

Digital Hadith and Gendered Harm: Negotiating Religious Authority and Female Circumcision Discourses on Instagram

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Abstract

The digital reproduction of weakly authenticated hadiths used to support the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM/C) exacerbates health risks. It reinforces patriarchal bias within Muslim communities, thereby eroding gender justice and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* amidst the democratization of religious authority on social media. Although the World Health Organization (WHO) has designated FGM/C as a harmful practice with serious medical and psychological consequences, some Indonesian Muslim groups continue to perpetuate it through cultural and religious legitimacy, creating tensions between textual tradition, human rights principles, and the dynamics of online discourse. This study addresses this gap by analyzing hadith narratives on the Instagram account @halalcorner, integrating hadith criticism and digital netnography to explore the negotiation of religious authority. Using a qualitative-descriptive netnography approach, data were collected through non-participant observation (March–August 2025) of 12 core posts, 1,256 user comments, and multimodal elements, with purposive sampling based on keywords and engagement levels. The analysis followed Kozinets' four-stage model (investigation, immersion, interaction, integration), with validity maintained through methodological, researcher, and theoretical triangulation, as well as Cohen's kappa calculation (yielding 85% agreement), peer debriefing, and an audit trail. The findings reveal a dominance of pro-circumcision narratives (70%), followed by opposition narratives (15%) and neutral narratives (15%). The cited hadith tend to emphasize the notion of *tahārah* rather than legal prescriptions, revealing interpretive biases that contradict the protection of life and lineage. By drawing on feminist theology and digital religion theory, this study underscores the need for online discourse that is more reflective, humanistic, and aligned with Islam's vision as a mercy for all creation.

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INTRODUCTION

Female circumcision (female genital mutilation/cutting) is a religious and cultural practice that continues to generate serious debate among Muslims. The World Health Organization (WHO) classifies it as a harmful practice due to its significant medical and psychological consequences (Biglu et al., 2016; Supriatami et al., 2022). Nevertheless, some Muslim communities continue to defend it on the basis of religious and cultural legitimacy (Heryani et al., 2020; Rosyid, 2020). This debate reflects a persistent tension between religious texts, local traditions, and human rights discourses, in which the hadith on female circumcision becomes the focal point of problematic justification. In this context, the phenomenon of digital religion gains significance, as the online space now serves as a new arena for contesting religious authority, circulating discourse, and reproducing Islamic traditions (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). Hadith studies are no longer confined to traditional academic settings, but are also practiced, debated, and reproduced through social media within a participatory and decentralized logic of authority (Karim, 2018).

Heidi A. Campbell's theoretical framework on digital religion and networked religion posits that religion in the digital age is not only present in online spaces but also shapes new patterns of social interaction that connect online and offline spheres. Campbell identifies five key

characteristics of digital religion: connected communities, narrated identities, shifting authority, convergent practices, and multisite realities (Campbell, 2025; Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). Thus, social media platforms such as Instagram function not merely as channels for preaching but also as an arena for contesting authority that demonstrates new dynamics in the production, legitimization, and dissemination of hadith (Heidi Campbell, 2007). In the context of female circumcision, platforms such as Instagram have become important spaces for the reinterpretation of the meaning of hadith, debates on religious authority, and the negotiation of moral values and public health.

The selection of the @halalcorner account was a deliberate methodological decision, as it represents an influential, Salafi-oriented digital authority within Indonesia's halal lifestyle ecosystem. With over 500,000 followers, the account articulates its religious stance through textualist Islamic guidance content and actively promotes female circumcision as a religious obligation using the inappropriate analogy of *ṭahārah*. The practice of expanding the interpretation of the hadith “five things are part of *fitrah*”, which in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* explicitly refers to a male practice, is employed to justify female circumcision as a form of ritual purity, despite isnād criticism categorizing the related hadith as *ḍa‘īf jiddan* (Abdul Rahman Sakka, 2021) and hermeneutical analyses demonstrating that the practice is more cultural than normative (Alamsyah, 2014). By framing female circumcision as an essential element of *ṭahārah* and family piety, @halalcorner illustrates how Salafi digital discourse operates within participatory spaces to reinforce gender norms and shape young audiences through algorithm-driven content consumption, making it a key case for examining the contested reproduction of religious authority in contrast to accounts that emphasize health-based or gender justice approaches.

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), locally known in Indonesia as female circumcision or female *khitan* (*khitan perempuan*), remains widespread in Muslim communities despite its lack of explicit basis in the Qur'an and the consensus among most Islamic religious authorities that the practice is not religiously obligatory (Abubakar, 2013; Boddy, 2016; El-Dirani et al., 2022; Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Statistics, n.d; Putri & Sundrijo, 2024; Rosyidah & Jamilah, 2022; Sariyah et al., 2023; Tønnessen & al-Nagar, 2024; Zabus, 2008). This practice is often justified through selective interpretations of weakly authoritative hadiths, which construct it as a sunnah or *makrūmah*. Globally, more than 230 million women and girls are affected, with Asia—including Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Maldives—accounting for approximately 80 million cases.

The persistence of this practice is reinforced by intergenerational habits, local religious authorities, traditional birth attendants, and increasing medicalization (Budiharsana et al., 2003; Gareau et al., 2025; Newland, 2006; Rouzi et al., 2020; Shell-Duncan, 2022). Despite declines in urban and educated populations, religious legitimacy remains a dominant factor, often obscuring serious physical, sexual, reproductive, and psychological risks associated with the practice (Belisario Olga Czarina Velayo, 2009; Clarence-Smith, 2008; El-Dirani et al., 2022; Rosyidah & Jamilah, 2022).

Academic studies show that the debate on female circumcision in Islam has evolved through various approaches. In Malaysia, this discourse involves tensions between medical and religious authorities due to the absence of official guidelines (Ithnin et al., 2023). In Indonesia, *sanad* criticism shows that the hadith on female circumcision are classified as *ḍa‘īf jiddan*, meaning they are not valid as legal evidence (Abdul Rahman Sakka, 2021). The hermeneutic approach emphasizes that this practice is transitional and contextual, serving as a form of adaptation to local culture (Alamsyah, 2014; Rakhman, 2016). From a medical perspective, research confirms significant health risks (Lubadi et al., n.d.), while a gender justice approach calls for an absolute ban on the practice (Pratiwi, 2024; Supriatami et al., 2022). Conversely, some scholars argue that a total ban may contradict the principles of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (Assalwa & Ma'arif, 2024).

Previous studies have primarily focused on the offline dimensions of FGM/C—the the history of anti-FGM/C campaigns, community norms, structural limitations on women's agency, religious leaders' responses to criminalization, and cultural reproduction in Indonesian Muslim communities (Abubakar, 2013; Campbell, 2025; Kholili et al., 2024; Nisa, 2018; Sikkink, 2000; Tønnessen & al-

Nagar, 2024; Uyuni et al., 2025; Zaid et al., 2022). However, the digital realm remains underexplored, despite platforms like Instagram being a crucial arena for young Muslims to negotiate religious knowledge and challenge traditional authority. This study examines the Indonesian halal lifestyle account, @halalcorner, to understand how hadith on female circumcision is presented, debated, and reinterpreted among millennial and Gen Z audiences, while also identifying emerging patterns of digital religious authority.

Although many studies have discussed the validity of hadith and its legal implications, and others have highlighted the shifting nature of religious authority in online spaces, little research has connected these two dimensions to understand how hadith narratives are mobilized on social media (Al-Achsanah & Sholikhah, 2025). This study aims to fill this gap by integrating two approaches: hadith criticism as a method for verifying textual authority and digital netnography as an instrument for analyzing religious discursive practices in the online space (Eriyanto, 2022). Theoretically, this study enriches hadith studies by presenting a contemporary dimension of authority negotiation in a fluid and interactive digital space (Mundzir et al., 2025). Practically, this research is relevant to the Indonesian context, which still maintains female circumcision as a tradition while simultaneously debating it as a public religious discourse (Hikmalisa, 2016). In the social media ecosystem, the general public is now consumers and producers of religious narratives, which directly influence perceptions of law, morality, and health (Gusnanda & Wijaya, 2023).

Based on this context, this study explores how hadith concerning female circumcision are represented and debated on the Instagram account @halalcorner, and how these hadith are employed to shape and negotiate digital religious authority. The central question guiding this study is: how does the contestation of hadith narrative on female circumcision unfold within digital spaces, and how can the combined approaches of hadith criticism and netnography uncover the dynamics of religious authority embedded in them? The originality of this research lies in its cross-methodological approach that combines hadith studies with digital religion studies, offering a new contribution to understanding the reproduction of religious authority in participatory, visual, and interactive social media (Campbell & Bellar, 2022).

METHODS

This study uses a netnographic approach to examine how religious authority regarding the hadith on female circumcision is constructed, negotiated, and contested in digital space. Referring to Kozinets, as adapted by Eriyanto (2022), netnography extends ethnographic methods into the online environment, enabling the systematic exploration of digital culture, interaction patterns, and meaning-making processes within online communities. The Instagram account @halalcorner was chosen as the research case due to its position as a digital religious authority with over 500,000 followers and its role in producing and distributing popular Islamic narratives, including the issue of female circumcision. This selection also addresses the gap in the literature regarding the mobilization of hadith on social media (Al-Achsanah & Sholikhah, 2025) and reflects the dynamics of Indonesian digital Islam as mapped by (Gusnanda & Wijaya, 2023) and (Gary R. Bunt, 2003).

Data were collected between March and August 2025 through non-participant observation to minimize reactivity bias. The instruments included the Instagram app, a web browser, and manual documentation in the form of screenshots. No scraping tools were used to maintain ethical compliance. Data sources consisted of: 1) 12 core posts related to female circumcision, including captions, hadith texts, and visuals; 2) 1,256 user comments ($\pm 70\%$ pro-circumcision, $\pm 15\%$ opposition, $\pm 15\%$ neutral); and 3) multimodal elements such as infographics and emojis. Data selection employed purposive sampling using the keyword “female circumcision” and was based on relevance and engagement level (≥ 500 likes/comments). All data were stored in a digital archive with structured metadata via an Excel log.

This study was conducted through four key stages of netnography: investigation, interaction, immersion, and integration, representing the methodological workflow of netnography. During the investigation stage, the researcher examined the content and narrative structure of the hadith on

female circumcision on the @halalcorner account. The interaction stage focused on analyzing public responses in the comments section, while the immersion stage explored patterns of visual and symbolic communication to understand the construction of hadith authority within digital spaces. In the final stage, integration, all findings were synthesized to explain how the hadiths on female circumcision are debated and recontextualized within the framework of digital religious authority, as well as their implications for the perception and representation of women's religiosity on social media.

The analysis was validated through multiple layers to ensure the reliability of the findings. This process involved methodological triangulation through cross-checking among text, visuals, and comments, as well as researcher triangulation, where two coders double-coded 20% of the sampled comments, yielding an 85% agreement rate based on Cohen's kappa calculation. Furthermore, theoretical triangulation was conducted by comparing the findings with medical literature (Supriatami et al., 2022) and contextual studies of hadith (Alamsyah, 2014). Validation was also strengthened through peer debriefing conducted in March 2025. To mitigate researcher bias, an audit trail—in the form of decision logs, NVivo exports, and reflective journals—was included in accordance with netnography standards (Eriyanto, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of @halalcorner and Representation of Female Circumcision Hadith

Halal Corner is a non-governmental organization (NGO) focused on halal certification education and assistance in Indonesia, founded by Aisha Maharani on December 4, 2011, in Bandung (Tentang Kami – HalalCorner.ID, n.d.). Aisha Maharani is a prominent woman born on May 31, 1979, who has long been involved in the world of halal certification and education. Over time, Halal Corner has evolved into a national network with branches in major cities, including Jakarta, Bogor, Makassar, and Medan. Aisha is recognized as a visionary and consistent figure in promoting halal awareness, not only through educational campaigns, but also via halal certification consultation services that help businesses meet halal standards for their products professionally and credibly (FeryFerdiansyahFajar, n.d.).

In the digital space, Aisha Maharani launched the Instagram platform @halalcorner in October 2013. Meta has Officially verified it since August 2021, it functions as a community, news media, consultant, and online marketing platform, featuring content oriented towards advocating halal principles in contemporary life, including sharia education on food (such as the differences between *halāl*, *harām*, *makrūh*, and *shubhāt*), halal certification consulting for businesses, and Islamic-based healthy lifestyle tips, as reflected in its dynamic narrative that integrates relevant hadith, local product innovations, and social critiques of non-halal contamination.

Its signature hashtag, #HalalisMyWay, reinforces a moral and spiritual image that emphasizes a halal lifestyle as the identity of modern Muslims. The dynamics of this content, with more than 3,973 posts and over 356,000 followers, are marked by significant variations in engagement (Halal Corner, 2024), ranging from dozens to hundreds of likes on informative posts such as warnings about pork exposure or infused water promotions, to thousands of interactions on controversial issues such as the criminalization of non-halal products in 2024, as well as the tone of netizen comments dominated by appreciation for educational clarity, despite being interspersed with sharp debates on fiqh interpretations and Islamophobic insinuations. This reinforces the account's role as a platform for deep intellectual and religious dialogue within Indonesia's Islamic digital ecosystem.



Figure 1. Instagram Account @halalcorner

The media activities carried out by @halalcorner display the characteristics of digital religious authority as described by Heidi Campbell, namely authority built through technology, text, and online community interaction (Heidi Campbell, 2007). By presenting content based on hadith, fatwas, and the views of scholars, this account acts as a mediator of religious knowledge in the digital public sphere. This account not only publishes Islamic information visually but also cultivates religious discourse rooted in the legitimacy of Sharia arguments and the authority of Hadith texts. Meta's verification status reinforces the public's perception of the symbolic authority of this account, as it demonstrates the authenticity of the institution's identity and adds to the audience's trust in the content disseminated. Thus, @halalcorner reflects a new model of religious authority in the digital age, where legitimacy does not solely come from institutional authority (scholars or fatwa institutions), but also from media credibility, number of followers, and interactivity with the online community. The hadith quote used by the @halalcorner account is from Sunan Ibn Mājah, which reads:

حَدَّثَنَا عَلِيُّ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ الطَّنَافِيسِيُّ، وَعَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الدِّمَشْقِيُّ، قَالَا: حَدَّثَنَا الْوَلِيدُ بْنُ مُسْلِمٍ قَالَ: حَدَّثَنَا الْأَوْزَاعِيُّ قَالَ: أُنْبَأَنَا عَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنُ الْقَاسِمِ قَالَ: أَخْبَرَنَا الْقَاسِمُ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ، عَنْ عَائِشَةَ، زَوْجِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، قَالَتْ: إِذَا التَّقَى الْخِتَانَانِ فَقَدْ وَجِبَ الْغُسْلُ، فَعَلُّهُ أَنَا وَرَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، فَأَغْتَسَلْنَا

‘Ali bin Muhammad ath-Thanafisi and ‘Abdurrahman bin Ibrahim ad-Dimasyqi told us, both of them said: al-Walid bin Muslim told us, he said: al-Auza’i told us, he said: ‘Abdurrahman bin al-Qasim told us, he said: al-Qasim bin Muhammad told us, from ‘Aisha, the wife of the Prophet, she said: “When the two circumcised parts meet (between a man and a woman), then it is obligatory to take a bath. I once did it with the Messenger of Allah, then we both took a bath.” (Reported by Ibn Mājah) (Ibn Mājah Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Yazid Al-Qazwini, n.d.).

The @halalcorner account interprets the hadith literally and directly links it to the practice of female circumcision. Through a persuasive visual approach, this account quotes the phrase “two circumcisions” as justification that women are also included in the recommendation for circumcision, to reduce sexual desire and maintain purity. Explanations regarding the technicalities of minor cutting and the timing of its implementation, which are linked to the hadith narrated by Jabir, are used to reinforce the legitimacy of Sharia compliance (Halal Corner, 2024). This interpretation shows a shift in the function of hadith from a source of classical fiqh law to a narrative instrument in the formation of digital religious authority, where the text of hadith is positioned not only as a legal argument but also as a symbol of religious identity in the online public sphere.

In the investigation of the hadith narrated by Ibn Mājah from Sayyidah ‘Āisyah, may Allah be pleased with her, through a very strong and diverse chain of transmission. In one narration, it is

mentioned: “*When the two circumcised parts meet (between a man and a woman), it is obligatory to perform ablution. I did it with the Messenger of Allah, then we both performed ablution*” (Ibnu Majah Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Yazid, n.d.). This clarifies the fiqh ruling regarding the obligation of ritual purification after sexual intercourse. The phrase */idzā iltaqā al-khitānān/* ‘when the two circumcised parts meet’ is understood metaphorically as the meeting of the male and female genitals in the context of penetration (*ilāj*), not merely in the physical sense of circumcision. This chain of narration originates from Ali bin Muhammad al-Ṭanafisī and Abdurrahman bin Ibrahim ad-Dimasyqī through al-Walīd bin Muslim, al-Awzā’ī, Abdurrahman bin al-Qāsim, and al-Qāsim bin Muhammad, to Aisha, the wife of the Prophet. Imam asy-Syāfi’ī also narrated this hadith through the same chain of transmission in *al-Umm* and emphasized that the obligation to bathe applies when the two circumcised areas meet, without having to wait for the discharge of semen. This hadith was also narrated by Aḥmad in al-Musnad, Muslim, at- at-Tirmidzī, and declared *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ* by at- at-Tirmidzī (Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, 1989, p. 365).

The author also traced the studies of scholars in subsequent periods who thoroughly examined the variations in wording and differences in the chains of transmission of these hadith. Imam al-Rabī’ narrated it from al-Syāfi’ī with a slight doubt, while al-Muzanī narrated it without doubt through the chain of al-Awzā’ī, Abdurrahman bin al-Qāsim, and al-Qāsim bin Muhammad. Harmalah also narrated it from ash-Shafi’ī, which has a continuous chain of transmission through al-Walid bin Muslim and al-Awza’i. These narrations are reinforced by Ibn Khuzaymah, Abu Abdullah al-Ḥāfiẓ, and Abu al-Walīd, who confirm the consistency of the chain of transmission and the absence of doubt in the transmission of the narrators (Ahmad bin Al-Hussein bin Ali bin Musa Al-Khushroujardi Al-Khorasani, Abu Bakar Al-Bayhaqi, 1991). Furthermore, al-Bayhaqī mentions that this hadith is classified as *ṣaḥīḥ* because it was narrated by trustworthy narrators (*thiqah*) from a continuous chain.

The author considers that the studies and assessments of several hadith scholars, both classical and contemporary, reinforce the credibility of this hadith. Al-Ṭabarānī narrated it from Abu Ayyub, while Ahmad narrated it from Rāfi’ bin Khadij and ‘Itbān bin Mālik, and al-Ṭahāwī from Abu Hurairah and Ibn Shāhīn in al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh from Anas (Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad bin ‘Alī bin Muḥammad bin Aḥmad bin Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, 1995). All of these chains were then collected by al-Ḥāzimī and deemed *ṣaḥīḥ* by al-Albānī in *al-Silsilah aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥah* (no. 1261), *al-Irwā’* (no. 80), and *al-Mishkāt* (no. 442) (Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, n.d.). Based on the entirety of these chains of transmission, scholars understand that the phrase “*when two circumcised parts meet*” does not refer to the practice of female circumcision itself, but rather to the fiqh ruling concerning the obligation of *gusl* after sexual intercourse. Hence, this hadith serves as an important foundation for the jurisprudence of purification (*ṭahārah*), rather than as textual evidence endorsing female circumcision.

Netnographic Analysis of Hadiths on Female Circumcision on the @halalcorner Account

There are four stages of netnography: namely, investigation, interaction, immersion, and integration. This study follows the four main stages of the netnography method: investigation, interaction, immersion, and integration, which are interconnected in analyzing the construction of digital religious authority. Each stage reveals patterns of communication, representations of hadith, and the dynamics of social meaning in the digital space.

Investigation Stage

This is an essential first step in netnography. This study examines the message structures, visual strategies, and audience response dynamics of religious narratives presented through Instagram posts (Eriyanto, 2022). At this stage, the focus is on viral content on Instagram, specifically a post uploaded on August 3, 2024, by the @halalcorner account, which discusses the law of female circumcision from the perspective of hadith and fiqh schools of thought. The

investigation results show that this account, which is oriented towards halal information and digital religious authority, has a high level of interaction, with 3,283 likes and more than 220 comments before the comment feature was disabled (Halal Corner, 2024). These findings indicate the unique appeal of content that combines hadith with contemporary issues, such as the Indonesian government's regulation prohibiting female circumcision, which motivates audiences to actively participate in the debate.



Figure 2. Post on the @halalcorner Account related to the Rationale for Female Circumcision

Based on visual documentation, the analyzed content exhibits a strong religious and educational construction through a moody and reflective carousel slide format. The main visual shows a woman wearing a hijab with large scissors and the rhetorical question “Is female circumcision still relevant today?” which serves as a provocative marker to spark critical awareness of the issue of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C). The visual composition, featuring an open natural background, bold sans-serif typography, and an image of a woman wearing a hijab, creates a spiritual, calm, and authoritative impression while affirming the Muslimah’s identity as a symbol of piety and representation of modern Islamic values. The systematic presentation structure, from hadith arguments to practical guidelines, combines elements of *da‘wah*, education, and scientific legitimacy, making this content informative and fostering a communicative, reflective image of Islam that reflects digital religious authority.

The carousel-style post presents a coherent narrative, starting with provocative questions and ending with explanations of hadith and the views of the four schools of jurisprudence (Ḥanafi, Māliki, Shafi’i, and Ḥanbali). This pattern demonstrates the account’s strategy in positioning itself as a digital religious authority through the use of persuasive language that invites audience participation (#HalalSquad) to share personal experiences. With over 356,000 followers and 3,973 consistent posts discussing sensitive topics such as female circumcision hadith, halal certification, and halal-haram categorization in contemporary Indonesian Muslim lifestyles, the @halalcorner account serves as a representative case study for analyzing the contestation of digital religious narratives through the lenses of hadith criticism and netnography.

In the landscape of digital religious narrative contestation in Indonesia, the emergence of a series of posts on the Instagram account @halalcorner regarding female circumcision following the issuance of Presidential Regulation No. 28 of 2024, which explicitly abolished the practice as an effort to protect children’s reproductive health, is a manifestation of non-traditional religious authority challenging the fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) Number 9A of 2008 and its clarification in 2021, which classified female circumcision as *makrūh taḥrīm*, a type of recommended worship. Through a systematic approach that integrates authentic hadith arguments (such as the accounts of Muslim, Bukhari, and Ibn Mājah), the opinions of the four schools of fiqh with an emphasis on the obligations according to the Shafi’i school, and the medical differentiation between authentic circumcision and genital mutilation, this account constructs a restorative

discourse that positions the practice as a noble sunnah for perfection and cleanliness, thus representing the dynamics of digital hegemony where communal platforms such as @halalcorner are seizing the space of interpretation from formal state institutions and official scholars.



Figure 3. Hadith Arguments and Opinions of the Mazhab Posted by @halalcorner

Researchers documented data from carousel posts that included hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and opinions of various schools of thought. These slides note variations in views, such as the Hanafi school of thought, which does not require female circumcision but considers it an honor; the Maliki school of thought, which also considers female circumcision an honor; the Hanbali school of thought, which considers circumcision obligatory for men but not for women; and the Shafi'i school of thought, which considers circumcision obligatory for both men and women (Halal Corner, 2024). This data indicates high user attention and engagement with religious narratives, even when they are linked to secular regulations. These interaction figures indicate that content contesting hadith has instant appeal and generates significant virality in Indonesia's digital Islamic ecosystem.

Interaction Stage

Within the framework of netnography, the interaction stage emphasizes the importance of active engagement, both direct and indirect, with content, audiences, and communication patterns that develop on digital platforms (Eriyanto, 2022). In the context of contesting narratives of female circumcision through Instagram account @halalcorner, researchers observed interaction patterns in the comments section and account responses to debates. This study aims to understand the audience's motivations for responding, as well as the emotional dynamics created by the account manager during the discussion.



Figure 4. Response from the Owner of the @halalcorner Account to User

Netizens' responses to the post reflected a range of opinions. Some netizens interpreted the post as a form of legitimate preaching, did not consider it a form of sharia prohibition, and even tended to defend the practice of circumcision on the grounds of the Shafi'i school of thought. Others questioned the validity and ethics of female circumcision in the modern era, and some expressed deep concern about the medical risks and trauma to children. Some netizens, while others. These varied reactions reflect differing perceptions within the digital community: one side views the narrative as reinforcing religious authority, while the other believes that such actions have the potential to undermine the harmony between religion and modern law.

The interaction between content creators (@halalcorner) and netizens shows an inclusive educational dynamic, where creators not only present information based on Islamic law in a persuasive manner, but also respond empathetically, consistently responding by liking comments, using an inclusive tone, such as suggesting midwives or doctors who comply with Islamic law, providing encouragement and clarification to netizens' questions about the age of circumcision or the availability of medical services. These actions are not merely spontaneous expressions but symbolic communication that effectively strengthens the emotional bond between the account creator and netizens, facilitating a space for constructive dialogue.

Meanwhile, interactions among netizens reflect a rich polarization of opinion, ranging from sharing personal experiences that support circumcision as a form of Shafi'i obedience, such as stories of searching for midwives or health benefits, to critical debates on the myths of sexual desire and medical implications, with elements of emotional support such as "stay strong" or sharp criticism of government policies, which overall illustrate how virtual communities shape collective narratives on sensitive issues, colored by a blend of religious tradition, empirical experience, and resistance to secular regulation.

This interaction reflects the "interaction" stage in the netnography methodology, where symbolic expression is crucial in building connections and expanding digital engagement. These differences in perception reflect the complexity of consuming and interpreting hadith narratives in the social media era, where the boundaries between religious authority and secular regulation are increasingly blurred. Through the interaction stage, researchers gain a deeper understanding of the social constructs formed within this community. Direct interaction in the digital space not only functions as a means of communication but also as an arena for negotiating the values and meanings that influence public perceptions of female circumcision.

Immersion Phase

The author immersed themselves in the digital community to gain an internal perspective, involving collecting diverse data (Eriyanto, 2022). Based on a post by the @halalcorner account on August 3, 2024, which discussed female circumcision in Islam and government regulations, the author analyzed 220 available comments (although only some were listed in detail in the data) (Halal Corner, 2024). This analysis focused on the following main classifications: Pro (supporting female circumcision, often citing religious law, positive experiences, or religious beliefs), Contra (opposing or not practicing it, citing medical reasons, difficulty of access, or doubts about its obligation), and Other (neutral, questions, general discussion, or not directly related to the main topic). Classification was based on the content of the comments, considering Indonesia's cultural, religious, and practical context.

The table 1 summarizes the classifications, with representative examples of comments from the available data. I have only included unique examples to avoid duplication and calculated the proportions based on all listed comments.

Table 1. Classification and Selected Examples

Classification	Estimated Number of Comments	Representative Comments (Selected Examples)	Rationale for Classification
Supportive	154 (majority supporting the sharia perspective and sharing positive personal experiences)	nda_rieska: "My daughter was circumcised in 2017... in accordance with Islamic teachings ﷺ" Fadisty: "Female circumcision is important... Allah's law serves as guidance for life." farassyafahreza28: "My 5-month-old daughter was circumcised... God willing, in line with Islamic recommendations ﷻ" seftiarickman: "A pediatrician circumcised both of my daughters."	Supporting circumcision as part of Islamic law, the Prophet's sunnah, or a form of virtue, many share successful experiences despite difficulties in finding medical practitioners. Comments often emphasize the Shafi'i school of thought and mention perceived benefits such as reducing itching or sexual desire.
Oppositional	33 (opposing or refraining due to practical or medical reasons)	ikatayeb: "Indonesia follows the Shafi'i school, right?... Both my daughters are girls, and we agreed not to circumcise them ﷻ." dewi_kusnul: "Bismillah, I chose not to circumcise my daughter, following medical recommendations... For now, I follow medical advice." neksneen: "I follow the Shafi'i school, and for me, female circumcision is not obligatory." amahdeew: "My child is a girl, and we decided not to circumcise her... we refuse if qualified medical professionals do not perform it." travelwithkoala: "Even in Arab countries, it has long been banned... because it brings more harm than benefit."	Opposing the practice due to non-obligatory interpretations, medical or modern priorities, government prohibition, or associated risks (such as mutilation), some express doubt about the authenticity of the hadith or regard it as a cultural rather than a purely religious practice.
Neutral	33 (neutral comments, questions, or side discussions)	dimsrh: "What are the effects if a woman is not circumcised? And vice versa?" aswaja_kaffah: "Could you provide the reference from the Shafi'i school and explain the first hadith mentioned?" saifa_sifei: "Excuse me, may I ask... how is circumcision applied for a female convert?" aaacnww: "If the child is already 1 or 3 years old, is it still possible to perform circumcision?" yafqisyia: "Please share information about clinics that provide this service ﷻ I live in Banjarmasin."	Including questions about the effects, scriptural sources, service locations, or neutral discussions, such as hadith interpretation; these comments are not explicitly pro or contra but rather reflect an effort to seek information or clarification.

The general conclusion from the analysis of interactions on the Instagram account @halalcorner shows that the majority of comments are in favor of female circumcision, in line with the educational nature of the account, which is based on pro-Sharia religious narratives. The majority of users express their support by sharing personal experiences to emphasize that this practice is different from the extreme form of female genital mutilation (FGM) that the government has banned. Although the opposing group is in the minority, its existence remains significant because it highlights practical issues, such as difficulties in accessing services after the 2010 and 2014 bans, and questions the relevance of hadith and *maḏhab* views in the context of modern medicine. The discussion that emerged also revealed public confusion regarding the safe implementation of this practice amid tensions between state regulations and religious legitimacy, accompanied by minor debates over the interpretation of hadith that were conducted in a polite manner. Overall, the dynamics of these comments illustrate the epistemological clash between traditional sharia authority and modern regulations in Indonesia, while also showing how digital spaces function as arenas for reflective and participatory religious discourse.

Integration Stage

The integration stage in this ethnographic research combines findings from investigation, interaction, and immersion to obtain a holistic understanding of the contestation of hadith narratives about female circumcision on Instagram @halalcorner. The integration of findings reveals that this account serves as a platform for representing digital religious authority, which combines the legitimacy of hadith texts, religious-educational visual strategies, and emotional engagement with the audience. Through narratives that link hadith arguments with the opinions of the four schools of fiqh, especially the Shafi'i school, as well as visuals that highlight symbols of Muslim piety, @halalcorner has established an image as an alternative authoritative source amid the weakening role of formal religious institutions. The high level of interaction and public response demonstrates the appeal of religious content packaged in a persuasive digital format, but also reflects the emergence of polarization between traditional religious authorities and secular regulations, particularly following the issuance of Presidential Regulation No. 28 of 2024, which reaffirms the prohibition of female circumcision practices.

Furthermore, integrating the immersion and interaction stages reveals that the digital space serves as an arena for contesting meaning, where hadith texts are debated horizontally and emotionally. Various responses from netizens, ranging from support for the Shafi'i school of thought to criticism of medical practices and regulations, show that religious narratives on social media are no longer hierarchical but participatory and reflective. The communication pattern of @halalcorner, which combines empathetic preaching, the use of emotive symbols, and strong visual framing strategies, shows how religious authority is transforming in the digital ecosystem into an authority based on emotion and collective experience. However, this phenomenon also raises ethical dilemmas, as women's bodies are represented as objects of traditional legitimacy, revealing tensions between religious values, human rights, and public health policies in the contemporary digital Islamic space.

Analysis of the Dynamics of Narrative Contestation and Digital Religious Authority on the Instagram Account @halalcorner

In the hadith debate on female circumcision in the digital space, Nur Rofiah presents a theological paradigm grounded in women's biological and social experiences as an epistemic source in Islamic interpretation (Nur Rofiah, 2020). Rofiah rejects the patriarchal approach that views women's bodies through a framework of moral control and masculine-oriented sharia law. Through the concept of Muslim Women's Critical Reasoning, Rofiah asserts that religious interpretation must avoid two forms of injustice: first, biological burdens that aggravate women's roles, such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding; second, five forms of social

inequality in the form of stigmatization, marginalization, subordination, violence, and double burdens (Nur Rofiah, 2020).

This paradigm is rooted in the idea of True Justice for Women, which places women not as objects of law, but as epistemic subjects in Islam. Women's bodies are seen as a divine trust that cannot be controlled by men, society, or repressive religious interpretations (Nur Rofiah, 2020). This principle of *tawhīd* affirms that any form of control over women's bodies, including through the practice of circumcision, is a theological deviation that degrades human dignity, as stated in Surah Al-Isrā': 70. Therefore, the interpretation of hadith that legitimizes female circumcision contradicts *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and the ethics of *rahmah*.

In the digital context, the Instagram account @halalcorner serves as a platform for both discussion and debate on the interpretation of the hadith. A post on August 3, 2024, which referred to female circumcision as a "noble sunnah," reflects a tendency to uphold the traditional interpretation of the Shafi'i school of thought without considering biological realities and women's suffering. For Rofiah, this approach fails to realize the principle of true justice because it ignores the physical and psychological aspects of women, as illustrated in the responses of netizens who recounted their traumatic experiences as a result of this practice.

Rofiah's rejection of female circumcision is not only moral in nature but also an epistemological deconstruction of gender-biased religious interpretations. Rofiah proposes a hermeneutics that makes women's experiences a source of theological truth, rather than merely an exception in interpretation. This approach highlights that a number of hadith related to female circumcision emerged from a patriarchal social context that is no longer in line with the principles of universal justice in Islam. Therefore, the reinterpretation of hadith should be directed towards the liberation of women, not the perpetuation of their subordination.

Furthermore, Rofiah interprets social media as a space for forming critical awareness among women, through the framework of Women's Ways of Knowing (Nur Rofiah, 2020, pp. 85–94). She describes the epistemic transformation of women from a passive position to constructed knowledge, namely the ability to actively interpret, assess, and correct religious discourse. This phenomenon is evident in the comments section of @halalcorner posts, where women express digital resistance through personal experiences, rejection of the legitimacy of hadith that support circumcision, and the offering of alternative interpretations that are more ethical. This shows a shift in the position of women from objects of *da'wah* to subjects of religious knowledge.

Hermeneutically, Rofiah's interpretation broadens the scope of hadith criticism from the aspects of authenticity of *sanad* and *matan* to an evaluation of its meaning and social impact. According to her, hadith must be weighed based on *maṣlaḥat* (public interest) principles and gender justice. In the context of female circumcision, even if a hadith is classified as *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic), its use to legitimize practices that harm women's bodies remains morally invalid. This criticism is not a rejection of hadith, but rather an effort to return it to the objectives of sharia: *ḥifẓ al-naḥs* (preserving the soul) and *ḥifẓ al-nasl* (preserving lineage).

A netnographic approach to @halalcorner reveals the convergence of two epistemologies: patriarchal interpretation, based on textual authority, and feminist interpretation, based on experience. This account's visual narratives and religious captions are a form of mediatized religion, in which women's bodies are constructed as symbols of piety and moral purity. Conversely, women's comments present embodied resistance, a theology of the body that rejects hegemony over women's physicality. At this point, Rofiah's idea finds its relevance by placing women's bodies at the center of spirituality, not as objects of control.

The concept of *Religious-Social Shaping of Technology* (RSST), proposed by Heidi A. Campbell (2010), provides an important analytical framework for understanding this phenomenon. RSST explains that religious communities shape the meaning of technology based on their social values and practices, so that social media such as Instagram does not merely function as a means of preaching, but as a space for participatory religious meaning construction. In the case of

@halalcorner, religious content is adapted to algorithmic logic and digital visual culture, marking a shift in authority from text to interaction, from clerics to digital creators.

In *Digital Religion*, Campbell explains that online religious authority is networked, formed through performative credibility, social connectedness, and emotional resonance (Campbell & Bellar, 2022; Heidi Campbell, 2013). Within this framework, the legitimacy of @halalcorner's preaching stems from the chain of transmission of hadith and the number of followers, visual aesthetics, and consistency of digital presence. These findings align with Gary R. Bunt's observations on *Cyber Islamic Environments* (Gary R. Bunt, 2003), in which traditional religious authorities are fragmented and replaced by "digital scholars" or institutional accounts that gain trust through algorithms and public participation.

However, as Campbell and Tsuria remind us (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021), this form of digital authority is dialogical and easily questioned because legitimacy is built through social networks, not hierarchical authority. In this context, Nur Rofiah's critique is particularly important because it establishes ethical standards for digital da'wah: every religious narrative must be tested against the principle of true justice, not merely loyalty to the text. Thus, Rofiah's feminist theology serves as a corrective to the religious banality that emerges from algorithmic logic.

In closing, Nur Rofiah's perspective highlights the importance of reevaluating the interpretation of hadith on female circumcision within the context of bodily justice and gender equality. Meanwhile, Campbell and Bunt's theory of digital religious authority explains how religious discourse is circulated, negotiated, and contested in the digital ecosystem. The phenomenon on the @halalcorner account shows that religious authority is no longer monopolistic, but rather the result of social negotiation between text, experience, and technology. This view is further reinforced by Mukhammad Zamzami's contemporary legal and medical analysis, which asserts that female circumcision is "highly unreasonable" because it has no theological legitimacy from the Qur'an or explicit hadith, and has adverse effects on women's reproductive and psychological health (Zamzami, 2017). Thus, female circumcision is not a "noble sunnah," but rather a practice that contradicts the *maqāsid al-sharī'ah* to protect life (*hifẓ al-naḥs*) and lineage (*hifẓ al-nasl*). At this juncture, the integration of Rofiah's feminist theology, Zamzami's medical-legal critique, and digital religion theory opens a transformative horizon for hadith studies: shifting from oppressive textual readings toward liberating interpretations. This paradigm ensures that digital religious narratives evolve as catalysts for women's emancipation within Islam, embodying its ultimate vision as a mercy of all creation (*rahmat li al-ālamīn*).

Compared with previous studies, these findings both strengthen and complement the critique of the *sanad* (chain of transmission), which considers hadiths on female circumcision to be *da'if jiddan* and unsuitable as a legal basis. Similarly, global literature shows that the practice of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C)—known in Indonesia as female circumcision—remains widespread despite having no explicit basis in the Qur'an and the majority of religious authorities stating that this practice is not religiously obligatory (Abubakar, 2013; Boddy, 2016; El-Dirani et al., 2022; Putri & Sundrijo, 2024). Justification for this practice is often based on a selective interpretation of hadiths, with weakly authenticated hadiths presented as *sunnah* or *makrūh*. These findings are consistent with global reports that more than 230 million women and girls are affected by FGM/C, including approximately 80 million in Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Maldives). The persistence of this practice is reinforced by intergenerational customs, local religious authorities, traditional birth attendants, and increasing medicalization (Budiharsana et al., 2003; Gareau et al., 2025; Newland, 2006; Rouzi et al., 2020).

This analysis also develops the contextual hermeneutic approach as formulated by Alamsyah (2014) and Rakhman (2016), which understands female circumcision as a residual cultural practice in transition. However, unlike these studies, which focus on textual validity, this research expands its scope to the digital realm by examining how hadith are mobilized in the formation of religious mediation—a research gap identified by Al-Achsanah & Sholikhah (2025) but not yet examined in depth. This research also finds that claims of religious legitimacy through hadith in the digital space

often mask serious medical, sexual, reproductive, and psychological risks, as confirmed in health and gender studies (Belisario Olga Czarina Velayo, 2009; Clarence-Smith, 2008; El-Dirani et al., 2022; Rosyidah & Jamilah, 2022). These findings align with those of Lubadi, Supriatami et al., and Pratiwi, although they differ from the efforts of Assalwa & Ma'arif (2024), who sought to find common ground with *maqāṣid*.

Gary Bunt's study on *Cyber Islamic Environments* enriches this analysis by demonstrating the fragmentation of religious authority into "digital cleric" figures (Gary R. Bunt, 2003), a pattern observed in public negotiations in the @halalcorner comments, as also noted by Gusnanda & Wijaya (2023) in the context of Indonesian social media. This demonstrates that digitalization is not only a medium for dissemination but also an arena for shifting authority and the production of new religious legitimacy.

The originality of this research lies in the synthesis of Rofiah's feminist theology, Campbell's theory of digital religion, and the netnographic approach. This synthesis not only fills a gap in the literature—particularly regarding the limited study of hadith in the context of Instagram, as noted by Hikmalisa (2016) and Mundzir et al., (2025)—but also offers a more transformative analytical paradigm. By positioning women as epistemological subjects in negotiations over digital religious authority, this research makes a significant contribution to the discourse on women's emancipation in contemporary Islam. These findings underscore the potential of digital spaces to foster values of mercy that challenge patriarchal hegemony. Through an interdisciplinary approach integrating gender, technology, and theology, this study opens new horizons for research on hadith and religious authority in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the contestation of hadith narratives regarding female circumcision on the Instagram account @halalcorner reflects a significant shift in Islamic religious authority from a hierarchical model to a networked one. Religious legitimacy no longer rests solely on the *sanad* (the traditional chain of narrators) and traditional institutions, but is instead shaped by participatory interactions, visual aesthetics, and the platform's algorithmic mechanisms. Using a netnographic approach, this study found a dominance of pro-circumcision narratives (approximately 70%), followed by rejection (approximately 15%) and neutral responses (approximately 15%). Critical hadith studies confirm the weak normative legitimacy of frequently referenced narrations, resulting in their reproduction in digital spaces that often reflect patriarchal biases, thus contradicting the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the principles of Islamic law), particularly the protection of life and offspring. The integration of hadith criticism, Nur Rofiah's feminist theology, and Campbell's digital religion framework demonstrates that women's experiences serve as epistemic resources, renegotiating hadith authority in online spaces. These findings fill a gap in the literature that previously focused on *sanad* or digital authority separately and illustrate how women's traumatic experiences in comment sections play a crucial role in shifting religious authority toward a more dialogic and participatory model. However, this study has limitations, primarily due to its reliance on public Instagram data, coverage of a single account over six months, and the potential for researcher bias in interpreting women's resistance despite literature triangulation. Platform algorithms have the potential to reinforce the dominance of certain narratives without fully representing public perceptions. Further studies are recommended to expand the scope across platforms, combine qualitative and quantitative methods, and conduct longitudinal research to map the long-term dynamics of hadith contestation. With this approach, the study of hadith and digital religion can contribute to the development of a more just, inclusive, and human dignity-oriented Islamic discourse.

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