Everyday Lived Islam: Malaysian Muslim Women's Performance of Religiosity Online

Siti Mazidah Haji Mohamad
Universiti Brunei Darussalam

Abstract

Today, as societies adapt to new technologies, new 'spaces' are created and explored, and although these are not initially intended for religious purposes, they become a space for the performance of religiosity. What we now witness are religious activities and practices conducted in a manner which differs from before. Also, these take place in a space that is distinct from those in the offline environment. New forms of religious practices emerged as exemplified by the growth in the content that users are sharing on most social media platforms. Such adaptation and nuances in online experiences and contexts have resulted in the emergence of new forms of everyday lived Muslim performance of religiosity. This paper examines Malaysian Muslim women's everyday self-presentation on Facebook and their use of the site for performing extrinsic religious practices to capture their everyday lived Islam and young people's religiosities in the new media age.

Introduction

The Internet has been providing new spaces for religious representations and practices beyond the conventional physical spaces. Scholars of different

disciplines have been interested in the Muslim presence on and in the media and the Internet and the knowledge of the use of media technologies to understand, further, the dynamics, nuances, and subjectivities of Muslim individuals and communities[1]. Studies during the past two decades have examined several issues. These include the following: the Muslim presence in and on the media[2]; the use of Internet to share Islamic information and Muslim dialogues for knowledge seeking[3]; specific Muslim communities on the Internet including transnational communities[4]; the creation of virtual Ummah afforded by the Internet[5]; and Muslim women online.[6]

Social media, in particular, has become an everyday space where young Muslims are, at the micro level, interacting with socio-cultural and religious others, constructing their religious identities and creating and

1 See Gary Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments* (London: Pluto Press, 2003); Cemil Aydin and Juliane Hammer, "Muslims and Media: Perceptions, Participation, and Change," *Contemporary Islam: Dynamics of Muslim Life, 4*,1, 2010, pp. 1-9; and Mia Lövheim, *Media, Religion and Gender: Key Issues and New Challenges* (London: Routledge, 2013).

2 Bruce Lawrence, "Allah on-line: The Practice of Global Islam in the Information Age," in Stewart Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark (eds.), *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture*, 237-253 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Elizabeth Poole and John Richardson, *Muslims and the News Media* (London: IB Tauris, 2006); and Rianne Subijanto, "Religious TV series: The Making of Popular Piety Culture in Indonesia," *Digithum,* 11, 2009, pp. 32-37.

3 Daniel Martin Varisco, "Muslims and the Media in the Blogosphere," *Contemporary Islam: Dynamics of Muslim Life, 4*, 1, 2010, pp. 157-177.

4 Peter Mandaville, "Reimagining Islam in Diaspora: The Politics of Mediated Community," *International Communication Gazette,* 63, 2-3, 2001, pp. 169-186; and Deborah Wheeler, "Islam, Community, and the Internet: New Possibilities in the Digital Age," *Interface: The Journal of Education, Community and Values,* 2, 2, 2002, pp. 1-26; and Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, "Portraits of Believers: Ahmadi Women Performing Faith in the Diaspora," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 6, 1, 2004, pp. 73-92.

5 Peter Mandaville, "Communication and Diasporic Islam: A Virtual Ummah?," in Karim H Karim (ed.), *The Media of Diaspora*, 135-147 (London: Routledge, 2003).

6 See Susan Bastani, "Muslim Women On-line," *The Arab World Geographer, 3*, 1, 2000, pp. 40-59; and Deborah Wheeler, "Empowerment zones? Women, internet cafés, and life transformations in Egypt," *Information Technologies and International Development, 4*, 2, pp. 89-104; Anna Piela, "Muslim Women's Online Discussions of Gender Relations in Islam," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs,* 30, 3, 2010, pp. 425-435; and Anna Piela, "Piety as a Concept Underpinning Muslim Women's Online Discussions of Marriage and Professional Career," *Contemporary Islam: Dynamics of Muslim Life,* 5, 3, 2011, pp. 249-265.

contextualising their everyday lived Islam. At a more global scale, they are negotiating the global contexts through everyday localised engagements and experiences. One aspect of Muslim life, the performance of religiosity, has been brought over to the online space,[7] which revealed the growth in individual agency in the religious context during the past decades. Of interest to this paper is the performance of religiosity in the form of negotiation of public and private religious selves of a group of Muslim women in a context collapsed[8] situation on Facebook. Performance of religiosity (practice and acts) online comes in varied forms and these could largely be demonstrated by way of construction and presentation of self and identity. In the early days of computer-mediated communication, social interaction and self-presentation were mainly based on texts;[9] however, the recent developments in technologies, videos, images, and hyperlinks have endowed us with simultaneous multi-modal engagements. The presentation of one's religious self can be done by means of identity sharing information, subtle preaching to others, constant self-reminders, exhibiting oneself wearing a headscarf, and written prayers to Allah in the forms of status (text) updates, photographs and video uploads. Additionally, sharing links of religious sites and liking religious Facebook pages could be considered as presenting one's religious self and revealing different levels of piety.

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7   See Ronald Grimes, "Ritual and the Media," in Stewart Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark (eds.), *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture*, 219-234 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). Ritual/religious practices and media were once separated as they are ontologically in opposition to one another; religious practices as sacred and the media as secular. Today, both religion and media have consolidated as we continue to witness the growth of mediated religious activities that are blurring the line between sacred and secular.

8   The term 'context collapsed' or 'collapsed context' refers to the presence of different contexts that are segregated originally but due to the features online sites offer (such as adding any users on one's social network site), these contexts are brought together. See Danah Boyd, "Taken out of Context: American Teen Sociality in Networked Publics" (PhD Dissertation, Berkeley: University of California, 2008); and Danah Boyd, "Faceted Id/entity: Managing Representation in a Digital World" (MSc Dissertation, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002).

9   Mia Lövheim, "Identity," in Heidi Campbell (ed.), *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in the New Media Worlds,* 41-56 (London: Routledge, 2013).

Facebook has also become an indirect mediator between the user and God and with the presence of the visible and invisible (hidden) audiences, has transformed what should be and used to be a private affair, into a public affair. The urge to share everyday happenings on Facebook has resulted in a unique religious experience. Performances are no longer centred on the number of times they pray (*solat*) physically offline but are now captured in different forms. Nowadays, it is common to see Muslims sharing text-based prayers as their status (in status update section), sharing religious meme, and including writing '*Alhamdulillah*', '*Insya Allah*', '*Masya Allah*' and hashtags (#selfreminder, #muslim, #islam, #muslimah, and #iloveislam to name a few) accompanying images that call for more Muslims to be pious.

Individuals' performance of religiosity online does not exist in seclusion; instead, this is embedded in their everyday interactions with those people from their own group and also with those socio-cultural and religious others who are present on the site. Such everyday social interactions, online as well as offline, are shaping their contemporary lived Islam and the Muslim landscapes we are witnessing today; from the dominance of physical religious landscapes such as mosques, and religious communal areas to more personalised religious spaces in the online environment.

This introduction section offers readers the reasons for the focus on online space in this study of Muslim women's performance of religiosity in the framework of everyday lived Islam. The use of this new space for religious purposes has attracted the attention of scholars from different areas of study.[10] In an attempt to conceptualise this development, scholars such as Lily Kong[11] introduced the term 'techno-religious' space

10 Such as Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson, "Print, Islam, and the Prospects for Civic Pluralism: New Religious Writings and their Audiences," *Journal of Islamic Studies,* 8, 1, 1997, pp.43-62. In the first chapter of their edited book, Eickelman and Anderson wrote of the development of new media technologies (fax machines, printed publications, Internet) and their potential as new spaces for dissemination of religious information. See also, Elizabeth Poole and John Richardson, *Muslims and the News Media.* and Thomas Hoffmann and Göran Larsson, *Muslims and the New Information and Communication Technologies* (London: Springer, 2013).

11 Lily Kong, "Religion and technology: Refiguring place, space, identity and community," *Area, 33*, 4, 2001, p. 405.

to describe a space that is created by technological developments as she has written "(t)echnological developments have opened up new spaces of religious practice – or 'techno-religious spaces' – and a consequent new politics of space, with refigured dominations and resistances." In her paper on broadcasting and religion in Singapore, Kong did not refer to new media and online spaces but this term is ever more pertinent to today's technological progress and evolving online spaces. Another scholar, Gary Bunt,[12] refers to this space as the Cyber Islamic Environments; these are environments that are specific to Islam and Muslims as a result of the existence of Islamic information and resources, such as websites and blogs, in the cyber world. These Cyber Islamic Environments enable Muslims to engage in dialogues and allow for religious understanding and expression of Muslim contexts.

These descriptions and the knowledge of the new public spaces highlight three points relevant to this study. Firstly, there is a close connection between the creation of these spaces and the growing individual agency. With the emergence of these online spaces and their mundane use by the users for everyday purposes, they are transformed into spaces with a multitude of contexts. In effect, the users' everyday religious experiences are transformed in dynamic and complex ways. Second, as a result of the first point and regardless of the dominant demographics of the users (who are young people), it is expected that no one space is identical to another as these online spaces have afforded the growth of individual agency. This point stresses the importance of contextualising young women's religiosity in these online 'techno-religious' spaces or in the 'Cyber Islamic Environments'. Third, as we are aware of the banality and personalised individual experiences online, these sites should be perceived as more than just a tool for communication but also, as a place and a way of being.[13] Internet offers new spaces and

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12 Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age*; and Gary R Bunt, *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

13 Annette Markham, *Life Online: Researching Real Experience in Virtual Space* (California: Alta Mira Press, 1998); and Annette Markham, "Metaphors Reflecting and Shaping the Reality of the Internet: Tool, Place, Way of Being" (Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers, Montreal, Canada, 2003)

tools for Muslims to engage with discursive resources available online, with own self and identity.[14] Hence, these women are offered sites to re-examine, express, and experience their religiosities in their own way.

This paper examines the use of online sites for the performance of religiosity by young Muslim women at a micro-scale level; it is expected that this paper could contribute to a contextualisation of everyday lived Islam that includes performance of religiosity in the form of religious practices and presentation of the religious self in an online environment. Everyday presence online is laden with negotiation and contestation and so there is a constant tug-of-war between freedom and constraint as users socially construct their experiences and religious self.[15] As their online presence comes with pressures and responsibilities, we should not simply regard these online sites as just a tool for social interactions and engagement but also as a space where everyday lives are embedded within, resulting in a seamless flow of religious offline-online experiences.

By considering the three points mentioned above and acknowledging the significance of this online space in our everyday lived Islam, this paper probes the everyday experiences of Malaysian Muslim women on Facebook; such experiences are typically multi-context, complex and dynamic. This paper focuses solely on those women's performance of religiosity in terms of day-to-day self-presentation on Facebook. In order to set the framework of this paper, the following section offers a discussion of Muslim women's presence online within the framework of everyday lived Islam. This section draws from everyday religiosity, performance of (Muslim) identity, and Muslim women's activities online. A description of the study is offered prior to discussing the performance of religiosity by the women involved in the study. In the penultimate section, a rethinking of Muslim women's religiosity, agency and the impact of digital technology is offered.

14 See Poole and Richardson, *Muslims and the News Media*; Varisco, *Muslims and the Media in the Blogosphere*; and Aydin and Hammer, *Muslims and Media.*
15 Siti Mazidah Haji Mohamad, "Rooted Muslim Cosmopolitanism: An Ethnographic Study of Malay Malaysian Students' Cultivation and Performance of Cosmopolitanism on Facebook" (PhD Dissertation, Durham: Durham University, 2004).

Muslim Women Online and Lived Islam

Why is there an interest in Muslim women, one might ask? Wellman[16] aptly writes that "(n)ot only is the Internet seen as affecting the rest of life, but gender, age, social class, *et cetera* are seen as affecting how the Internet is used." Today, women, regardless of their religion, "represent about half of social media users worldwide and constitute roughly three-fifths of the bloggers online. Such platforms enable women to create and disseminate their knowledge, share ideas, enter the public debate on various topics, and build solidarity around women's issues and gender equality."[17] This condition justifies the significance of further study of this gender group and as posited by many other studies of Muslim women,[18] those women are not excluded from embracing new technology and new media. Indeed, they are empowered by technology and their use of new technological advancements is on the rise. To date, however, their everyday lived Islam and in particular their religious experiences online, remain under-studied.[19]

A study conducted by Wheeler[20] on Egyptian women on the Internet has shown how technological advancement has empowered those women who participated in her research. Her research found that Internet access (at internet cafes) led to different forms of empowerment, especially in the Egyptian controlled Muslim society. Internet allows some women to transcend their local contexts and it heightens their awareness of other societal practices. It allows them to maintain current relationships and engage with new ones; for example, finding men to date. Online, they gain support from women in similar circumstances; for example, divorced or

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16 Barry Wellman, "The Global Village: Internet and Community," *Ideas: The Arts and Science Review,* 1, 1, 2004, pp. 16-19.

17 UN Women. S*ummary Report: The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Turns 20.* New York, 2005.

18 Such as Bastani, *Muslim women on-line*; and Ahmed-Ghosh, *Portraits of Believers.*

19 Anna Piela, "Muslim Women's Online Discussions of Gender Relations in Islam"; and Nora Repo, "Everyday lived Islam: religiosities and identities of Muslim women in the Republic of Macedonia," *Journal of Contemporary Religion,* 32, 2, 2017, pp. 417-430.

20 Wheeler, *Empowerment zones? Women, Internet cafés, and life transformations in Egypt.*

preparing for one. Also, they go online for economic purposes such as finding jobs. All these activities are forms of empowerment afforded by the Internet and technology and they are reconfiguring the traditional social, as well as, religious structure to which the women were accustomed. These women were able to extract benefits from this technological advancement suggesting how everyday use of the Internet and online space can create a change in their lives, not just as Muslim women, but also as women in their own society. Wi-Fi enabled gadgets are an excellent example of technological development which, in the case of these Muslim women bloggers, and many others, have removed their reliance on spatial physical location. Wireless access and mobile technology such as smartphones, have access to social networking sites/photo sharing apps; as such, they offer new features such as social networking, photo sharing and blogging capabilities, which provide a different form of empowerment for the users. Muslim women can easily share information at their fingertips and communicate with other users "on the go." As we continue to be comfortable with our current situation, we need to think further of how portability, accessibility and connectivity have changed our social and religious practices and we need to consider the implications for our day-to-day religious rituals. Accessibility and portability eventually lead to a greater amount of opportunity to express and perform religious beliefs and practices.

Being out there is different now for young Muslim women with the Internet and the media. Young Muslim women bloggers and YouTube users are taking advantage of the technological developments to share the latest fashion, trends (not necessarily Islamic), self-presentation, and to perform religious piety. For instance, the well-known YouTube Muslim personality, Amena Khan, performs Islamic subjectivity on the site via daily sharing of her make-up and hijab tutorials.[21] The relatively well-known Singaporean blogger, Dalilah Ismail, uses Instagram (@dalilahismail) and her personal blog (https://aveilofmodesty.com/) to express her Muslim self through fashion, such as her 'Outfit of the Day' (OOTD) posts. Subijanto[22] produced

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21 Kristin Peterson, "Performing Piety and Perfection: The Affective Labor of Hijabi Fashion Videos," *Cyber Orient,* 10, 1, 2016, pp. 1-9.
22 Subijanto, *Religious TV series.*

her case study of the production of religious TV series in Indonesia and of how religious practices, at a time when secular media industry is at its peak, are maintained and challenged. Her work showed that religious practices were appropriated both on-site (on film) and off-site (off film). This represented nuances and paradoxes in the practice of piety. On-site practices follow the trend in piety movement, with the storylines of the films adopting Islamic themes such as Islamic stories, veiling and Islamic wordings. However, off-site practices are not as straightforward as those on films (on-site). These include, for instance, the everyday negotiation of religious practices surrounding veiling and prayer obligations that are associated with the label 'Muslim' and which the female lead interviewed by Subijan to had encountered.

Muslim women's use of these online sites (the new religious spaces) indicated distinct individuality and expression of their life perspectives and religiosity. Online sites, such as those mentioned previously, provide platforms for these young Muslim women to express and to explore themselves. Rather than exhibiting a homogenous Muslim social and religious landscape, there was evidence of multiple distinct religiosities emerging from their personalised use of the online sites with traces of their religious communal affiliations.

We already know of the range of possibilities to which women's online presence could lead;[23] therefore, it would be a shortcoming if academia were to continue neglecting this group when conducting further analyses and in generalising the experiences of the young women online. A review of the current state of academia shows that Muslim women fare better than Muslim men, because the men received less attention than the women. Thus, relatively few scholars are interested in the experiences of Muslim men in offline contexts and such research has shown distinct contextual Muslim experience.[24] Such experience[25] justify further interest

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23 See Janey Morahan-Martin, "Women and the Internet: Promise and perils," *Cyber Psychology and Behavior,* 3,5 2000, pp. 683-691; Piela, "Piety as a Concept"; and Peterson, "Performing Piety and Perfection"

24 See Peter Hopkins, "'Blue squares', 'Proper' Muslims and transnational networks narratives of national and religious identities amongst young Muslim men living in Scotland," *Ethnicities,* 7, 1, 2007, pp. 61-81; Peter Hopkins, "Global events, national politics, local lives: Young Muslim men in Scotland,"

in studying just this one gender group. I acknowledge the shrinking gender digital divide but at the same time I do not suggest that there is a general religious experience worldwide. As said previously, I would want to avoid generalising Muslims' narratives and in particular their religious and socio-cultural experiences online, as evident in other scholarly work.[26] There is a need to examine these differential experiences between Muslim women by looking at how and what they use online spaces for on an everyday basis; this could reconfigure their traditional social and religious practices.

Women's online presence has been examined in a few studies,[27] but not all of these necessarily entailed study within the framework of lived Islam; however, they do explicate Islam and religiosity at every day and individual level. As researchers continue to witness women's online presence, somewhat liberated from the structure of religious institutions, it becomes appropriate to adopt the concept of lived religion/Islam and religiosity as a framework to study the young Muslim women's presence and activities online. Religion is part of our culture, society and everyday life and as Orsi[28] writes, [the] "study of lived religion situates all religious creativity within culture and approaches all religion as lived experience." Thus, the use of a lived religion framework to understand religion and religiosity in this contemporary period remains relevant. Lived religion rethinks religion "as a form of cultural work [and that] the study of lived religion directs attention to institutions *and* persons, texts *and* rituals, practice *and* theology, things *and* ideas-all as media of making and unmaking worlds."[29]

Environment and Planning A, 39, 5, 2007, pp. 1119-1133; Peter Hopkins, "Youthful Muslim masculinities: Gender and generational relations," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers,* 31, 3, 2006, pp. 337-352; and Niels van Doorn, Liesbet van Zoonen, and Sally Wyatt, "Writing from experience - Presentations of gender identity on Weblogs," *European Journal of Women's Studies, 14,* 2, 2007, pp. 143-158.

25 Also found in other studies such as Nadia Jeldtoft, "Lived Islam: religious identity with 'non-organized' Muslim minorities," *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 34,* 7, 2011, pp. 1134-1151.

26 See Lawrence, *Allah On-line.*

27 Such as Bastani, *Muslim women on-line*; and Piela, *Piety as a Concept.*

28 Robert A Orsi, "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live In?," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* 42, 2003, pp. 169-174.

29 Orsi, *Is the study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live In?,* p. 172.

Practice and contexts are important to an individual's religiosity and they do not always follow the structure of the religion just as the "concept of lived religion assumes that an individual's religiosity is in flux, defined and re-defined by concrete experiences and practices"[30] as we will see in a later section of this paper.

I acknowledge the features of lived religion, including lived Islam, as individualised, privatised, unstructured, and contextualised; thus, I focus my lived Islam on micro-level performance of religiosity. Few scholars of lived Islam consider practice (ritual aspect including rites and acts) to be one of the key aspects of religiosity[31]. This study of the performance of an individual's religiosity or religious self could provide readers with an insight into how individuals externalise their religious belief and experiences within their day-to-day contexts,[32] including interactions with family members and other members of society who would have an influence on their performance, offline and online. In this situation then, the "(c)onstructions of religion online ... are the outcome of a complex interplay between the conditions for interaction in a particular site, individual resources, and the nature of different religious traditions or "narratives" in a society."[33] This finding is also evident in my study.

30   Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion, Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), as cited in Caroline Berghammer and Katrin Fliegenschnee, "Developing a Concept of Muslim Religiosity: An Analysis of Everyday Lived Religion among Female Migrants in Austria," *Journal of Contemporary Religion,* 29, 1, 2014, p. 90.

31   See Alex Wilde and Stephen Joseph, "Religiosity and personality in a Moslem context," *Personality and Individual Differences,* 23, 1997, pp. 899–900; Steven E Krauss, Azimi H Hamzah, Turimah Suandi, Sidek M Noah, Rumaya Juhari, Jamiah H Manap, Khairul A Mastor, Hasnan Kassan, and Azma Mahmood, "Exploring Regional Differences in Religiosity among Muslim Youth in Malaysia," *Review of Religious Research,* 47, 2006, pp. 238–252; and Hisham Abu-Raiya, Kenneth I Pargament, Annette Mahoney, and Catherine Stein, "A Psychological Measure of Islamic Religiousness: Development and Evidence for Reliability and Validity," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion,* 18, 2008, pp. 291–315 as cited in Berghammer and Fliegenschnee, "Developing a Concept of Muslim Religiosity".

32   McGuire, "*Lived Religion, Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*" as cited in Berghammer and Fliegenschnee, "Developing a Concept of Muslim Religiosity" also emphasises the need to study individual religiosity to capture everyday lived Islam.

33   Mia Lövheim, "Virtually Boundless?: Youth Negotiating Tradition in Cyberspace," in Nancy Ammerman (ed.), *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*, 83 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

The Study

The research data presented in this paper are material obtained from the writer's doctoral research conducted between 2011 and 2012. As part of that research, male and female Malaysians in the United Kingdom agreed to take part in semi-structured interviews; these took place in both Malay and the English language and were supplemented with an online observation of their activities on their Facebook profiles. As this paper confines its scope to Malaysian Muslim women, and their performance of religiosity on Facebook, only the findings from the 28 female Muslims[34] in the writer's doctoral study are included in the discussion presented in this paper. These 28 Muslim women were between the ages of 18 and 40 and had been in the United Kingdom for between one and four years for their higher education. All the respondents have a Facebook profile, which was one of the selection criteria for respondents. The discussion in this article is based on a small and highly ethnicised sample. Hence, the discussion in this article cannot be generalised to the lived religious experiences of other Malaysian Muslim women. Although, the sample size is small, this study remains significant as it provides a deeper understanding of Malaysian Muslim women's individualised and contextualised everyday lived Islam.

During the study, it was found that these women had maintained a Facebook profile for a period ranging from a few months to a few years. They shared everyday activities on Facebook, and worked on expanding their social network, which comprised mostly people from their own ethnic group, Malay[35]. They had encountered good and bad experiences relating to their Facebook activities; these included being reprimanded by family members and peers because of actions that they considered to be inappropriate for the individual or the community. These women's

34 The subsequent chapter presents findings only from these 28 Muslim women. It is not the writer's wish to make general statements on everyday lived Islam of other Malaysian Muslim women or Muslim women in general.

35 Malay is one of the ethnic groups in Malaysia. In Malaysia, all Malays are constitutionally defined as Muslim. According to Constitution of Malaysia (1963), a Malay is a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language and conforms to Malay custom.

online presence is not free from daily issues and problems. In general, their online experiences are highly contextual and individual.

The main aim of my doctoral study was to investigate the potential of Facebook in creating cosmopolitanself[36] amongst the respondents through their social interactions and engagements online and offline. The second aim was to examine how the respondents in the study group performed and expressed their selves and identity[37] on the site. The main study consisted of two analytical parts. The first of these entailed discursive resources gathered and reflexively absorbed on Facebook, that allowed the respondents to inherit cosmopolitan attributes such as openness, flexibilities and tolerance towards religious and socio-cultural others. The second related to performance of self and identity (including religious self) on Facebook. This second part focused on the content they shared, the self/selves they presented on the site, the constraints they had in achieving successful self-presentation and the strategies they adopted to achieve their goals. In line with the focus of this paper, performance of (religious) self online, the findings presented in this paper are drawn mostly from this second part of the study.

From that second part, a recurring theme was encountered in the respondents' interview data, within the context as previously mentioned. That theme was on presenting a stable Malay and/or Muslim self while being an individual who understands others, and at the same time tolerant and open to cultural and religious differences. For most of the respondents, their presentation of self on the site was largely influenced by the social networks they have on Facebook: Malay Muslim family and friends who are in Malaysia and those who were in the United Kingdom; and social and religious others (British, other Malaysians of different race and other international students) who are in the United Kingdom and in Malaysia. The daily feed they received on their Facebook pages from other users, whether the information was religiously orientated or not,

36   Cosmopolitan self of an individual in the study is measured generally by their openness, flexibilities and tolerance to socio-cultural and religious differences.

37   Including cosmopolitan self; a self that is open to socio-cultural and religious differences.

would influence their self-presentation on the site. The consistent feed of knowledge exposed them to different ways of life and viewpoints that are vital to their self-reflection and resulting actions.

In general, religiosity is a multi-dimensional phenomenon consisting of belief, practice, knowledge, experience and consequences, while an individual's religiosity is a make-up of these dimensions in varying degrees.[38] But just what constitutes performance of religiosity on Facebook? Is religiosity and its performance the same between individuals and within different contexts? Offline, ritual practices such as praying, and chanting are considered to be performances of religiosity. However, the online environment and infrastructures challenged the obvious conventional religious practices and introduced a new context and form of religious performance. In this paper, the respondents' performance of religiosity is analysed through their strategic negotiation and presentation of religious and non-religious selves on Facebook. The findings, which are discussed in the subsequent section of this paper, suggest the prevalence of performance of the Muslim self and nuances in the respondents' everyday interactions and engagements on Facebook, that demonstrate their contextualised and individualised everyday lived Islam.

Performance of Religiosity – Contextualising Everyday Lived Islam

Central to the respondents' performance of religiosity is their belief that showing piousness online is not an obligation although performing some forms of religiosity are expected of a Muslim; showing any form of religious deviation is scorned upon. This view is shared by most of the respondents. This belief shaped their daily activities on Facebook and their presentation of self. The respondents' main purpose of having a Facebook profile is to communicate with their offline network, whether they are in the United Kingdom or Malaysia. However, they also use Facebook to obtain religious discursive resources and to perform their religiosity. From the interviews, I became aware of the dilemmas and struggles of this group of

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38 See Berghammer and Fliegenschnee, *Developing a Concept of Muslim Religiosity*, p.90, for a Muslim concept of religiosity.

Muslim women in their day-to-day interactions and engagements and self-expression on Facebook. Their online presence and actions are negotiated between different contexts; Malay and socio-cultural and religious others.

Such a situation may first seem to contradict the previous claim I made on the ability of new technologies and the Internet to offer Muslim women freedom and individual agency, with religiosity becoming more individual than before. Nonetheless, these women are able to share their voices and reconfigure their traditional and communal structures. They found ways to express themselves using the strategic use of the site's features and seeking a balance between these groups' expectations. While these women exhibit their everyday self-presentation and narratives on Facebook, they inadvertently reveal a spectrum of religious piety. The following sections of this paper will illustrate how these women, through the content of their Facebook pages, are effectively and strategically negotiating their private and public selves and religious and least religious self. This revealed their everyday dilemma in preserving their image and identity, whether it is as a Muslimah, a Malay, both Malay Muslim or simply an individual without attachment to religion or race. For the purpose of accentuating the nuances in their religious stands and self-presentation, these28 female respondents are placed into three general categories (*I'm a Muslimah*, *I'm a Muslim but I don't share much religious material*, and *I'm a Muslim but I don't share religious stuff at all).* It is nonetheless critical to emphasise that this categorisation is not meant to offer a clear-cut demarcation between this group of Malaysian Muslim women as their religious viewpoints and stands differ.

'I'm a Muslimah'

The women in this first group, regardless of who are on their network, clearly exhibit the religious self as this is the identity that they are obligated to carry everywhere they go, online and offline. The religious expression of the women in this group is displayed directly by proclaiming oneself as a Muslimah[39] and displaying Muslimah's attributes on the site.

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39 For many of the respondents, being a Muslim and claiming themselves to be a Muslimah are not the same. All respondents in this study are born Muslim but only a few claimed themselves to be a Muslimah: a Muslim woman who is working on improving her religiosity; belief and actions combined.

For example, starting and ending a conversation with Islamic greetings (*Assalamu alaikum*, *Jazakallahu Khairan*), and preaching to others to do good as proselytising (*dakwah*) are obligations of every Muslim, in particular those who proclaim themselves as a Muslimah or those working towards being a better Muslimah.

As claimed earlier, not all the 28 respondents speak of their intention to display their religiosity on Facebook; however, those respondents who proclaimed themselves as Muslimah have to portray strong religious selves. One respondent, Izzah, mentioned that the act of declaring oneself as a Muslimah brings a set of expectations that is sometimes a struggle to keep up with. She has to act tactically when she is on Facebook as she needs to perform her Muslimah identity through her actions on site. These can be direct (sharing religious texts as a reminder to other Muslim to behave appropriately and proselytising); or indirect (liking religious pages on the site and as shown below, the use of the site's setting to manage one's religious image).

A Muslimah is always careful of her interactions with the opposite sex as direct and open interactions are considered least acceptable for a Muslim; between a Muslim woman and a Muslim man, a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man, and a Muslim man and a non-Muslim woman. The strategic use of Facebook's settings is her way of maintaining the religious self that she wishes to portray on the site. In order to avoid potential dissatisfaction amongst her family, relatives and peers by openly chatting with men on her Facebook Wall, she only accepts direct communication from them via the site's message feature. This precaution ensures a consistent presentation of her religious self and is evidence that points to a negotiation of her public (religious, Muslimah) and private (religious still but is flexible) self. In this situation, her religiosity is performed via direct presentation of her Muslimah self.

'I'm a Muslim but I don't share much religious materials'
The respondents in the second group do not proclaim themselves as Muslimah but their religious activities are apparent on Facebook, although not as explicit and intense as those who claimed to be a Muslimah. The

content of their profile and their actions on the site, on their own profile and on others, the presentation of a specific self, and their religiosities are negotiated to fulfil the expectations that the Malay community, and social and religious others, have of them. For these women, the presence of these two communal groups requires them to present a self that is not overtly religious primarily for those who are not Malay Muslim. However, that same self and those actions must be considered appropriate and acceptable to their Malay community on their Facebook network. This presence of others shapes their presentation of religious self and what is extreme, and what is not, are negotiated on Facebook with these people in consideration. This act says much about the complexity of identity construction, representation and practice of religiosity in the space where contexts are collapsed. Finding a balance in between is vital for maintaining a well-accepted image by both groups.

Rina's strategic use of the site to maintain her image is quite similar to Izzah's, although Rina did not proclaim publicly via texts or photograph that she is a Muslimah. She also does not proselytise on the site and her religious acts are limited. However, she is still careful with her actions on the site as she said, "I don't upload photos [of] me and my boyfriend. I don't do that ... probably because of family and friends. Also, because I went to religious school, Islamic school. Unless I get married." Her educational background which involved religious schools prior to her study in the United Kingdom, influenced her social interactions and the content she uploads on the site. For Rina, managing her image as someone with knowledge of Islamic teachings from religious institutions is expected. Actions such as photos of herself and her boyfriend on Facebook are one of the contents that are censored because pre-marital relationships are not encouraged by Islam or by her Malay community. Her careful presentation of self on Facebook reflects her performance of religiosity in a way that she is careful not to show acts and behaviour that are unacceptable in Islam and in the view of her Malay community. Her experience and strategies, interestingly, highlight the difference between one's private and public self and sometimes the struggle one has in managing an impression of oneself. Offline, she finds it acceptable

to have a pre-marital romantic relationship with her boyfriend, but she regards publicising their relationship on Facebook as unfitting. Here, in a manner similar to Izzah, she is also juggling between two versions of her selves: public and private.

'I'm a Muslim but I don't share religious stuff at all'

The respondents in the third group do not portray their religious selves on Facebook, for one of the following two reasons: thus, religiosity is not something that needs to be displayed on Facebook and also, the pressure and expectations associated with proclaiming oneself as a Muslimah are burdensome. The decision not to claim oneself, explicitly, as a pious individual is justified by the notion that religiosity (practices and rituals in whatsoever form) is an individual matter and it is sufficient when it is privately performed. The second reason involves apprehension in sharing religious information and portraying a religious self on the site; that apprehension arises from poor knowledge of Islam and the worry of these respondents that they cannot ensure consistency in their self-presentation.

In the case of this third group of respondents, their performance of religious self is not available on the Facebook site to be observed. Everyday sharing on that site is limited to mundane activities such as attending events and classes, travelling around the United Kingdom or to other European countries and expressing emotions such as missing family members who are in Malaysia. Sharing this type of general information on Facebook is considered to be a way of maintaining a generally acceptable self. This is a significant finding as we can see differing views on private and public religious self. The third group believed religious self to be a private matter, to be hidden from the outsiders' prying and possibly, judging eyes. As far as the other two groups of respondents were concerned, public self is a religious self; in other words, a self that needs to be displayed to others at varying levels and for different reasons, which could be individual or communal.

It has been clearly stated throughout this paper that religion is not separate from our day-to-day interactions. Because we are 'connected'

and are becoming more 'public,' our religiosity is tied to other people's expectations. The experiences of those Muslim women shared previously elucidate the contestation between community acceptance and expression of individual self; they also show the continuous search for ways to straddle between the two, efficiently. The Muslim women in this writer's study are trying to find ways to appear both as a Muslim (for their Muslim friends) and as individuals who can be accepted by their Muslim and non-Muslim friends (usually as individuals not tied to their religious identity). These women actively engaged in impression management:[40] portraying self as a proper Muslimah/individual through images, speech (text), links, and videos. From the previous section of this paper, on performance of religiosity, readers could derive that being online is about negotiating Muslim identity, to some extent, in relation to Muslim and non-Muslim others. The term 'performance of religiosity' in this sense refers to the presentation of a person's public and private selves to others, which is a strategy to cope with everyday challenges, trials and tribulations. However, not everyone is pressured to 'perform': there are many others who resorted to a neutral self-image (not tied down by any specific identity and specifically Muslim identity) yet subtly presenting a religiously acceptable self or none at all.

These three groups of respondents show diversity, plurality, and individuality in their religiosity and in their display of religious selves. Their differing approaches towards the performance of piety places their self-presentation along a spectrum of performative religious self. This ranges from a strong religious self (first group) to a weak or non-existing religious self (third group) and with a moderate level of religious performativity in between them (second group). This spectrum demonstrates the diversity of individual Muslim women's experiences and the performance of religiosity on the Facebook site.

Veiling Practice on Facebook

One performance of religiosity that particularly struck this writer's attention is the sartorial presentation of Muslim self on the Facebook

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40 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1959).

site. All the respondents mentioned that the act of wearing a headscarf is a mark of one's identity as a Muslim. With the literal act of covering up, these Muslim women's relationships with the wider environment are transformed.[41] Thus, this act brings with it a set of expectations about how an individual must behave offline and online, whether they openly proclaim themselves as a Muslimah or not. This view was shared by Nora as follows: "I think … you carry your identity wherever you go. It's a good principle for Muslims." Offline, this obligation is easily assessed as these women are physically visible. When on Facebook, one's physical image behind the computer screen is invisible to the other users. This is where the veiling obligation is appropriated by several of the respondents in this study.

Some women claimed that online, the veiling obligation can be adopted differently. Because of the setting and the infrastructure of the online space, women are not expected to share photographs of themselves with their headscarves on. For them, the ontological difference between the online ('from a distance', hence not in the actual flesh) and offline ('in person') space gave them the opportunity to negotiate this veiling obligation. Photographs of the non-veiled person are regarded as being acceptable for sharing on Facebook as these are viewed from a distance (on a photograph and separated by a computer screen). Unlike Nora and some of the other respondents (Erna and others), indicated that they do not mind uploading photos showing them without their headscarves on; Erna felt that people who opt not to veil in public are not less of a Muslim because they fulfil the other main religious obligations such as praying five times a day, giving alms, and fasting in the month of Ramadhan. Interestingly, those women in this group are also those who believed that religious acts must be demonstrated online (moderate to weak). Just as Berghammer and Fliegenschnee[42] posited, "an individual's religiosity is perceived as a changing, multifaceted mixture of beliefs and practices that can even be contradictory." The justification offered by Erna (and

41 Emma Tarlo, "Hijab in London: Metamorphosis, resonance and effects," *Journal of Material Culture,* 12, 2, 2007, pp. 131-156.
42 Berghammer and Fliegenschnee, *Developing a Concept of Muslim Religiosity*.

others) points to these women's negotiation of performance of religious self via selective religious acts. Not all rituals and religious acts need to be displayed on the site for a woman to be acknowledged as a Muslim and to perform her religiosity effectively. Furthermore, these women feel that disregarding the veiling obligation online does not indicate that one is non-religious, irrespective of what others may think.

However, another group of respondents believed that regardless of whether the space is physical/offline or non-physical/online, a Muslim's obligation still exists. Islamic decorum and norms for a Muslim woman remain the same; thus, headscarves should be visible in both spaces. Adding on to what Nora said about an individual carrying her identity wherever she goes, she continued to say that, "there is only decent pictures ... whatever that is suitable for public viewing ... I don't prefer to go out to public without headscarves so those (photos) without headscarves won't be uploaded." While there are two different views and practices on veiling, all these women hold the view that Muslim women do have the autonomy and freedom to decide whether or not to don their headscarves, despite the obligation. The difference of opinion regarding veiling has led some of the respondents in the study to adopt strategies to negotiate this specific veiling obligation; these include premeditated self-disclosure and self-censorship. Prior to sharing any contents, a thorough filtering is done to ensure that only content that fits the collapsed contexts are available on the site. They can share photos of themselves, without headscarves, with selected Malay friends and families. This selection is done by adjusting the privacy settings on the site, thus ensuring successful self-disclosure and impression management. The meticulous use of the online space and by taking advantages of the features and privacy settings offered by the site allow these Muslim women to negotiate micro-level concerns such as those on veiling.

Muslim Women's Agency, Religiosity and Everyday Lived Islam

As space and time are reconstructed by technological developments, it becomes imperative to re-think Muslim women's everyday lived Islam particularly online. To date, we know the following:

- our social interactions and daily activities are not bound by physical space as previously;
- the transformation in spaces and social activities continues to blur our online-offline everyday contexts;
- there are seamless online-offline experiences that feed into one another;
- the online presence afforded by the infrastructures of online sites comes with certain sets of expectations, which are both confining and liberating; and
- the growing women's agency and empowerment is enabled by new media technologies.

Overall, there is a complex interplay between space, individual agency and technology as discussed in earlier sections of this paper.

A change in space from offline to online allows individuals to experience and shape their own individual religiosity beyond the communal expectations of what religion and its performativity are. Online space provides both freedom and restrictions to these Muslim women. Their lived religiosity is inextricably linked to everyday actions and experiences, which are unfailingly contested and negotiated. This transformation has led us to a better understanding of young people's (in particular Muslim women) contexts and actions; as written by Tsatsou,[43] "the user has the potential not only to re-conceptualise but to re-shape and re-structure the time and space boundaries that matter for his or her communication." These Muslim women (re)painted own landscapes and experiences on the space to cater to their everyday life and social practices. An online space "alters the structural conditions under which people conceptualise and experience space."[44] There is a two-way process at work in this nexus of space and people. That process re-creates what we know of an Islamic/Muslim space. But what

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43 Panayiota Tsatsou, "Reconceptualising 'time' and 'space' in the era of electronic media and communications," *PLATFORM: Journal of Media and Communication,* 1, 2009, pp.11-32.
44 Tsatsou, *Reconceptualising 'time' and 'space'*, p. 23.

makes a space an Islamic/Muslim space? Offline, Islamic/Muslim spaces are identified by the physical landscapes and infrastructures such as mosques. Online, however, the social and religious physical symbols are absent and intangible and instead we observed religious landscapes (non-sacred) tinted by individual and communal religious and socio-cultural activities in different forms. Space indeed is re-conceptualised by the new technologies that inherently transform our everyday life and lived spaces; however, this is not to say that religious physical spaces are totally replaced by online ones. Rather, both co-exist and work together in providing seamlessly connected platforms for individuals' religious practices and experiences.

Aspects of a person's life, religion and religious practices are known to flow seamlessly from offline to online and vice versa. Therefore, any further study of everyday Islam must take into account this transformation in space and its inherent complex processes. Of equal significance are the experiences of the individual Muslim woman. Individual agency has taken the rein in the dissemination of religious teaching (sharing of religious texts) and the performance of religiosity. This revolution in the transmission of religious information speaks of the separation of the ownership of religious information from religious institutions to individual Muslims.[45] Muslim women have the autonomy to share religious teachings in their own unique and creative ways, whether this sharing is in the form of donning vibrantly designed headscarves and/or sharing religious texts and images. They decide what to disclose and what to keep away from their audiences and in doing so they shape their own religious landscapes particular to their own experiences and life perspectives. Their agency therefore materialises in various forms. For example: the individual's decision to disclose and censor self in terms of information shared; the autonomy to create one's own social network; individual expression of self; and ability to negotiate social roles as in the case of their headscarves, Muslimah identity and social engagements. It

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45 See Heidi Campbell, "Who's got the power? Religious authority and the Internet," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication,* 12,3, 2007, pp. 1043-1062.

must be borne in mind that online space together with the individual's will can assist in creating individual agencies, but these are not without constraints. These women are not entirely 'free' as there is and will always be a negotiation process between oneself and others, which is highly contextualised and established around the individuals, features and settings of the online site, and the dynamics of their social networks.

As previously found, expressions of Muslim self are executed through sartorial presentation of self together with everyday social engagement with Muslim and non-Muslim others. Veiling practices and managing a Muslimah image by the Muslim women discussed in this paper point to the interplay and negotiation between their private and public version of Muslim self and indicate nuances in these women's online experiences and religiosity. We are able to observe the spectrum of religious piety from their performance of religious self, based on what the respondents disclosed and those whom they censored to maintain a specific image (pious or non-religious individual). The individual's own socio-cultural and religious contexts are brought into Facebook and this has resulted in more-or-less similar offline social processes. At the same time, they depend upon the infrastructure, settings and access that online spaces and sites offer. It is true that the features offered by online sites allow the user to transcend physical boundaries but in reality, the user's connections and relationships are predominantly bounded geographically. Against this background, a supposedly neutral online space has been painted with a multitude of contexts; these must be taken into account when examining the performance of religiosity as they offer us a view of these respondents' everyday lived Islam.

In relation to everyday lived Islam, these Muslim women have shaped a distinct and unique form of everyday lived Islam where their autonomy, to some extent, takes precedence over communal or institutional restraints. An excellent example of this situation is the perpetual and complex reworking of various interpretations of veiling accompanied by the carefully-curated performance on Facebook, to negotiate their individual and communal selves. This should not imply that their actions are based on what others expect of them. On the contrary, these

women have the autonomy to decide upon their own lives, and which self to portray to others. Nevertheless, to some extent, the close-knit nature of their society means that they are bounded by expectations of families, friends and Muslim others from their own socio-cultural group. There are some instances where and when communal and institutional dominance are unavoidable. Offline, religious practices are a private and individual as well as communal affair but less of a strategy. Online, however, strategising religious performativity becomes a common experience although this is possibly not realised by the audiences. The end result is overlapping individual, communal and national Muslim landscapes online.

The concept of online spaces and sites as socio-cultural and religious spaces is specific to the main point addressed in this chapter: performance of religiosity on online spaces. A techno-religious space has been created which was quite different from what Lily Kong and Gary Bunt have espoused. Rather than seeing a mass religious broadcasting, we continuously witness individualised sharing that directly or indirectly involves the (re)production of space; a similar yet distinctively different techno-religious space or cyber Islamic environment. The Internet is used to solidify religion and its practices and to persuade the religious community to conform. At the same time, though, it offers a sense of individuality and of community. By connecting and interacting with each other, these women moulded their everyday lived Islam and created religious but not sacred spaces; experiences and spaces created by multi-modal interactions as indicated earlier.

Conclusion

In summary, religion is about more than just ritual practices. Thus, Islam is a way of life and this is translated online through these Muslim women's everyday interactions and experiences. We are witnessing not only new social practices and communication but an everyday lived Islam. Socially constructed technologies are transforming both individual agency and space into a distinct techno-religious space. The arguments presented in this article on performance of religiosity also

aimed to increase our understanding of the relationships between space, religion, and individual agency. At an individual level, religious teachings and knowledge are understood, engaged and interpreted in different ways. Hence, online space (social networking sites) must not be left out of our academic lens when we strive to grasp the complexity of individual agency and religious experiences, because this space now continues to gain dominance over offline space. The global nature of online space is shaping religion in ways that are conceptually and empirically different from our conventional offline practices. Online space is tied to events outside one's locale but in the case of performing self and religion the scale remains local, hence, the significance of this reflection on micro-scale everyday lived Islam. Today's online landscape is an assemblage of multiple religious, socio-cultural and political contexts. It is especially a youth's space, creating specific young people's religiosity at a micro-level. Finally, these Muslim women's religiosity has given us another view in comprehending the dynamics of new religious agents in this age of new media. Religiosity can be performed in many other ways, not only by means of presentation of public and private religious self, online. Therefore, in line with other scholars' advice, we must take great care to not generalise such micro-scale and localised experiences and then to extrapolate them to a global experience. Furthermore, performance of religiosity as described in this paper is contextualised and individualised and is to an extent a strategy to negotiate everyday life.

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Everyday Lived Islam: Malaysian Muslim Women's Performance of Religiosity Online

Siti Mazidah Mohamad

Geographical and Environmental Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam.

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS), Universiti Brunei Darussalam

+673 246 0922/0923 (Ext: 1406)

mazidah.mohamad@ubd.edu.bn

Biography:

Siti Mazidah Mohamad is a lecturer at Universiti Brunei Darussalam. She graduated from Durham University (PhD in Human Geography) in 2015 and her thesis was titled 'Rooted Muslim Cosmopolitanism: An Ethnographic Study of Malay Malaysian Students' Cultivation and Performance of Cosmopolitanism on Facebook and Offline.' Her main research interest lies at the intersection of geography, media and communication studies. Currently, her research centres on Muslim youth's everyday social practices and social realities in various new social media platforms. Within this research area, she has studied Muslim cosmopolitanism, online privacy in the context of young Bruneians' self-disclosure on social media, the rise of social media influencers or micro-celebrities afforded by digital technologies and their influence on Muslim women's hijab consumption, Muslims performance of religiosity in the framework of lived Islam, and Brunei's young Muslims 'Generation M' expression of identity on Instagram and YouTube. She has a special interest in youth's self-mobilisation and is currently leading a funded research on Muslim Bruneian youth's' self-branding practices on Instagram to explore their mobilities of different forms.