

Virtuality of Online Religion in Cyberspace: Study of Virtual Hajj in Metaverse Discourse

Nur Aisyah Fadillah*¹, Ahmad Nailul Murad²

Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia

Email: aisyah.fadillah@uiii.ac.id¹, Ahmad.murad@uiii.ac.id²

Abstract

The article examines the phenomenon of shifting religion in Cyberspace, where the practices from the offline to the online sphere are indicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has changed the social structure and behaviour of Indonesian society. For the most part, Hajj metaverse discourse tends to use this new public space to be a clear visual manifestation of religious identity. Using this theoretical framework of Champbell and Sheldon, religion needs to adjust to all threats and risks in Cyberspace. The article questions to what extent the metaverse Hajj discourse has shifted religious authority in Cyberspace. How has the pandemic impacted the discourse of Hajj through the metaverse? as seen from the debate of restrictions on places of worship and leading to alternative ways to enjoy the Hajj pilgrimage during the COVID-19 pandemic? Using qualitative methods and ethnographic study, discourse on metaverse Hajj makes it impossible to shift religious authority because, in historical, legal, and procedural terms, it is problematic to apply in Muslim society. On the other hand, the ritual of Hajj cannot be broken because a series of activities requires physical presence. The second finding is that the law of Hajj in the metaverse to spread COVID-19 does not validate the Hajj itself because it does not fulfil the pillars of Hajj. Findings reveal that while the metaverse offers potential benefits such as increased accessibility and immersive experiences, it also raises concerns regarding fulfilling Hajj's core tenets, which require physical presence and adherence to specific rituals. The study concludes that although virtual Hajj may serve as a supplementary tool for education and familiarization, it cannot replace the actual pilgrimage due to its inherent limitations in fulfilling the religious obligations associated with Hajj. This research contributes to understanding how digital transformation influences religious practices and highlights the tension between technological advancements and traditional rituals.

Keyword : Covid-19, Shifting Online Religious, Virtual Hajj, Metaverse, Religious Authority in Cyberspace.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji fenomena perpindahan agama di dunia maya, dimana praktik dari ranah offline ke ranah online terindikasi dari pandemi COVID-19 yang telah mengubah struktur sosial dan perilaku masyarakat Indonesia. Secara umum, wacana metaverse haji cenderung memanfaatkan ruang publik baru ini sebagai perwujudan visual identitas keagamaan yang jelas. Dengan menggunakan kerangka teori Champbell dan Sheldon, agama perlu

menyesuaikan diri dengan segala ancaman dan risiko di dunia maya. Artikel tersebut mempertanyakan sejauh mana wacana metaverse haji telah menggeser otoritas keagamaan di dunia maya. Bagaimana dampak pandemi terhadap wacana haji melalui metaverse? terlihat dari perdebatan pembatasan tempat ibadah hingga mengarah pada alternatif cara menikmati ibadah haji di masa pandemi COVID-19? Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif dan kajian etnografi, wacana haji metaverse tidak memungkinkan terjadinya pergeseran otoritas agama karena secara historis, hukum, dan prosedural, hal tersebut problematis untuk diterapkan dalam masyarakat Muslim. Di sisi lain, ibadah haji tidak bisa dibatalkan karena rangkaian aktivitasnya memerlukan kehadiran fisik. Temuan kedua, hukum haji di metaverse penyebaran COVID-19 tidak memvalidasi haji itu sendiri karena tidak memenuhi rukun haji. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa meskipun metaverse menawarkan manfaat potensial seperti peningkatan aksesibilitas dan pengalaman yang mendalam, hal ini juga menimbulkan kekhawatiran mengenai pemenuhan prinsip inti haji, yang memerlukan kehadiran fisik dan kepatuhan terhadap ritual tertentu. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa meskipun haji virtual dapat berfungsi sebagai alat tambahan untuk pendidikan dan sosialisasi, hal ini tidak dapat menggantikan ibadah haji yang sebenarnya karena keterbatasan yang melekat dalam memenuhi kewajiban agama yang terkait dengan haji. Penelitian ini berkontribusi untuk memahami bagaimana transformasi digital memengaruhi praktik keagamaan dan menyoroti ketegangan antara kemajuan teknologi dan ritual tradisional.

Kata Kunci : *Covid-19, Pergeseran Keagamaan Online, Haji Virtual, Metaverse, Otoritas Keagamaan di Dunia Maya.*

INTRODUCTION

Hajj is the last pillar of Islam, and it must be performed only for capable people. The statement shows that implementing Hajj requires physical existence, which aims to fulfil the pillars of Hajj such as *Ihram*, *Wukuf*, *Tawaf* and *Sa'i* directly. According to DPR (Indonesian House of Representatives) the Increase in Hajj Quota in 2023 become 229.000 people from the last data 2020 which recorded only 212,730 pilgrims from Indonesia (Setjen DPR, 2023). As known at the beginning of 2020, the world is experiencing a big problem, and it is the spread of serious diseases caused by Covid-19, which has threatening many people's lives. This incident began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 (Nizam & Asti, 2021). This pandemic has impacted many aspects, including religious activities such as Hajj (Alrasheed et al., 2020). Because this pandemic is a serious disease that people are worried about interacting with, things like this are an issue for pilgrims who have been waiting for years to perform the Hajj. This pandemic affected many aspects of the education sector, the political system and the

essential target, namely the religious sector, which is essentially very thick with sacred things (Galang, 2021).

Entering the modern century where the society lives closely with technology. Some scholars develop the technology with the aim to helping their work and daily activities, one of them is the create of the metaverse. The metaverse is the new ritual world community that connected together. People can perform normal activities in the real world, using the term avatar where the human position becomes the subject of the activities in it. Interactions are conducted through political, economic, social and cultural activities. The metaverse discourse in Islamic studies, such as Hajj, raises many interpretations regarding practice and ideology (Lombardi & Lombardi, 2010). The use of VR in Hajj practice aims to make pilgrims feel as if they are in the sacred land (Mekkah) to perform the pilgrimage due to being constrained by the coronavirus pandemic and unable to be directly at the location. This is also an additional point to avoid pilgrims who cannot anticipate the actual situation in the sacred land (Mekkah), especially during the Hajj season. (Abdillah & Fahri, 2023).

Online religious rituals such as virtual Hajj were created with the aim that all Muslims can virtually see the ka'bah, which carries a lot of Islamic history, such as the mosque in Masjidil Haram. Consequently, there is a need to digitize religious practices for the benefit. Of course, this has led to many discourses, such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, as the biggest Islamic organizations in Indonesia. This is because the virtual performance of Hajj does not place people in direct activities, which is a requirement of Hajj (Fernando & Larasati, 2022). In the case of the pandemic in 2020, the pattern of practice in performing Hajj has changed. The discourse of virtual Hajj has been debated by several religious authorities, especially in Indonesia, where the majority of the population is Muslim, and they also participate in exchanging opinions on the case. In religious practice, worship activities from offline to online have been discussed by previous scholars but with different objects, such as online da'wah. However, this study becomes very sacred because it is an obligatory form of religious worship for a Muslim.

Based on online worship cases in Indonesia, some previous scholars that examine it, starting from the article written by Wahyudi Akmaliah and Ahmad Najib Burhani, argue that The shift of religious rituals from offline to online had spread to society long before the covid pandemic came. However the emergence of the covid-19 crisis strengthened the digitalization of Islam on social media,

even the Islamic organizations Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah participated in discussing social issues that took place on social media during the pandemic (Akmaliah & Burhani, 2021). This finding is reinforced by several scholars afterwards, such as Abd Hannan, who argues that the covid-19 phenomenon strengthens the era of disruption in digitizing religious rituals online, from activities conducted offline to the online sphere, the Muslim community can accept these a new rites with the support of Islamic organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah supporting the policy (Hannan, 2021).

Other scholars also say that how the Covid-19 pandemic affects online prayer, gathering opinions from Sunni scholars regarding the law of shifting online prayer to virtual activities is not only influenced by ordinary fatwas but also by various social and cultural aspects (Hegazy, 2020) Slama argues that the shift of religious piety from offline to online has a positive impact on religious activities (Martin Slama, 2017). This finding will strengthen other research, such as Naro et al., (2021) about *Have Attitudes towards Religiousness Shifted Due Covid 19 Outbreak? Evidence from Moslem Generations in Makassar-Indonesia*; The second, Abdillah & Fahri, (2023) about *Fenomena Praktik Ibadah Haji Secara Virtual Melalui Teknologi Metaverse: Perspektif Ulama Kontemporer* (The Phenomenon of Virtual Hajj Practices Using Metaverse Technology: Perspective of Contemporary Ulama); and the third Hill-Smith, (2011) *Cyberpilgrimage: The (Virtual) Reality of Online Pilgrimage Experience*. I seek to fill this gap in the literature review by analyzing how the virtual Hajj is presented and discussed in cyberspace. The discourse of virtual Hajj not only raises a range of meanings but is also able to shift the practice and ideology of the Hajj pilgrimage. In line with this matter, the author will formulate the problem: 1. How is the Hajj shifted from a historical perspective? 2. to what extent are the challenges and opportunities of virtual Hajj discourse? 3. how the online religious shift in the Indonesian context?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed qualitative research, using a virtual ethnography approach to investigate the discourse surrounding virtual Hajj in the metaverse. Data collection involved tracing relevant information available on the internet, including online forums, social media platforms, news articles, and official statements from religious authorities. Additionally, the researcher actively

participated in and observed online discussions and virtual events related to the metaverse Hajj concept. The qualitative method, in case of the virtual ethnography approach, will be used by tracing the data available on the internet and following a number of activities in the online spaces related to the research case study. The theoretical approach to digital religion only includes how online and offline religious practices have been integrated. Islam, for one, seeks to replace offline religious practices with online ones. This becomes a fence against the news that covid-19 has changed religion. In other words, religion has been transformed. Quoting from Campbell & Sheldon's response as a reference for writing in this article, that religion needs to adjust to all threats and risks in cyberspace. In the case of covid-19, which implements physical distancing, avoiding crowds, and eliminating in-person worship (H. A. Campbell & Tsuria, 2021), by using this theoretical framework can answer how Hajj activities according to religion must be carried out offline because it has been determined by Islamic law, but moved to the online sphere which is influenced by the times and the covid-19 pandemic.

The primary data source for this study were the online discussions and debates on the Hajj metaverse conducted by various stakeholders, including religious scholars, Islamic organizations, technology experts, and the general public. The researcher utilized a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques to identify relevant online spaces and participants. Data analysis involved a thematic approach, identifying and categorising recurring themes and patterns in the online discourse. The researcher analyzed the arguments, opinions, and concerns expressed by different stakeholders to understand the various perspectives on the validity and implications of virtual Hajj. The findings were then interpreted within the theoretical framework of digital religion, which examines the integration of online and offline religious practices.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Historical Perspective: Virtual Haji from Offline to Online

Hajj is terminologically defined as “visiting or intending”. Etymologically, it means visiting the ka'bah to perform Hajj by the practices and regulations set by Allah SWT. The word ka'bah in this sense is masjidil haram, *shafa* and *Marwa*, *muzdalifah*, *arafah* and *mina*. Visiting is aimed at *ihram*, *tawaf*, *sai*, *wukuf* and *arafah* activities. Where the time is determined in the Islamic months

of Syawall, Dzulqa'dah and the first 10 days of Dzulhijjah, this fifth pillar of Islam is required to be performed in Saudi Arabia. It is only required for financially capable Muslims, as supported by the Qur'an verse 3:97. This means : *"in it are clear signs and the standing place of Ibrahim. Whoever enters it should be safe. Pilgrimage to this house is an obligation by Allah upon whoever is able among the people. And whoever disbelieves, then surely Allah is not in need of any of his creation"*.

The Hajj ritual, in accordance with Islamic law, has several pillars that require Muslims to be directly in Makkah. A good Hajj should be performed based on what the Prophet said so that it can achieve "mabrur Hajj", which has no reward other than heaven. The implementation of Hajj can be understood as a matter that is quite difficult because it is not performed every day like other religious practices. requires effort in terms of financial and physical and spiritual health to carry out the ritual. Starting from walking to a distant location and understanding the complete and perfect Hajj procedures (Salleh et al., 2021). Achieving an ideal understanding of Hajj requires specialized learning. Accordingly, most Hajj practices use ka'bah, and *jamrah* models and show related pictures and videos. The use of material objects and models as aids can provide some understanding but still fail to show the actual situation to the pilgrims. Therefore, a virtual simulation of Hajj could be the best revolution to provide an understanding of Hajj (Qanaah, 2009). According to Arafah, before the covid-19 pandemic happened, the implementation and guidance of the Hajj was the responsibility of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the religious affairs office in each city. Both are responsible for providing Hajj services and guidance. The implementation of the rituals was also carried out in two stages, namely at the district and sub-district stages with a total of 10 meetings and a guidance time of 4 hours of lessons (Arafah, 2020).

In 2020, when the pandemic happened, the Hajj rituals changed. As the Ministry of Religion states, it is divided into three models. The first is offline: the pilgrims follow the implementation of manasik through information media such as television or radio broadcasts on RRI or TVRI. Second, online: the pilgrims watch the material delivery through social media such as YouTube, Zoom and so on. Third, hybrid or blended learning, namely face-to-face and online (Badan Pengelola Keuangan Haji, 2020). These two differences in methods bring a discourse about virtual Hajj by metaverse where pilgrims during the covid pandemic can still perform Hajj virtually in the metaverse. Metaverse itself is an

engineering technology program that moves the world and human activities into a virtual form through avatars (Mystakidis, 2022), reported by the chief of the Grand Mosque, Sheikh Abdul Rahman al-Sudais, launched the metaverse ka'bah as well as the first person to visit the metaverse ka'bah using virtual reality (VR). This aims to provide an opportunity for Muslims to be able to touch the hajar aswad virtually, which in the real world must struggle with other worshipers on the covid-19 pandemic floor. The Hajj pilgrimage in health issues has always been controversial because it is where many people meet at one time and is prone to spreading the virus (Aldossari & Aljoudi, 2019). Saudi Arabia is one of the countries prone to a pandemic which caused it to limit the number of pilgrims at that time. The impact of these restrictions resulted in an increasingly long chain of pilgrims so that the discourse of virtual Hajj emerged.

Virtual Hajj during Pandemic: Challenges and Opportunities

Among Muslim-majority Indonesians, the discourse on virtual Hajj in the metaverse is no less controversial. Hajj is mandatory for every Muslim who is physically, mentally and financially capable. The implementation of Hajj, which is carried out in the 12th month of the month of hijrah for 40 days, makes it inseparable from several rituals during the implementation of Hajj such as tawaf around the ka'bah. According to the definition of Hajj itself is an activity that is always related to direct physical activity. It must also be practiced in accordance with Islamic law based on the Qur'an and hadith.

There are several Challenges in implementing Hajj activities in the virtual world, First, Hajj has no specific time requirements so that Hajj can be done anytime and anywhere. Whereas in Islamic law, the implementation of Hajj has a certain time. Second, the lack of possible problems in visualizing hajar aswad, ka'bah and masjidil haram. As in real time, pilgrims will be confronted with thousands of other pilgrims and take turns to see the hajar aswad, it also requires strong health to be able to travel the Hajj (Sparkes, 2021). Third, there is a discourse of imitation of the Hajj process, such as the implementation of the pillars of Hajj and religious symbols related to Hajj simulated through metaverse discourse. Such as the Hajj activities that are done outdoors for 40 days but in the metaverse discourse, are done in space with a shorter time such as the simulation of tawaf (surrounding the ka'bah) and *wukuf* in the metaverse discourse (H. Campbell, 2007). Observing this challenge, the discourse of virtual Hajj will experience a shift from the context of the practice and meaning of Hajj itself. in

other words, davis in responding that the shift is due to the metaverse resting on second life (Davis et al., 2009).

Shifting Online Religious: Virtual Hajj in Metaverse discourse in Indonesia

What will be studied in this chapter is nothing more than discussing how the shift in practice and ideology towards the case of virtual Hajj in metaverse discourse. Regarding the perspective law, Nahdlatul Ulama responds to this by relying on the Syafi'i school of thought which argues that there are pillars of Hajj that must be performed at the Grand Mosque. Based on reliable sources, he argues that performing Hajj without direct physical presence is invalid. Hajj is categorized as a *tauqifi* act of worship where the command comes directly from Allah and is taught by the Prophet Muhammad. Where the nature of Hajj has a procedure that has been determined, namely in Mecca (Masjidil Haram and its surroundings), implemented on the 9th Dzulhijjah and the pillars of Hajj which are performed in the sacred land. The procedures for Hajj that have been determined by Islamic law. based on this rule, humans do not have the authority to change it or even replace it with the latest metaverse technology which is carried out virtually (alhafiz kurniawan, 2022). In this regard, laws that come from Allah directly only need to be implemented without having to break the harmony within them. Even if there is a covid, it is best to avoid direct worship activities so as not to be infected. As for the Muhammadiyah website, they think that Hajj cannot be replaced by virtual activities. Unless it is intended for religious tourism and as learning material like a child learning the Hajj, then it is fine. Which is where the aim is to better understand the implementation of the Hajj pilgrimage properly and correctly. (Novianto, 2022).

The chairman of MUI Fatwa also argues that the implementation of Hajj must be in accordance with the example of the prophet. With some rituals that require physical presence such as going around the ka'bah seven times, which must start from the corner of the hajar aswad physically with the position of the ka'ba on the left of the worshipper (redaksi@mui.or.id, 2022). So, virtual Hajj is allowed if only as a means of stimulating the implementation of the Hajj pilgrimage. Based on the views of the three highest Islamic authorities in Indonesia, it is argued that virtual Hajj in the metaverse is not valid because it does not fulfill the terms and conditions of the Hajj that have been commanded by Allah and practiced by the Prophet Muhammad. In short, performing the Hajj

requires physical presence at the Hajj site. The Covid pandemic cannot be used as an excuse to require virtual Hajj. If in the implementation of the Hajj there are obstacles such as the Covid pandemic, it means that someone is not yet obliged to perform the Hajj. This is supported by the *fiqhiyyah* rule which means, an obligation is incomplete without something so that there is something mandatory (Hakim, 2022).

In sociological perspective, this is known as a sudden shift, where reality shifts from one to another. This happens because it happens in a short time. In general, sudden shifts eliminate the boundaries of one region with another, shifting the order of the global community into the form of smartphones, computers and their kind (Kasali, 2018). In this sense, the sudden shift does not mean eliminating real life, but only moving people's activities, which initially all can be communicated offline, to online. Religion can be abstracted in this phase as an entity that experiences deprivatisation. (Casanova, 2011). Religion, which was previously considered a religious practice and could only be found in places of worship and by people who have religious authority, has now become public consumption that can be found in digital spaces that are known to be free and there are no restrictions on expression. From this perspective, conceptually explaining the religious behavior of Muslims in Indonesia in experiencing ritual transformation in the covid-19 pandemic situation from traditional patterns to digitalization. Such as the transfer of the Hajj pilgrimage from offline to online, the implementation of which was planned suddenly due to the covid pandemic, both in teaching and practice.

I argue that there are several reasons why shifting religious authority from offline to online in the case of virtual Hajj in the context of the Muslim-majority world, especially in Indonesia, is not acceptable. Some of these reasons are: First, the implementation of virtual Hajj cannot fulfill the pillars of Hajj that have been stipulated in Islamic teachings. This is why three religious institutional authorities in Indonesia-MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah-reject the validity of virtual Hajj (Tanos, 2022). It can be assumed that the rise of virtual worship began during the Covid-19 pandemic which was almost spread throughout the world. Although, in some records, some cases of virtual worship such as prayer have been authorized before this pandemic era by several scholars. (Abidin et al., 2022) In his opinion, although using virtual Hajj as a learning tool, it was found that users still need time to adapt to the new learning environment. Where the majority of Hajj pilgrims are elderly, it will be difficult to digest virtual learning.

Such as Sheikh Al-Ghumari, one of the scholars who is an expert in Islamic law from Morocco and whose knowledge is recognized in the Muslim world, for example, wrote a book explaining the validity of Friday prayers using the radio (Al-Ghumari, 1956, p. 23). Although his opinion is still controversial among scholars and there are still some groups who object to accepting it, what was written by this jurist shows a shift in religious rituals from the real world to the virtual world. (Niu, 2023, p. 106) argues that the potential of Virtual Reality (VR) technology to improve the experience and understanding of the Hajj pilgrimage. VR can provide a more realistic and interactive simulation, allowing prospective pilgrims to better understand and appreciate each stage of the Hajj pilgrimage. In line with (Salleh et al., 2021, p. 63) also argue that the potential of Virtual Reality (VR) technology in improving the experience and understanding of the Hajj pilgrimage. VR offers a more realistic and interactive simulation, allowing prospective pilgrims to feel as if they are in the Holy Land. However, the use of VR in the Hajj pilgrimage also raises questions about its validity and compatibility with Islamic law, especially in the context of carrying out the pillars of the Hajj which require physical presence.

Prayer and Hajj are two rituals of worship that must be performed by every Muslim with the conditions of validity. In this case, following the opinion of Imam Ahmad ibn Hambal, the point that is emphasized in the congregational prayer is the voice, while in the Hajj is the physical presence of a Muslim, so the virtual implementation of prayer is much more possible than the implementation of the Hajj. In addition, the more complex pillars and conditions for the validity of Hajj are also taken into consideration. That is why it is quite logical to understand that if the implementation of virtual prayer alone still reaps controversy among scholars, let alone if the process of implementing virtual worship is applied in the context of Hajj. The consequence is that more and more scholars disapprove of it, given that the requirements of Hajj are much more complex and will be difficult to fulfill when carried out virtually when compared to prayer.

Second, the use of the fiqh rule that says *al-dlarurah tubih al-mahzurat* (emergency allows something that was originally prohibited by sharia) (Al-Suyuthi, 1994, p. 83). In this case cannot be used as a justification for performing a virtual pilgrimage. Indeed, the condition of the Covid-19 pandemic is an emergency situation where a gathering involving many people should not be

carried out for a while because of the fear of the spread of the virus. Therefore, a *mufti* (jurist) may use this *fiqh* rule argument to allow the implementation of some virtual worship practices, including the Hajj. Unfortunately, the pandemic situation cannot be said to be an emergency condition that can allow the shift of religious rituals from offline to online with totality. Although in some cases, religious rituals such as *tahlilan* and Friday prayers have been ritually practiced by some Muslims in Indonesia (Akmaliah & Burhani, 2021, pp. 7–8). However, the fact that the procession of the virtual Hajj in Indonesia has not been accepted by several institutions with renowned religious authority shows that the Hajj cannot be equated with other acts of worship.

Third, the physical non-implementation of certain worship practices due to certain temporary conditions does not threaten the existence of a religion. In general, in issuing a fatwa, a *mufti* must base his fatwa on the principles of *maqashid shari'a* (the objectives of sharia) which in this context is *hifz al-din* (protecting the religion). Those who argue that it is permissible to practice worship virtually usually assume that by doing so the implementation of *maqashid hifz al-din* can be realized. In other words, if the practice of worship cannot be carried out physically or offline, then leaving it means not preserving religious symbolism which will erode the existence of a religion (Hegazy, 2020, p. 80). On the other hand, the opinion that rejects virtual worship considers that it can erode Muslim identity because it does not function the mosque and several other places of worship - including Mecca - properly. This opinion tends to associate Muslim identity with physical places of worship. According to him, the virtual simulation of places of worship is considered a threat to the identity of Muslims so that this is seen as a point that contradicts the basic principle of *maqashid, hifz al-din*.

Both opinions base their arguments on the basic principles of *maqashid shari'a* with different perspectives. If it is related to the context of virtual Hajj, then the conclusion is quite clear; the first opinion will consider that by performing virtual Hajj, it can be considered as an effort to preserve the existence of Islam. However, as I mentioned earlier, performing the Hajj virtually requires an emergency situation. Otherwise, there is no shar'i justification for performing it ritually. This is because Hajj is more likely to emphasize physical presence (*hudur*) in its performance. In addition, Hajj is an act of worship that must be performed once in a lifetime and can only be performed once a year. So that a covid situation that only ranges in a period of approximately two years cannot be

said to be an emergency condition in the context of worship like this. On the other hand, the implementation of *maqashid hifz al-din* can still be carried out by performing other alternative worship individually which has the same proportion of reward as the Hajj. From these reasons, it is clear to understand why the three highest religious authorities in Indonesia reject the virtual Hajj pilgrimage.

CONCLUSION

The effects of the covid-19 pandemic have created a shift in religious behavior, especially Muslims in Indonesia. Where technology had developed before, it became more developed after the pandemic event. The community performs worship in accordance with Islamic teachings, such as Hajj, which is performed in Mecca and follows a series of Hajj procedures. Champbelle emphasized that there is a shift in people's cultural patterns from offline to online due to the development of technology that binds the Muslim community (H. A. Campbell & Sheldon, 2021). This happens to the Hajj ritual, which has been shifted to the virtual Hajj discourse where the Saudi government argues that the purpose of this plan is to make it easier for Muslims to worship easily (Abidin et al., 2022).

On the other hand, Hajj is demanding because all the procedures, pillars and conditions of Hajj have been commanded directly by Allah and practised by the Prophet Muhammad. In other words, the ritual of Hajj cannot be broken because a series of activities require physical presence. The time and place where it is supposed to be performed are only in the month of Dzulhijjah, while the opinions conveyed in the virtual Hajj worship are related to flexible time (A. kurniawan, 2022). On the other hand, Hajj means to visit or come. In short, Hajj is a pilgrimage to Mecca, a series of trips from one place to another by the practices set by Allah SWT. While the digitalization of religious practices offers some advantages, it is important to carefully consider its potential drawbacks and ensure that it does not replace or diminish the importance of traditional religious practices. Further research is needed to fully understand the impact of technology on religious behavior and to develop guidelines for its ethical and responsible use.

REFERENCES

- Abdillah, & Fahri, D. S. (2023). Fenomena Praktik Ibadah Haji Secara Virtual Melalui Teknologi Metaverse: *Shautuna: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Perbandingan Mazhab dan Hukum*, 72–87. <https://doi.org/10.24252/shautuna.vi.32581>
- Abidin, A. R. Z., Masmuzidin, M. Z., Hussien, N. S., & Mohaidin, M. (2022). Virtual Hajj: The development of virtual environment for learning about Hajj and Umrah. *AIP Conference Proceedings*, 2617(1), 040005. <https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0119708>
- Akmaliah, W., & Burhani, A. N. (2021). Digital Islam in Indonesia: The Shift of Ritual and Religiosity during Covid-19. *Perspective*, 2021(107). https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/68720894/ISEAS_Perspective_2021_107-libre.pdf?
- Aldossari, M., & Aljouidi, A. (2019). Health issues in the Hajj pilgrimage: A literature review. *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*, 25(10), 667–668. <https://doi.org/10.26719/2019.25.10.667>
- Al-Ghumari, A. S. (1956). *Al-Iqna' Fi Sehat al-Juma'ah Fil Manzil Khalf al-Medhya'*. Dar al-Ta'leef.
- Alrasheed, H., Althnian, A., Kurdi, H., Al-Mgren, H., & Alharbi, S. (2020). COVID-19 Spread in Saudi Arabia: Modeling, Simulation and Analysis. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(21), 7744. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17217744>
- Al-Suyuthi, J. (1994). *Al Durr al manthur fi al tafsir al ma'thur* (Vol. 1). Dar al Fikr.
- Arafah, S. (2020). The Effectiveness Of Hajj Ritual Guidance Services By The Ministry Of Religious Affairs On Eastern Indonesia. *Al-Qalam*, 26(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.31969/alq.v26i1.822>
- Badan Pengelola Keuangan Haji. (2020, September). *Manasik Haji akan Digelar dengan Pola Baru*. <https://bpkh.go.id/manasik-haji-akan-digelar-dengan-pola-baru/>
- Campbell, H. (2007). *Making Space for Religion in Internet Studies*: 21(4). <https://doi.org/10.1080/01972240591007625>
- Campbell, H. A., & Sheldon, Z. (2021). Religious Responses to Social Distancing Revealed through Memes during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Religions*, 12(9), 787. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12090787>

- Campbell, H. A., & Tsuria, R. (2021). Introduction to the study of digital religion. In *Digital Religion* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Casanova, J. (2011). *Public Religions in the Modern World*. University of Chicago Press.
- Davis, A., Murphy, J., University of Nebraska at Omaha, Owens, D., University of Nebraska at Omaha, Khazanchi, D., University of Nebraska at Omaha, Zigungs, I., & University of Nebraska at Omaha. (2009). Avatars, People, and Virtual Worlds: Foundations for Research in Metaverses. *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, 10(2), 90–117. <https://doi.org/10.17705/1jais.00183>
- Fernando, H., & Larasati, Y. G. (2022). Metaverse And Hajj: The Meaning Of Muslims In Indonesia. *KURIOSITAS: Media Komunikasi Sosial dan Keagamaan*, 15(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.35905/kur.v15i2.2622>
- Galang, J. R. F. (2021). Science and religion for COVID-19 vaccine promotion. *Journal of Public Health*, 43(3), e513–e514. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdab128>
- Hakim, A. (2022). Maxim Law Fiqh And Its Application During The Covid-19 Pandemic. *NUSANTARA: Journal Of Law Studies*, 1(1), 1-8. <https://juna.nusantarajournal.com/index.php/juna/article/view/11>
- Hannan, A. (2021). *Covid-19 and the Disruption of Islamic Religiosity in Contemporary Indonesia; From Traditional Rituals to Virtual Rituals*. 5(2).
- Hegazy, W. (2020). Muslim Online Prayer in a Sociocultural Context. *CyberOrient*, 14(2), 64–84. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1804-3194.2020.tb00003.x>
- Hill-Smith, C. (2011). Cyberpilgrimage: The (Virtual) Reality of Online Pilgrimage Experience. *Religion Compass*, 5(6), 236–246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2011.00277.x>
- Kasali, R. (2018). *Disruption*.
- kurniawan, alhafiz. (2022, February 10). *Hukum Ibadah Haji Virtual di Metaverse | NU Online*. <https://islam.nu.or.id/bahtsul-masail/hukum-ibadah-haji-virtual-di-metaverse-nvhMZ>
- kurniawan, A. (2022, February 10). *Hukum Ibadah Haji Virtual di Metaverse. NU Online*. <https://www.nu.or.id/bahtsul-masail/hukum-ibadah-haji-virtual-di-metaverse-nvhMZ>

- Lombardi, J., & Lombardi, M. (2010). Opening the Metaverse. In W. S. Bainbridge (Ed.), *Online Worlds: Convergence of the Real and the Virtual* (pp. 111–122). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-84882-825-4_9
- Martin Slama. (2017). Social media and Islamic practice: Indonesian ways of being digitally pious. In *Digital Indonesia* (pp. 146–162). ISEAS Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814786003-015>
- Mystakidis, S. (2022). Metaverse. *Encyclopedia*, 2(1), 486–497. <https://doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia2010031>
- Naro, W., Abubakar, A., Syatar, A., & Amiruddin, M. M. (2021). Have Attitudes Towards Religiousness Shifted Due Covid 19 Outbreak? Evidence From Moslem Generations in Makassar-Indonesia. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 18(3), 322-334. <https://archives.palarch.nl/index.php/jae/article/download/5520/5434>
- Niu, S. (2023). Virtual Hajj as a response to demographic and geopolitical pressures. *Contemporary Islam*, 17(1), 95–108. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-023-00512-1>
- Nizam, S., & Asti, M. J. (2021). Is There Any Rukhṣah in Performing Praying During Covid-19? Maqashid Sharia Analysis. *Mazahibuna: Jurnal Perbandingan Mazhab*, 98–117. <https://doi.org/10.24252/mh.v3i1.19687>
- Novianto, R. D. (2022, February 12). *Muhammadiyah: Haji di Metaverse Tidak Sah*. <https://www.idxchannel.com/syariah/muhammadiyah-haji-di-metaverse-tidak-sah>
- Qanaah, U. M. (2009). *Fiqh al-Taysir Fi al-Syari'ah al-Islamiyyah*. Dar al-Mushtafa.
- redaksi@mui.or.id. (2022, February 13). *Alasan Mengapa Kabah Metaverse tak Bisa untuk Haji dan Umroh? – Majelis Ulama Indonesia*. <https://mui.or.id/hikmah/33579/alasan-mengapa-kabah-metaverse-tak-bisa-untuk-haji-dan-umroh/>
- Salleh, S. M., Hasan, A. S. M., Salleh, N. M., Sapiai, N. S., Ghazali, S. A. M., Rusok, N. H. M., & Zawawi, M. Z. M. (2021). [Virtual Reality Technology of Hajj Practice: An Innovation of The Future] Teknologi Virtual Reality Amali Haji: Satu Inovasi Masa Hadapan. *Jurnal Islam Dan Masyarakat Kontemporer*, 22(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.37231/jimk.2021.22.2.577>
- Setjen DPR. (2023). *Komisi VIII Jelaskan Tambahan Kuota Haji 2023: Sulsel Dapat Dua Kloter*. <http://www.dpr.go.id/berita/detail/id/44674>

Sparkes, M. (2021). What is a metaverse. *New Scientist*, 251(3348), 18.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0262-4079\(21\)01450-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0262-4079(21)01450-0)

Tanos, K. (2022, February 9). *MUI Sebut Ibadah Haji Virtual di Metaverse Tidak Sah*.
MUI Sebut Ibadah Haji Virtual di Metaverse Tidak Sah - Manado Post.
<https://manadopost.jawapos.com/nasional/28600538/mui-sebut-ibadah-haji-virtual-di-metaverse-tidak-sah>