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# Rethinking Indonesian Muslim youth's religious identity in popular Islam: Hanan Attaki's preaching on social media

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**Abstract**

Popular Islam constructs a new religious trend for Muslim practices and identities on social media. The famous preacher Hanan Attaki, who has millions of followers and subscribers, employs this phenomenon to fascinate religious practice as a netizen lifestyle. Consequently, it not only reduces the substance of religion from its true meaning but also integrates Islam into consumer society. This study discusses the religious identity circulated by Attaki as a millennial preacher in popular Islamic discourse. This article examines Attaki's preaching on his social media accounts using a digital ethnography study focusing on pop Islam toward the religious identity among young Muslims. The study shows that pop Islam in Attaki's preaching activities on his Instagram and YouTube highlights contemporary elements regarding visibility and communication techniques and is related to young Muslim topics. However, the success of this preaching involves a disruption of religious identity for his followers. In addition to the superficial and passing religious knowledge that they absorb at a glance, those who are accustomed to studying religion only through social media will have great potential to trap millennial Muslims in extreme, excessive, and fanatic religious sentiments in views and practices instead of a predetermined and prescribed religious identity.

**Keywords:** Religious identity, popular preaching, pop Islam, Hanan Attaki.

## Introduction

The recent trend of Islamic preaching in the Indonesian Muslim community, known as a millennial or popular preacher, has evolved into contemporary Muslims' new religious identity. This preaching trend has caused a shift in symbolic consumption that can reduce the substance of religion from its true meaning, from mere guidance to shallow entertainment (Ummah, 2020; Khairina, 2020; Hannan, 2021; Jinan, 2021). On the other hand, this shows the success of the popular strategy carried out by millennial Muslim preachers in using religious rhetoric through media convergence activities (Muhammad, 2021). They attract more interest from millennial Muslims because their preaching style tends to be populist (Hannan, 2021; Putra et al., 2021) by raising populist themes (Hadiz, 2018) or pop Islam as a new phenomenon (Noor, 2015). Attaki, one of Indonesia's leading millennial Muslim preachers, plays this religious identity of pop Islam very well. It can be seen, for example, from Attaki's Instagram account—which had 6.2 million followers in 2019 (Rappedeo, 2019), 8.8 million in 2020 (Parhan et al., 2020), and reached 9.3 million in 2022 (Arini & Sudradjat, 2022)—has a potent influence of preaching (69%) on the religiosity of followers (Rappedeo, 2019). Thus, pop Islam preaching influences personal and communal practice among its followers, so this

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new reality has fascinatingly endorsed a new religious identity of Indonesian Muslim netizens.

Many studies have been conducted on Attaki's preaching as a millennial preacher in Indonesia, from the features and style of Attaki's preaching in terms of language (Nikmah, 2019), rhetorical strategies (Septiani, 2020), preaching issues (Syams, 2019; Nizar, 2020; Kamillah et al., 2023; Gustia & Putra, 2023; Zulaecha et al., 2023), preacher performance (Fauziyah & Noorhidayati, 2021), Attaki's self-branding (Nurjaman & Herlina, 2021), Attaki's preaching challenge (Permatasari et al., 2023), and acceptance by his followers (Abdullah, 2018; Rappedeo, 2019; Arini & Sudradjat, 2023). However, these studies have gaps in their investigation of the new religious identity of Islamic populism from the construction of Attaki's preaching as a millennial Islamic preacher among Indonesian Muslim netizens.

Although studies on the millennial preacher Attaki on social media have been conducted, the religious identity of Indonesian Muslim netizens circulated by pop Islam through this preacher has not received special attention. The discourse of popular Muslim preachers, known as *millennial ustaz* or *da'i zaman now* (Sari, 2020), as new actors in the contemporary global Muslim community is exciting and essential to study. However, the previous generation opposes this new religious reality and contains contradictions (Azman, 2021). The previous generation of preachers carried out their preaching activities in traditional spaces such as mosques. The millennial preacher group delivers religious materials by utilizing networks on social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and others (Santoso, 2019). Although they interestingly are classified as newcomers in the field of preaching, they have succeeded in contesting and constructing their existence in the community, surpassing the previous generation (Yuliasih, 2022). In recent years, the existence of millennial preachers has increasingly gained considerable existence and recognition from the public, having popularity and a significant number of followers, especially among Muslim netizens (Diana, 2022). In addition, this is not only in the contestation of religious discourse but also practically colors the religious reality in Indonesia (Habibi, 2018). Moreover, the current Muslim population in Indonesia, which is dominated by Gen Millennial, Gen Z, and Gen Alpha netizens, has the potential to enhance their influence and even more massive significance (Annur, 2022a).

Therefore, this study analyzes the representation of this Muslim identity in the religious discourse in which Islam has been rebranded and repackaged by Attaki as a millennial preacher on social media. Pop Islam incorporates pop culture into their practiced religion through social media by marketing Islamic teaching. In this context, he has an enormous influence and number of followers, especially among millennial Muslims in Indonesia. The extent of Attaki's preaching influence through social media corresponds to Pop culture, representing Muslim identities and practices that personalized their character. For this reason, this paper rethinks how Attaki's popular preaching disseminates Pop Islam on his social media accounts and examines its infiltration into the millennial Muslim religious identity.

## Literature Review

According to Baudrillard (1994a), popular culture or pop culture is closely related to the concept of simulation, hyperreality, and the relationship between reality and representation. He argues that in contemporary society, reality is increasingly replaced by simulations. Popular culture operates within this framework, where images and representations do not just reflect reality but create a hyperreality—a state where the distinction between reality and representation blurs. He also suggests that popular culture commodifies experiences and identities. Individuals consume cultural products not for their intrinsic value but for the symbols and meanings they carry, which often lack depth or authenticity (Baudrillard, 1998b). Baudrillard believes that as culture becomes more commercialized and mediated, it loses its original meaning. Popular culture becomes a series of empty signs where superficial images replace genuine cultural narratives. Media plays a critical role in shaping popular culture. Baudrillard contends that media representations construct social realities, influencing how people perceive themselves and their world.

Thus, in Baudrillard's perspective, popular culture operates on visibility through images and symbols. An image is a visual appearance, picture, and mental impression of a visual shadow caused by an inevitable reality, whether in images, videos, writing, or anything visible. A symbol is a sign or emblem attached to the image. What and how a person's image is influenced by the construct of symbols and signs in him. Both images and symbols are fictional realities, with no original definition as a type of reality or fact, except for the play of signs and images, producing a lot of fantasy and imagination. In a situation like this, a person's behavior and paradigm of thinking in taking attitudes and actions, including in religious matters, are primarily controlled and shaped by something imaginative, entertaining, and artificial that occurs in digital space (Saumantri & Zikrillah, 2020; Oktavianingtyas et al., 2021).

This symbolic representation then gives rise to religious visualization practices that emphasize existence rather than essence, surface values rather than ethical values, and appearance rather than substance. In short, popular culture has reduced religion and its sacred symbols into a world of symbolic images, as in the "smile of collusion"; religion has experienced commodification at the level of meaning, function, and usefulness from what was originally a guideline to a spectacle, from a ritual of worship to entertainment in consumer society (Baudrillard, 1998b). In this process, information media technology and all its advantages and sophistication play a central role as a sophisticated machine that can hypnotize its users (millennial Muslims), design and package the appearance of religion according to the goals and interests of the actor, including constructing the identity and character of Islam for the millennial Muslim generation.

The emergence of digitalization of religion among millennials has triggered the formation of a new religion, a representation of identity that precedes and determines

religious practice. Millennial Muslims have more religious learning online than comprehending directly from religious teachers or *ulama*, which has encouraged popular preachers to turn to social media. Through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, they circulate their preaching vision to social media users or netizens, particularly millennials, as the most active internet users (Annur, 2022a). At the practical level, millennial preachers usually preach religious rhetoric through media convergence activities (Muhammad, 2021).

Therefore, popular Muslim preachers are new religious authorities that have parallel segmentation to millennial Muslim netizens. This similarity lies in their social relationships, which rely on self-communication models of using and utilizing popular social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and the like (Supratman, 2018). This fact is also an explanatory variable as to why, in many religious preaching activities, millennial Muslim preachers tend to use a popular approach regarding language, visibility, and religious issues. There is a wide gap between the level of recognition and liking of millennial Muslims for the existence of preachers between today's preachers (millennial and alpha generations) and preachers of the past generation or the baby boomers-baby-bust generation (Mujahadah, 2020). In general, the difference in popularity gap or distance can be found on social media accounts, such as the number of followers and the number of *likes*, which are more dominated by modern popular preachers than traditional preachers. This popular factor is why these preachers are currently more popular among millennial Muslims than traditional preacher groups; they, notably Attaki, who preaches through social media, have a widespread echo among millennial Muslim netizens.

Popular Islam or Pop Islam is a new phenomenon in the Muslim world, where Islam is viewed through a new system of meaning in the sense of popular culture. Islam is obtained as a representation of religion offered, branded, and repackaged so that religion is no longer considered separate from one's life (Ruthven, 2006; Bunt, 2012). Pop Islam provides a new perspective on religion that is biased with popular cultural values (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003; Ruthven, 2006) so that Muslims distinguish between the basics of religion as taught by the Prophet and what has been marketed as 'Islamic.' Thus, pop Islam personalizes popular culture into a reality that offers alternative discourses in established religious practices and captivatingly absorbs new identities. This term combines religious and economic aspects, so it seems Islam fascinates preachers in promoting and broadcasting their products (Noor, 2015) or religious consumption (Millie & Baulch, 2024); consequently, the preachers are like agents marketing commodities that sell well among millennial Muslims. On the other hand, religious populism has become a new trend involving millennial Muslim preachers, especially right-wing preachers who infiltrate ideological and political views into theocracy (Williamson et al., 2022).

## Method

This study uses a visual ethnography method to investigate various events in the internet world in-depth and the implications they cause, especially for users (Hine, 2000). This method is used to observe, investigate, and analyze Attaki's social media accounts as users in his preaching practices, which include the discourse of religious identity built by his concerning pop Islam. So, this paper discusses religiosity and Muslim identity on social media, which is related to Attaki's enchanting preaching in the context of popular Islam discourse. This preaching disseminates a primordial narrative or rhetoric so that it can easily target and influence the dimensions of the imagination and emotions of her congregation or followers among millennial Muslims.

Thus, the primary data used in this study includes Attaki's social media accounts, especially on Instagram (@Hanan_attaki) and YouTube (@HananAttaki) in 2022. Then, it was supported by other data, such as Attaki's background as a famous preacher and others related to the discourse of Muslim identity and Pop Islam in Indonesia. In 2022, YouTube had approximately 2.6 billion active users globally, making it one of the largest social media platforms in the world. As the world's most popular video content-sharing media, YouTube, a video-sharing website founded in 2005, users can do many things, from uploading, watching, sharing, and uploading various videos. In Indonesia, YouTube has around 139 million users, accounting for 50% of the population, reflecting its widespread popularity for video content consumption in the country (DataReportal, 2022). Then, Instagram users (2022) have reached more than 2 billion, especially in Indonesia, where Instagram users are 99.15 million, or equivalent to 35.7 percent of the national population. Interestingly, the data shows that most Instagram users in Indonesia are from the 18-24 age group, which is 33.90 million. In detail, 19.8% of the application's users are female, while 17.5% are male (DataReportal, 2022). The data shows that users of both social media are popular among Indonesian netizens.

Furthermore, this study employs Baudrillard's (1994a) hyperreality analysis to interpret and examine how Attaki circulates the discourse of religious identity in his popular preaching on social media. This is relevant to examine the current phenomenon of millennial Muslims in Indonesia due to the symbolic construction of religious reality, the meaning of sacred values, and the perception of Muslim identity, rather than the shift in the function and use of Islamic preaching on social media. Baudrillard (2003c) questions the representation of reality infiltrated by images, virtuality, and fiction. The construction of a new reality has undergone a process of reification and commodification in the symbolic dimension so that the image of a Muslim or his obedience to religion becomes a new sign that is free from references to religious teachings, including religious practices and teachings, as a simulacrum in new religious discourse (Baudrillard, 1994a). The meaning of identity that does not refer to Islamic reality (the loss of history) is supported by popular culture as one of the spaces for the proliferation of fascinating religious hyperreality. The proliferation of this preaching mediates by reproducing the

meaning of religious identity into a ready-made object of consumption for millennial Muslims (Baudrillard, 1994a; 1998b).

## Results and Discussion

### Popular Preachers Nowadays, Influencers or Programmers?

The number of followers or subscribers can identify popular preachers on social media. The following is data on the ten lists of preachers with the most followers on Instagram accounts dominated by millennial preachers. The number of followers with the most is Attaki, with 9.2 million. This number is much higher than the previous generations of preachers, such as Shihab, with 284 thousand Instagram followers. Then, in sequence, it was obtained by Felix Siauw with 5.1 million followers, Adi Hidayat with 3.6 million followers, and the young preacher who has just risen (just become famous), Syam al-Marusy with 1.6 million followers.

**Figure 1.** ***Top Ten Preachers Based on the Number of Followers on Instagram Accounts***

| No | Preachers | Number of Followers |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hanan Attaki | 9.2 million |
| 2 | Abdullah Gymnastiar (AA Gym) | 7.2 million |
| 3 | Abdus Somad | 6.7 million |
| 4 | Felix Siaw | 5.1 million |
| 5 | Syekh Ali Jaber | 3.9 million |
| 6 | Adi Hidayat | 3.6 million |
| 7 | Yusuf Mansyur | 2.8 million |
| 8 | Khalid Z.A Basalamah | 2.8 million |
| 9 | Gus Miftah | 2.0 million |
| 10 | Syam al-Marusy | 1.6 million |

Note. Data collected from a survey conducted by the author in June 2022

Attaki has two Instagram accounts: @hanan_attaki and @shiftmedia.id. The first account was created on October 9, 2015; until 2022, the number of followers had reached 9.2 million. The account profile mentions several pieces of information, including its founder, management, contact number, and its prominent tagline in the form of a narrative, "*Banyak maen, banyak manfaat, banyak pahala* (Lots of play, lots of benefits, lots of rewards)." This jargon is commonly written on his social media accounts. This tagline is followed by its activity feed, in which video galleries and images of religious content dominate.

Meanwhile, Attaki groups them into several genres in his photo and video posts while still displaying a religious nuance. Based on observations in his gallery or album feed, his account post page is filled with photos and videos of a series of his preaching activities. As with the theme of religious preaching that he generally brings, Attaki designs his posts on his Instagram account with a youth-style genre. This can be found

in several captions, hashtags, and photo or video visualizations of his posts, such as the caption on one of his posts entitled "*Youth and Nature, Entertaint tapi Tetap Spiritualitas.*" As for the photo and video visualizations, Attaki often displays elements of natural panoramas as the background of his videos, as it is currently a popular commodity among teenagers who are known to like nature exploration activities (healing), enjoying the exotic views of the natural environment.

Attaki's preaching activities in the media can also be seen on YouTube. As the world's most popular video content-sharing media, YouTube is used and utilized by people from all walks of life, including Attaki. The Attaki YouTube channel called "Hanan Attaki Official Channel" was created on May 11, 2017, and is affiliated with *Shift, gerakan Pemuda Hijrah* (the Hijrah Youth movement). It is recorded that since 2017-2022, the Attaki channel has uploaded 241 videos with a total of 2.33 million subscribers and has been watched for 90,662,070 hours. Based on its ranking, the Hanan Attaki YouTube Channel is in grade B, with details of ranking 1,069 for the category of number of subscribers, 97,507 for the category of number of YouTube video visitors, and 299 for the domestic category, and position 487 for the general public category (2022).

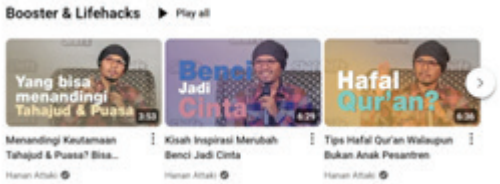
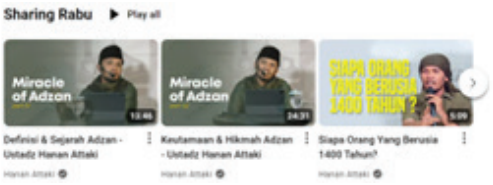
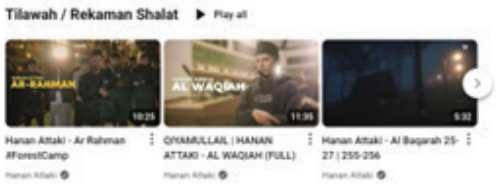
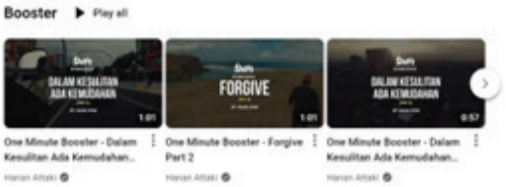
**Figure 2.** ***Number of Posts, Hours Viewed, and Subscribers of Hanan Attaki's YouTube Account***




Note. Data collected from a survey conducted by the author in June 2022

"*Programmer Dakwah*" on his channel description page, Attaki identifies his profile not as a preacher but as a 'Dakwah Programmer' with his tagline: *Banyak Maen, Banyak Manfaat, Banyak Pahala…* (A Lot of Play, Lots of Benefits, Lots of Rewards). However, Attaki, on his YouTube channel, uploads videos about religious teachings and messages with a presentation that tends to be casual and trendy. For example, in the video entitled "*Menandingi Keutamaan Tahajud & Puasa? Bisa Banget!*" (Competing for the Virtues of Tahajud and Fasting? It's Really Possible!), posted on July 4, 2019, Attaki appears in a casual custom wrap in a checkered shirt, wearing glasses and a popular knitted hat (rasta-reggae cap hat style). Likewise with his communication style in many of his speeches, Attaki often uses contemporary and trendy diction such as "*doang, udah, banget, ngerasa, ingin, direject,*" and several other trendy word choices (slang). On his YouTube channel, Attaki groups his uploaded videos into several categories, each of which is given a particular name.

**Figure 3.** ***Categorization of Attaki YouTube Video Content***

| No | Category | Number | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *Booster and Lifehacks*   | 63 videos | Contain relatively short durations with an aver-age duration of 3-7 minutes. |
| 2 | *Sharing Rabu* (Wednesday Sharing)   | 55 videos | Contains videos with longer durations. |
| 3 | *Tilawah/Rekaman Shalat* (Prayer Recitation/Recordings)   | 20 videos | Contains videos of prayer activities up to recita-tions. |
| 4 | *Booster*   | 34 videos | Contain motivational and reflection videos, with an average duration of 1-2 minutes. |

Note. Data collected from a survey conducted by the author in June 2022

The grouping of the uploaded videos is designed fascinatingly with slang and casual and fashionable language, as is the attraction of young people. This can be traced from several videos such as those entitled "*Dalam Kesulitan Ada Kamudahan*" (In every difficulty, there is relief) (January 17, 2019), "*Forgive*" (November 20, 2017), "*Di-Reject*" (January 18, 2018), "*Benci Jadi Cinta*" (Hate becomes love) (July 1, 2019), "*Miracle of Azan"* (March 14, 2022), and another video with the most viewers reaching 2,344,194, "*Menandingi Keutamaan Tahajud & Puasa? Bisa Banget!*" (Competing for the virtues of tahajud and fasting? It's absolutely possible!) (July 4, 2019).

## Behind Popularity and Popular Islamic Preaching

Attakis's popularity on social media parallels his personal branding strategy in his performance to reach the lives of millennials, both in terms of trending language choices, clothing styles, social networks, and popular preaching topics. This effort

is closely related to his millennial preacher and religious organization background. Hanan Attaki, whose full name is Tengku Hanan Attaki, was born in Banda Aceh City on December 31, 1981, the fifth of six children. He studied religion at the Ruhul Islam Islamic Boarding School in Banda Aceh (Syams, 2019). After graduating from the Islamic boarding school in 2000, he continued his undergraduate education with a scholarship to Al-Azhar University, Egypt, majoring in Tafsir al-Quran, Faculty of Ushuluddin, and graduated in 2004 with a bachelor's degree in Licentiate (Nizar, 2020). Returning from Egypt, Attaki lived in Bandung with his family, and there he taught at several institutions, including the Habiburrahman Tafsir Qur'an School Institute and Jendela Hati, as Director at Rumah Quran Salman at the Bandung Institute of Technology (Nurjaman & Herlina, 2021). In addition, he is also active in religious organizations, having established the Gerakan Pemuda Hijrah in March 2015. This movement made his name even more famous as a popular preacher. After seven years, the organization he initiated has progressed rapidly; his preaching activities are not only carried out directly by meeting his congregation but also by penetrating the world in digital platform networks, primarily through social media channels such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram (Septiani, 2020).

As a contemporary preacher, Attaki is well-known among the wider public, especially millennial Muslims and the next generation accustomed to living in a multitasking world. Although he is a preacher, his appearance and social style are unlike most preachers, who generally emphasize religious clothing such as sarongs, turbans, caps, shirts, etc.; in communicating, he also is not like most traditional preachers who tend to use serious communication models and relatively rigid, definitive, and thoughtfully. He prefers a relaxed and slang language commonly used by young people and topics of discussion in everyday conversation (Abdullah, 2018). In many of his preaching safari activities, Attaki performs in a contemporary style, such as how he dresses, communicates, and others. He dresses casually with a flannel outer shirt and a hat as his main characteristic. In addition, he occasionally wears jackets, t-shirts, and other clothing commonly worn by young people. Another characteristic that distinguishes his preaching activities from the previous (traditional) preacher model is his hobbies, like the millennial generation, such as touring, skateboarding, and enjoying contemporary coffee (Fauziyah & Noorhidayati, 2021).

Symbolically, Attaki's preaching model can be seen in the preaching tagline written on several of his social media accounts: lots of play, lots of benefits, lots of rewards, few sins, with his primary logo saying "Shift," which can be interpreted as *hijrah*. In this case, Attaki is skilled at modifying serious and mainstream religious themes. He simplifies issues and topics that are difficult for the public to understand so that they are more connected and accessible to young people. Social problems of young people, such as matchmaking, anxiety, dating, quarter-life crisis, sustenance, and other topics, closely intersect with the life experiences of today's generation; all of these have become popular topics that he discusses in his preaching to reach and be accepted by the younger generation. According to the Alvara Research Center report

(2022), internet-addicted users utilize the internet more than 7 hours/day. They mostly come from young people from Generation Z (Annur, 2022a)—Gen Z was born between 1996-2021, Millennials between 1980-1995, and Gen X between 1966-1979. Meanwhile, social media has been the primary source of information for the Indonesian people in the last three years (2020-2022), reaching 72.6% (Annur, 2023b).

### Encouraging the Discourse of Religious Identity of the Young Muslim Generation

As a preacher born in the millennial age group, Attaki is known to be quite close to social media platforms. In addition to being used for preaching, social media has also become the main stage for him to portray his branding to be able to reach various Muslim groups, especially the millennial group who spend more time and activities in cyberspace. The combination of entertainment nuances in visible posts on his social media accounts has ultimately proven successful in attracting the interest and enthusiasm of many Muslim netizens by identifying their religious behavior in cyberspace (Figure 3). The high number of followers of his account, which has reached more than 9 million followers, is the highest among all preachers in Indonesia (Figure 1). In addition, it is also clearly reflected in the number of responses from IGers on each of his posts, which can reach tens to hundreds of thousands of feedback.

Furthermore, considering the performance and visibility of popular preaching, it is not surprising that it can captivate and fascinate millennials—although the level of knowledge, insight, and religious knowledge of popular preachers differ from traditional religious actors such as *kiai* or *ulama*. At least this thesis can be strengthened by their learning process (previous preachers) who generally received comprehensive religious education in Islamic boarding schools with more than enough intensity and time, not to mention their works such as books, books, and the like. This fact contrasts with several popular preachers who only received a brief religious education in formal Islamic boarding schools or none.

However, from the perspective of pop Islam, this religious phenomenon in the social media space, in the context of Attaki as a popular preacher, influences his many followers. Attaki's preaching model is related to contemporary discourse on the religious identity of young Muslims in Indonesia. Identities in popular culture are often constructed distortively through simplistic and stereotypical media because the media not only reflects reality but also actively contributes to representing narratives that construct the understanding of Muslim society (Mamdani, 2022; Ruthven, 2006); even these representations focus on violence, terrorism, and exoticism, thus creating stigma and prejudice (Sardar, 2023).

### Consuming, Marketing, and Endorsing Religious Products: Integration of Capitalism and Islam

However, the representation reveals a fascinating cultural modification, with Muslims embracing a consumerist lifestyle and directing interest in global brands, fashion,

and the latest trends. This adaptation to modernity and capitalist values is a fascinating or captivating aspect innate to popular culture, for instance, pragmatic, popularity, contemporaneity, superficial, profane, instant, visibility, stylish, prestigious, following trends, and standardization of sense, entertaining, hedonistic, dissatisfaction with desires for consumption, hybrid, hyperreality, and loss of territoriality in consumer society. These characteristics are interrelated and intertwined, as evidenced in Attaki's popular preaching activities on social media.

Reality in this pragmatic view can be considered proper when it is in line with interests and beneficial according to the understanding of its subjectivity, thus causing the loss of critical power. This aligns with the materialistic view of his factual preaching activities and his preaching model on social media (Figure 2), emphasizing the popular aspect and the popularity related to financial income as a user. In this context, Attaki's hybrid preaching activities operate simultaneously in factual and popular digital spaces. In real space, Attaki sermonizes through Islamic communities, such as Shift, Pesantrend, Forestcamp, and other programs that use event organizers to preach around various cities. Interestingly, on many occasions, he often popularly designs his religious activities, such as collaborating with famous artists or figures not for free but paid, with unusual places such as mosques or religious-based places but in hotels or enormous ballrooms (Nabilla, 2024). This differs from the previous generation of preachers who preferred to carry out their preaching openly and for the general public. In practice, Attaki's preaching directly to meet the congregation was rejected or canceled several times by citizens for various reasons (Meilisa, 2023), such as those that emerged because it was indicated to be affiliated with Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) or adhering to the Salafy-Wahabi that believes in the caliphate or fights for an Islamic state—but in mid-2023 Attaki declared himself as *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah* (Aswaja) by joining the NU religious organization to negate these accusations (Rizki, 2023).

Regardless of whether these accusations are true or not, this shows that there are different perceptions of the Muslim public towards their image and their preaching messages visualized through social media with actual preaching. Indeed, figural media representation offers a more complex experience than previous cultures (Pauwels, 2010). With a visual strategy that offers excellence and sophistication, Attaki reproduces images and symbols to present a new reality in Muslim communities. In addition, visual culture can also reduce reality. It can even present and display reality beyond the original. However, precisely, as in popular culture, this strategy is quite effective and successful in attracting the attention and enthusiasm of Muslims, especially millennial Muslim netizens. This success can be seen from the high number of followers on his social media, reaching millions (Figure 1).

Furthermore, in constructing a consumer society, the subject positions himself as a consumer who buys, uses, and enjoys products or commodities. However, consumers are not just a matter of taste and desire; they are not just about passive needs. Consumers also actively give more (additional) meaning to their activities, which means

that consuming something they find pleasure and satisfaction represents the existence of their identity, social class, and economic status (Kucuk, 2016; Yassin, 2021). In this context, understanding the culture of consumerism behind the emergence of millennial Muslim preachers can be interpreted as the religious behavior of Muslim netizens in consuming contemporary religious activities such as lectures, preaching, and the like is not always purely due to religious factors or motivations. More than that, such practices represent contemporary meaning that becomes a social space to express lifestyle, trends in religion, social status, and even economic status. So, through religious activities and patterns like this, their existence or presence as a millennial Muslim generation feels more alive and recognized by their surroundings.

Such self-image is part of the popular daily lifestyle of society. This lifestyle focuses on visibility and performativity, usually used to attract attention to the conditions or surroundings (McCracken, 1986). The better, more attractive, and contemporary a person's style is, the more he or she becomes the center of public attention. This happens in the pop Islam phenomenon among millennial Muslim preachers in Indonesia, as in the case of Attaki. The construction of contemporary culture (re)produced directly by technology and information media provides symbolic satisfaction to its followers so that reality experiences more than its original meaning (hyperreality), which not only obscures meaning but also distorts and creates a new imitation of reality. In other words, the subject can no longer distinguish between the original and the imitation, between fact and image, between real and fictional (simulation). It is a vague entity formed by the play of signs and symbols. However, in this context, the reality of Pop Islam by millennial preachers is accepted by the public. It has even taken over religious authority and occupied a crucial position in religious life. The commodification of religion in the form of popular narratives and contemporary Attaki symbolization has made religion seem to be out of the real world. Religion tends to be presented as a symbolic representation rather than the essence of Islamic teachings—in short, it is positioned more as a spectacle than a guide, which is separate from the meaning of degrading or lowering the sacredness of religion theologically, but more on how religion is manifested, interpreted, and applied in everyday life by its adherents.

## Ancillary Problem in Contemporary Indonesian Muslim Religious Practices

So, what and how do Millennial Muslim preachers play the impact of popular Islam on the reality of Islamic society in Indonesia, especially among Muslim netizens as the most active community group in the cyber world? Does this Pop Islam phenomenon have the potential to significantly threaten the sustainability of religious life in Indonesia as a new religious phenomenon that contains elements of primordial sentiment and popular Islamic identity? Pop Islam among millennial Muslim preachers, in the context of Attaki, at the level of practice is identical to the emergence of new cultures in religion both in the dimensions of values and teachings as well as rituals circulated through the use and utilization of social media. As the main space for religious learning activities, social media is no longer used in madrasas, schools, mosques, and places of worship

as is generally done by traditional preachers. This method and model of learning is not without problems. In addition to experiencing religiosity problems in the form of shallowness at the level of religious understanding and behavior, another problem that is no less crucial is their being trapped in the vortex of global capitalism (Levinovitz, 2015).

The magnitude of the attitudes and behavior of millennial Muslim netizens' sentiments towards various religious symbols and signs has become a momentum for the infiltration of capitalism (Siles et al., 2021). With their astuteness in seeing the market, capitalist groups cleverly make elements of religious symbols and symbols into commodity instruments to attract consumers, in this case, Muslim netizens. The construction of the hijab is not in the sense of simply covering oneself as required by religion. However, it has developed into various patterns by considering market tastes, popular model trends (Anwar & Mujib, 2021), and symbols considered Islamic and other religious practices. That is why, in many situations, this Muslim generation tends to show a consumptive personality in addition to tending to show religious sentiment (Fahrizal, 2019). At this stage, religious behavior is no longer formed and driven by needs in the true sense but rather by the drive of desire, hobbies, and simply following market trends.

No matter how expensive, the costs and burdens that must be borne must be paid by Muslims. Through these practices, they imagine gaining awareness and satisfaction from their spiritual experience and social recognition from their environment. That is why being religious in this young generation of netizens is quite expensive. This is because religiosity has been incorporated into global market capitalism, including fashion, lifestyle, infotainment, film, etc. Muslims who are active in producing and consuming culture and cultural products (fashion) are dominated by urban or urban Muslims and the upper middle class. It is rarely consumed by lower-class Muslims, especially those living in rural areas, the interior, and underdeveloped areas (Yunianti, 2022). Apart from that, another problem that is no less crucial is related to the psychology of millennial Muslims, who are still in an unstable phase in terms of age. In this phase, younger Muslim generations do not yet have high critical reasoning skills; they quickly consume various news and information widely spread in cyberspace. At the same time, the internet network on social media has become an incubator for the spread of radicalism and global extremism. The preaching of popular millennial preachers also needs to be scrutinized for their messages and views because the threat from right-wing preachers still has grand ambitions to shift the ideology and political system in the state and nation from a democratic system to a theocratic system (Williamson et al., 2022).

In the context of Indonesia, it is pretty logical that the existence of the young Muslim generation group is the main target for the spread of radicalism because this group is the dominant generation that plays a strategic role and functions in the explosion of the youth population in the future. With mental power that is still weak and exacerbated by the level of knowledge and understanding of religion that is still shallow,

it practically makes their minds and thoughts easily contaminated. Concerns in that direction are not without reason; based on the latest survey by the National Counter-terrorism Agency (BNPT), it was found that as many as 85 percent of the millennial generation in Indonesia are vulnerable to being exposed to extremist understanding or teachings, both extremism motivated by religious understanding and certain political ideologies. Therefore, critical power and intense religious deepening that is genuinely learned from ulama, whose knowledge is recognized, is undoubtedly the solution, not popularity and passionate passion in religion.

## Conclusion

The Pop Islam phenomenon in Attaki's preaching integrates religion with popular culture, especially among young Muslims in Indonesia. As a prominent preacher in social media, Attaki plays a crucial role in shaping the religious behavior of young Muslims through media platforms like Instagram and YouTube. This new trend promotes visibility and a popular approach to religious practices, often attending to reduce symbols and lifestyle choices rather than deep, sincere worship or even vulnerable infiltrated by extreme religious ideologies. The phenomenon reflects a broader cultural shift where religion becomes a consumable product, influenced by social media trends and hyper-reality in lifestyle. Young Muslims, searching for identity and meaning amidst social and political uncertainty, are drawn to simplified and accessible religious content. However, these risks weaken their commitment to traditional religious principles, leading to a comprehensive understanding of Islam. The challenge for the Muslim community is to reassert the importance of spiritual depth and sincere religious practices beyond appearances or popular trends.

The study's significance underlines how religion is being transformed by popular culture and social media and its consequences, particularly among young Muslims in Indonesia. Religious teachings are becoming more accessible and appealing, aligning with modern digital lifestyles. Attaki connects with a younger audience seeking identity and meaning by using entertainment elements and relatable content on platforms like Instagram and YouTube. However, while this makes religion more visible, it also presents risks. The content may reduce religious practice to superficial symbols and trends, and young people may become vulnerable to extreme ideologies due to the over-simplified nature of the content. This reflects a broader cultural shift, where religion is commodified and potentially forfeits spiritual essence. Thus, the challenge for the Muslim community is to strike a careful balance between embracing modern platforms to engage youth and preserving Islam's more profound spiritual and traditional values. Ultimately, the younger Muslim generation is more likely to see religious practice as something that can be chosen according to desire and not as an obligation that must be carried out sincerely.

The recommendation of this study for further research is to explore how the Pop Islam phenomenon impacts young Muslims' long-term spiritual development and religious understanding. Future studies could investigate how engagement with popular

religious content through social media affects deep religious commitment and adherence to traditional practices. Additionally, research could examine strategies for balancing the appeal of modern platforms with the need to preserve Islam's core spiritual and doctrinal principles. Further exploration is also needed to assess the potential risks of oversimplified religious messaging leading to vulnerability to extreme ideologies and how these risks can be mitigated through responsible religious education in digital spaces. In addition, this study has not focused too much on the potential for overcoming this problem by integrating local cultural wisdom, which is not superficial, into popular preaching to reformulate it into preaching strategies that influence the construction of identity and religious practices of more modest young Muslims.

### Statement of Interest

The author has no conflicts of interest.

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