

Religiosity Among ARMY Fans: Examining the Intersection of Islamic Values and K-Pop Fandom

ABSTRACT

This study examines the religiosity of ARMY community members in Tasikmalaya, focusing on how they navigate Islamic values within the cultural framework of K-Pop fandom. The purpose is to understand how fandom engagement influences their religious beliefs, practices, and identity. The study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a sociological approach. Data was gathered through interviews, observations, and document analysis, capturing personal experiences and perspectives on balancing religious identity and fandom. The findings reveal that ARMY members actively maintain their belief in God and participate in religious practices. However, their engagement with fandom presents both challenges and opportunities for expressing religiosity. The study identifies a blend of personal belief and social influences shaping members' approach to faith, revealing a dynamic space where cultural and religious identities coexist. The results highlight the need for religious and community programs that integrate cultural interests, like fandom, with religious education, aiming to reinforce faith relevance among youth. This study contributes to understanding how youth integrate religious values into secular subcultures, providing a unique insight into the adaptability of Islamic identity within contemporary fandoms.

Keywords: Fandom; Islamic values; K-Pop; Religiosity; Youth culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Sociologically, K-pop culture has become a prominent global phenomenon, reaching diverse demographics across various countries, including Indonesia (Fitriah, Islam, & Diharjo, 2023). This culture, widely embraced regardless of age and gender, illustrates the broad appeal of Korean popular music and media (Poetri, Ranteallo, & Zuryani, 2015). Known as *K-pop* (an abbreviation for Korean popular music), this trend forms part of the broader *Korean wave* (*Hallyu*, or the global popularity of South Korean culture) that has significantly influenced consumption patterns and lifestyle choices worldwide (Alifia, Haika, & Hasan, 2023; Simbar, 2016). Such a trend introduces new social dynamics, impacting young people's identity construction, particularly in cities where global pop culture exerts a growing influence.

In Tasikmalaya, the local community of *ARMY* (Adorable Representative MC for Youth) represents K-pop enthusiasts who are primarily fans of the boy group BTS (*Bangtan Sonyeondan*, which translates to “Bulletproof Boy Scouts”). This community consists of individuals from various age groups, from teenagers to adults, who share a mutual interest in BTS. In addition to social activities, such as charity drives and distributing food to the underprivileged, this group faces frequent criticism from the public, who often view them as excessively fanatical and sometimes question their adherence to religious values. This public perception raises questions regarding how members of the *K-pop* community, especially *ARMY*, balance their interest in global pop culture with their religious identity, particularly within a society that strongly upholds religious values.

Previous research on religiosity has largely focused on factors influencing an individual’s religious attitudes. Manshur (2017) posits that religiosity is a factual behaviour that can be analysed through a system of religious practices. Saleh (2022), along with Fikri and Ruhullah (2022), further clarifies that religiosity encompasses beliefs, rituals, experiences, and the application of religious values. Several external factors are also known to influence religious behaviour, including local wisdom (Affandy, 2019), psychological influences (Syamaun, 2019), economic factors (Nugroho, 2016), and social systems (Husin & Arief, 2023). In the context of religiosity studies, these works tend to explore general determinants of religious attitudes, but few have addressed how global pop culture impacts young people’s religiosity within fandom communities, such as *ARMY*.

This research thus aims to fill this gap in the literature by investigating how *ARMY* members integrate religiosity into their everyday lives, particularly concerning the intersection between *K-pop* culture and religious practices. Using the theory of religiosity proposed by Glock and Stark (Ancok & Suroso, 2011), this study seeks to provide deeper insights into how passion for *K-pop* culture may coexist or potentially conflict with religious identity among fans.

This study is motivated by the prevalent societal perception that members of the *ARMY* community prioritise *K-pop* fandom over their religious obligations, often viewed as overly devoted to pop culture at the expense of their spiritual commitments. This perception raises questions about whether involvement in *K-pop* culture, with its intense fan activities, influences members’ religious practices and identity. Based on this background, the study argues that participation in *K-pop* fandom could impact *ARMY* members’ religiosity, potentially creating a complex relationship that might reflect either a conflict of identities or a unique form of religious expression within the context of modern global culture. Through this exploration, the research aims to uncover whether engagement in *K-pop* fosters a blend between popular culture interests and religious devotion or challenges traditional religious practices.

METHOD

This study focused on the *ARMY* community in Tasikmalaya, selected due to its active participation in various social and fan-based activities, making it a representative case for examining the intersection between fandom culture and religiosity. The research employed a qualitative descriptive method, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the community’s behaviours and perspectives. A

sociological approach was adopted to understand the social dynamics within this fandom and how it interfaces with religious attitudes (Nasution, 1988).

Data sources for this study were divided into primary and secondary categories. Primary data were obtained through direct observation of community activities, semi-structured interviews with both members and coordinators, and analysis of community documentation, such as meeting notes and event records. Interviews were conducted to capture insights into members' motivations, religious practices, and the perceived impact of *K-pop* on their religious identity. Observations were conducted over several weeks, enabling the researcher to observe interactions and community events, providing context to support interview findings (Arikunto, 2011).

Secondary data were gathered through literature reviews, including relevant theses, academic journals, and books on religiosity and fandom culture. This literature provided a theoretical backdrop and contextual understanding that informed the analysis.

Data analysis was conducted by organising and categorising information according to themes relevant to the research question, such as fan activities, religious practices, and community dynamics. Relevant data were then described in a narrative format, providing a comprehensive picture of the community. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on patterns and correlations found within the data, allowing for an interpretive understanding of how *K-pop* fandom interacts with religious identity in this context (Sugiyono, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. *Religiosity of Teenagers in the ARMY Tasikmalaya Community*

Belief Dimension

This dimension relates to a set of beliefs encompassing religious individuals' hopes, where they adhere to specific theological views and acknowledge the truth of the doctrines therein. In Islam, this belief dimension pertains to faith in the existence of *Allah* (God), Angels, Prophets, the Books of *Allah*, the Day of Judgement, and belief in *Qodho* and *Qodar* (predestination). Regarding this belief dimension, researchers found that all ARMY members accept the truth of Islamic doctrines. For instance, Balqis expressed a strong belief in God's existence, demonstrating her faith by turning to God when facing difficulties. She believes that every problem has a solution, and every solution comes from *Allah* (Balqis and Inge, personal communication, 2022). Similarly, Nurcahyani conveyed her belief in God as the force governing life events, including her personal life journey (Nurcahyani, personal communication, 2022). Conversely, Nuraeni's faith in God is based on the existence of the earth itself; she reasons that such a beautiful universe could not have been created by humans alone, reinforcing her belief in God (Nuraeni, personal communication, 2022).

While many believe in God due to childhood indoctrination from parents and society, Pratiwi's faith emerged from personal experiences. She noted that during volleyball tournaments, people often resort to supernatural means to harm opponents to win matches. However, she refrains from such practices, confident that God will protect her. This experience has reinforced her conviction of God's

existence, as she feels a continuous divine safeguard against harm. Similarly, Salsabila's faith strengthened through personal experiences, particularly when her desires were fulfilled after making a vow through fasting or giving *alms* (charitable donations) (Salsabila, personal communication, 2022).

All ARMY members have a strong belief in God, grounded in both knowledge and personal experiences. Belief derived from knowledge includes faith that God provides solutions to problems, governs life, and created the universe. In contrast, experiences such as divine protection and the fulfilment of heartfelt wishes further reinforce their faith.

Ritual Dimension

This dimension includes the acts of worship or devotion undertaken by individuals to demonstrate their adherence to religious teachings. In Islamic religious practice, rituals are expressed through *ta'lim* (religious study), commemoration of Islamic holidays, and so forth. Additionally, the ritual dimension in Islam manifests in relatively spontaneous personal actions and contemplations, such as performing *salah* (prayers), fasting, *zakat* (almsgiving), *hajj* (pilgrimage), reading the holy verses of the *Al-Qur'an* (Quran), among other practices.

The study findings revealed that all informants reported regularly performing the five daily prayers, though they encountered occasional obstacles. For instance, Balqis stated that she consistently performs the five daily prayers, except for the dawn prayer, as she often oversleeps (Balqis, personal communication, 2022). Conversely, Inge mentioned that, in general, she observes the required religious rituals, including prayer, but sometimes skips prayer when faced with urgent matters (Inge, personal communication, 2022). Nuraeni expressed a similar view, noting that she occasionally misses prayers due to the demands of school assignments (Nuraeni, personal communication, 2022). In contrast to these statements, Pratiwi asserted that she has never missed a prayer. She prays every day, even if not always at the start of the designated time. Salsabila also reported that she strictly adheres to religious commands, including the five daily prayers, and compensates for any missed prayers by performing *qada* (make-up prayers) at a later time.

From these descriptions, it can be concluded that each ARMY member demonstrates a level of commitment in performing the religious rituals mandated by Islam. This is evidenced by their collective efforts to observe the five daily prayers, although some occasionally miss prayers due to factors such as school obligations or oversleeping.

In addition to obligatory rituals, these ARMY members are also diligent in performing voluntary worship. For example, Nurcahyani shared that she regularly performs the *Dhuha* (mid-morning) prayer (Nurcahyani, personal communication, 2022). Similarly, Balqis performs the *Dhuha* prayer, motivated by her school's requirement for all students to observe this prayer. Additionally, some members also participate in the Monday-Thursday fasting ritual, as Pratiwi reported fasting on these days as a regular practice (Pratiwi, personal communication, 2022). Salsabila views fasting on Mondays and Thursdays as an obligation, as her parents

instilled this habit in her from a young age (Salsabila, personal communication, 2022). However, while some ARMY members enjoy performing *sunnah* (voluntary) rituals, others do not. For example, Inge and Nuraeni explained that they are less inclined to engage in these voluntary rituals because they lack a motivating factor, making them less enthusiastic about performing them (Inge and Nuraeni, personal communication, 2022).

Based on the above observations, it can be concluded that most ARMY members are religious, as evidenced by their commitment to both obligatory and voluntary (*sunnah*) rituals. However, some members exhibit reluctance to perform *sunnah* rituals due to a lack of motivation, leading to a lower frequency of engagement in these practices.

Dimension of Experience

This dimension considers the expectations inherent in all religions, acknowledging that religious individuals may seek a sense of connection and affirmation in their faith practices. In Islam, this often includes feeling close to *Allah* (God), feeling loved by *Allah*, the belief that every prayer will be answered, and experiencing a sense of peace and happiness derived from worship.

Regarding religious experiences of closeness to *Allah*, the researchers collected various responses from informants. Most ARMY members reported that they do not consistently feel a sense of closeness to *Allah*; rather, this feeling is often situational. For example, Balqis noted that she feels close to *Allah* only when she performs her prayers, admitting that outside of this ritual, she does not feel this closeness (Balqis, personal communication, 2022). In contrast, Nurcahyani shared that she has not yet experienced a closeness to *Allah*, which she attributes to neglecting religious obligations (Nurcahyani, personal communication, 2022). Inge and Pratiwi expressed similar sentiments, stating that they have not felt a personal connection with *Allah* due to being too focused on worldly pursuits (Inge and Pratiwi, personal communication, 2022). However, a few participants, such as Nuraeni and Salsabila, indicated they have felt a sense of divine protection in challenging situations, suggesting a perceived closeness to *Allah* (Nuraeni and Salsabila, personal communication, 2022).

Beyond experiences of closeness to *Allah*, the researchers found that most ARMY members have had experiences where they felt their hopes were fulfilled. Inge, for instance, shared that her prayers are often answered swiftly, strengthening her faith (Inge, personal communication, 2022). Pratiwi also mentioned that her wishes, such as safety from harm, financial stability, and her parents' health, are frequently granted by *Allah* (Pratiwi, personal communication, 2022). Conversely, Balqis shared that she has yet to experience such fulfilment, as many of her prayers remain unanswered (Balqis, personal communication, 2022). Meanwhile, Nurcahyani and Nuraeni believe that unfulfilled hopes will be granted in the afterlife, suggesting a deeper belief in divine timing (Nurcahyani and Nuraeni, personal communication, 2022). Salsabila noted that, in her experience, *Allah* fulfils prayers based on what is needed rather than on mere desires (Salsabila, personal communication, 2022).

Most ARMY members have not yet experienced a significant religious connection, either in terms of feeling close to *Allah* or seeing their specific hopes fulfilled. Nonetheless, a small group among them reports feeling a sense of divine protection and experiencing fulfilment in their hopes, which reinforces their belief in *Allah's* presence and support.

Dimension of Religious Knowledge

This dimension refers to the expectation that religious individuals should possess at least some knowledge of the fundamental beliefs and rituals in their faith. In Islam, this includes understanding the main teachings that must be upheld, such as the *rukun iman* (pillars of faith), *rukun Islam* (pillars of Islam), Islamic law, and Islamic history. Research findings indicate that most ARMY community members have acquired a basic knowledge of the religion they follow. For instance, Nurcahyani has foundational knowledge of Islam, including the history of *Nabi Muhammad SAW* (Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him). Additionally, most members know about the Prophet's birth, his appointment as an apostle, the responsibilities of prophecy, and his passing (Pratiwi, Nuraeni, Salsabila, personal communication, 2022). However, a small number of members lack knowledge in these areas, as noted by Balqis and Inge, who mentioned that they had not been taught about these topics in school (Balqis and Inge, personal communication, 2022).

Besides a general understanding of Islamic history, most ARMY members have additional knowledge, such as the pillars of faith, the pillars of Islam, and daily prayers. Balqis, for example, knows the key components of the *rukun Islam* and stated that these include the *shahada* (declaration of faith), *salat* (prayer), *zakat* (almsgiving), *sawm* (fasting), and *hajj* (pilgrimage for those able to perform it) (Balqis, personal communication, 2022). Similarly, Nurcahyani has knowledge of the *rukun iman*, identifying the six pillars: faith in *Allah* (God), faith in angels, faith in the holy books, faith in the prophets, faith in the Day of Judgement, and belief in *qada* and *qadar* (divine decree and predestination) (Nurcahyani, personal communication, 2022). Many members are also familiar with the *sahabah* (companions of the Prophet) who later became caliphs, as mentioned by Nuraeni and Pratiwi, who identified the four *khulafa ar-rashidin* (rightly guided caliphs): Abu Bakar, Umar bin Khattab, Uthman bin Affan, and Ali bin Abi Talib. Additionally, some members, such as Inge and Salsabila, know common daily prayers, including prayers for entering the bathroom, before sleeping, before meals, and upon waking up (Inge and Salsabila, personal communication, 2022).

Consequence Dimension

The Consequence Dimension pertains to religious commitment, focusing on how an individual's religious beliefs, practices, experiences, and knowledge drive them to be motivated by their faith's teachings. In Islamic teachings, this dimension includes values such as helpful behaviour, cooperation, personal development, upholding truth and justice, honesty, environmental protection, maintaining trust, obeying Islamic laws, and abstaining from prohibited activities like gambling and intoxication.

Islam consistently instructs its followers to carry out religious obligations and avoid all prohibitions. For example, Islamic teachings encourage a sense of sharing and kindness towards others and prohibit behaviours such as consuming alcohol, gambling, and engaging in *zina* (fornication or unlawful sexual relations). Within this framework, all members of the ARMY community reported that they have refrained from engaging in actions prohibited by Islam. Furthermore, they are often the ones who encourage and advise others to avoid these prohibited acts (Balqis and Nurcahyani, personal communication, 2022). However, as Inge and Nuraeni explained, if people persist in prohibited activities despite receiving advice, ARMY members prefer to remain silent rather than cause further issues (Inge and Nuraeni, personal communication, 2022). Pratiwi added that individuals accustomed to certain prohibited behaviours may be difficult to influence, so it is essential not to be affected by their actions (Pratiwi, personal communication, 2022).

Members of the ARMY community also demonstrate their commitment to Islamic values through actions aimed at doing good, such as offering help, cooperating, and providing *sadaqah* (charity). For instance, Balqis mentioned that members frequently engage in humanitarian activities, such as providing assistance to those in need (Balqis, personal communication, 2022). Such assistance often involves sharing essential items with others (Pratiwi and Salsabila, personal communication, 2022). As Nurcahyani noted, these positive actions extend to family, where they assist in lightening their parents' burdens (Nurcahyani, personal communication, 2022). This commitment to good deeds is grounded in their belief that every action, whether big or small, will eventually return to them (Inge, personal communication, 2022).

2. Inhibiting Factors of Religiousness in ARMY Community Members

Essentially, no human being is perfect, and each individual inevitably has personal shortcomings, including members of the ARMY Tasikmalaya community. Members acknowledged that they have certain limitations in practising religiosity and admitted to having areas where they feel deficient in terms of religious knowledge and practice. They attribute these shortcomings to a variety of underlying factors. A primary factor contributing to their reduced religious engagement is a tendency towards laziness in studying religious knowledge. For instance, Balqis, Nuraeni, and Salsabila expressed awareness of their limited religious understanding, attributing this to a lack of motivation to study and read. Balqis mentioned that she would struggle to engage with religious study without external encouragement (Balqis, Nuraeni, and Salsabila, personal communication, 2022).

In addition to personal laziness, other factors influence their limited knowledge of Islam. For example, Inge pointed out that her demanding schedule makes it challenging to find time for religious study (Inge, personal communication, 2022). Pratiwi and Nurcahyani noted that a lack of dedication to learning about their faith further inhibits their religious knowledge (Pratiwi and Nurcahyani, personal communication, 2022).

From these accounts, it is evident that members of the ARMY community recognise their religious limitations. They understand that they lack

comprehensive religious knowledge, which they attribute to multiple factors, including personal laziness, busy schedules, and a lack of *niyyah* (sincere intention) to actively pursue religious learning.

3. The Relationship between Fandom Culture and Religious Identity

The findings show that religiosity within the ARMY Tasikmalaya community is shaped by a blend of personal belief and situational challenges. Members maintain a foundational belief in God, which is strengthened through personal experiences and cultural values. For example, the desire to maintain religious practices while actively engaging in fandom illustrates a commitment to both religious and personal identities. The variability in ritual adherence and religious knowledge suggests that individual dedication to religious practices fluctuates based on personal and social factors, such as encouragement from family or community influences. The tendency for some members to prioritize personal obligations over religious study reflects broader social dynamics, particularly in the youth demographic, where secular activities often compete with religious priorities.

The findings of this study align with and expand on previous research regarding religiosity within community settings, particularly in youth subcultures. Religiosity is shaped by a blend of personal belief and situational factors, with individual experiences and social dynamics impacting religious expression. Prior studies indicate that religiosity significantly influences personal well-being in societies where it is prevalent, highlighting societal conformity as a factor that enhances personal satisfaction through religious identity (Eichhorn, 2012). Similarly, the ARMY Tasikmalaya members navigate both personal devotion and group expectations, reflecting how community and peer dynamics shape religious observance.

In relation to cultural participation, studies show that religiosity fosters group belonging and social ties, especially when it is a core element of personal identity (Lipnicka & Peciakowski, 2021). This study aligns with these findings, as ARMY members experience a sense of belonging within the fandom while simultaneously balancing religious practices. Additionally, consistent with Dunbar's (2021) findings, participation in community activities fosters stronger social bonds, as evidenced by ARMY members' engagement in humanitarian initiatives, which reinforces their religious commitments through social involvement.

This study further adds a unique perspective by demonstrating that the specific framework of fandom culture allows members to negotiate their religious identity alongside secular interests. Unlike findings by Montoro-Pons & Cuadrado-García (2018), which noted reduced engagement in highbrow cultural activities among highly religious individuals, ARMY members actively engage in both secular fandom and religious practices, reflecting a flexible approach to identity negotiation that supports rather than detracts from religious commitment within the subculture.

The findings of this study highlight a significant interaction between modern fandom culture and religiosity, particularly within the youth demographic in Tasikmalaya. Socially, this interaction shows how young people today negotiate

religious identity within secular spaces, challenging traditional boundaries between the sacred and the secular. Historically, the practice of maintaining religious values within popular cultural movements reflects a broader ideological shift where personal identity is constructed through a combination of traditional beliefs and contemporary influences. This research adds to the understanding of how religiosity in youth is increasingly shaped by digital subcultures, where ideological values and social belonging merge, creating a complex religious landscape that accommodates both devotion and pop culture engagement. This flexibility in religious expression is key to understanding how contemporary communities, especially youth, engage with faith in an era of rapid cultural convergence.

This study reveals both functional and dysfunctional aspects of balancing fandom and religious identity. Positively, the integration of fandom into religious life enables ARMY members to create a supportive community that encourages social responsibility, such as participating in humanitarian initiatives, which align with Islamic values. This dual engagement strengthens community ties and promotes a sense of collective identity. However, a potential dysfunction arises in the form of competing priorities, where the intensity of fandom can overshadow religious study or observance. This tension highlights the risk that secular engagement may sometimes displace religious priorities, leading to a diluted understanding or practice of faith among youth. Addressing this imbalance is crucial to ensuring that fandom and religious values can coexist without diminishing the importance of either aspect in personal development.

To address the insights revealed by this study, several practical recommendations emerge. First, religious and community leaders can introduce programmes that bridge fandom interests with religious learning, such as social events or discussions that contextualize Islamic teachings within the ARMY community's values. These events could highlight how popular interests can complement religious principles, making faith more relevant to youth without dismissing their cultural engagement. Furthermore, family and educational institutions could emphasize the importance of religious literacy, encouraging a balanced approach to personal interests and religious responsibilities. Finally, further research into youth religiosity within subcultures could support policies aimed at youth engagement in faith, ensuring religious principles adapt in ways that maintain their relevance amid evolving cultural landscapes.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that religiosity among ARMY community members in Tasikmalaya is shaped by an intricate blend of personal beliefs, social influences, and fandom engagement. Members generally maintain a foundational belief in Islamic doctrines and religious practices while balancing their identity within the ARMY fandom. This negotiation reflects a broader trend of young people striving to merge traditional values with modern cultural influences, demonstrating that religious identity can be flexible and responsive to secular interests.

The study contributes to existing literature by illustrating how youth subcultures, such as fandom, do not necessarily contradict religious beliefs but can coexist and even enhance a sense of community, social responsibility, and religious

commitment. The findings also provide valuable insights into the adaptability of religiosity within youth culture, underscoring the need for approaches that make religious values relevant within secular contexts. This research supports the idea that integrating cultural engagement with religious education can strengthen religious identity without dismissing secular interests.

This study is limited to a specific youth community in Tasikmalaya, and findings may not fully apply to other cultural or religious contexts. Future research could expand by exploring religiosity in various subcultures across different demographic regions, investigating how diverse fandoms influence religious commitment. Further studies could also focus on the role of digital platforms in shaping religious expression within fandoms, examining how online and offline communities shape youth identity and belief in increasingly globalized cultural landscapes.

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