious healing practices such as *ruqyah* have undergone significant transformation. Traditionally performed through face-to-face ritual encounters, *ruqyah* is increasingly conducted through live-streamed sessions on platforms such as TikTok, where practitioners engage directly with dispersed audiences in real time. These online *ruqyah* practices function simultaneously as ritual performances, interpersonal interactions, and mediated spectacles. While existing studies on digital religion have explored online preaching, religious influencers, and mediated rituals (Battista, 2024; Evolvi, 2022; Zhang, 2025), limited attention has been paid to how spiritual healing practices operate within live-streaming environments and how trust, legitimacy, and authority are constructed in the absence of physical co-presence.

To address this gap, this study draws on Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) theory to examine how affective trust is formed through mediated interaction. Research in CMC demonstrates that interpersonal bonds and credibility can emerge in virtual environments through symbolic cues, emotional responsiveness, and sustained interaction (Baruah, 2025; Sherblom, 2010; Walther, 2011). In live-streamed *ruqyah* sessions, trust is not grounded in institutional credentials alone but is produced through ritualized communication, visual symbolism, and audience engagement. At the same time, platform affordances such as monetization features, engagement metrics, and algorithmic visibility embed these spiritual interactions within the political economy of digital media (Bentsen & Pedersen, 2024; Duffy & Meisner, 2023; Werning, 2018) raising critical questions about the commodification of religious practices and the fragmentation of religious authority.

This study advances scholarship on digital religion by theorizing online *ruqyah* as a hybrid form of ritualized spiritual labor operating at the intersection of computer-mediated communication, affective trust formation, and platform-based commodification. Using qualitative content analysis of live-streamed *ruqyah* sessions on TikTok, this research examines how spiritual authority is produced, contested, and monetized within platform environments. Rather than treating

online *ruqyah* solely as mediated religious content or alternative healing practice, this study conceptualizes it as a dynamic process in which ritual performance, emotional labor, and platform logics converge to reshape contemporary religious experience.

2. Literature Review

Digital Religion and the Mediatization of Religious Practices

The growing presence of religion in digital media has been widely examined through the framework of digital religion and mediatization of religion. Scholars argue that digital platforms do not merely transmit religious messages but actively reshape religious practices, symbols, and authority according to media logics such as visibility, interactivity, and performance (Evolvi & Cheong, 2021). Religion in digital contexts becomes increasingly embedded in everyday media use, blurring the boundaries between sacred and profane, private devotion and public performance.

Within this framework, social media platforms have emerged as central arenas where religious meaning is produced and negotiated. Studies show that platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok facilitate new forms of lived religion, allowing practitioners and audiences to engage in rituals, sermons, and spiritual counseling beyond institutional settings (Lomachinska, 2025; Zhang, 2025). Live-streaming features, in particular, intensify this process by enabling real-time interaction, affective engagement, and collective participation, thereby transforming religious rituals into mediated events oriented toward dispersed digital publics.

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and the Formation of Spiritual Trust

To analyze religious interaction occurring without physical co-presence, this study draws on Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) theory. Walther argues that interpersonal relationships, emotional closeness, and trust can be established through sustained virtual interaction, even in the absence of face-to-face contact. In live-streamed religious contexts, spiritual relationships are not produced through physical proximity but through interaction intensity, responsiveness, and affective performance.

Several derivative concepts of CMC are particularly relevant. Social Information Processing (SIP) explains how individuals strategically employ verbal and nonverbal cues—such as tone of voice, facial expressions, religious symbols, and attire—to construct a favorable self-presentation and elicit positive social responses. Meanwhile, the Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects (SIDE) suggests that digital communication spaces can strengthen collective religious identity, enabling audiences to express spiritual concerns, emotional distress, and healing expectations more freely.

Audience trust in such contexts is often generated through trust signals operating via peripheral routes, as described in the *Elaboration Likelihood Model*.

Emotional resonance, symbolic cues, and ritualized performances tend to outweigh rational evaluation in shaping perceptions of spiritual credibility within digitally mediated religious interactions.

Religious Commodification and the Political Economy of Digital Media

The economic dimension of digital religious practices is examined through the lens of commodification within the political economy of media. Mosco conceptualizes commodification as the transformation of use value into exchange value, whereby social and cultural practices—including religion—are rendered into commodities within capitalist systems.

In digital media ecosystems, religion is not only understood as a belief system but is also produced and packaged as visually engaging and emotionally compelling content designed to align with algorithmic logics. Monetization features such as *virtual gifts, likes*, and engagement metrics function as forms of symbolic participation that simultaneously carry economic value. These mechanisms mark a shift from sacred, private ritual toward publicly consumable and monetizable religious content, embedding spiritual experience within platform capitalism.

As a consequence, religious authority becomes increasingly fragmented. Legitimacy is no longer derived solely from formal religious institutions but is constructed through digital visibility, popularity, and affective engagement with audiences.

Interpersonal Communication and Digital Empathy

This study also draws on interpersonal communication theory, particularly Julia T. Wood's emphasis on relational meaning. Wood argues that the quality of interpersonal communication is not determined exclusively by physical presence but by responsiveness, empathy, and acknowledgment of others' emotional experiences.

In online ruqyah practices, digital empathy is constructed through personalized address, individualized prayers, acknowledgment of suffering, and immediate responses to audience comments. These practices foster emotional closeness, psychological comfort, and perceived support despite technological mediation. Consequently, empathy is not diminished in digital religious interaction but is reproduced through affective symbols and ritualized communicative performance.

Normative Foundations: Ruqyah Syar'iyah and the Contestation of Legitimacy

Within Islamic tradition, ruqyah is normatively categorized into ruqyah syar'iyah and ruqyah shirkiyyah. Ruqyah syar'iyah refers to healing practices conducted in accordance with Islamic teachings, utilizing Qur'anic verses and authenticated prayers, employing comprehensible language, and affirming that ultimate healing derives solely from Allah. In contrast, ruqyah shirkiyyah involves practices that contradict Islamic doctrine, such as obscure incantations, reliance on supernatural intermediaries, or unsubstantiated claims regarding the unseen.

In digital contexts, these normative distinctions become sites of public contestation. The open and performative nature of live-streamed ruqyah invites scrutiny, critique, and debate regarding religious legitimacy. Accordingly, this study treats Islamic normative discourse not as theological judgment but as an analytical framework for understanding how religious authority and authenticity are negotiated within digital public spaces.

Previous Studies and Scholarly Contribution

Previous studies have examined ruqyah and religious practices in digital media. Hamzah et al. (2023); Ramadhani et al. (2025); Salsabila et al. (2024) analyze ruqyah content on YouTube as an effective medium of da'wah using a netnographic approach but do not engage deeply with commodification or platform economics.

Building on and extending these studies, this research integrates CMC theory, affective trust formation, and platform commodification to theorize online ruqyah as a form of hybrid spiritual labor. This conceptualization captures how digitally mediated religious practices simultaneously function as spiritual rituals, interpersonal engagements, and activities embedded within the economic logic of social media platforms.

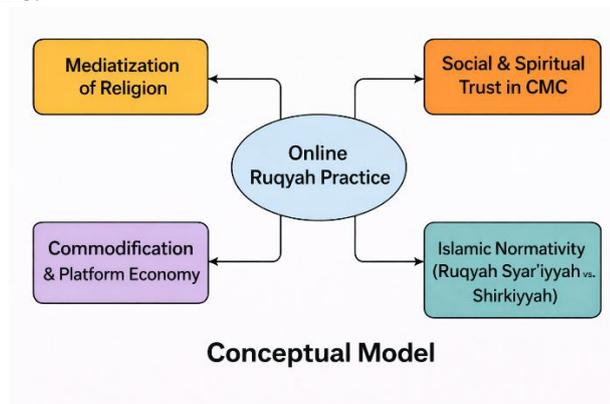


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Model of Online Ruqyah Practice in Digital Media

3. Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in a constructivist epistemological perspective, viewing meaning as socially produced through interaction between practitioners, audiences, and platform affordances. Data were collected through non-participant digital observation of live-streamed ruqyah sessions on the TikTok account @nyairosidah3 during March 2025. The unit of analysis consists of communicative acts, including verbal expressions, visual and symbolic cues, affective performances, and audience interactions manifested through comments and platform features. Data were analyzed using inductive qualitative content analysis, with iterative coding to identify recurring interactional patterns rather than predefined categories. Reflexivity was incorporated by positioning the analysis within a sociocommunicative framework, treating online ruqyah not as a theological object of evaluation but as a digitally

mediated cultural practice shaped by affective trust, ritual performance, and platform dynamics.

4. Results

Patterns of Audience Engagement in Live-Streaming Ruqyah

Analysis of live-streaming ruqyah sessions on the TikTok account @nyairosidah3 indicates intensive audience engagement characterized by real-time interaction, emotional expression, and ritual participation. Audience responses were not homogeneous but clustered into three dominant patterns: supportive and empathic engagement, skeptical or critical responses, and direct requests for spiritual healing and consultation. These patterns coexisted within the same sessions, demonstrating that online ruqyah operates within a plural and contested communicative environment.

These interactional patterns are summarized in Table 1, which categorizes audience comments based on their dominant communicative function.

Table 1. Categories of Audience Interaction in Live-Streaming Ruqyah

Category	Characteristics	Illustrative Function
Supportive and empathic comments	Prayers, religious praise, blessings, moral support	Reinforce emotional solidarity and perceived spiritual legitimacy
Skeptical and critical comments	Doubt, ridicule, accusations of deception	Contest legitimacy and introduce public scrutiny
Requests for healing and consultation	Descriptions of illness, emotional distress, requests to participate	Position practitioner as accessible spiritual mediator

Table 1 presents three dominant patterns of audience interaction in live-streaming ruqyah sessions: supportive engagement, skeptical responses, and requests for spiritual healing. Supportive comments dominate the interaction, while critical responses introduce contestation. Consultation requests indicate that audiences perceive the platform as a space for accessible spiritual care and mediation.

Supportive and Empathic Responses

Supportive engagement constituted the most visible form of audience interaction. Viewers frequently expressed prayers, religious invocations, and moral encouragement toward both the practitioner and patients. These responses contributed to the formation of a collective spiritual atmosphere and sustained emotional closeness throughout the sessions.

Representative examples of supportive and empathic comments are presented in Table 2, illustrating how affective expressions function within live-streamed ritual interaction.

Table 2. Supportive and Empathic Audience Comments

Date	Excerpt of Audience Comment	Communicative Function
2 March 2025	“O Allah, may Allah protect you.”	Spiritual support and empathy
9 March 2025	“Tabarakallah, Nyai sincerely helps others.”	Moral affirmation
13 March 2025	“Masyaallah, soothing sholawat.”	Collective spiritual atmosphere
16 March 2025	“Trust in Allah’s power.”	Affirmation of faith
25 March 2025	“Stay healthy, your heart is so noble.”	Emotional encouragement

Table 2 illustrates supportive and empathic audience comments expressed through prayers, religious praise, and moral encouragement. These responses reinforce emotional solidarity and contribute to the formation of a collective spiritual atmosphere during live-streaming sessions, sustaining perceptions of sincerity and spiritual legitimacy.

Skeptical and Critical Responses

Skeptical responses emerged alongside supportive engagement. These comments expressed doubt regarding the effectiveness of ruqyah, questioned the sincerity of the practitioner, or framed the ritual as deceptive or suggestive. Although critical in tone, these responses did not halt the ritual process but instead triggered counter-responses from other viewers.

Examples of skeptical and critical comments are provided in Table 3, highlighting the contested nature of spiritual authority in digital public spaces.

Table 3. Skeptical and Critical Audience Comments

Date	Excerpt of Audience Comment	Type of Criticism
4 March 2025	“What kind of treatment is this?”	Questioning legitimacy
5 March 2025	“Collective deception.”	Accusation of fraud
7 March 2025	“Arrest this witchcraft.”	Moral and legal condemnation
14 March 2025	“Is this a joke or serious?”	Ridicule

Table 3 summarizes skeptical and critical audience responses that question the legitimacy, effectiveness, or sincerity of the ruqyah practice. Although fewer in number, these comments reveal the contested nature of spiritual authority in digital public spaces and highlight the presence of scrutiny within live-streamed rituals.

Requests for Spiritual Healing and Consultation

A substantial portion of audience interaction consisted of direct requests for ruqyah and spiritual consultation. Viewers disclosed physical ailments, emotional suffering, and long-term health concerns, often requesting to be invited into the ritual process. These requests were framed in polite religious language, signaling trust and hope for divine intervention.

Examples of consultation requests are summarized in Table 4, demonstrating how audiences position the practitioner as a mediator of spiritual care.

Table 4. Audience Requests for Ruqyah and Spiritual Consultation

Date	Excerpt of Audience Comment	Type of Request
4 March 2025	"I want to consult, Umi."	Personal consultation
8 March 2025	"My wife is ill, please help."	Intercessory healing
13 March 2025	"I have suffered back pain for years."	Chronic illness
22 March 2025	"I often have nightmares."	Emotional distress

Table 4 documents audience requests for ruqyah and spiritual consultation, often framed through descriptions of illness, emotional distress, or recurring personal concerns. The repetition of such requests indicates that viewers position the practitioner as an accessible spiritual mediator within the live-streaming environment.

Monetization and Symbolic Participation

Audience participation was not limited to textual interaction. Platform-specific features such as virtual gifts and engagement metrics were frequently used, particularly during emotionally charged moments. These features functioned as symbolic gestures of appreciation and support while simultaneously embedding the ritual within the economic infrastructure of the platform.

5. Discussion

Online Ruqyah as Hybrid Spiritual Labor

The findings indicate that online ruqyah should be understood not merely as a digitally mediated religious ritual, but as a form of hybrid spiritual labor situated at the intersection of ritual performance, affective communication, and platform affordances. Patterns of audience engagement suggest that the practitioner's role extends beyond the delivery of spiritual healing to include sustained emotional responsiveness, symbolic self-presentation, and continuous interaction with viewers. This observation aligns with scholarship arguing that digital religious practices increasingly entail forms of labor oriented toward visibility, relational maintenance, and affective management within platform environments (Berger, 2017; Cheong, 2017; Evolvi, 2022; Gao et al., 2024).

In contrast to conventional ruqyah conducted in private or semi-private settings, live-streamed ruqyah requires an ongoing affective presence and public engagement. Spiritual authority is therefore enacted through repeated ritual performances and emotional availability, effectively aligning religious practice with broader forms of affective and visibility labor characteristic of platform-mediated communication.

Affective Trust Formation in Computer-Mediated Religious Interaction

The analysis further underscores the central role of affective trust in sustaining online ruqyah practices. Drawing on Computer-Mediated Communication theory, the findings demonstrate that trust is generated through symbolic cues, ritual language, and emotional responsiveness rather than through physical co-presence or formal institutional validation (Boyns & Loprieno, 2013; Campos-Castillo & Hitlin, 2013; Mizrahi-Werner et al., 2025). Supportive comments, collective prayers, and repeated affirmations function as mechanisms through which audiences collaboratively reinforce the practitioner's spiritual credibility.

This pattern is consistent with research suggesting that trust in (Pham, 2007; Silva et al., 2025; Xiao et al., 2025). Within live-streamed ruqyah, affective trust thus emerges as a critical resource mediated environments often develops through peripheral or affective pathways, where emotional resonance outweighs systematic rational evaluation enabling spiritual authority to be performed, recognized, and sustained through mediated interaction.

Platform Commodification and Fragmented Religious Authority

The incorporation of monetization features and engagement metrics situates online ruqyah firmly within the political economy of digital platforms. Virtual gifts and visibility indicators do not operate as neutral technical affordances; rather, they actively shape how spiritual practices are valued, sustained, and circulated. This dynamic reflects broader processes of commodification, whereby religious practices are transformed into content aligned with platform logics of engagement, visibility, and monetization (Boyns & Loprieno, 2013; Cole-Turner, 2019; Fitria, 2025)

As a result, religious authority becomes increasingly fragmented and decentered. Rather than being grounded exclusively in institutional credentials or doctrinal legitimacy, authority is negotiated through popularity, affective engagement, and algorithmic amplification. The presence of skeptical and critical comments further illustrates that spiritual legitimacy in digital spaces remains unstable and contested, subject to ongoing public scrutiny within heterogeneous audiences.

Islamic Normativity and Public Contestation in Digital Spaces

The coexistence of supportive and skeptical responses highlights how Islamic normativity is publicly negotiated within digital environments. Normative distinctions between ruqyah syar'iyah and ruqyah shirkiyyah are not resolved through formal theological adjudication but are enacted through everyday interaction, commentary, and collective judgment among viewers. Digital platforms thus function as arenas in which doctrinal boundaries are continuously debated and reinterpreted in real time.

Rather than treating Islamic normativity as a fixed evaluative framework, this study conceptualizes it as a discursive resource mobilized by audiences to affirm or contest spiritual authority. This finding resonates with scholarship on lived religion, which emphasizes that religious meaning is continually produced through practice, interpretation, and social interaction within specific media contexts (Hoover, 2020).

Overall Theoretical Contribution

By theorizing online ruqyah as a form of hybrid spiritual labor, this study advances scholarship on digital religion by integrating affective trust formation and platform commodification into the analysis of religious healing practices. It demonstrates that spiritual authority in digital environments emerges from the convergence of ritual performance, emotional labor, and platform-based economic structures, offering a conceptual framework applicable to a wider range of digitally mediated religious

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that online ruqyah on TikTok should be understood not simply as a digitally mediated form of religious healing, but as a mode of hybrid spiritual labor embedded within platform-based media environments. By integrating perspectives from digital religion, computer-mediated communication, and the political economy of platforms, the findings show that spiritual authority is produced through affective trust, ritualized performance, and algorithmic visibility rather than institutional validation alone. The analysis further reveals how digital platforms simultaneously enable the commodification of spiritual practices and facilitate the public negotiation of Islamic normativity, positioning online ruqyah as a dynamic site of affirmation, contestation, and emotional dependency. Although the study is limited to a specific platform and temporal scope, it offers a conceptual framework for examining digitally mediated religious healing practices across platforms and cultural contexts, and invites future research to explore how affective labor, spiritual authority, and platform capitalism continue to reshape contemporary religious experience.

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