

Religiolinguistic Authority and Digital Hybridity: Arabic and Sasak Language Contestation Among Mataram Muslim Communities on Social Media Platforms

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the complex dynamics of Arabic and Sasak language contestation within religiolinguistic practices of the Mataram Muslim community across digital platforms. Employing a netnographic methodology grounded in interpretive-constructivist epistemology, this research examines how language choices function as markers of religious authority, cultural identity, and social positioning in online religious discourse. Data were collected from six digital platforms over twelve months, generating a corpus of 2,847 posts and 15,324 comments. Through thematic analysis, critical discourse analysis, and semiotic interpretation, this study reveals three major patterns: (1) language stratification whereby Arabic language accumulates religious authority while Sasak language signifies local legitimacy and accessibility; (2) creative hybridity and strategic code-switching as mechanisms through which communities actively negotiate linguistic power relations; and (3) implicit contestation wherein community members resist linguistic hierarchization through subtle rhetorical strategies. Theoretically, this research advances understanding of how Muslim communities perform postcolonial religiolinguistic identity within algorithmically mediated spaces. Practically, findings underscore the importance of culturally responsive approaches to digital religiosity, with implications for Islamic education, content creation, and digital literacy. This research contributes to closing the gap in scholarly literature regarding how Southeast Asian Muslim communities authentically construct and transform religious identity through linguistically mediated digital practices.

Keywords: Religiolinguistic Authority, Digital Hybridity, Sasak Language Contestation

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INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of religious practice is one of the most significant sociocultural shifts in contemporary Muslim communities worldwide. As internet technology becomes embedded in daily life across the Global South, especially in Southeast Asia, where around 275 million Muslims live, digital platforms have become key spaces for shaping religious identity, authority, and meaning-making (Pew Research Center, 2019). Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, with approximately 231 million Muslims, has experienced particularly rapid digitalization in religious life. Within this context, Mataram, the capital of Nusa Tenggara Barat, stands out as an important center of Islamic education and scholarship, home to Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Mataram and many Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). This setting shapes how Mataram's Muslim community, marked by diverse educational backgrounds, age groups, and socioeconomic positions, expresses religious identity through digital communication. More than a simple adoption of technology, this shift reflects a

broader reconfiguration of religious authority, communal solidarity, and spiritual practice in relation to both global Islamic discourse and local cultural traditions (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp have created new spaces for religious dialogue, scriptural interpretation, theological debate, and mutual support with unprecedented accessibility and visibility. At the same time, these platforms operate through algorithmic systems that privilege certain content, users, and forms of engagement, shaping religious expression in ways that differ markedly from offline interaction. Understanding these developments requires close attention to the linguistic, cultural, and religious specificities of Muslim communities rather than relying on generalized frameworks derived mainly from Western or Arab contexts.

Within Mataram's religiolinguistic landscape, the contestation between Arabic and Sasak languages occupies particular significance in shaping how community members perform and negotiate their religious identity. Arabic, understood as the liturgical and textual language of Islam, holds extraordinary symbolic value in Muslim communities globally, functioning as the language of the Quran, prophetic traditions (hadith), and classical Islamic scholarship. Simultaneously, Sasak, the indigenous language of the Sasak people indigenous to the island of Lombok, of which Mataram is the capital, represents deep historical continuity, intimate social bonds, and localized forms of knowledge transmission. The relationship between these languages cannot be understood through simplistic dichotomies of tradition versus modernity or local versus global; rather, as postcolonial scholars have emphasized, the coexistence of multiple linguistic systems reflects deeper historical processes of colonialism, Islamic expansion, and ongoing negotiations of cultural sovereignty (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020). Bourdieu's theory of linguistic capital illuminates how language choices function as expressions of social power: individuals and communities strategically deploy languages to accumulate cultural capital (in the case of Arabic, through claims to religious authenticity and scholarly legitimacy) or social capital (in the case of Sasak, through assertions of communal belonging and cultural heritage). Language use in religious contexts carries profound epistemological consequences, as each linguistic choice implicitly makes claims about what counts as legitimate knowledge, who possesses authority to speak about sacred matters, and how religious meaning should be produced and circulated. The digital context adds distinctive complexity: whereas offline religious institutions (mosques, pesantrens, and religious organizations) have historically exerted relatively concentrated control over who can speak authoritatively about religion, digital platforms distribute communicative capacity more widely, enabling users with minimal formal training to participate in religious discourse. Yet despite this apparent democratization, online platforms themselves generate new forms of hierarchy, as algorithms promote certain content types and user profiles while marginalizing others, potentially reinforcing rather than disrupting existing power structures (Gillespie, 2020).

Existing scholarly literature addressing language dynamics within Muslim communities has primarily concentrated on either formal educational contexts (Spolsky & Shohamy, 2000) or historically grounded analyses of how colonial languages shaped Islamic institutional development in Indonesia (Kuipers, 1998). Simultaneously, growing research on digital religiosity has documented how Muslims engage with online platforms for theological learning, communal bonding, and religious identity expression (Cheong et al., 2012; Campbell, 2013), yet this body of work has remained largely inattentive to the specifically linguistic dimensions of these practices, particularly within non-Arab Muslim communities. The scholarship on netnography and online identity has developed robust methodologies for understanding how communities construct meaning through digital interaction (Kozinets, 2015; Hine, 2015), yet applications to religiolinguistic contexts remain sparse, particularly in Southeast Asian settings. More specifically, no comprehensive research currently maps how the Mataram Muslim community situated at the intersection of local Sasak identity, national Indonesian political culture, and global Islamic networks actively negotiates linguistic representation of religious authority and authenticity on contemporary social media platforms. This research addresses this gap by offering the first in-depth netnographic analysis of religiolinguistic practice in Mataram, examining not simply what languages are used in online religious discourse but how,

why, and with what social and political consequences language choices function within contexts of religious identity negotiation. The study contributes to broader scholarly conversations regarding how Muslim-majority societies navigate tensions between localism and globalism, tradition and modernity, in ways that resist Western theoretical frameworks that frequently position these as mutually exclusive categories.

This research proceeds from the central observation that digital platforms create distinctive conditions for linguistic contestation. Whereas offline religious spaces typically maintain relatively stable hierarchies regarding which languages carry greater authority (with Arabic generally privileged in formal contexts and Indonesian or local languages in everyday communication), digital platforms generate contexts of instability and fluidity. Platform algorithms reward engagement regardless of linguistic choice; users from diverse educational and linguistic backgrounds participate simultaneously in the same comment threads; the persistent visibility of all posts creates archives of linguistic choice that enable comparative analysis; and the relative anonymity of online communication can enable speakers to experiment with linguistic expression in ways less constrained by offline social consequences (though surveillance capitalism and platform governance create new forms of constraint). This study examines how Mataram's Muslim community navigates these distinctive dynamics. The core research questions are: (1) What patterns characterize the use of Arabic, Sasak, and Indonesian languages within online religious discourse across diverse digital platforms? (2) What social, epistemological, and political functions do language choices serve in the expression and negotiation of religious identity? (3) What mechanisms of explicit or implicit contestation emerge around linguistic representation of religious authority? (4) How do community members strategically deploy language hybridity to navigate tensions between aspirations toward global Islam and commitments to local cultural identity? (5) What are the implications of these linguistically mediated digital practices for religious education, content creation, and community organizing? Addressing these questions carries significance at multiple levels: theoretically, it advances understanding of how Muslim communities construct postcolonial identity in algorithmically mediated contexts; methodologically, it demonstrates the utility of netnographic approaches for studying religiolinguistic practice; and practically, it provides insights for educators, content creators, and religious practitioners seeking to understand and navigate the evolving dynamics of digital religiosity.

The theoretical framework guiding this research integrates three complementary perspectives. First, sociolinguistic theory particularly as developed by Bourdieu (1986), Labov (1972), and contemporary scholars of language and power provides concepts for understanding how linguistic choices constitute and reflect social relations. Within this framework, language never functions as a neutral medium for communication; rather, every linguistic choice involves implicit claims about identity, authority, and social position. Second, postcolonial and hybrid identity theory drawing particularly on the work of Bhabha (1994), Said (1978), and contemporary scholars of digital culture and diaspora enables analysis of how communities construct identity not through adherence to putatively pure cultural or religious traditions, but through creative negotiation and combination of diverse elements, often inherited through histories of colonialism and cultural contact. This perspective resists essentialist understandings of culture or religion as fixed entities, instead emphasizing identity as performative process continuously produced through everyday cultural practices. Third, digital ethnography and platform studies informed by Kozinets (2015), Gillespie (2020), and scholars of algorithmic culture contribute methods and concepts for understanding how digital technologies restructure the conditions of social interaction, including how algorithms shape visibility, engagement, and the constitution of community. These three theoretical streams converge in emphasizing that religiolinguistic identity in contemporary Mataram cannot be understood as an expression of essential cultural traits or individual preferences, but rather as the product of complex negotiations among technological affordances, communal values, historical inheritances, and individual agency.

Mataram itself merits particular attention as a research site. The city holds distinctive significance within Indonesia's Islamic landscape: it is home to UIN Mataram, one of

Indonesia's premier Islamic universities, which trains Islamic educators, scholars, and religious leaders not only for Nusa Tenggara Barat but for Indonesia and the broader Islamic world. The region's population includes significant communities of Sasak people (the largest ethnic group), Samawa people, Mbojo people, and other indigenous groups, each with distinct linguistic and cultural traditions. Mataram's Muslim population thus combines deep roots in indigenous cultural traditions with sophisticated engagement with cosmopolitan Islamic scholarship, creating a context where tensions between local and global, vernacular and scholarly, take particularly acute form. Moreover, the region's internet penetration and social media adoption have grown rapidly in recent years; young people (aged 15–35) report social media use rates exceeding 80 percent according to recent surveys (Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia, 2023), making the region's online spaces significant arenas for religious practice. The population's educational diversity ranging from individuals with minimal formal education to PhD-holding scholars means that digital religious spaces encompass an unusually wide variation in linguistic sophistication and religious training, generating rich contexts for observing language negotiation.

This research employs netnography, an ethnographic methodology adapted to online contexts (Kozinets, 2015), combined with critical discourse analysis and semiotic interpretation. Netnography enables researchers to observe and participate within online communities in ways that respect their autonomy and integrity, accessing naturally occurring communicative practices without the significant intrusion that face-to-face ethnography entails. Over a twelve-month period, the researcher conducted systematic observation of six digital platforms: Instagram, TikTok, Facebook groups, specialized Islamic discussion forums, WhatsApp groups, and websites of local Islamic organizations. Data collection prioritized posts, comments, and conversations engaging explicitly with religious topics, language use in religious practice, and expressions of religious identity. The resulting corpus comprises 2,847 posts, 15,324 comments, and 89 sustained multi-turn conversations. Analysis proceeded through an iterative process: initial familiarization with the data corpus, identification of recurrent thematic patterns through open coding, focused analysis of language choice patterns and their functions, and interpretation of these patterns within the theoretical framework. The methodology privileges understanding how community members themselves interpret language choices and identity expression, maintaining throughout the research process a commitment to ethical engagement with the community and reflexive awareness of the researcher's own positionality.

This article proceeds as follows. Following this introduction, the methodology section articulates in detail the philosophical and practical foundations of the research, including the netnographic approach, ethical considerations, and analytical techniques. The theoretical framework section elaborates the three theoretical perspectives integrated in the research and develops a conceptual model for understanding religioliinguistic identity in digital contexts. The results section presents major findings regarding language stratification, creative hybridity, and contestation mechanisms, supported by illustrative examples from the data. The discussion section interprets these findings in relation to existing scholarship and develops practical implications for education and religious practice. The conclusion synthesizes the research and indicates directions for future investigation. The original contribution of this research lies in three dimensions: methodologically, it demonstrates the utility of netnographic analysis for studying religioliinguistic practice; theoretically, it advances understanding of how contemporary Muslim communities perform postcolonial identity in algorithmically mediated contexts; and empirically, it provides the first comprehensive documentation of how the Mataram Muslim community negotiates linguistic representation of religious authority on social media. Beyond these scholarly contributions, this research responds to a pressing social need: as digital platforms increasingly become primary sites of religious practice and identity formation, particularly for younger Muslims worldwide, understanding how communities authentically construct religious identity through linguistically mediated digital communication becomes essential for education, policy, and community organizing. This research aims not merely to document what occurs but to illuminate the social, epistemological, and political

stakes of linguistic choice in religious contexts, thereby contributing to more nuanced, respectful, and culturally grounded approaches to Muslim communities in the digital age.

METHOD

2.1 Epistemological Foundation

This research rests upon an interpretivist-constructivist philosophical stance (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). This epistemology holds that social reality including religiolinguistic practice does not exist as an objective fact independent of human interpretation but rather emerges through the ongoing collective construction of meaning among social actors. Within this framework, the contestation of language in religious contexts does not represent conflict among pre-existing entities (Arabic language, Sasak language, religious identity) but rather constitutes the very process through which these categories are continually created, negotiated, and transformed. This philosophical orientation suits the study of language precisely because it enables investigation not merely of which languages are used, but of why individuals assign meanings to language choices, how they construct identity through linguistic expression, and what social consequences follow from patterns of language use. An interpretivist epistemology rejects determinist assumptions whether technological determinism (that platform features mechanically determine user behavior) or cultural determinism (that religious tradition or linguistic inheritance mechanistically produce language choices) in favor of understanding human agency as operating within structured conditions, both enabling and constraining creative expression (Giddens, 1984). This perspective proves particularly valuable for understanding digital religiosity, where users are neither passive consumers of algorithmic content nor entirely autonomous agents, but rather actors creatively navigating constraints and opportunities embedded in technological systems, cultural norms, and religious traditions.

2.2 Methodological Approach: Netnography

Netnography, often defined as "a postmodern, qualitative, interpretive research methodology that adapts ethnography to study the cultures and communities that emerge in online spaces" (Kozinets, 2015, p. 1), provides the primary methodological framework. Ethnography traditionally involves immersion in a physical community over an extended period, with the researcher participating in daily life while systematically observing and documenting social practices. Netnography adapts this methodology to online contexts, acknowledging both continuities and important differences: online communities are anchored not in physical proximity but in shared interests and practices; interaction is mediated by technological platforms; communication leaves persistent digital traces; and participation may be geographically dispersed. These characteristics create both methodological challenges and advantages. The primary advantage for this research is that netnography enables genuine participation in the community's actual communicative practices without the disruption that face-to-face ethnography sometimes creates. When a researcher observes religious conversation on Instagram or WhatsApp, the community continues its normal interaction; one additional observer in a comment thread does not fundamentally alter the dynamics as it might in a small face-to-face group. Moreover, digital communication creates permanent records; posts do not vanish after being spoken but persist in searchable archives, enabling systematic analysis and comparative investigation across time. Netnography emphasizes ethical engagement and reflexivity: researchers must obtain informed consent from communities, maintain participants' privacy, and continually reflect on how their own positioning and interpretations shape the research. For this study, netnography was particularly suitable because it enabled investigation of naturally occurring discourse about language, authority, and identity discourse that participants themselves initiate rather than which the researcher elicits through interviews. The netnographic approach prioritizes authenticity, respecting how communities speak rather than how they might represent themselves if asked directly about language attitudes (Kozinets, 2015; Hine, 2015).

2.3 Research Perspective: Digital Islamicity and Postcolonial Lens

Beyond methodological positioning, this research adopts a particular analytical perspective informed by contemporary scholarship on digital religion and postcolonial studies.

The study understands "digital religiosity" not as a derivative or lesser form of religion that merely transplants offline religious practices into digital spaces, but rather as a distinctive form of religious practice with its own dynamics, constraints, and creative possibilities (Cheong et al., 2012; Campbell, 2013). Religiolinguistic practice in digital contexts generates novel phenomena: the ability to perform religious identity to a potentially global audience; the persistent visibility of one's linguistic choices in comment histories, the mixing of diverse linguistic communities in single comment threads, and the shaping of religious visibility by algorithmic ranking systems. From a postcolonial perspective, this research understands language contestation not primarily as cultural conflict but as ongoing negotiation of how communities relate to globally hegemonic forms of Islam (centered particularly in Arab regions) while maintaining distinctive cultural and linguistic identities. Postcolonial theory emphasizes that colonialism leaves deep traces in contemporary societies, including through language hierarchies (wherein languages of former colonizers often retain prestige) and anxieties about authenticity and tradition (Pennycook, 2010). In the case of Mataram's Muslim community, Arabic carries the paradoxical status of being simultaneously the sacred language of Islam (essential to Muslim identity worldwide) and a foreign language (not the community's indigenous linguistic tradition). English occupies the status of a global prestige language (associated with modernity and international access). Indonesian functions as the national language (associated with modernity and national belonging). Sasak represents the ancestral language (associated with local identity and cultural authenticity). These languages exist not in isolation but in dynamic relation within what Hall (1996) terms a "field of representation" where power relations shape which languages are heard as authoritative, modern, legitimate, or marginal. This research aims to illuminate these power relations while also recognizing communities' capacities to subvert hierarchies and create novel forms of linguistic expression.

2.4 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection proceeded over twelve months (spanning 2023–2024) across six digital platforms:

Instagram (46% of total corpus): Focus on public posts from accounts of Islamic educators, pesantren institutions, Islamic organizations, and individual Muslims sharing religious content. Data collection prioritized posts engaging Quranic exegesis, hadith discussion, contemporary Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), and Islamic social ethics.

TikTok (29% of corpus): Short-form video content with accompanying text and comments from content creators addressing religious topics. Netnographic observation tracked both video content (which frequently combines Sasak, Indonesian, and English) and written captions and comments (where linguistic choice patterns are particularly visible).

Facebook groups (15% of corpus): Membership-based discussion groups dedicated to Islamic study, Islamic questions and answers, and various Islamic organizations. These spaces generated longer-form discussions and more sustained exchanges about religious topics. Specialized Islamic forums (8% of corpus): Dedicated websites where users pose religious questions to scholars and engage in extended theological discussions. WhatsApp groups (2% of corpus): Membership-based private groups of Mataram Muslims (with group administrator consent and participant information). This generated more intimate discourse less visible to external audiences. Islamic organization websites (1% of corpus): Public-facing content from pesantren, Islamic organizations, and religious institutions presenting curricular materials and institutional positions on religious matters (Boellstorff et al., 2012).

Data collection proceeded through systematic procedures. The researcher initially conducted a three-month observation period (January–March 2023) to familiarize herself with the field, identify major accounts and groups, understand platform-specific norms and communication patterns, and develop access relationships. During this familiarization period, the researcher obtained informed consent from group administrators, institutional representatives, and where possible, individual participants. For closed groups, explicit written consent was requested; for open, public platforms, the researcher followed platform policies and ethical guidelines established by the Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR, 2019) which indicate that observation of public content generally does not require individual

informed consent, though pseudonymity should be maintained. Following the familiarization period, systematic data collection continued through nine months of targeted observation and participation. The researcher monitored regularly updated content, tracking posts, comments, and conversations; participated in discussions when appropriate and transparent regarding research purposes; downloaded or screenshotted data; and maintained detailed fieldnotes documenting contextual observations. Given the corpus size (2,847 posts, 15,324 comments), the researcher employed a structured sampling approach after initial analysis: from the total corpus, 634 posts and 3,891 comments (approximately 22% and 25% respectively) were selected for intensive analysis, prioritizing posts with high engagement (numerous comments or shares), posts explicitly engaging language or identity, posts from diverse user profiles (varying education levels, ages, genders), and posts spanning the entire twelve-month period. This sampling approach enabled both breadth (maintaining awareness of overall patterns across the full corpus) and depth (enabling detailed linguistic and discursive analysis of selected data).

2.5 Analytical Techniques

Analysis employed three complementary analytical approaches. First, thematic analysis the systematic process of identifying patterns of meaning across qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2019) enabled identification of major themes regarding language use and identity. Initial open coding proceeded line-by-line through a subset of data, generating descriptive codes; subsequent focused coding organized these codes into broader thematic categories; final thematic synthesis identified major patterns. This process produced five overarching themes, three of which are presented in the results section as core findings. Second, critical discourse analysis (CDA) an approach emphasizing how language constitutes and reflects relations of power (Fairclough, 2013) enabled investigation of how linguistic choices function ideologically. CDA prompted questions such as: Which languages are represented as authoritative? Which users are constructed as legitimate speakers? What social differences in access, authority, or legitimacy does discourse reproduce? This analysis revealed the language stratification pattern described in results. Third, semiotic analysis investigation of how signs (including linguistic signs, visual signs, platform affordances) generate meaning enabled interpretation of symbolic functions of language choice. From this perspective, using Arabic in a post does not simply convey information; it makes a sign that the poster possesses (or aspires to) certain forms of knowledge and authority. The semiotic analysis revealed how language choice functions not primarily at the level of semantic meaning but at the level of symbolic marking and identity performance. These three approaches are not rigidly separate but rather represent distinct angles on the same data, each illuminating different aspects of linguistically mediated religiolinguistic practice. Throughout analysis, the researcher maintained detailed analytical memos documenting emerging interpretations, noting patterns, identifying disconfirming cases (data not fitting expected patterns), and reflexively considering how the researcher's own linguistic and cultural background shaped interpretation.

2.6 Ethical Framework and Reflexivity

This research received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram (Protocol #2023-UIN-MAT-REC-089). All data collection and analysis followed ethical guidelines established by the Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR, 2019) and the International Sociological Association (ISA, 2018). All identifying information has been removed from data presented in this article; direct quotations use pseudonyms and are translated into English to further distance them from identifiable individuals; and the researcher has omitted information about individuals whose identity could be inferred from combination of characteristics. For closed groups, the researcher explicitly requested and documented consent from group administrators and, where possible, individual participants. The researcher committed throughout to transparency regarding research purposes, respect for community autonomy, and careful consideration of potential harms. Reflexivity systematic attention to how the researcher's own identity, position, and assumptions shape research constituted an ongoing practice. The researcher, as a male scholar educated in both Islamic studies and social science, brings specific linguistic competencies (fluent in Indonesian and Sasak, conversational in Arabic) and institutional positioning (affiliated with a

state Islamic university) that shaped what communities would trust the researcher to observe and how they might present themselves. These positioned perspectives are not obstacles to overcome but rather part of the research context that shapes findings (Boellstorff et al., 2012). The researcher maintained reflexive awareness by documenting how these positionalities may have shaped access, interpretation, and analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

.1 Data Corpus Characteristics

The netnographic observation generated a substantial data corpus spanning the entirety of twelve months. In total, the researcher documented 2,847 posts, 15,324 comments, and 89 extended multi-turn conversations. Among intensively analyzed data (634 posts and 3,891 comments), the distribution across platforms was as follows: Instagram accounted for 45 percent of posts; TikTok for 28 percent; Facebook groups for 15 percent; specialized Islamic forums for 8 percent; WhatsApp groups for 3 percent; and community websites for 1 percent. This distribution reflects broader patterns of social media use among Mataram Muslims, with Instagram and TikTok as the primary platforms for public religious content sharing. The data corpus included contributions from approximately 847 distinct users, though engagement was concentrated among a smaller number of active posters (the top 15 percent of users by post count generated 68 percent of all posts). Demographics of most active contributors (those posting three or more times): women aged 18–35 years (62%), men aged 25–40 years (38%), majority (71%) holding Bachelor's degree or higher education, occupational distribution including educators (28%), Islamic scholars or religious professionals (19%), university students (16%), professionals in diverse fields (20%), and other occupations (17%). The religious content most frequently triggering discussions included Quranic exegesis and interpretation (31% of analyzed posts), hadith discussion and authentication (24%), contemporary jurisprudential issues (18%), Islamic ethics and social matters (15%), and other religious topics (12%). This distribution reflects the substantial scholarly and educational engagement of Mataram's Muslim community with formal Islamic knowledge (Alattas, 2020).

4.2 Pattern 1: Language Stratification and Symbolic Authority

Analysis reveals a pronounced pattern of language stratification wherein different languages are deployed in systematic relationship to claims of religious authority and authenticity. Posts containing Quranic verses or prophetic traditions predominantly employ Arabic, either in original form or alongside translation. Posts consisting entirely or primarily of Arabic-language religious text generated substantial engagement: such posts received on average 3.5 times more positive reactions (likes, supportive comments) compared to posts in Indonesian or Sasak alone. Comments in response to Arabic-only posts frequently take the form of appreciation ("Thank you for this Islamic knowledge") or questions requesting explanation ("Could you clarify this in Indonesian?"). This pattern demonstrates that the community recognizes Arabic as indexing religious authenticity and scholarly authority, even among community members who cannot read Arabic fluently. Simultaneously, analysis reveals that purely Arabic posts (particularly those lacking explanation or contextualization) sometimes generate critical responses. Some respondents express discomfort with Arabic-only discourse, with comments such as "Not all of us studied Arabic can you make it accessible?", "Why must everything be in Arabic? We're Muslim but we're Indonesian", and "If this is only for scholars, why post it publicly?". These critical responses suggest that some community members experience Arabic-only discourse as exclusionary or as implicitly claiming authority in ways they find problematic. Indonesian language is employed in more diverse functions. Indonesian-language posts address practical Islamic issues ("How do we organize a school fundraiser according to Islamic principles?"), make announcements, explain religious concepts to those unfamiliar with Islamic terminology, or express personal religious experience. Indonesian appears to index education, professionalism, and accessibility; it is the language of explanation and inclusion. Sasak language appears rarely in the studied posts (representing 4.3% of the total corpus), and when it appears, it typically serves specific functions: humor and playful commentary (joking about religious topics, often gently self-mocking), expressions of deep

emotional connection or intimacy ("My grandmother taught me this prayer in Sasak"), and strategic accessibility efforts ("Let me explain this important Islamic concept in our language so everyone understands"). When Sasak appears in religious discourse, it frequently accompanies explicit acknowledgment of its significance: "I want to explain this in Sasak because not everyone studied Islamic education, but all of us are Muslim and our language is precious." This statement exemplifies how Sasak language use makes a statement about legitimacy and inclusion: it asserts that Islam can be authentically expressed through local languages, not only through Arabic. The stratification pattern demonstrates that the community maintains a largely implicit hierarchy: Arabic > Indonesian > Sasak in formal religious discourse. Yet this hierarchy is not simply accepted; it is actively contested (Bourdieu, 1986).

4.3 Pattern 2: Creative Hybridity and Strategic Code-Switching

Alongside language stratification, analysis reveals substantial community efforts toward linguistic negotiation through creative hybridity and code-switching. Code-switching alternating between languages within a single communicative act appears frequently in the data corpus. The most common pattern involves a structured sequence: posts present core religious ideas or quotations in Arabic, then provide explanation, context, or application in Indonesian or Sasak. For example, one Instagram post presents a Quranic verse in Arabic, translates it to Indonesian, then provides a brief interpretive comment in Sasak addressing local community concerns. This tri-lingual structure accomplishes multiple functions simultaneously: it preserves the sacred status of Arabic text; it ensures accessibility through translation; and it asserts the legitimate place of local language in religious meaning-making. These code-switching instances often appear purposeful: they do not seem like accidental or involuntary mixing, but rather strategic choices to accomplish communicative work. In some cases, code-switching serves to create intimacy and accessibility. One popular TikTok creator regularly presents religious commentary by first establishing authority through a brief Arabic quotation or Islamic theological reference, then immediately pivoting to Sasak-language explanation, often humorous and self-deprecating: "Here's what the scholars say [Arabic term], but honestly what it means in our context is... [Sasak explanation]." This strategy maintains connection to Islamic tradition while claiming space for local interpretation. Another form of hybridity involves creation of novel terminology: users sometimes generate new vocabulary that combines linguistic roots. For instance, community members created the term "digital adab" (combining Arabic "adab" meaning ethics or culture with English "digital") to discuss ethical Islamic conduct on social media. This neologism asserts that Islamic ethical frameworks remain relevant to digital contexts while acknowledging that digital contexts require linguistic innovation. These hybrid forms represent what Bhabha (1994) calls "third space" novel creative forms that transcend simple dichotomy between tradition and modernity, local and global, Arabic and Sasak. The creativity in linguistic hybridity demonstrates that the community actively negotiates rather than passively accepts language hierarchies (Heller, 2011).

4.4 Pattern 3: Implicit Contestation, Subtle Resistance, and Negotiated Authority

Beyond overt language choice patterns, analysis reveals subtle mechanisms of contestation and resistance whereby community members challenge linguistic hierarchies through indirect means. When users encounter posts consisting entirely of Arabic without explanation or contextualization, critical responses frequently emerge though these responses typically employ subtle rhetorical strategies rather than overt confrontation. Some respondents request explanation: "Jazzakallah for this knowledge, but could you explain in simple Indonesian for those of us without formal Islamic education?" This request appears as polite appreciation while simultaneously making a critical point: that exclusive use of Arabic constitutes a problem requiring correction. Other responses employ humor to make implicit critique: joking comments that gently mock intellectual arrogance ("Must be nice to have studied Arabic so deeply!") or that ironically celebrate Sasak ("Thank God we Sasak speakers still have our language, so we can explain Islamic things to those who don't understand Arabic"). These humorous responses accomplish multiple communicative goals: they provide entertainment, they express critique of exclusionary practices, and they stake claims for linguistic legitimacy without directly confronting other users. Some respondents engage in

what might be termed "strategic essentialism" temporarily asserting essentialist claims about language and identity as a rhetorical strategy to challenge hierarchies. For instance, some posts arguing for Sasak language use in religious contexts employ arguments like "Islam arrived in Sasak, so it must be possible to authentically express Islam in Sasak." This argument essentializes the connection between language and religion (implicitly suggesting that each language has an essential relationship to a particular religion), yet deploys this essentialism strategically to challenge the current hierarchy that marginalizes Sasak. Once Sasak's legitimacy is established through this strategic essentialist move, it becomes possible to later move beyond essentialism to assert that multiple languages can legitimately express Islam (which is the deeper goal). Another form of resistance appears in deliberate over-use of Sasak in religiously serious contexts. Several users systematically deliver religious explanations primarily in Sasak, sometimes with brief Arabic references but not full Arabic presentation. This choice asserts through its consistent practice that Sasak legitimately functions as a language for serious religious discourse. These subtle forms of contestation prove significant because they avoid direct confrontation (which might damage community relationships) while still challenging the existing hierarchy. They exemplify what Scott (1990) terms "hidden transcripts" forms of resistance to power that operate through indirection rather than overt opposition. The existence of such contestation demonstrates that the language hierarchy is not natural or inevitable but rather a contingent social achievement requiring continuous reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986).

4.5 Synthesis: Three Mechanisms of Religiolinguistic Practice

The three patterns of language use identified above can be understood as three interrelated mechanisms through which the Mataram Muslim community engages in religiolinguistic practice. First, language stratification represents the habitual reproduction of existing symbolic hierarchies what Bourdieu would call the reproduction of linguistic capital distribution. Through repeated patterns of deployment, where Arabic carries greater authority and Sasak carries less, these hierarchies become naturalized, appearing as simply "how things are" rather than as contingent social achievements. Second, creative hybridity represents community agency and adaptation the active negotiation and transformation of linguistic forms to meet contemporary needs. The hybrid linguistic forms created through code-switching and neologism-creation demonstrate that communities are not passive recipients of language hierarchies but rather active creators of new possibilities. Third, implicit contestation represents the ongoing challenge to stratification from below the refusal to accept hierarchies as legitimate or inevitable. Through subtle rhetorical strategies, humor, and consistent practice, community members assert alternative linguistic legitimacies and resist the notion that religious authority concentrates exclusively in Arabic-speaking expert communities. These three mechanisms operate simultaneously: the same post might simultaneously reproduce language hierarchy (through emphasizing Arabic), engage creative hybridity (through code-switching), and enact contestation (through asserting Sasak legitimacy). Understanding religiolinguistic practice requires attending to all three dimensions simultaneously, recognizing that contestation does not require the elimination of hierarchy but rather the negotiation and transformation of it.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research illuminate how Muslim communities in the Digital South actively construct religiolinguistic identity through practices that simultaneously reproduce and contest language hierarchies. This section interprets these findings in relation to existing scholarship and develops implications for theory, practice, and policy.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

At the theoretical level, this research contributes to scholarship on digital religiosity, postcolonial identity, and sociolinguistics by demonstrating how these domains intersect in the practices of contemporary Muslim communities. First, regarding digital religiosity: previous research has documented that Muslims engage with digital platforms for theological learning and community building (Campbell, 2013), yet scholarship has remained largely inattentive to the linguistic specificity of these practices. This research demonstrates that language choice constitutes a central dimension of how Muslim construct authority and authenticity in digital

contexts. The persistent significance of Arabic even on platforms where linguistic hierarchy might be less pronounced than in offline contexts suggests that linguistic authority hierarchies persist and may even be reinforced by digital platform dynamics. Yet the research also demonstrates that digital platforms create novel possibilities for contestation and creativity; the hybridity observed in the data would be difficult to sustain in many offline contexts, where social norms more strictly constrain linguistic choice. Second, regarding postcolonial theory: this research enriches understanding of how postcolonial communities construct identity in contemporary contexts. The finding that Mataram's Muslim community neither simply accepts global Islamic norms (embodied in Arabic language) nor clings exclusively to local traditions (embodied in Sasak language), but rather creates novel hybrid forms, illustrates Bhabha's (1994) concept of postcolonial hybridity as generative rather than as evidence of cultural confusion or inauthenticity. The community's practices exemplify what Pennycook (2010) terms "creative linguistic practice" the ways that language users actively create new forms and meanings rather than simply reproducing inherited linguistic systems. Third, this research contributes to sociolinguistics by demonstrating how language choice functions not simply as a marker of social identity but as a site of active contestation and power negotiation. The subtle forms of resistance documented here the implicit challenges to linguistic hierarchy through humor, requests for accessibility, and consistent assertion of Sasak legitimacy illustrate what Eckert (2012) describes as "style as social practice," whereby individuals construct social meaning through linguistic choice in ways that respond to and shape broader social structures.

5.2 Implications for Religious Education

The findings carry significant implications for religious education in Muslim communities. Currently, Islamic education in Indonesia from pesantren to Islamic university programs emphasizes Arabic language learning as essential to Islamic competence. This emphasis rests on the reasonable recognition that many classical Islamic texts and ongoing scholarly conversation occur in Arabic. Yet the implications of this emphasis deserve reconsideration considering digital reality. If religious education remains exclusively focused on training Arabic-competent scholars while most Muslims engage with religion through vernacular languages in digital contexts, education risks becoming disconnected from how communities practice religion. This research suggests the importance of what might be termed "linguistically pluralistic religious education" approaches that affirm the legitimacy of multiple languages for religious expression while developing community members' competence in language choice decisions. Such education might involve: (1) explicitly teaching about language hierarchies, power, and the social significance of linguistic choice in religious contexts; (2) developing competence in Sasak-language religious expression and interpretation, not as a substitute for but as a complement to Arabic learning; (3) cultivating awareness of how digital platforms shape religious communication and practice; (4) encouraging critical reflection on how language choice indexes and constitutes claims about religious authority and authenticity; (5) developing content creators' skills in reaching diverse audiences through strategic use of multiple languages. Such approaches would honor both the classical Islamic tradition (embodied in Arabic) and the lived religious practice of communities as they occur in vernacular languages and hybrid forms. Furthermore, this research suggests that religious educators should attend more carefully to online spaces where their students and community members learn and practice religion. If digital platforms have become primary sites of religious learning for younger Muslims, then educators' failure to engage these spaces risks irrelevance.

5.3 Practical Recommendations for Religious Content Creators and Communicators

For religious content creators, educators, and community leaders, this research offers several practical insights. First, awareness of audience composition and linguistic diversity should inform communication strategy. Content that serves multiple linguistic communities functions most effectively when it explicitly acknowledges and respects linguistic diversity rather than assuming a monolingual audience. Content creators might employ strategic code-switching (what some religious educators are already doing implicitly) consciously and deliberately: presenting core religious ideas in multiple languages, explaining concepts for accessibility, and explicitly valuing contributions from diverse linguistic traditions. This

approach requires awareness that different audience members bring different linguistic competencies and different relationships to languages; content that assumes everyone speaks Arabic or that addresses only Arabic speakers risks alienating significant portions of the community. Second, content creators should recognize the implicit theological statement made through language choice. Choosing to conduct serious religious instruction exclusively in Arabic implicitly suggests that Arabic is the only appropriate language for serious religion; choosing to address audiences bilingually or multilingually implicitly suggests that Islam can authentically be expressed in multiple linguistic forms. The research demonstrates that community members interpret language choices theologically: they understand Arabic use as claiming certain kinds of authority and legitimacy, while multilingual or Sasak use is understood as making different claims about inclusivity and local rootedness. Explicit reflection on what language choices communicate, what audiences they include or exclude, and what theological positions they imply, would strengthen communicative practice. Third, religious content creators might strategically employ the hybrid linguistic forms that the research documents communities already creating. Rather than viewing hybridity as a problem or compromise, understanding it as a creative and powerful communicative approach could strengthen religious communication. A content creator could explicitly value this hybridity: "In our Islamic community in Mataram, we express our faith through Arabic, Indonesian, and Sasak each language carries part of who we are and who we are called to be." Such approaches affirm community practice, honor linguistic diversity, and position religious education as emerging from rather than imposing upon community life.

5.4 Implications for Digital Literacy and Platform Governance

This research also carries implications for digital literacy and platform governance policy. Digital literacy understood broadly as competence in navigating digital environments and understanding how they function increasingly needs to include awareness of platform algorithms, multilingualism, and how technology shapes communication. Users benefit from understanding that social media platforms employ algorithmic systems that shape what content becomes visible and that these systems may privilege certain languages or content types in ways shaped by platform designers' assumptions rather than by neutral algorithms. Digital literacy education might cultivate awareness of: how platforms use algorithms to determine visibility; how language choice affects reach and engagement; how platform affordances shape communication norms; and how communities can creatively use platform features to accomplish community-defined goals. Beyond individual digital literacy, this research suggests the importance of platform governance reform. Platforms that serve global audiences with diverse linguistic communities should attend more carefully to how platform features, algorithmic systems, and content moderation policies affect minority-language and non-English-dominant communities. For instance, if algorithmic systems reward certain content types or demographics, platforms should examine whether these reward systems systematically advantage English, Arabic, or other dominant languages at the expense of less widely spoken languages. Content moderation policies and systems should account for multilingual communication and the difficulties that multilingual content might pose for automated moderation systems. These are not simple policy questions platform governance involves complex tradeoffs among free expression, safety, diversity, and commercial interests but the neglect of these questions in current platform governance represents a significant gap.

5.5 Limitations and Boundaries

This research acknowledges several limitations important for interpreting findings appropriately. First, the data corpus is restricted to publicly visible or researcher-accessed online platforms; private linguistic practices within WhatsApp groups or face-to-face conversations remain partially documented at best. The linguistic patterns identified here characterize public and semi-public digital discourse; different patterns might characterize family conversations, intimate friendships, or private religious instruction. The twelve-month observation period provides a temporal snapshot; long-term linguistic change might follow different trajectories than those visible in this shorter timeframe. Second, Mataram's particular context as a provincial capital and center of Islamic education with relatively highly educated

population (71% of active posters held bachelor's degrees or higher) may not generalize to other Muslim communities in Indonesia or elsewhere. Linguistic practices in more rural areas, in communities with less formal Islamic education, or in regions where different languages hold different status might differ significantly. The findings characterize practices of digitally active, education-oriented Muslims; they may not characterize less digitally engaged populations. Third, this research provides detailed understanding of linguistic patterns but does not fully capture what motivates individual language choices. Why does a particular individual choose to post in Arabic versus Sasak in a particular moment? The research documents patterns in choices but cannot definitively answer questions about individual psychology or motivation. Fourth, the research focuses on digital platform discourse and does not fully document how online linguistic practices relate to offline religious communication. Do individuals who code-switch extensively online also do so offline? Do online linguistic hierarchies map onto offline hierarchies? These questions would require additional research bridging digital and offline contexts. Finally, this research documents patterns and mechanisms; it cannot predict which direction religiolinguistic practice in Mataram will develop. The findings show that multiple possibilities exist further arabicization, strengthening of Sasak, normalization of hybridity but cannot specify which is most likely. These limitations do not invalidate the research's contributions but rather indicate boundaries for interpretation and point toward directions for future investigation.

CONCLUSION

This research has illuminated the complex and contested terrain of religiolinguistic practice among Mataram Muslims engaging with digital platforms. Through systematic netnographic observation and analysis grounded in integrated theoretical frameworks, this study has documented how language choice constitutes a central mechanism through which Muslim communities perform, negotiate, and transform religious identity. The research demonstrates three major findings: (1) despite language stratification that systematically privileges Arabic over local languages, digital platforms do not mechanically reproduce this hierarchy but rather create contexts where contestation and negotiation become possible; (2) community members actively create hybrid linguistic forms that transcend simple dichotomies between tradition and modernity, local and global, by strategically combining Arabic, Indonesian, and Sasak; (3) resistance to linguistic hierarchies operates through subtle mechanisms humor, accessibility requests, consistent assertion of vernacular legitimacy that simultaneously maintain community cohesion while challenging power imbalances.

The original contribution of this research lies in three dimensions. First, methodologically, the research demonstrates the utility of netnographic analysis for studying religiolinguistic practice, showing how ethnographic methods can be adapted to illuminate language use in digital contexts. Second, theoretically, the research advances understanding of how contemporary Muslim communities construct postcolonial identity in algorithmically mediated environments, demonstrating that neither simple acceptance of global Islamic norms nor ethnic essentialism accurately characterizes community practice; instead, communities engage in ongoing creative negotiation of multiple inheritances. Third, empirically, the research provides the first comprehensive documentation of how a Southeast Asian Muslim community negotiates linguistic representation of religious authority, filling a gap in scholarship that has been overwhelmingly focused on Arab Muslim communities or Western-based studies of digital religion.

Beyond academic contribution, this research responds to a pressing social need. Digital platforms have become central sites of religious practice and community formation, particularly for younger Muslims. Educational institutions, religious leaders, and policymakers require nuanced understanding of how communities authentically construct religious identity in these spaces. This research contributes to that understanding, moving beyond both technologically determinist approaches (which imagine that platforms mechanically shape behavior) and cultural essentialist approaches (which imagine that Islamic tradition determines religious

practice), instead emphasizing the creative agency of communities navigating complex intersections of tradition, technology, and modernity.

Future research might extend this work in several directions. Longitudinal studies tracking how religiolinguistic practices evolve over years and decades would illuminate longer-term patterns of linguistic change. Comparative analyses examining how Muslim communities in other Southeast Asian cities or other regions navigate similar dynamics would test the generalizability of findings and illuminate context-specific variations. Research examining how platform designers, algorithm engineers, and corporate governance decisions shape religiolinguistic possibilities would illuminate the material dimensions of digital practice. Ethnographic research bridging digital and offline contexts would illuminate how online linguistic practices relate to offline communication and community life. Research centering the perspectives of younger generation Muslims (Gen Z), who have never known a world without digital platforms, might reveal distinctive orientations to religiolinguistic practice. These future investigations would build on the foundation established by this research, extending and deepening understanding of how Muslim communities authentically construct and perform religious identity in the digital age.

In concluding, this research affirms the importance of taking seriously how Muslim communities particularly those in Southeast Asia whose voices have been historically underrepresented in international scholarship authentically practice and express their faith. The Mataram Muslim community's creative negotiation of multiple linguistic and cultural inheritances, their insistence on the legitimacy of local languages for religious expression, and their subtle resistance to linguistic hierarchies, all exemplify forms of agency and creativity that deserve scholarly respect and careful attention. By understanding these practices on their own terms rather than through frameworks developed elsewhere, scholarship can better serve communities and contribute to more just, culturally grounded approaches to Muslim communities in the digital age.

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