P-ISSN: 1907-7491
E-ISSN: 2502-3705

Epistemé
Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman
Vol. 20, No. 01, June 2025
https://doi.org/10.21274/epis.2025.20.01.85-120

NEGOTIATING THE SACRED: *Rajah*, Orthodoxy, and the Digital Reframing of Islamic Symbol

Muhammad Satrio Wibowo Zaki
UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia
muhammadsatrio828@gmail.com

Mukhammad Zamzami
UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia
m.zamzami@uinsa.ac.id

Corresponding Author: Muhammaf Satrio Wibowo Z. & Mukhammad Zamzami
Article history: Received: April 10, 2025 Revised: June 11, 2025 Published: June 29, 2025.

Abstract

The phenomenon of the rajah as an Islamic talisman occupies a contested discursive space between theological legitimacy and strong condemnation as a practice of shirk. This debate is rooted in the diversity of the Prophet's hadith, which, on the one hand, allows ruqyah as long as it is free from elements of shirk, but on the other hand, categorically condemns all forms of talismans. Whereas previously the relevant authority of the rajah was determined through fatwas issued by religious scholars and local religious practices, now the discourse has shifted to the digital realm, mainly through memes and educational content that represent sacred symbols in the form of criticism, satire, and esoteric narratives. This article employs a netnographic approach to discuss the construction of meaning of the rajah in memes on social media and netizens' responses to them, while also analyzing them from the perspective of hadith interpretation. The study argues that netizen involvement does not stop at spontaneous reactions, but forms a continuum of discourse: from humorous deconstruction to firm normative affirmation, then continuing to historical-esoteric interpretations. These findings confirm that rajah in the digital public sphere is a locus of popular theology that negotiates Islamic orthodoxy, local traditions, and contemporary digital culture.

Copyright: © 2025. The authors. *Epistemé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* is licensed under a Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0.

[Fenomena rajah sebagai azimat Islam menempati ruang diskursif yang problematis antara legitimasi teologis dan kecaman keras sebagai praktik syirik. Perdebatan ini berakar pada keragaman hadis Nabi, yang di satu sisi membolehkan ruqyah asalkan bebas dari unsur syirik, sementara di sisi lain menolak segala bentuk azimat. Jika sebelumnya otoritas terkait rajah ditentukan melalui fatwa ulama dan praktik keagamaan lokal, kini wacana tersebut bergeser ke ranah digital, terutama melalui meme dan konten edukatif yang merepresentasikan simbol sakral dalam bentuk kritik, satir, maupun narasi esoteris. Artikel ini menggunakan pendekatan netnografi untuk menganalisis konstruksi makna rajah dalam media sosial dan respons netizen terhadapnya, sekaligus menimbangnya melalui perspektif pemaknaan hadis. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa keterlibatan netizen tidak berhenti pada reaksi spontan, melainkan membentuk kontinum diskursus: dari dekonstruksi humoris hingga afirmasi normatif yang tegas, lalu berlanjut ke intepretasi historis-esoteris. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa rajah di ruang digital sebagai lokus teologi populer yang menegosiasikan ortodoksi Islam, tradisi lokal, dan budaya digital kontemporer.]

Keywords*: Rajah, Digital Religion, Hadith, Meme*

Introduction

The phenomenon of *rajah*, often formulated as amulets in Islam, occupies a problematic position in Muslim religious heritage and can sometimes spark controversy both in theological discourse and in the religious practices of communities. This debate is mainly rooted in various interpretations of the Prophet's hadith regarding the permissibility of *rajah* practices.[1] On the one hand, there are hadiths, such as those narrated by Imam Muslim, which indicate that the Prophet permitted *ruqyah* as long as it did not contain elements of *shirk* (polytheism),[2] but on the other hand, there are hadiths that explicitly condemn all forms of

[1] Syafi'ul Huda and Saifuddin Zuhri Qudsy, "Kontestasi Hadis Azimat di Masyarakat Online," *At-Turāṣ: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 62 (2019): 307. https://doi.org/10.33650/at-turas.v6i2.892.

[2] Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj Abū al- Ḥasan al-Qushayrī al-Naysābūrī, *al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Mukhtaṣar bi-Naql al-'Adl ilā Rasūl Allāh Ṣallā Allāh 'alayhi wa Sallam*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.).

spells, amulets, and *tiwālah* (love spells) as *shirk* practices.[3] This difference reflects the tension in the authority of religious text interpretation, which has implications for the people's religious attitudes towards the use of *rajah* in the form of amulets in various communities. Historically, the discourse on the *rajah* was largely determined by traditional authorities, whether through the interpretations of scholars, religious fatwas, or local community practices. Now, however, the debate has shifted to the digital public sphere. Social media presents a new arena where sacred symbols are consumed, reproduced, subverted, and even parodied through popular media such as memes. Thus, religious authority over the *rajah* is no longer hierarchical but is negotiated participatively in an interactive and contested online discursive space.

The theoretical framework regarding religion and new media is relevant for understanding shifts in religious practices in the digital age. Heidi A. Campbell, through the concept of digital religion, explains that religious practices do not only occur in parallel in the online and offline realms, but also influence each other and form new spaces of praxis where community, identity, authority, and authenticity are negotiated through digital interactions and media convergence, reflected in six main characteristics: multisite reality, convergent practices, networked communities, narrated identities, shifts in authority, and authenticity of experience.[4]

Within the *Religious–Social Shaping of Technology* (*RSST*) framework, Campbell emphasizes that religious communities do not necessarily reject technology, but negotiate its acceptance based on history, tradition, values, and collective narratives.[5] This perspective is in line with Gary R. Bunt's analysis, which shows how Islamic religious practices are

[3] Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath ibn Isḥāq ibn Bashīr ibn Shadād ibn 'Amr al-Azdī al-Sijistānī, Sunan Abī Dāwūd, vol. 4 (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Aṣriyyah, n.d.).

[4] Heidi A. Campbell and Wendi Bellar, *Digital Religion: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2022), 1–11.

[5] Heidi Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (London: Routledge, 2010), 1–11, https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781134272136.

contextualized in digital space through the concept of e-jihad, namely the transformation of traditional *jihad* into forms of online activism such as hacking, digital campaigns, and post-9/11 peaceful actions.[6] In addition, Bunt highlights online religious authority, particularly online fatwas, which allow non-traditional figures to gain religious legitimacy in the virtual realm, and introduces the concept of Cyber Islamic Environments as a global discursive ecosystem where Muslim majorities and minorities can engage in dialogue, disseminate interpretations, and shape religious consciousness through digital media.[7]

The development of digital technology has created a new space for religious discourse, where sacred symbols are recontextualized in different ways. Meme-based accounts such as @memeislam.id, @pos.total, @Neomistikposting, @Teman-temanBuluBurung, @PetrolWeeb, and @Kamz circulate *rajah* in humorous or satirical formats, often as socio-religious commentary that provokes debates on orthodoxy, mysticism, and commodification. Alongside these, non-meme accounts like @libraryofmagick and @zakicha.a approach rajah from a different angle: as objects of cultural heritage, esoteric knowledge, or spiritual practice, presented with a tone of preservation and authority rather than parody. This dual constellation highlights how rajah occupy contested positions in the digital sphere, ranging from desacralized images embedded in internet humor to re-sacralized artifacts curated within spiritual or esoteric communities. Public responses are equally diverse; some interpret meme-*rajah* as creative *da'wah* against potential *shirk*, while others perceive them as disrespect toward sacred texts, especially when Qur'anic verses or the name of Allah are involved.

This phenomenon highlights the complexity of public interpretations of religious symbols and shows how religious authority is reconfigured in virtual communities. Debates over the legitimacy

[6] Gary R. Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 19–37.

[7] *Ibid*., 124.

of the *rajah* take place not only within Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Salafi, but also increasingly intensely in the discursive space of social media. Muhammadiyah and Salafi generally reject all forms of *rajah* as shirk practices, while NU tends to tolerate them if they contain prayers or verses from the Qur'an intended to seek Allah's blessings.

Although a number of studies have examined the theological and cultural dimensions of *rajah*, its representation in digital space has received little attention, especially in the form of memes that combine symbolic criticism with popular internet culture. Drajat et al. (2021) examined *rajah* in the context of spiritual healing, Zidan and Omar (2021) studied *bazūband* artifacts from the Safavid and Qajar periods, Zamzami (2018) researched the practice of *Asma*' *Artho* (amulet money) certificates in Islamic boarding schools, while Maola and Al-Hasani (2022) looked at amulets as an alternative treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study by Huda and Qudsi (2023) discusses online responses to hadiths about amulets through content analysis of scholars' sermons. However, no study has systematically examined *rajah* in the form of memes as part of digital religious discourse.

Although a number of studies have examined the theological and cultural dimensions of *rajah*, its representation in digital space has received little attention, especially in the form of memes that combine symbolic criticism with popular internet culture. Drajat et al. (2021) examined *rajah* in the context of spiritual healing,[8] Zidan and Omar (2021) studied *bazūband* artifacts from the Safavid and Qajar periods,[9] Zamzami (2018) researched the practice of *Asma*' *Artho* (amulet money) certificates in

[8] Amroeni Drajat, "*Rajah* dan Spiritualitas Lokal dalam Hukum Islam; Studi Analisis Tafsir Hermeneutik," *Jurisprudensi: Jurnal Ilmu Syari'ah, Perundang-Undangan dan Ekonomi Islam* 16, no. 1 (2024). https://doi.org/10.32505/jurisprudensi.v16i1.8071.

[9] Boussy Muhammad Zidan and Radwa Mohammed Omar, "A Collection of Talismanic Bāzūbands from the Safavid and Qajar Epochs: A Descriptive and Analytical Study," *Journal of Association of Arab Universities for Tourism and Hospitality (JAAUTH)* 20, no. 4 (2021). DOI: 10.21608/jaauth.2021.88466.1215.

Islamic boarding schools,[10] while Maola and Al-Hasani (2022) looked at amulets as an alternative treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic.[11] The study by Huda and Qudsi (2023) discusses online responses to hadiths about amulets through content analysis of scholars' sermons.[12] However, no study has systematically examined *rajah* in the form of memes as part of digital religious discourse.

As an intersection between visual culture and sacred Islamic symbols, *meme rajah* deserves academic attention. This article does not intend to explore the esoteric meaning of *rajah*, but rather to examine how netizens understand, construct, and respond to *rajah* represented in the form of memes on social media. Using a netnographic approach, this study maps the construction of the meaning of *rajah* in digital public discourse while examining responses to it from the perspective of hadith. Netnography, as an adaptation of ethnography, allows researchers to examine religious practices, social interactions, and identity construction in online communities with their horizons and social logic.[13]

Rajah as Talisman: Text, Symbol, and Function

In Islamic and cross-cultural traditions, *amulets* are considered small objects, such as stones, metals, paper, or cloth, which are carried or worn with the belief that they have protective powers, especially against danger, illness, and negative energy. Savage-Smith (1997) emphasizes that amulets often contain Qur'anic inscriptions, names of Allah, or prayers believed to have intrinsic power, without necessarily being linked to a

[10] Mukhammad Zamzami, "Konstruksi Sosial-Teologis Ritual Ijazah Asma' Artho (Uang Azimat) di Pondok Pesantren Fathul Ulum Kwagean Pare Kediri," *Islamica: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 12, no. 2 (2018). https://doi.org/10.15642/islamica.2018.12.2.288-314.

[11] Mochammad Maola and Syed Mahbubul Alam al-Hasani, "*Rajah*: Islamic Talisman for Overcoming Disease," *Teosofia: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Mysticism* 12, no. 2 (2023). https://doi.org/10.21580/tos.v12i2.18845.

[12] Huda and Qudsy, "Kontestasi Hadis Azimat di Masyarakat Online."

[13] Robert V. Kozinets, *Netnography: Ethnographic Research in the Age of the Internet* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd, 2010), 58–73.

particular cosmological construct.[14] Porter (2011), through his study of the British Museum collection, describes Islamic amulets as "sacred inscribed" objects that work because of the authority of the sacred texts they contain.[15] Thus, amulets can be understood as defensive and protective objects that serve to protect the owner from external threats.

Unlike amulets, talismans, which in the Malay context are often called *rajah*, imply a more complex intellectual construction. It is defined as an object that is consciously created to direct or produce a certain influence through cosmological structures, symbols, and rituals. Saif (2015) places talismans in the category of Islamic occult sciences, which are rooted in the relationship between the structure of the cosmos (especially astrology/astral) and material symbols.[16] In line with this, Coulon (2021), in his analysis of the text Aḥmad al-Būnī, asserts that talismans are designed with special formulas in the form of letters, numbers, or diagrams that are believed to be able to "attract" cosmic powers. Farouk Yahya (2016) further shows that in Malay manuscripts, *rajah*s appear in charts or visual designs that are protective and transformative, for example, to obtain victory, healing, or social influence.[17]

This conceptual framework becomes clearer when placed within the Islamic intellectual tradition rooted in esotericism and the philosophy of letters (*ʿilm al-Ḥurūf*). In this realm, a *rajah* is not understood merely as a practical amulet, but as a point of intersection between cosmology, language, and spirituality. Authoritative texts such as al-Būnī's *Shams al-Maʿārif al-Kubrā* dramatize the belief that the combination of Arabic letters and divine names can emit spiritual effects that connect the inner

---

[14] Emilie Savage-Smith, *Magic and Divination in Early Islam* (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 1997).

[15] Venetia Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 2011).

[16] Liana Saif, *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[17] Farouk Yahya, *Magic and Divination in Malay Illustrated Manuscripts* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

realm with cosmic reality. Noah Gardiner's modern study of al-Būnī's *Laṭa'if al-Ishārāt fī Asrār al-Ḥurūf al-'Ulwīyāt* deepens this understanding through an analysis of the transmission and reception of talismanic traditions in Mamlūk manuscripts, and highlights the potential for an exchange of ideas between Muslim esoteric Sufism and Jewish Kabbalistic traditions of the 12th to 13th centuries.[18]

Based on the theoretical distinctions above, the fundamental difference between amulets and talismans can be mapped onto their functional orientation. Amulets are more passive and defensive in nature, while talismans, including *rajah*s, are proactive and constructive, intended to produce specific effects. This distinction is consistently emphasized in academic literature, although in practice the boundary between the two is often unclear.[19]

This distinction becomes even more significant when traced in a historical context. Engmann (2019) shows that 19th-century Islamic talismans spread widely through trans-Saharan trade routes to West Africa.[20] This confirms that rajah had a protective function and an offensive one, used to obtain longevity, healing, protection from enemies, and to ward off magic. Furthermore, their spread proves the transcultural and global nature of the talisman tradition in Islam.

Finally, the intellectual roots of talismanic science found their philosophical legitimacy in the thinking of classical Muslim scientists. Ṭābit ibn Qurrā' (9th century) referred to talismanic science as "the most noble part of astronomy." This idea was later reinforced by Ibn Sīnā, who

[18] Noah Gardiner, "Esotericist Reading Communities and the Early Circulation of the Sufi Occultist Aḥmad Al-Būnī's Works," *Arabica* 64, nos. 3–4 (September 2017): 89–92; 39-64, https://doi.org/10.1163/15700585-12341455.

[19] Savage-Smith, *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*; Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum*; Saif, *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy*; Jean-Charles Coulon, "Al-Būnī and the Sciences of the Letters in Medieval Islam," in *Islamic Occultism: New Perspectives*, ed. Liana Saif et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 215–20; Yahya, *Magic and Divination in Malay Illustrated Manuscripts*.

[20] Emily Engmann, *Islamic Talismanic Objects in West Africa: Trans-Saharan Circulations of Esoteric Knowledge* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

asserted that the purpose of talismans was "to combine the power of the heavens with the power of objects on earth so that from this combination a force is born that is capable of producing strange (*gharīb*) actions in the material world."[21] Thus, *rajah* as talismans occupy an important position in Islamic intellectual heritage, while also revealing the dialectic between sacred texts, cosmic symbols, and cultural practices.

The Dialectics of Hadiths on *Rajah*: From *Shirk* Accusations to Legitimate *Ruqyah*

The prohibition of using amulets (*tamā'im*) in early Islamic tradition is recorded in a number of hadiths with various chains of transmission. One of them was narrated by 'Imrān bin Ḥuṣain. Through the narrators 'Alī b. Abī al-Khaṣīb, Waki', Mubārak, and al-Ḥasan, it is mentioned that the Prophet Muhammad once saw a man wearing a brass bracelet. When asked about its purpose, the man replied that the bracelet was worn as a talisman against a disease known as *al-wāhinah*. The Prophet then insisted that the bracelet be removed immediately, because it would not add strength, but rather weakness.[22] Another similar account comes through the chain of transmission of Khalaf b. Walīd, Mubārak, and al-Ḥ asan, also sourced from 'Imrān bin Ḥuṣain. In this version, the Prophet even warned more sternly that if someone died while still wearing such a bracelet, they would not receive good fortune forever.[23] These two accounts show the consistency of the Prophet's view that making certain objects a source of protection or healing is a form of deviation from the faith, because it fosters dependence on something other than Allah.

---

[21] Ibn Sīnā, *Al-Shifā': Al-Ṭabīʿiyyāt*, vol. 2 (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Amīriyyah, 1907).

[22] Ibn Mājah Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Yazīd al-Qazwīnī, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, vol. 2 (al-Qāhirah: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah - Fayṣal 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, n.d.), n. 3531.

[23] Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Al-Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, n.d.), n. 19149.

The third account comes through a long chain involving a number of prominent narrators. This hadith was narrated by Muhammad bin al-'Ala, from Abu Mu'awiyah, from al-A'mash, from 'Amr bin Murrah, from Yahya bin al-Jazzar, from the nephew of Zaynab, the wife of 'Abdullah bin Mas'ud—who then passed it on from Zaynab herself, until it reached Ibn Mas'ud. In this narration, Ibn Mas'ūd emphasized that he heard the Messenger of Allah say directly: "Indeed, certain *ruqyah*, amulets (*tamā'im*), and *tiwalah*—that is, magical efforts to foster a wife's love for her husband—are acts of *shirk*."[24]

The commentary (*sharḥ*) on Sunan Abi Dawud reinforces the interpretation of these hadiths, which explains that reliance on amulets is considered a devil's trick. In one story, Abdullah bin Mas'ud recounts a man who asked a Jew for a spell to cure his eyes. Abdullah then stated that what actually happened was a trick of the devil, who stabbed the man and then removed the stab when the spell was recited. However, the hadith literature also mentions that the Prophet Muhammad performed *ruqyah* on his companions who were suffering from certain illnesses, and taught Hafshah special recitations for healing.[25]

This indicates that not all forms of *ruqyah* or *rajah* are automatically categorized as prohibited practices, but rather depend on the content and intent behind their use. The contextual background (*asbāb al-wurūd*) of hadith also points to the use of objects as amulets believed to provide benefits, not to all forms of religious recitations or writings used for protection.

One example comes through the chain of narration from Abū al-Ṭāhir, Ibn Wahb, Mu'āwiyah b. Ṣāliḥ, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Jubair, to 'Auf b. Mālik al-Ashja'ī. In this hadith, it is narrated that the companions who were accustomed to performing incantations since the days of ignorance

[24] al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 4:3883.

[25] Abū Sulaymān Ḥamd ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn al-Khaṭṭāb al-Bustī al-Ma'rūf bi al-Khaṭṭābī, *Ma'ālim al-Sunan Wa Huwa Sharḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, vol. 4 (Ḥalab: al-Maṭba'ah al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.).

asked the Prophet about the ruling on this practice. The Prophet then asked them to recite what they used, then stated that there was no prohibition on *ruqyah* as long as its content was free from *shirk*. [26]A similar account was also narrated through Aḥmad b. Ṣalih and Ibn Wahb, with the same core message: *ruqyah* is acceptable if it does not contain beliefs in powers other than Allah.[27]

According to scholars ,particularly in *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, *ruqyah* or protective recitations are permitted if they meet several conditions: first, they must contain verses from the Qur'an or the names and attributes of Allah; second, they must be in a language that is understandable in meaning; and third, they must not be believed to have independent power outside the will of Allah.[28]

If these conditions are not met, then the *ruqyah* falls into the prohibited category. The contextual background (*asbāb al-wurūd*) of the hadith permitting *rajah* is seen in the incident when 'Auf bin Malik told the Prophet that he used to use incantations since the days of ignorance. The Prophet then asked him to recite the incantation, and after learning its contents, he stated that it was permissible as long as it did not contain elements of *shirk*. The contradiction between these two groups of hadith, one prohibiting and the other permitting, is the main source of opinion differences among scholars.

Some scholars generalize all forms of *rajah*s as idolatry, while others adopt a more contextual approach, permitting them as long as they do not contain words or beliefs of idolatry. This difference opens the door to more contextual interpretations and requires caution in determining the boundaries between theologically valid beliefs and those deviating from the principles of *tawhid*.

---

[26] al-Naysābūrī, *Al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Mukhtaṣar Bi-Naql al-'Adl 'an al-'Al Ilā Rasūl Allāh Ṣallā Allāh 'alayhi Wa Sallam*, vol. 5, n. 4079.

[27] al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, vol. 4, n. 3388.

[28] Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Ḥajar Abū al-Faḍl al-'Asqalānī al-Syāfi'ī, *Fatḥ Al-Bārī Syarḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Jakarta: Pustaka Azzam, 2002).

The Rise of Meme *Rajah*: A Netnographic Perspective

Studies of religious practices and discourses can no longer be separated from the dynamics of digital sphere. Social media has become a new space where religious symbols, practices, and interpretations are constantly transformed and negotiated. One relevant methodological approach to understanding religious social phenomena in the virtual world is netnography. Rooted in the tradition of ethnography, it was developed by Robert Kozinets as a qualitative method for researching online communities and the social interactions that form within them. Unlike conventional ethnography, which focuses on real-world societies, netnography enables researchers to observe, analyze, and understand cultural practices, symbolic communication, and social dynamics within virtual communities in a participatory and contextual manner.[29]

Investigation Stage

The phenomenon of the "*meme rajah*" was first detected by researchers through the Instagram platform. Further investigation revealed that similar memes were also widely spread across social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok. However, in this study, researchers limited their focus to the three main platforms—Instagram, Facebook, and X—as these platforms demonstrated high levels of content dissemination and significant user interaction.

An investigation was conducted into several accounts that actively posted memes. Among them were Instagram accounts @memeislam.id and @pos.total; Facebook accounts @Neomistikposting, @TemantemanBuluBurung, and @Kamz; and X account @PetrolWeeb.

Initial quantitative data from each account shows high public attention to the content:

[29] Kozinets, *Netnography*.

A. @memeislam.id (Instagram) has 46.7 thousand followers, with 4,599 likes, 45 comments, and 104 shares on one of its meme posts.[30]

Picture 1. from Instagram @memeislam.id

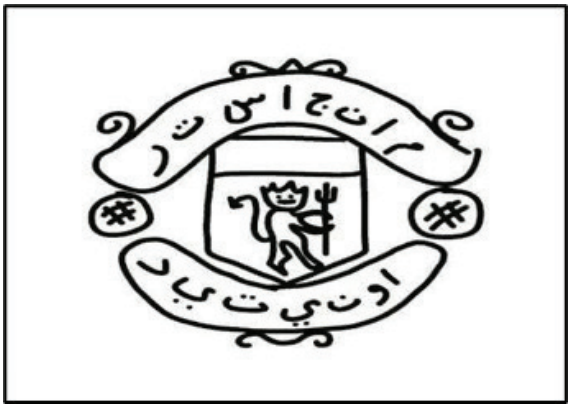
B. @pos.total (Instagram) memiliki 5.410 pengikut, dengan 10.389 likes, 169 komentar, dan 1.730 *shares*. @pos.total (Instagram) has 5,410 followers, 10,389 likes, 169 comments, and 1,730 shares.[31]

Picture 2. from Instagram @pos.total

[30] "Memesyirik," Instagram, September 14, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/memeislam.id/p/C_4LAV_zK_c/.

[31] "Perkumpulan Orang Santai Total di Instagram: '😌😌 -Raihan Nagara,'" Instagram, September 7, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/pos.total/p/C_onNmFhmhm/.

C. @Neomistikposting (Facebook) has 63,000 followers, 768 likes, 165 comments, and 431 shares.[32]



Picture 3. from Facebook @NeoMistikPosting

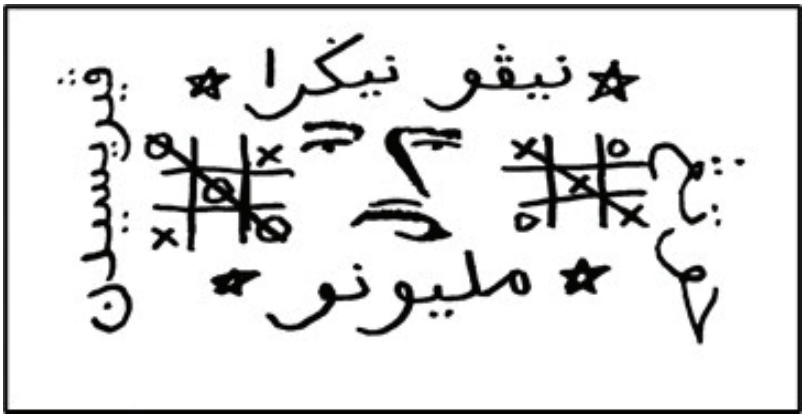
D. @Teman-temanBuluBurung (Facebook) has 56,000 followers, 376 likes, 52 comments, and 50 shares.[33]

Picture 4. from Facebook @TemanBuluBurung

[32] "MU," accessed July 28, 2025, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=916263737213749&set=pb.100064903926099.-2207520000&type=3&locale=id_ID.

[33] "Memerajah," accessed July 28, 2025, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=460557986981301&id=100090813114461&set=a.165476323156137.

E @PetrolWeeb (X) has 3,859 followers, with around 13,000 likes, 262 comments, 2,400 retweets, and 905,000 views.[34]



Picture 5. from X @PetrolWeeb

F. @Kamz (Facebook) has 448 followers, 887 likes, 220 comments, and 83 *shares*.[35]

Picture 6. from Facebook @Kamz

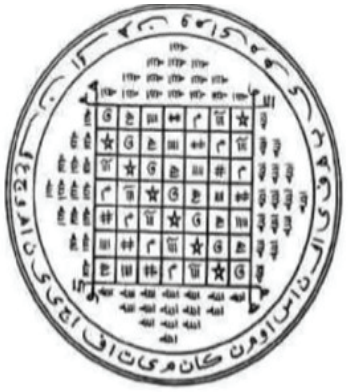
[34] Petrol Weeb, F [@PetrolWeeb], "Meta meme baru dari FB di bulan September: Manga Arab (Rajah) https://t.co/DOWSeZX0Qu," Tweet, Twitter, September 7, 2024, https://x.com/PetrolWeeb/status/1832373189927899231.

[35] "DokSli : Dokumen Asli ‍ #doksli 'Bising Bodo Aku Nak Tido'‍ Facebook," accessed July 28, 2025, https://www.facebook.com/groups/525844029229811/posts/1008601290954080/.

G. @libraryofmagick (Instagram) has 90,200 followers and 38 comments.[36]

Picture 7. from Instagram @libraryofmagick

H. @zakicha.a (Instagram) has 79,710 followers, 137.048 likes, and 2,822 comments.[37]



Picture 8. from Instagram @zakicha.a

[36] "Library of Magick di Instagram," Instagram, July 22, 2023, https://www.instagram.com/libraryofmagick/p/CvA77OOs8Sc/.

[37] "Zakicha.a di Instagram: 'Dikutip dari kitab Shamsul Ma'arif,'" Instagram, April 2025 ,11, https://www.instagram.com/zakicha.a/reel/DITvQhWz310/./

Through various posts, each account constructs a specific narrative and image of the *rajah*, as a mystical object that is parodied, as a religious symbol that is questioned, or as part of public education to avoid practices that are considered to lead to *shirk*. Netizens' interactions also reveal diverse responses, ranging from support, criticism, and debates to reflective questions about the meaning and legitimacy of the *rajah* within Islamic teachings.

An analysis of this phenomenon is important to understand how religious symbols are reconstructed in digital spaces and how the public forms collective meanings around religious practices that have traditionally been local and traditional. Using a netnographic approach, this study not only records quantitative data on digital interactions but also attempts to capture the deeper social meanings of the *rajah meme* phenomenon as a form of religious cultural expression in virtual society.

Interaction and Immersion Stage

This section presents representations of the *rajah* on social media, along with a variety of responses from netizens that reflect religious perceptions, symbolic expressions, and the discursive dynamics of digital communities in understanding the practice of using the *rajah*.

On the @memeislam.id account, a post shows a group of people prostrating themselves before a statue, accompanied by a quote from the Qur'an that emphasizes the prohibition of *shirk*, as well as Surah al-Nisā verse 48 about unforgivable sins. This post is clearly normative, attempting to classify *rajah* as a form of shirk. Netizens' responses were divided. @pemuda_akhir_zaman1001 questioned whether this kind of thing could be used as material for jokes, revealing the tension between humor and sacredness. @sarpianaji responded with satire, comparing *rajah* to the Prophet Moses's staff or the Prophet Muhammad's sword, as if rejecting the claim of idol worship humorously. On the other hand, @by_am13 expressed confusion by highlighting the word Allah on the tattoo, while @dudul_halal emphasized his surprise that many still

support the tattoo, thus reinforcing the anti-idolatry narrative promoted by the content creator.[38]

Meanwhile, the @pos.total account uploaded an image of the *rajah* uxtaposed with the face of YouTuber IShowSpeed, accompanied by the emojis 😔😔, giving a sarcastic impression. The reactions that emerged were also diverse. @nrpdnsc considered that the *rajah* should be used as humorous material so that it would not be considered sacred, which is a deconstructive comment on the legitimacy of polytheism. On the other hand, @journey_through_decade and @edgart256_ simply wrote "*Rajah*?", showing a lack of basic understanding of the concept. Interestingly, @annisautam attempted to answer with a brief definition, highlighting the role of netizens as knowledge mediators. Finally, @vvalenntinnoo pointed out the theological problem related to using sacred verses in the *rajah*, namely the conflict between the physical form of the symbol and its spiritual meaning.[39]

A post from the @NeoMistikPosting account featured the Manchester United football club logo combined with a talisman in a humorous context. Although it seemed lighthearted, netizens' comments sparked a serious debate. @Budi Sadewo asked about the legality of talismans, to which @Aditya Subagja and @Ahmad Zamroni replied, asserting that talismans are considered shirk. Meanwhile, @Joshua responded to the difference in views with a sarcastic emoji, as if highlighting the contradiction between those who believe in shirk and those who consider it trivial. There was also @Rohmat Es, who was concerned about religion being used as a joke, although this comment was responded to in a confrontational yet educational manner by @Reyhan Akbar and @Luthfi Azizah.[40] Thus, the conversation in this post forms a layered discursive space: between humor, theological admonition, and efforts to educate about shirk.

[38] Instagram, "@memeislam.id di Instagram."
[39] Instagram, "Perkumpulan Orang Santai Total di Instagram."
[40] "MU."

The @TemanBuluBurung account displays a comical meme, showing an illustration of a human head in a toilet held by the character SpongeBob, accompanied by informative captions. The responses confirmed netizens' diverse positions in interpreting the inscription. @ Optimum Pride used sarcasm to criticize the tendency to understand the Arabic letters in the inscription literally. At the same time, @Bonaparte Ricky supported the meme to educate young people about the dangers of idol worship. On the other hand, @Titan Nugraha took a moderate approach: he acknowledged the presence of elements of *shirk* in the inscription, but emphasized the need for caution when the text contains sacred verses.[41] This interaction reveals the dynamics between sarcastic criticism, didactic function, and normative caution in responding to the phenomenon of the inscription.

The post by the @PetrolWeeb account shows President Jokowi's face with a *rajah* pattern, which is clearly positioned as satire against the practices of *rajah* and *shirk*. Netizens' responses varied, ranging from support for the anti-*shirk* narrative to criticism of potential bias. @Zulka considers this type of meme positive because it conveys a theological message through humor, while @jojo expresses his appreciation with the comment, "Indirectly eradicating *shirk*, well done." On the other hand, @Yudistira criticizes the post because it is considered potentially offensive to certain groups,[42] showing the tension between the function of humor as a medium for preaching and the risk of generalization that hurts religious sensibilities.

The @Kamz account presents memes based on local Javanese humor, accompanied by explanations about the use of talismans in local traditions. The conversation in the comments section shows the dynamics of cross-cultural comparisons as well as theological tensions. @Ltpihmtt explains the differences between Middle Eastern and Javanese talismans,

[41] "Memerajah."

[42] Petrol Weeb, F [@PetrolWeeb], "Meta meme baru dari FB di bulan September: Manga Arab (Rajah) https://t.co/DOWSeZX0Qu."

but @Andre Saputra states that both are *shirk*. A sarcastic comment from @Dansstore highlights the misconception of understanding Arabic letters as sacred verses. At the same time, @Zhay Zwswozky quotes a hadith to justify talismans, even though some other users reject its textual interpretation. Finally, an ambiguous comment from @Entahlah hints at criticism of the paradox between belief and tattoo practice, while also emphasizing that memes about tattoos have become an arena for dialectics between humor, cultural legitimacy, and normative debate.[43]

Unlike accounts that display talismans in the form of memes, the @libraryofmagick account provides a direct explanation of the concept of *tawiz* as a written prayer that serves as protection from jinn, spirits, or magic, as well as a means of gaining social and personal influence, with the caveat that dependence on it can lead to *shirk* practices. The responses of netizens in the comments section show a wide spectrum: some are clarificatory, such as @mehek_shaikh_007 and @joda_dasupasoulja, who ask about the content of the text and the dragon symbol, while others are normative-theological in tone, such as @maryam.imtiaz.522 and @abahnahaya, who reject talismans as shirk. An esoteric perspective emerged from @salmanmasud_official, who interpreted the image as a medium for summoning supernatural entities, while a historical-cultural perspective was shown by @honneybunchy, who referred to the ancient book *Tam Tam Hendi*, and @agungmuntaraa, who linked it to the practice of *rajah* in Indonesia. There are also syncretic comments from @dannyph4ntm linking this phenomenon to Patronus in fiction, pragmatic comments from @kofiidris emphasizing its protective benefits, and promotional comments from accounts such as @sigilcrafting and @oracleofsothis offering esoteric services.[44]

@libraryofmagick, which displays talismans within the framework of global esoteric knowledge, the Instagram account @zakicha.a focuses

[43] "DokSli : Dokumen Asli¸ #doksli 'Bising Bodo Aku Nak Tido'¸ Facebook."
[44] Instagram, "Library Of Magick di Instagram."

more on technical explanations and classical Islamic sources regarding talisman practices.[45] In his posts, he explains that talismans or amulets are written on physical media such as animal skin or paper according to certain rules. They cannot be made carelessly because they require the guidance of a teacher, accompanied by rituals, and involve various symbols—from the letter alif, which is considered the opener, to the Star of David, which is considered the most risky because it is associated with summoning jinn since the era of Prophet Solomon. Netizens responded in various ways: some asked about the consequences of using symbols (such as @mahawxrra), while others highlighted aspects of sharia law with questions about *fiqh* (@hudadewantara) or affirmations of normative hadith (@adt.ytama). While comments such as @zkoy45 linked the talisman to the story of Prophet Solomon and the veil between humans and jinn, and horror-themed comments such as @hbsyi_doang mentioned the name Azazil. The social and political dimensions emerge through the account @nabilfarid2022, which questions the possibility of using amulets for business or organizations, while personal experiences come from accounts such as @andryk.suma, @putri749ayu, and @haidir_kamsuy, who recount the discovery and destruction of amulets in their homes. Other variations are seen in ascetic claims, such as @ayundha.lestari55, who mentions undergoing David's fast without any mystical experiences, to pop-cultural comments from @ar.thhari, who compares talismans to anime techniques, as well as non-religious perspectives such as @orangpusing_explore, who claims to be agnostic.[46] This diversity underscores that the discourse on talismans in the digital space is not only discussed within the framework of law and theology but also touches on the realms of experience, politics, popular culture, and even across religious identities.

[45] Instagram, "Zakicha.a di Instagram."
[46] Instagram, "Zakicha.a di Instagram."

Integration Stage

This analysis stage needs to confirm the connection between the findings in the interaction and immersion phases and a deeper theoretical reading. If in the previous phase we saw the dynamics of comments on the *rajah* content, whether in the form of humor, clarification, or normative reprimands, then at this stage the focus shifts to how these differences in dynamics and orientation create poles of discourse. In this context, two educational accounts, @libraryofmagick and @zakicha.a, serve as a referential axis that presents the legitimacy of knowledge while contrasting the meme culture that tends to emphasize the comedic aspect. The presence of these accounts marks the existence of a serious epistemic space, where *rajah* is discussed with historical, cultural, and cosmological nuances, thus providing theoretical weight that balances the dominance of light or satirical narratives from the realm of memes.

From the findings that emerged, there appears to be an expansion of themes that enrich the spectrum of discourse on *rajah* in the digital space. On the epistemic-cognitive dimension, it is evident how netizens have transformed into "knowledge brokers", rather than merely passive consumers. For example, accounts such as @annisautam provide systematic definitions of *rajah*. At the same time, @zkoy45 offers cosmological interpretations that link the practice of *rajah* with the story of Prophet Solomon, the veil between humans and jinn, and the existence of giant creatures. This phenomenon shows a shift in authority: knowledge is no longer monopolized by clerics or esoteric experts, but is distributed through the participation of netizens who combine popular information with traditional references. In line with this, the historical-cultural dimension shows that *rajah* needs to be seen as a heritage artifact. References to classical texts such as Shams al-Ma'arif by al-Buni or al-Bulhan by al-Isfahani (mentioned in @zakicha.a) are combined with interfaith symbols such as the Star of David and modern pop culture icons (e.g., Patronus).

Another prominent dimension is pragmatic-personal, where netizens' narratives do not stop at theory but touch on concrete life experiences. Accounts such as @andry_k.suma recounted finding a *rajah* in their home and then burning it, while @putri749ayu and @haidir_kamsuy shared similar experiences, even linking them to religious anxiety. Others connect it to spiritual practices, like @ayundha.lestari55, who claims to have undergone the Fast of David without experiencing mystical symptoms. All of this shows that talismans are present as part of the spiritual biography of society, where everyday experiences intersect with fear, faith, and experimentation. Furthermore, the economic-political dimension adds a broader horizon: accounts such as @nabilfarid2022 question the possibility of talismans being used for business, organizations, or even the state, shifting the discussion to the realm of collective and utilitarian functions. Finally, the commodification-promotion dimension shows *rajah* as a product: accounts such as @sigilcrafting and @oracleofsothis, for example, turn esoteric symbols into commodities offered to a global audience. This phenomenon marks a shift from the *rajah* as an object of belief to a capitalized digital commodity. Thus, the landscape of discourse about the *rajah* on social media is no longer limited to the pros and cons of sharia law, but forms a multi-layered ecosystem of discourse: from epistemic search to commercial promotion, from historical heritage to personal practice, all intertwined in a fluid interactive space that is not bound by a single authority.

The discourse layer presents a continuum that shows the positions of discourse in an evolutionary line. At one end, memes function as a deconstructive strategy: accounts such as @PetrolWeeb or @Kamz use humor and parody to mock the king as a symbol of sacredness, thereby reducing him to the realm of popular entertainment. Here, sacredness is stripped away, and symbols that have been considered to have magical powers are demystified through visual jokes and sarcastic captions. Moving towards the middle of the continuum, a more assertive

normative narrative emerges, explicitly labeling the *rajah* as *shirk*. Accounts such as @holviannur.media or comments by @adt.ytama reinforce this by quoting hadiths about *tamīmah*, showing how traditional religious authority—based on normative Islamic texts—remains present and active in the digital space. Then, at the other end of the continuum, the discourse shifts towards the esoteric-historical: educational accounts such as @libraryofmagick and @zakicha.a place *rajah* in a long tradition of classical manuscripts, rituals, and cross-cultural symbols.

This continuum shows that the discourse on *rajah* in social media does not move in a simple pro-con dichotomy, but rather in a fluid and overlapping spectrum. Humor can coexist with normative claims, while esoteric discourse uses the same space to expand spiritual imagination and reinforce the position of *rajah* in Islamic intellectual history and local culture. Thus, the digital sphere becomes an arena where three modes of discourse meet: deconstruction, normativity, and esotericism, which both negate and complement each other. From this, it can be seen that the debate on *rajah* does not stop at the "black-and-white" aspects according to sharia, but involves aspects of how symbols and knowledge are inherited, challenged, and rearticulated in the participatory culture of the digital age.

The discourse on *rajah* in social media, when viewed through Heidi Campbell's lens, shows how digital communities construct identity boundaries through strict labeling—some mark *rajah* as "*shirk*" and "*haram*," while others emphasize it as an expression of Javanese culture or heritage. The issue of text also occupies an important position, especially when the words Allah or verses from the Qur'an appear in *rajah*, raising the dilemma of textual sanctity in the digital age: can it still be treated according to traditional rules, or has it become fluid in the logic of memes and popular content? In the context of authority, a tug-of-war between brief *fatwas*, hadith quotations, references to classical texts, and claims of esoteric authority, which compete and coexist with digital curators

and sellers of spiritual services. All of this shows that social media is not just a space for debate, but an arena where the structures of community, text, and authority are constantly being renegotiated.[47]

Meanwhile, within Gary Bunt's framework of Cyber-Islamic Environments, comment sections can be read as spaces for diffuse religious participation, where quick definitions, "impromptu *fatwas*," and peer education operate without institutional filters.[48] Here, authority is hybrid: classical texts are quoted alongside personal narratives or pop culture references, creating a new form of legitimacy that transcends the boundaries between traditional and modern. Even established institutions and independent voices compete and collaborate to remain relevant. Thus, the discourse of the *rajah* on social media reveals a pattern characteristic of religion in dealing with new media: it does not entirely reject or accept, but renegotiates community identity, the sacredness of texts, and claims to authority in a fluid digital landscape.

Theological Debates on *Rajah*

The practice of *rajah* or Islamic talisman in Muslim communities, particularly in Indonesia, is part of the local Islamic cultural heritage that continues to spark theological debates to this day. *Rajah*, which often contains symbols or verses from the Qur'an, is believed by some as a spiritual means to bring one closer to Allah and as a form of protection against harm.

However, many consider it a practice that deviates from tawhid because it is considered to have the potential to lead its practitioners to *shirk*. In the community's belief system that supports this practice, there is an assumption that verses from the Qur'an are not merely liturgical readings but have a performative and barakah dimension when written

[47] Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media*, 19–40.

[48] Gary R. Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*, Islamic Civilization and Muslim Networks (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 3–5.

and used as amulets.[49] Al-Ghazali's statement in *al-Awfāq*, which mentions that hanging the name of Allah in the house can bring sustenance, is one of the spiritual bases for the legitimacy of *rajah* supporters.[50] This means that this practice did not emerge in a vacuum, but grew within an epistemological framework that combines faith, life experience, and Sufi tradition.

However, other scripturalists reject this practice because relying on objects, even if they contain verses from the Qur'an, is a form of deviation from the faith. They believe that the use of *rajah* is tantamount to attributing supernatural powers to other than Allah, which directly contradicts the principle of *tawhid*.

In Islamic jurisprudence and theology, differing views on *rajah* are reflected in the diverse opinions of scholars. Imam Malik, as quoted in Imam al-Nawawi's *al-Tibyān fī Adab Ḥamalat al-Qur'ān*, states that the use of *rajah* is permissible as long as it is not misused, especially if it contains verses from the Qur'an and can be protected from impurity or abuse.[51] This opinion reflects a moderate approach that maintains respect for the Qur'an while accommodating the spiritual needs of society.

Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani expresses a similar view in *Fatḥ al-Bārī*. He stipulates three conditions for permitting the use of amulets: they must contain the words of Allah or His names, be written in a language that is understood, and there must be a belief that the power of the amulet stems from the will of Allah, not the object itself.[52] In other words, Ibn Hajar offers an inclusive framework of *tawhid* that does not outright condemn traditional practices, provided they do not violate the fundamental principles of faith.

---

[49] Ahmad Zaenal Abidin, "Amulet of Quranic Verses in East Javanese Rural: Unraveling Mystical Theology and Living Quran," *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 12, no. 6 (2023): 397 https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2023-0177.

[50] Zamzami, "Konstruksi Sosial-Teologis Ritual Ijazah Asma' Artho (Uang Azimat) Di Pondok Pesantren Fathul Ulum Kwagean Pare Kediri," 330.

[51] Yahya bin Syaraf, *Al-Tibyān Fī Ādāb Ḥamalat al-Qur'ān* (n.d.), 172.

[52] al-Syāfi'ī, *Fatḥ Al-Bārī Syarḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 291.

However, a firm stance comes from Wahhabi scholars such as Abdurrahman bin Hasan Alu al-Syaikh, who explicitly refers to amulets as a form of *shirk*, whether in its minor *shirk* (*shirk asghar*) or major *shirk* (*shirk akbar*), depending on the believer's conviction.[53] This exclusive approach tends to close the door to *ijtihad* regarding religious traditions within society.

Meanwhile, contemporary scholars in Indonesia, such as Buya Yahya, are on the middle ground. In his lectures, Buya Yahya distinguishes between amulets containing *shirk* and those that do not. According to him, an amulet becomes *shirk* only if it is believed to have autonomous power. In contrast, if it is believed to be an intermediary or symbol of supplication to Allah, it does not fall under *shirk*. Buya Yahya also emphasizes the importance of understanding the meaning of the writings in amulets to avoid engaging in practices of unclear origin.[54]

A more stringent view was expressed by *Ustaz* Khalid Basalamah, who rejected all forms of amulets without exception, even if they contain verses from the Qur'an. He categorized all forms of dependence on objects as a violation of pure monotheism.[55] This stance reflects a puritanical tendency in understanding religion that rejects compromise with local cultural heritage.

In the Indonesian context, this dynamic cannot be separated from the position of large religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. NU, with its approach of social *fiqh* and accommodation of local culture, tends to accept the practice of *rajah* as long as it remains grounded in the belief that all power and effort come

---

[53] Al-Syaikh Abdurrahman bin Hasan bin Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab, *Fathul Majid Li Syarh Kitab Al-Tauhid* (Makkah: Maktabah Dar al-Hijaz, n.d.), 321.

[54] *Hukum Jimat - Buya Yahya Menjawab*, directed by Al-Bahjah TV, 2017, Youtube, https://youtu.be/1Mbx97du774?si=v7UHcO84d4aKqXQX.

[55] *Hukum Memakai Jimat, Wafaq, Rajah Ceramah Ustadz Khalid Basalamah*, directed by Akhmad Kh, 2020, Youtube, https://youtu.be/wSFK9NmMUGM?si=4imCKriSS5ywbKcR.

from Allah alone.[56] This practice is understood as a form of *tawassul* that does not negate the oneness of God. On the other hand, Muhammadiyah, with its rationalist and scripturalist orientation, officially rejects the use of *rajah*, although it acknowledges the existence of differing opinions among scholars.[57]

In addressing the phenomenon of *rajah* memes circulating on social media, the most moderate approach is to view *rajah* as part of Islamic cultural heritage rich in spiritual meaning, provided it is not accompanied by beliefs in *shirk* or the replacement of God's role in bringing benefits. As demonstrated by some scholars, the use of amulets containing verses from the Quran can be accepted as long as they are believed to be a means of intercession, not as a source of power in themselves. This moderate perspective urges society not to hastily judge traditional symbols but to place them fairly within the framework of pure monotheism and preserved local wisdom.

In the context of legitimizing the socio-theological aspects of *rajah*, according to the author, some scholars permit the use of *rajah* or *ta'wīd* if they contain only Qur'anic verses, the name of Allah, or authentic prayers from the Sunnah. In this context, Islamic talismans are considered spiritual extensions of Qur'anic recitation, not separate magical means. This view reflects a moderate interpretation of the hadith and sunnah. Conversely, scholars agree that *rajah* containing non-religious elements, such as pagan mantras, astrological symbols, or teachings not derived from the Qur'an or Sunnah, are classified as *shirk*, because they imply belief in powers other than Allah. This approach is based on the hadith of the Prophet, which considers the use of such amulets a form of *shirk*.

---

[56] A. Khoirul Anam, "Asal Niatnya Benar, Penggunaan Jimat Tidak Dilarang," *NU Online*, January 2013, https://nu.or.id/daerah/asal-niatnya-benar-penggunaan-jimat-tidak-dilarang-z5aNa.

[57] Tim Redaksi Muhammadiyah, "Jimat/*Rajah* Dari Al-Qur'an Bolehkah?," *Muhammadiyah*, 2021, https://muhammadiyah.or.id/2021/02/jimat-*rajah*-dari-al-quran-bolehkah/.

There are varying views among Muslims. Sometimes, in certain socio-cultural contexts, *rajah* is promoted as a positive spiritual symbol, such as a reminder to recite *dhikr* (remembrance of God) or a means of encouraging faith, as long as mystical expectations do not accompany it. However, other groups reject all forms of talismans for fear of commercializing sacred symbols or replacing trust in Allah.

Thus, the theological debate over the practice of *rajah* reflects a broader tension in Islamic thought between scripturalism and accommodation to local cultural wisdom. While some scripturalist scholars reject *rajah* as potentially violating the principle of monotheism, others advocate a more contextual and phenomenological understanding—one that takes into account the religious experiences of Muslims in everyday life. The diverse views of both classical and contemporary scholars demonstrate that *rajah* is not a single, uniform practice, but rather a product of diverse epistemologies, sociocultural conditions, and interpretive frameworks. Therefore, *rajah* should not be readily categorized as heresy or polytheism, but rather examined critically and proportionately as a meaningful part of spiritual expression. A critical and empathetic theological approach to *rajah* allows Islamic teachings to remain rooted in the principle of monotheism, while remaining open and relevant to the evolving dynamics of the community's religiosity.

Between Spirituality and Symbolism

In Islamic tradition, Islamic talismans are objects that contain verses from the Holy Qur'an, names of Allah, or specific symbols believed to possess spiritual power. Throughout Islamic history, particularly in religious practices among non-Arab Muslim communities such as those in Southeast Asia, West Africa, and the Indian subcontinent, talismans serve functions that are not merely magical but also spiritual, symbolic, and even educational.

Historically, *rajah* or Islamic talismans have been part of Islamic practice since early times. Figures such as Ahmad al-Būnī (d. 622 AH) systematically discussed '*ilm al-ḥurūf* and *ʿilm al-ṭilasmāt* in his work *Laṭāʾif al-Ishārāt fī al-Ḥurūf al-'Ulwīyāt* (*The Subtleties of the Allusions regarding the Superior Letters*), in which he interpreted Arabic letters as metaphysical entities that can be used as a medium of approach to God (*tawassul*), when arranged with a specific intention.[58] In addition, the science of letters and names was described as a hidden tradition inherited from the prophets, which must be preserved so that it does not fall into the wrong hands.[59] In more contemporary times, this practice has been critically examined by Noah Gardiner, who demonstrates that al-Būnī's work is not merely sorcery but part of an esoteric Islamic tradition that combines elements of Sufism, philosophy, and Qur'anic symbolism.[60]

In Negar Zeilabi's (2017) research, Islamic talismans are understood in the context of a complex visual culture. Although Islam is known for its aniconism (prohibition of images of living beings), talismanic art has flourished using text, numbers, and symbols as representations of spiritual power. Its primary function is not aesthetic but as a form of protection against metaphysical evils such as magic, *jinn*, and the evil eye (*al-'ayn*).[61] Some communities in East Java view talismans containing Quranic verses as a form of the "living Quran"—that is, how the sacred text operates in the lived space of Muslims, not merely read but also internalized symbolically and visually through the medium of Islamic talismans. In this context, talismans are used to heal, protect homes and

[58] Ahmad al-Būnī, "Laṭāʾif al-Ishārāt fī al-Ḥurūf al-'Ulwīyāt", in Noah Gardiner, "Islamic Occult Sciences and the Book of al-Buni", *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 19 (2019): 55–79.

[59] Gardiner, "Esotericist Reading Communities and the Early Circulation of the Sufi Occultist Aḥmad Al-Būnī's Works."

[60] Noah Gardiner, "Islamic Occult Sciences and the Book of al-Buni", *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 19 (2019): 55–79.

[61] Negar Zeilabi, "Talismans and Figural Representation in Islam: A Cultural History of Images and Magic," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 3 (2019): 425–39. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48541314.

agriculture, and even enhance economic productivity.[62]

Amulets and talismans from the Islamic world are artifacts that truly reflect the harmony between art, religion, and metaphysics. With verses from the Qur'an, names of angels, or Islamic astrological symbols, talismans create a space where spirituality is practiced in material form, not as object worship, but as a medium of spiritual communication with God.[63] The functions of Islamic talismans can be categorized into several dimensions: spiritual protection from supernatural disturbances, jinn, and magic; healing and medical treatment in the context *of al-ṭibb al-nabawī* (prophetic medicine); symbolization of beliefs in visual form; spiritual communication tools between humans and God through the medium of letters and prayers; and construction of social-religious authority in local Muslim communities.[64]

However, it should be noted that this practice is also controversial in Islamic law. Some classical and contemporary *fiqh* scholars argue that *rajah* containing verses from the Qur'an are permissible as long as they are not believed to have autonomous power (*mushtarak* with Allah), but rather as a means of *tawassul* based on the belief in *tawhid*. However, the use of symbols not derived from Islam, such as empty amulets or non-Islamic magical elements, is often considered to lead to *shirk* and is prohibited.

Conclusion

This article argued that conversations about *rajah* in social media represent a complex digital discourse space, where netizens do not simply comment spontaneously, but actively negotiate community boundaries,

[62] Ahmad Zainal Abidin et al., "Amulet of Quranic Verses in East Javanese Rural: Unraveling Mystical Theology and Living Quran", *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 12, no. 1 (2023): 121–132. https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2023-0177.

[63] Nazanin Hedayat Munroe, "Wrapped Up: Talismanic Garments in Early Modern Islamic Culture," *Journal of Textile Design Research and Practice* 7, no. 1 (2019): 4–24. DOI: 10.1080/20511787.2019.1586316.

[64] Marcela A. Garcia Probert and Petra M. Sijpesteijn, *Amulets and Talismans of the Middle East and North Africa in Context: Transmission, Efficacy and Collections* (BRILL, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004471481.

the sacredness of texts, and claims to religious authority. Through a netnographic approach, a spectrum of responses was identified, ranging from deconstructive humor, normative judgments that affirm *shirk*, to historical-esoteric narratives that link *rajah* with classical texts, local heritage, and global symbols. This layer of discourse shows that netizen engagement is a form of popular theology, connecting Islamic orthodoxy with cultural practices, personal experiences, and pop imagination.

Conceptually, this article contributes to a deeper understanding of how religious symbols such as *rajah*s undergo semantic transformation within the digital media ecosystem. It argues that no singular interpretive framework is sufficient to capture the complexity of this practice. Instead of being hastily dismissed as heterodox or deviant, *rajah* should be understood through a contextual lens that accounts for its socio-religious significance, spiritual values, and expressive diversity within Muslim communities. This study proposes that *rajah* may be viewed as a form of symbolic *tawassul*, provided it does not involve belief in an autonomous power apart from Allah. Such a moderate cultural interpretation allows for a more inclusive reading of Islamic traditions, one that balances theological integrity with respect for local expressions of piety.

References

Abidin, Ahmad Zaenal. "Amulet of Quranic Verses in East Javanese Rural: Unraveling Mystical Theology and Living Quran." *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 12, no. 6 (2023).

Akhmad Kh, dir. *Hukum Memakai Jimat, Wafaq, Rajah Ceramah Ustadz Khalid Basalamah*. 2020. Youtube. https://youtu.be/wSFK9NmMUGM?si=4imCKriSS5ywbKcR.

Al-Bahjah TV, dir. *Hukum Jimat - Buya Yahya Menjawab*. 2017. Youtube. https://youtu.be/1Mbx97du774?si=v7UHcO84d4aKqXQX.

Anam, A. Khoirul. "Asal Niatnya Benar, Penggunaan Jimat Tidak Dilarang." *Nu Online*, January 2013. https://nu.or.id/daerah/asal-niatnya-benar-penggunaan-jimat-tidak-dilarang-z5aNa.

Bunt, Gary R. *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*. Islamic Civilization and Muslim Networks. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018.

———. *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments*. London: Pluto Press, 2003.

Campbell, Heidi. *When Religion Meets New Media*. London: Routledge, 2010. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781134272136.

Campbell, Heidi A., and Wendi Bellar. *Digital Religion: The Basics*. London: Routledge, 2022.

Coulon, Jean-Charles. "Al-Būnī and the Sciences of the Letters in Medieval Islam." In *Islamic Occultism: New Perspectives*, edited by Liana Saif, Francesca Leoni, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, and Farouk Yahya, 215–20. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021.

"DokSli: Dokumen Asli. #doksli 'Bising Bodo Aku Nak Tido'. Facebook." Accessed July 28, 2025. https://www.facebook.com/groups/525844029229811/posts/1008601290954080/.

Drajat, Amroeni. "Rajah dan Spiritualitas Lokal dalam Hukum Islam; Studi Analisis Tafsir Hermeneutik." *Jurisprudensi: Jurnal Ilmu Syari'ah, Perundang-Undangan Dan Ekonomi Islam* 16, no. 1 (n.d.): 2024.

Engmann, Emily. *Islamic Talismanic Objects in West Africa: Trans-Saharan Circulations of Esoteric Knowledge*. Leiden: Brill, 2019.

Garcia Probert, Marcela A., and Petra M. Sijpesteijn. *Amulets and Talismans of the Middle East and North Africa in Context: Transmission, Efficacy and Collections*. BRILL, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004471481.

Gardiner, Noah. "Esotericist Reading Communities and the Early Circulation of the Sufi Occultist Aḥmad Al-Būnī's Works." *Arabica* 64, nos. 3–4 (September 2017): 405–41. https://doi.org/10.1163/15700585-12341455.

Gardiner, Noah. "Islamic Occult Sciences and the Book of al-Buni", *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 19, 2019.

Ḥanbal, Aḥmad ibn. *Musnad Al-Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, n.d.

Huda, Syafi'ul, and Saifuddin Zuhri Qudsy. "Kontestasi Hadis Azimat Di Masyarakat Online." *At-Turāṡ: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 62 (2019).

Instagram. "Library of Magick di Instagram." July 22, 2023. https://www.instagram.com/libraryofmagick/p/CvA77OOs8Sc/.

———. "Memesyirik." September 14, 2024. https://www.instagram.com/memeislam.id/p/C_4LAV_zK_c/.

———. "Perkumpulan Orang Santai Total di Instagram: '😌 😌 -Raihan Nagara.'" September 7, 2024. https://www.instagram.com/pos.total/p/C_onNmFhmhm/.

———. "Zakicha.a di Instagram: 'Dikutip dari kitab Shamsul Ma'arif.'" April 2025 ,11. https://www.instagram.com/zakicha.a/reel/DITvQhWz310/.

Khaṭṭābī, Abū Sulaymān Ḥamd ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn al-Khaṭṭāb al-Bustī al-ma'rūf bi al-.*Ma'ālim al-Sunan Wa Huwa Sharḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd*. Vol. 4. Ḥalab: Al-Maṭba'ah al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.

Kozinets, Robert V. *Netnography: Ethnographic Research in the Age of the Internet*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd, 2010.

Maola, Mochammad, and Syed Mahbubul Alam Al-Hasani. "Rajah: Islamic Talisman for Overcoming Disease." *Teosofia: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Mysticism* 12, no. 2023) 2).

"Memerajah." Accessed July 2025 ,28. https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=460557986981301&id=100090813114461&set=a.165476323156137.

"MU." Accessed July 2025 ,28. https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=916263737213749&set=pb.-.100064903926099 2207520000&type=3&locale=id_ID.

Naysābūrī, Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj Abū al-Ḥasan al-Qushayrī al-. *Al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Mukhtaṣar Bi-Naql al-'adl 'an al-'adl Ilā Rasūl Allāh Ṣallā Allāh 'alayhi Wa Sallam*. Vol. 5. Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.

Petrol Weeb, F [@PetrolWeeb]. "Meta meme baru dari FB di bulan September: Manga Arab (Rajah) https://t.co/DOWSeZX0Qu." Tweet. Twitter, September 2024 ,7. https://x.com/PetrolWeeb/status/1832373189927899231.

Porter, Venetia. *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum*. London: British Museum Press, 2011.

Qazwīnī, Ibn Mājah Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Yazīd al-. Sunan Ibn Mājah. Vol. 2. Al-Qāhirah: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah - Fayṣal 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, n.d.

Saif, Liana. *The Arabic Influences on Early Modern Occult Philosophy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Savage-Smith, Emilie. *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*. Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 1997.

Sijistānī, Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath ibn Isḥāq ibn Bashīr ibn Shadād ibn 'Amr al-Azdī al-. *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*. Vol. 4. Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-'Aṣriyyah, n.d.

Sīnā, Ibn. *Al-Shifā': Al-Ṭabi'iyyāt*. Vol. 2. Cairo: Al-Maṭba'ah al-Amīriyyah, 1907.

Syāfi'ī, Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Ḥajar Abū al-Faḍl al-'Asqalānī al-. *Fatḥ Al-Bārī Syarḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Jakarta: Pustaka Azzam, 2002.

Syaraf, Yahya bin. *Al-Tibyān Fī Ādāb Ḥamalat al-Qur'ān*. n.d.

Tim Redaksi Muhammadiyah. "Jimat/Rajah Dari Al-Qur'an Bolehkah?" *Muhammadiyah*, 2021. https://muhammadiyah.or.id/02/2021/jimat-rajah-dari-al-quran-bolehkah/.

Wahab, Al-Syaikh Abdurrahman bin Hasan bin Muhammad bin Abdul. *Fathul Majid Li Syarh Kitab Al-Tauhid*. Makkah: Maktabah Dar al-Hijaz, n.d.

Yahya, Farouk. *Magic and Divination in Malay Illustrated Manuscripts*. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Zamzami, Mukhammad. "Konstruksi Sosial-Teologis Ritual Ijazah Asma' Artho (Uang Azimat) di Pondok Pesantren Fathul Ulum Kwagean Pare Kediri." *ISLAMICA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 12, no. 2018) 2).

Zidan, Boussy Muhammad, and Radwa Mohammed Omar. "A Collection of Talismanic Bāzūbands from the Safavid and Qajar Epochs: A Descriptive and Analytical Study." *Journal of Association of Arab Universities for Tourism and Hospitality (JAAUTH)* 20, no. 2021) 4).