

When Ritual Meets the Feed: TikTok, Mediatization, and the Reconfiguration of Hindu Religious Authority

I Ketut Putu Suardana^{1*}, Zohaib Hassan Sain²

¹ Institut Agama Hindu Negeri Gde Pudja Mataram, Pancaka Street Number 7B Mataram, Indonesia

² Superior University, Lahore, Pakistan

E-mail: ikp31suardana@iahn-gdepudja.ac.id

Abstract

Purpose: This study analyzes how a Hindu pandita's transcendent communication (mantra recitation and ritual practice) is mediatized on TikTok by examining content characteristics, engagement dynamics, and audience negotiations between sacred values and platform logic. **Methodology:** Using a qualitative netnographic approach, the study focuses on the TikTok account @idapandita65. Data were collected through non-participant observation of 86 video posts and 2,144 user comments from January–April 2025, alongside recorded engagement metrics (likes, views, and comments). **Findings:** Three main findings emerged. First, extended rituals were recontextualized into short-form videos with an average duration of 3.2 minutes, and 67.4% of posts involved self-recording during mantra/ritual performance. Second, engagement increased sharply in April 2025 (20,322 likes; 509,204 views), representing 5,084% and 4,822% increases respectively compared to January, occurring in temporal proximity to the post-Nyepi period (Nyepi: 29 March 2025) and Galungan (23 April 2025), followed shortly by Kuningan (3 May 2025). Third, audience responses were polarized: 45% were appreciative (n=964), 38% were critical—particularly regarding sanctity, concentration, and *sesana* in self-recorded ritual content (n=814)—and 17% were humorous/ambivalent (n=366). **Implications:** Theoretically, the findings suggest that TikTok affordances and platform metrics do not merely transmit religion but actively reshape the logic of spiritual authority through algorithmic visibility and public participation. Practically, the study offers guidance for Hindu leaders and institutions to develop digital strategies that protect ritual integrity (e.g., considering delegated recording), and it highlights for platform designers and policymakers the sensitivity of contemplative and sacred ritual content in entertainment-oriented environments. **Originality:** This study extends mediatization theory to embodied and sonic Hindu ritual practices on short-video platforms, providing empirical evidence on audience polarization and demonstrating how production methods (self-recording vs. third-party recording) shape perceptions of authenticity and religious legitimacy.

Keywords: Digital religious authority; Hindu pandita; mediatization; TikTok; transcendent communication.

Abstrak

Tujuan: Studi ini bertujuan menganalisis bagaimana komunikasi transenden (pembacaan mantra dan ritual) seorang pandita Hindu dimediasasi melalui TikTok, dengan menelaah karakteristik konten, dinamika engagement, serta negosiasi audiens antara nilai sakral dan logika platform. **Metodologi:** Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode netnografi pada akun TikTok @idapandita65. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi non-partisipatif terhadap 86 unggahan video dan 2.144 komentar pengguna selama Januari–April 2025, disertai pencatatan metrik *engagement* (*likes, views, comments*). **Temuan:** Hasil menunjukkan tiga temuan utama. Pertama, ritual berdurasi panjang direkontekstualisasi menjadi video pendek dengan durasi rata-rata 3,2 menit, dan 67,4% konten menampilkan praktik self-recording saat mantra/ritual berlangsung. Kedua, engagement meningkat tajam pada April 2025 (20.322 *likes* dan 509.204 *views*), setara dengan kenaikan 5.084% dan 4.822% dibanding Januari, berdekatan dengan periode pasca-Nyepi (29 Maret 2025) dan Galungan (23 April 2025), dengan Kuningan menyusul (3 Mei 2025). Ketiga, respons audiens terpolarisasi: 45% apresiatif (n=964), 38% kritis terkait kesakralan, konsentrasi, dan *sesana* terutama pada konten self-recording (n=814), dan 17% ambivalen/humoris (n=366). **Implikasi:** Secara teoretis, temuan menegaskan bahwa *affordance* TikTok dan metrik platform tidak sekadar menyalurkan agama, tetapi ikut membentuk ulang

*Corresponding author

Received: January 7, 2025; Revised: April 26, 2025; Accepted: April 29, 2025

logika otoritas spiritual melalui visibilitas algoritmik dan partisipasi publik. Secara praktis, hasil ini memberi masukan bagi pemimpin dan institusi Hindu dalam merancang strategi digital yang menjaga integritas ritual (misalnya mempertimbangkan delegasi perekaman), sekaligus membantu perancang platform dan pemangku kebijakan memahami sensitivitas konten ritual yang bersifat kontemplatif dan sakral. **Orisinalitas:** Studi ini menawarkan kontribusi orisinal dengan memperluas teori mediatisasi ke konteks ritual Hindu yang *embodied* dan *sonic* di platform video pendek, serta memberikan bukti empiris kuantifikasi polarisasi respons audiens dan pengaruh metode produksi (self-recording vs pihak ketiga) terhadap persepsi autentisitas dan legitimasi religius.

Keywords: Otoritas agama digital; pendeta Hindu; mediatisasi; TikTok; komunikasi transenden.

INTRODUCTION

In early 2025, Indonesia recorded 143 million social media users representing 50.2% of the national population with TikTok alone reaching 108 million users aged 18 and above (Kemp, 2025). This digital saturation profoundly impacts how millions engage with religious practices, particularly for Hindu communities where spiritual authority traditionally resided with *pandita*, ordained priests serving as intermediaries between humans and transcendent values. Sacred rituals previously confined to exclusive temple spaces and physical congregations now circulate as viral content, accessible to anyone with internet connectivity. This shift affects not only how dharma teachings reach audiences but fundamentally restructures the relationship between spiritual leaders and laity, the boundaries between sacred and profane spaces, and the mechanisms through which religious authority is validated. The development of digital communication technology has influenced almost all dimensions of life (Fakhruroji, 2021; Mishol-Shauli & Golan, 2019; I Ketut Putu Suardana, 2020), including religious spaces that were previously exclusive, closed, and sacred (Grishaeva & Shumkova, 2020; Maulana, 2022; Rustandi, 2020). The advancement of this technology has created a new phenomenon in the form of religious mediatization (Kołodziejaska, Mandes, & Rabiej-Sienicka, 2024; Peterson, 2020), namely the process in which religious practices and expressions are formed, mediated, and constructed through media (Grishaeva & Shumkova, 2020), especially digital media such as social media. The emergence of digital communication technology like this has an influence on religious life in society (Campbell, 2022; Isetti, Innerhofer, Pechlaner, & De Rachewiltz, 2020; Kopytowska, 2022).

This phenomenon is even more evident when we observe the religious practices of Hindu society, especially in the transcendental communication carried out by the *pandita*. Hindu *pandita* is basically a central figure in the Hindu religious structure who has high spiritual authority to convey sacred teachings (*dharma*), guide the implementation of *yadnya* ceremonies, and act as a liaison between the congregation and supernatural or transcendental values (Suardana, 2020; Yudhiarsana, 2021). In various regions in Indonesia, the terms used to refer to *pandita* vary, such as *sulinggih*, *pedanda*, *wasi*, *wiku*, *mpu*, *sira mpu*, *sri mpu*, *jro dukuh*, and some even call them *anak lingsir* (Juniawan & Wiguna, 2023; Sukadana & Lagatama, 2022; Warta, 2022), depending on the origin of the spiritual tradition and the socio-religious position of each Hindu *pandita*.

The proliferation of digital platforms has democratized religious knowledge production and distribution (Campbell, 2022; Fakhruroji, 2021), enabling spiritual messages to bypass traditional institutional gatekeeping. Yet this accessibility generates complex negotiations as communities must balance preserving sacred traditions with adapting to media logics that prioritize engagement metrics, algorithmic visibility, and participatory interaction. For embodied religious practices like Hindu transcendent communication involving mantra recitations, ritual gestures, and ceremonial implements

the translation into digital formats raises unique questions about authenticity, concentration, and the potential commodification of the sacred.

Scholarly literature on religious mediatization has documented how digital technologies reshape faith expression across diverse traditions. Hjarvard's (2008) foundational framework theorizes mediatization as a process where media are not neutral transmission channels but active agents restructuring religious authority and meaning. Subsequent research has examined this phenomenon in Christian contexts (Giorgi, 2019; Klaver, 2021; Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2019; Peterson, 2020), Islamic settings through SMS-based *da'wah* (Fakhrurroji, 2015), ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities adapting WhatsApp (Mishol-Shauli & Golan, 2019), and Sikh digital identity formation (Lundby, 2023). These studies consistently demonstrate that digital platforms introduce new dependencies, where religious messages adapt to platform affordances character limits, algorithmic preferences, engagement metrics sometimes compromising doctrinal depth for viral appeal (Schulz, 2004).

However, three significant knowledge gaps persist. First, existing scholarship disproportionately focuses on text-centric or image-based religious traditions, with limited examination of embodied, sonic ritual practices like Hindu mantra recitation and *yajna* ceremonies. How do rituals requiring specific physical postures, temporal durations, and concentrated spiritual focus translate into TikTok's short-video format and entertainment-oriented algorithms? Second, prior studies predominantly analyze institutional or organizational social media use (Hall & Kołodziejska, 2021; Poon, Huang, & Cheong, 2012), where professional media teams manage content production. The phenomenon of spiritual leaders personally creating and uploading content while simultaneously performing rituals effectively serving as both religious mediators and content producers remains underexplored. Third, while research documents audience reception patterns, few studies quantitatively categorize the spectrum of responses or examine what percentage of digital congregations resist versus embrace mediatization.

These gaps are particularly significant in Hindu Indonesian contexts, where *pandita* occupy unique socio-religious positions. Unlike clerics in Abrahamic traditions who primarily engage in textual exegesis or sermon delivery, Hindu *pandita* perform transcendent communication (*komunikasi transenden*) ritualized practices believed to connect humans with *Ida Sang Hyang Widhi* (the Supreme Divine) through mantras, offerings, and ceremonial actions (Suardana, 2021; Yudhiarsana, 2021). These practices traditionally occurred in private or semi-private settings following strict protocols of purity and concentration. The emergence of *pandita* documenting and broadcasting these practices on public entertainment platforms like TikTok represents a paradigm shift warranting empirical investigation.

This study employs an integrated theoretical framework combining Hjarvard's (Hjarvard, 2008) mediatization theory with platform affordance analysis. Hjarvard posits that mediatization operates through two logics: first, religious practices increasingly conform to media formats, temporalities, and aesthetics; second, media institutions gain authority in defining what constitutes authentic or legitimate religious expression. We extend this framework by incorporating platform-specific affordances the technical features enabling or constraining particular actions (Boyd, 2010). TikTok's affordances include short-video formats, algorithmic feeds prioritizing watch time and engagement, public comment sections enabling immediate audience feedback, and remix features allowing content appropriation.

The intersection of mediatization theory and platform affordance analysis allows examination of three dimensions: format transformation examines how multi-hour rituals adapt to minute-long videos optimized for mobile viewing and algorithmic distribution; authority reconfiguration investigates how digital metrics supplement or compete with traditional legitimacy sources; and audience participation analyzes how public comment sections transform unidirectional spiritual communication into dialogical

negotiation where laity can affirm, question, or critique religious leaders' practices. This framework is further informed by scholarship on digital religious authority (Bosch & Gauxachs, 2023) and studies of religious belief community formation through media (German, 2023), emphasizing how digital platforms function as arenas where religious meanings are collectively negotiated rather than unilaterally transmitted.

This study aims to examine how transcendent communication by Hindu pandita is mediatized through the TikTok platform, specifically investigating the @idapandita65 account as a case study. The research addresses four specific objectives: first, to identify the content characteristics and formats through which transcendent communication is presented, including ritual types, video durations, visual elements, and textual framing; second, to analyze temporal patterns in posting frequency and audience engagement metrics from January to April 2025, identifying periods of peak interaction and their relationship to Hindu religious calendars; third, to categorize and quantify netizen response patterns, distinguishing between appreciative, critical, and ambivalent reactions; and fourth, to theorize the implications of mediatized transcendent communication for Hindu spiritual authority, examining how platform logics reshape traditional boundaries between sacred and profane, exclusive and accessible, contemplative and performative.

RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative study employed netnographic methodology to explore religious communication dynamics in digital space. Netnography ethnographic research adapted for online communities (Kozinets, 2015) enables systematic observation of naturally occurring interactions without researcher intervention. The study focused on the TikTok account @idapandita65, operated by a Hindu pandita identifying as "Ida Pandita Empu." This account was selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: explicit identification as a Hindu pandita with religious authority, consistent documentation of transcendent communication practices, and substantial public engagement. TikTok was chosen as the platform of analysis due to its dominance in Indonesia and its unique affordances emphasizing short-video content and algorithmic distribution.

Data collection occurred from January 1 to April 30, 2025, capturing both routine periods and high-intensity festival seasons in the Hindu calendar. The author conducted daily non-participatory observation, systematically documenting video content (n=86 posts), engagement metrics (likes, views, and comment counts), and user comments (n=2,144 analyzed). Documentation involved screenshots, screen recordings, and observational logs maintained in a secure database.

Analysis proceeded through iterative stages combining content analysis and thematic coding. Videos were coded for observable characteristics including ritual type, duration, attire, and camera angles, while engagement metrics were compiled in spreadsheet format for descriptive summary. User comments were analyzed using inductive thematic coding to identify recurring meanings and patterns; emerging codes were refined through constant comparison and then consolidated into three response categories: Appreciative/Supportive, Concerned/Critical, and Humorous/Ambivalent.

To strengthen analytical credibility in this single-author study, a recoding procedure was conducted. Approximately 20% of the comments were re-coded after a time interval of two weeks

to check coding stability and consistency across iterations. In addition, the author maintained an audit trail documenting coding decisions, category definitions, and revisions throughout the analysis process. Data credibility was further supported through source triangulation by comparing patterns across (1) video content characteristics, (2) engagement metrics, and (3) comment discourse.

This study adhered to netnographic ethics principles for public digital spaces (Kozinets, 2015). The research operates under implied consent, as users posting on public TikTok accounts implicitly consent to observation. No usernames or personal identifiers are disclosed in research reporting, with all comment examples using anonymized references. The author maintained reflexivity regarding the sacred nature of documented content, approaching rituals with cultural respect and avoiding extractive or sensationalist framing. The research team consulted with Hindu community advisors to ensure culturally appropriate interpretation.

RESULTS

Content Characteristics and Ritual Documentation

This section presents the content characteristics of the @idapandita65 TikTok account, where a Hindu pandita documents transcendent communication within diverse ritual contexts. As shown in Figure 1 (the account's profile page during the observation period), the account is actively used as a digital channel for religious communication, featuring recurring uploads centered on Hindu ceremonies, mantra recitations, and related devotional practices. The following analysis maps the distribution of ritual content, identifies recurring visual and audio elements, and examines production practices (including camera positioning) that shape how ritual activity is presented in short-video form.

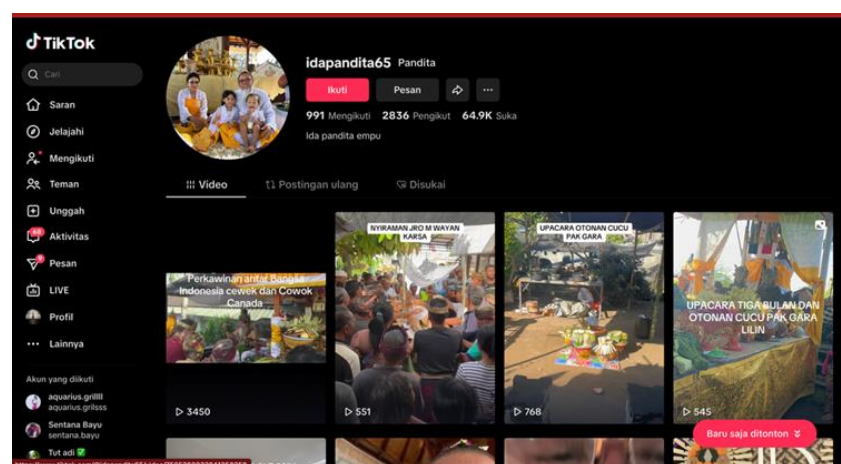


Figure 1. TikTok profile page of @idapandita65

(Source: TikTok, screenshot captured during the observation period, 2025)

As shown in Figure 1, the TikTok account @idapandita65 demonstrates a strong presence in using social media as a platform for religious communication. During the observation period, the account had 2,836 followers and regularly disseminated content focused on Hindu rituals and devotional practices. Across the four-month observation window, the account uploaded 86 posts,

indicating an active but fluctuating pattern of content production rather than a strictly stable rhythm. These posts not only document ritual activities but also function as a mediated channel for conveying spiritual values, religious teachings, and forms of transcendent communication between the pandita and the Hindu community within a digital platform. The distribution of uploaded content during this period is presented in Table 1, detailing ritual types, percentages, and total post counts.

Table 1. Distribution of Ritual Content (N = 86 posts)

No	Types of Ritual Activities	Percentage	Total (N)
1	Marriage ceremonies (Wiwaha)	25.6%	22
2	Monthly ceremonies (Otonan)	20.9%	18
3	Body bathing rituals (Nyiramang)	17.4%	15
4	Three-monthly ceremonies	14.0%	12
5	Temple festivals (Piodalan)	11.6%	10
6	Dharma teachings	10.5%	9

Table 1 summarizes 86 posts uploaded between January and April 2025, documenting diverse Hindu religious activities. Marriage ceremonies (*wiwaha*) comprised 25.6% of content, followed by monthly ceremonies (*otonan*, 20.9%), body bathing rituals (*nyiramang*, 17.4%), three-monthly ceremonies (14.0%), temple festivals (*piodalan*, 11.6%), and dharma teachings (10.5%). Video durations ranged from 9 seconds to 7 minutes 2 seconds, with a mean duration of 3.2 minutes. The largest share of videos (40.7%) fell within the 61–180 second range, while 24.4% were 181–300 seconds.

These patterns indicate that the account prioritizes high-visibility, socially embedded rituals, especially life-cycle and calendrical ceremonies (e.g., *wiwaha* and *otonan*) that naturally generate relatable narratives and recognizable visual sequences for broad audiences. At the same time, the compression of ritual documentation into a mean duration of 3.2 minutes, with the largest share concentrated in the 61–180 second range, suggests adaptation to TikTok’s short-form consumption norms where attention is optimized through concise, highlight-based presentation rather than full procedural completeness. In practical terms, the distribution implies a selective mediatization strategy: the pandita curates segments of complex ritual processes into digestible “ritual snapshots,” balancing the communicative aims of religious transmission with platform-driven temporal constraints that favor brief, continuous viewing and rapid circulation.

Table 2. Visual Elements in Ritual Videos

Visual Elements	Percentage of Appearance
Rudraksha bead malas	90.7%
Flower offerings	82.6%
Hand bell (<i>genta</i>)	74.4%

Visual Elements	Percentage of Appearance
Incense & ritual fire	48.8%
Holy water vessels	44.2%

Note: The pandita appears in ceremonial attire across all videos.

As shown in Table 2, the videos consistently present key ritual elements. Rudraksha bead malas appeared in 90.7% of videos, flower offerings in 82.6%, hand bells (*genta*) in 74.4%, incense and ritual fire in 48.8%, and holy water vessels in 44.2%. The pandita appears in ceremonial attire across all videos. Background audio consisted primarily of Balinese gamelan music (60.5%) and mantra recitation (79.1%), with ambient ceremony sounds present in 36.0% of videos. Captions were predominantly written in Indonesian (83.7%), with occasional use of Balinese (9.3%) or bilingual combinations (7.0%), averaging 4.3 hashtags per post.

Table 3. Camera Position and Behavioral Indicators

Category	Percentage	Information
Front-facing camera (self-recording)	67.4%	Pandita is seen setting up the camera himself
Third-party recording	24.4%	Recordings by others
Mixed/uncertain	8.1%	Camera position is unclear

In self-recorded videos, the pandita's gaze periodically shifts toward the camera lens at intervals of approximately 15–45 seconds during ritual performance. This recurring gaze pattern indicates that the ritual act is carried out alongside ongoing monitoring of the recording device, suggesting a division of attention between maintaining contemplative focus and managing the technological apparatus. As a result, self-recording becomes not merely a documentation technique but part of the ritual's mediated performance, subtly shaping how concentration, presence, and perceived authenticity are negotiated within the short-video format.

Table 3 indicates that 67.4% of videos used a front-facing camera with self-recording, 24.4% were recorded by third parties, and 8.1% were mixed/uncertain. In self-recorded videos, the pandita's gaze periodically shifts toward the camera lens at intervals of approximately 15–45 seconds during ritual performance, suggesting a division of attention between ritual focus and technology management.

Temporal Engagement Patterns

Table 4 summarizes the monthly posting activity and engagement metrics of the @idapandita65 TikTok account from January to April 2025, providing an overview of how audience interaction developed alongside variations in upload frequency. By comparing the number of posts with aggregated monthly likes, views, and comments, this section identifies periods of baseline activity and peak engagement, thereby situating subsequent analysis of high-performing content within the account's broader temporal dynamics.

Table 4. Monthly Posting Activity

Month	Number of Posts	Likes	Views	Comments
January	13	392	10,346	2
February	32	1,202	87,013	38
March	6	299	37,081	12
April	35	20,322	509,204	2,092

Table 4 summarizes the monthly posting activity and engagement metrics of the @idapandita65 TikTok account from January to April 2025. Monthly posting frequency and engagement varied substantially across the observation period. January served as the baseline, with 13 posts generating 392 likes, 10,346 views, and 2 comments. February showed increased posting frequency (32 posts) alongside higher engagement (1,202 likes, 87,013 views, and 38 comments), representing increases of 207%, 741%, and 1,800% respectively compared to January. March recorded reduced posting activity (6 posts) with 299 likes, 37,081 views, and 12 comments. April demonstrated peak performance with 35 posts accumulating 20,322 likes, 509,204 views, and 2,092 comments.

Compared to the January baseline, April engagement increased markedly: likes rose by 5,084%, views by 4,822%, and comments by 104,500%. Per-post averages further illustrate this intensification, with April posts averaging 580.6 likes, 14,549 views, and 59.8 comments, compared to January's 30.2 likes, 796 views, and 0.15 comments per post. This surge occurred in temporal proximity to major Hindu religious events, including the post-Nyepi period (Nyepi: 29 March 2025) and the Galungan celebration (23 April 2025), with Kuningan following shortly thereafter (3 May 2025) in the Balinese Hindu calendar.



Figure 2. Highest-engagement post on @idapandita65 (5 April 2025)
(Source: TikTok, screenshot captured during the observation period, 2025)

The highest-engagement post was uploaded on 5 April 2025, featuring a brief 9-second self-recorded video of the pandita in ceremonial attire making hand gestures toward the camera. This

post accumulated 17,243 likes (84.8% of April's total), 287,450 views (56.4%), and 1,156 comments (55.3%).

Audience Response Patterns and Polarization

Analysis of 2,144 comments revealed three distinct response categories. Appreciative/supportive comments comprised 45.0% of responses (n=964) and were characterized by religious greetings and reverential expressions (e.g., “Om Swastyastu,” “Rahayu ida”), gratitude statements (e.g., “Terimakasih Ida,” “Nunas berkah”), positive emoji use (e.g., folded hands, hearts), and requests for blessings. These comments primarily expressed reverence and gratitude for perceived spiritual accessibility through the platform. Figure 3 presents illustrative examples of such supportive expressions.



Figure 3. Examples of appreciative/supportive comments on @idapandita65
(Source: TikTok, screenshot captured during the observation period, 2025; usernames and profile images anonymized by the author)

Figure 3 illustrates how supportive engagement is expressed through brief devotional greetings that function primarily to signal reverence and sustain social-spiritual connection, rather than to elaborate on ritual content. Repeated formulas such as “*Rahayu ida*” and accompanying prayer emojis operate as digital markers of respect, recognizing the pandita’s authority and enacting a sense of proximity within the comment space. The recurrence of these honorific expressions across different users suggests that TikTok’s interactive affordances facilitate micro-devotional participation, enabling followers to perform gratitude and seek blessings in concise, culturally recognizable ways despite the absence of physical co-presence.

Concerned/critical comments represented 38.0% of responses (n=814) and clustered into several subthemes. Concentration and focus concerns comprised 50.6% of critical comments, with users questioning whether ritual attentiveness could be maintained while simultaneously managing recording technology (e.g., comments asking whether concentration is possible while looking at a phone). *Sesana* (ethical conduct) concerns represented 35.5%, reflecting perceptions that active social media engagement may be incompatible with expected priestly comportment. The remaining 13.9% offered recording-method suggestions, recommending that documentation be delegated to others rather than performed through self-recording during rituals. Figure 4 presents examples of these critical responses, including satirical remarks (e.g., references to “Gen Z pandita”) that frame self-recording as a disruption of ritual seriousness.



Figure 4. Examples of concerned/critical comments on @idapandita65
(Source: TikTok, screenshot captured during the observation period, 2025; usernames and profile images anonymized by the author)

Figure 4 highlights that critical engagement is articulated less as rejection of digital religious content per se than as a concern about role integrity and ritual attentiveness in the act of production. Comments that question “concentration while looking at a phone” construct self-recording as evidence of divided focus, implying that technological management should remain external to the sacred performance. Satirical labels such as “Gen Z pandita” function as a moral-cultural critique, framing the pandita’s on-camera self-documentation as an encroachment of contemporary digital habits into a domain expected to embody seriousness, composure, and *sesana*. In this sense, the critical responses shown in Figure 4 reveal an evaluative boundary drawn by commenters: mediatization is more acceptable when it preserves the perceived separation between ritual devotion and platform performance.

Humorous and ambivalent comments comprised 17.0% of responses (n=366) and were characterized by laughing emoticons, playful wording, and reactions that neither clearly endorsed nor rejected the practice. These comments often employed teasing expressions such as “*Lucu Ida ne*” (“This revered one is funny”) while maintaining a respectful tone through continued use of honorific titles (e.g., *Ida*, *sulinggih*). Typical remarks included phrases like “*guyu ne sulinggih*” and “*ida funny*,” indicating a lighthearted response that preserves reverence even as it introduces humor. Overall, this category suggests that some users negotiate the sacred-digital tension through playful commentary, using humor as a socially acceptable way to register novelty or discomfort without overtly challenging the pandita’s authority.

Analysis of comment distribution across post types revealed significant differences in reception. Posts depicting self-recording during active ritual received 62% critical responses, 24% appreciative responses, and 14% humorous responses. In contrast, posts showing post-ritual dharma teachings received 71% appreciative responses, 15% critical responses, and 14% humorous responses. Posts documenting ceremonies recorded by third parties received 58% appreciative responses, 28% critical responses, and 14% humorous responses, suggesting that recording method substantially shaped perceived ritual authenticity and audience evaluation.

Discussion

This netnographic study reveals three key findings related to the mediatization of Hindu priests’ transcendental communication on TikTok. First, hours-long Hindu rituals underwent substantial format transformation to adapt to the platform affordances, with an average length of

3.2 minutes and the majority falling within the 61-180-second range, a compression necessitated by TikTok's algorithmic preference for shorter content. Significantly, 67.4% of ritual documentation used a front-facing camera, recording themselves, with the priest's gaze periodically shifting toward the camera lens every 15-45 seconds during active mantra recitation, indicating simultaneous performance of sacred duties and technology management. Second, audience engagement exhibited exponential temporal variation, with April 2025 generating 20,322 likes and 509,204 views, representing a 5,084% and 4,822% increase compared to the January baseline, which coincided with a major Hindu festival period. Third, audience responses showed a clear polarization: while 45% expressed appreciation for democratized spiritual accessibility, 38% raised substantive concerns about ritual authenticity, compromise of concentration, and violation of *sesana*, with recording methodology significantly influencing reception patterns.

These findings extend mediatization theory (Hjarvard, 2008) by demonstrating how platform affordances actively restructure not just communication formats but the fundamental ontology of religious practice itself. Unlike the text-centered religious traditions documented in previous research (Campbell, 2022; Fakhruroji, 2021), embodied Hindu transcendental communication involves sonic elements (mantra recitation), temporal requirements (ritual completion sequences), and contemplative concentration, all of which undergo negotiated transformations when adapted to TikTok's entertainment-oriented infrastructure. The compression of rituals from hours to minutes represents what Schulz (Schulz, 2004) calls "format adaptation," where religious messages adapt to the temporality of the medium rather than maintaining tradition-based duration. However, our findings reveal a more complex dynamic than simple accommodation: priests strategically select the most visually compelling segments of rituals for algorithmic distribution, effectively creating what we call "ritual highlights" that prioritize spectacular moments over procedural completeness.

The phenomenon of self-recording during active ritual performance requires special theoretical attention, as it introduces a dual positionality not present in traditional spiritual practices. The priest simultaneously occupies the role of religious mediator channeling divine communication through mantra recitation and content producer actively managing the technological apparatus. The documented 15-45 second intervals of gaze into the camera lens reveal a division of cognitive load between spiritual focus and platform performance. This dual positionality challenges Bosch and Gauxachs (2023) framework of digital religious authority, which assumes sequential rather than simultaneous performance of sacred and mediated roles. The finding that 62% of critical comments emerged specifically in response to self-recorded ritual content compared to only 28% for third-party recorded ceremonies suggests that audiences perceive the management of technology during active ritual as a potential compromise of spiritual authenticity. This aligns with broader concerns in religious studies regarding the commodification of sacred practices (Peterson, 2020), but introduces a new dimension: the concern centers not on the commodification of content per se, but on the perceived incompatibility between contemplative concentration and technological self-documentation.

The exponential spike in engagement during the late March–early May Hindu festive period illuminates how platform algorithms interact with the religious calendar to create an amplification loop. The dramatic increase in April occurred in temporal proximity to the post-Nyepi period (Nyepi fell on 29 March 2025) and the Galungan celebration on 23 April 2025, with Kuningan following shortly thereafter on 3 May 2025. This timing suggests that TikTok's recommendation

system may have registered heightened user attention to Hindu-related content during this broader festival window and subsequently amplified the visibility of @idapandita65's posts within algorithmic feeds. This temporal pattern extends Fakhruroji (Fakhruroji, 2015) findings on Islamic digital communication by suggesting that algorithmic visibility operates not as a neutral distribution but as an active agent shaping which religious content achieves prominence. A 9-second video that generated 287,450 views, 56.4% of the April total, further reveals the platform's preference for brevity over doctrinal depth, confirming Hjarvard (Hjarvard, 2008) observation that media logic increasingly defines the criteria for religious legitimacy. However, unlike the institutional religious accounts studied by Poon et al. (Poon et al., 2012), where a team of professionals optimizes content for algorithmic performance, @idapandita65 represents individual spiritual leadership navigating platform demands, demonstrating that mediatization pressures operate differently across organizational scales.

The tripartite audience response pattern of appreciation (45%), concern (38%), and ambivalence (17%) provides empirical evidence of what we call "simultaneous sacralization and desacralization." Appreciative responses indicate digital platforms enable transcendent communication to transcend spatio-temporal boundaries, fulfilling the democratization promise documented by Campbell (Campbell, 2022). Comments requesting blessings ("Nunas berkah") and expressing gratitude indicate audiences perceive spiritual efficacy through digital mediation, challenging the assumption that sacred practices require physical co-presence. These findings resonate with German (German, 2023) observation that religious meaning-making increasingly occurs through mediated rather than exclusively embodied encounters. However, substantial critical responses (38%) reveal that this accessibility generates contentious negotiations around authenticity. Concerns about compromised concentration and violation of *sesana* indicate a significant segment of the audience maintains the traditional boundaries between sacred contemplation and public performance, viewing self-recording during rituals as a category confusion that violates established norms of *pandit* behavior.

The analytical framework reveals a tension between two competing logics: a platform logic that prioritizes engagement metrics, algorithmic visibility, and participatory interactions; and a religious logic that emphasizes ritual purity, contemplative focus, and hierarchical authority structures. The *pandita*'s strategic content selection, dominated by visually spectacular elements such as bells (74.4%) and flower offerings (82.6%), suggests accommodation to the platform logic, but the maintenance of full ceremonial attire and consistent use of Sanskrit mantras signal resistance to the complete commodification of entertainment. This negotiation supports Mishol-Shauli dan Golan (Mishol-Shauli & Golan, 2019) findings regarding the selective media adaptation of ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities, extending their framework to demonstrate that accommodation and resistance operate not as binary choices but as simultaneous strategies within individual posts.

The polarized distribution of comments by recording method provides crucial insights into audience evaluation criteria. Posts filmed by a third party received 58% appreciative responses versus 28% critical, while self-recorded rituals yielded the reverse pattern (24% appreciative, 62% critical), suggesting audiences perceive technological delegation as maintaining appropriate boundaries between sacred performance and documentation. These findings reveal that mediatization concerns center not on documentation per se but on who controls the recording

apparatus during transcendental communication. Audiences appear willing to accept mediatization of rituals when technological management remains external to the spiritual practitioner, but reject configurations in which the priest divides attention between divine communication and platform performance. This nuanced pattern of reception has not been documented in previous mediatization literature, which typically treats “religious digitalization” as a monolithic phenomenon rather than examining how specific production practices influence perceptions of legitimacy.

This study demonstrates several methodological strengths that contribute to its empirical and theoretical contributions. The netnographic approach allows for systematic observation of naturally occurring interactions over a four-month period, capturing both routine activities and peak festivals, providing a temporal depth often lacking in cross-sectional studies of digital religion. The integration of quantitative engagement metrics with qualitative comment analysis allows for triangulation between behavioral indicators (likes, views) and expressed audience interpretations, offering a more comprehensive understanding than a single-method approach. Inductive coding of 2,144 comments with established inter-coder reliability provides empirical rigor to the categorization of audience responses, going beyond impressionistic claims of “netizen reactions” common in descriptive social media studies. Theoretically, this study extends the framework of mediatization beyond text-centric Western religious contexts to embodied and sonic Hindu practices, demonstrating the differential impact of platform affordances across religious traditions.

However, several limitations need to be acknowledged. First, the single-case design focusing exclusively on @idapandita65 limits generalizability across Hindu pandita practices on TikTok or other platforms. While purposive sampling allows for in-depth analysis of mediatization dynamics, findings may not represent broader patterns among Indonesian Hindu spiritual leaders with varying technological literacy, institutional affiliations, or demographic audiences. Second, the study’s temporal scope (January–April 2025) captures a specific festival period but cannot address longitudinal evolution in content strategies or audience reception over a longer timeframe. Third, the netnographic methodology precludes direct investigation of pandita motivations, decision-making processes, or subjective experiences navigating platform demands, limiting analytical capacity to explain why specific content choices are made. Fourth, comment analysis faces inherent limitations because public comments may not represent silent audience segments—the 509,204 views in April far outnumber the 2,092 comments, suggesting the analyzed responses come from a vocal minority rather than comprehensive audience sentiment. Finally, this study cannot determine spiritual efficacy from a practitioner perspective; Although we document audience perceptions of authenticity, we make no claims about whether self-recording actually compromises ritual concentration or spiritual outcomes.

This study yields significant practical and theoretical implications while identifying critical avenues for future research. Practically, the findings suggest that Hindu religious institutions and spiritual leaders require deliberative strategies to navigate the pressures of mediatization while maintaining doctrinal integrity. Substantial critical responses to self-recording during active rituals (62%) indicate that audiences respect the boundaries between sacred performance and technology management. Religious leaders might consider delegating documentation responsibilities to trained assistants, allowing for full concentration on transcendent communication while still achieving digital accessibility. The finding that third-party recorded ceremonies received a majority of appreciative responses (58%) provides empirical evidence supporting this approach.

Furthermore, religious education programs should address digital literacy among spiritual leaders and congregations, fostering critical engagement with mediated religious content rather than uncritical acceptance or blanket rejection.

For platform designers and policymakers, the findings illuminate how algorithmic systems privilege certain content characteristics—brevity, visual spectacle, and engagement metrics—that may systematically disadvantage contemplative or doctrinally complex religious expression. Platform governance structures might incorporate considerations of religious sensitivity, recognizing that optimization for watch time and engagement operates differently for spiritual content than for entertainment media. The exponential spike in engagement during festival periods suggests algorithms can amplify the visibility of religious content, but without deliberate design, this amplification may privilege sensationalistic over substantive spiritual communication.

Theoretically, this study contributes to mediatization scholarship by demonstrating that platform affordances not only transmit religious content but actively reshape the fundamental logic of spiritual authority. The co-construction of religious legitimacy through platform metrics and audience participation represents a paradigm shift from traditional hierarchical structures, where authority derives from ordination, lineage, and institutional affiliation. Future theoretical development should examine how digital metrics (followers, likes, views) interact with or potentially replace traditional sources of legitimacy, and whether this represents a democratization or algorithmic governance of religious authority. The concept of “ritual highlighting” introduced here the strategic selection of visually appealing ritual segments for algorithmic distribution requires further theoretical elaboration as a mediatization strategy distinct from both comprehensive documentation and institutional messaging.

Several research directions emerge from the findings and limitations of this study. First, comparative research examining multiple Hindu pandita accounts with varying content strategies, demographic audiences, and platform choices would allow for the identification of generalizable patterns versus idiosyncratic practices. Second, longitudinal studies tracking individual accounts over several years could reveal how content strategies evolve as spiritual leaders develop platform literacy and respond to audience feedback. Third, interview-based research directly engaging with Hindu pandita users would provide insights into subjective motivations, ethical deliberations, and perceived tensions between religious duty and platform demands addressing the current study’s limitation of inferring intentionality from observable content. Fourth, audience reception studies using surveys or focus groups could access the perspectives of the silent majority not represented in public commentary, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how diverse Hindu populations evaluate mediated transcendental communication. Fifth, cross-platform comparative analyses examining the same pandita content on TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook would illuminate how specific affordances differentially shape religious expression. Finally, experimental or quasi-experimental designs could examine whether exposure to mediated versus traditional ritual contexts actually influences practitioners’ spiritual experiences, quality of concentration, or perceived ritual efficacy moving beyond perception to measuring experiential outcomes.

The polarized audience responses documented here suggest that digital mediatization produces not a resolution but an ongoing negotiation between sacred values and platform logic. Rather than assuming inevitable secularization or straightforward religious adaptation, future research should examine how these tensions evolve, which stakeholders acquire definitional

authority, and whether new hybrid forms emerge that transform both religious practice and digital culture. Understanding these dynamics has implications beyond the Hindu context, offering insights into how embodied and contemplative religious traditions globally navigate algorithmic platforms designed for entertainment consumption rather than spiritual transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully achieved its research objectives by systematically examining how Hindu pandita's transcendent communication is mediatized through TikTok's @idapandita65 account. Through netnographic analysis of 86 video posts and 2,144 user comments over four months, the research identified three core dimensions of digital religious transformation: format recontextualization, where multi-hour rituals compress into 3.2-minute videos optimized for algorithmic distribution; temporal amplification, evidenced by exponential engagement surges during Hindu festival periods; and audience polarization, with 45% expressing appreciation for democratized access while 38% raised authenticity concerns particularly regarding self-recording practices. The study demonstrates that platform affordances do not merely transmit religious content but actively reshape the fundamental ontology of spiritual authority, introducing what we term "dual positionality" the simultaneous performance of sacred mediation and technological content production. This research extends mediatization theory beyond text-centric Western contexts to embodied, sonic Hindu practices, providing empirical evidence that religious digitalization generates simultaneous sacralization and desacralization within unified digital spaces rather than linear secularization trajectories.

The broader significance of these findings lies in illuminating how algorithmic platforms reconfigure the locus of religious legitimacy in contemporary Indonesian society. Traditional Hindu spiritual authority derived from ordination lineages, institutional affiliation, and exclusive ritual knowledge is increasingly co-constructed through platform metrics and participatory audience engagement. This paradigmatic shift has profound implications for religious institutions navigating digital modernity: accessibility gains that democratize spiritual knowledge simultaneously generate contested negotiations around ritual authenticity and ethical conduct (*sesana*). The study reveals that audience concerns center not on digital documentation per se but on production methodologies specifically, whether technological management during active ritual compromises contemplative focus. For practitioners, policymakers, and platform designers, these findings underscore the necessity of deliberate strategies balancing digital accessibility with doctrinal integrity, including potential delegation of documentation responsibilities and platform governance structures sensitive to contemplative religious expressions that resist entertainment commodification logics.

Future research should address several critical directions emerging from this study's findings and limitations. Comparative investigations across multiple pandita accounts with varying technological literacies and demographic audiences would enable differentiation between generalizable patterns and idiosyncratic practices. Longitudinal studies tracking content evolution over extended timeframes could reveal adaptive strategies as spiritual leaders develop platform competencies and respond to community feedback. Interview-based research directly engaging Hindu pandita would access subjective motivations and ethical deliberations absent from observational data, while audience reception studies employing surveys or focus groups could

capture silent majority perspectives beyond vocal commenters. Cross-platform comparative analysis examining how TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook differently shape religious expression through distinct affordances represents another vital avenue. Ultimately, experimental designs examining whether mediatized versus traditional ritual contexts actually affect practitioners' spiritual experiences would move beyond perception to measure experiential outcomes, addressing fundamental questions about digital mediation's impact on transcendent communication efficacy in embodied religious traditions globally.

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