

Pre-Wedding Photography as a Semiotic Artifact in Muslim Visual Culture: Hadith Hermeneutics at the Intersection of Textual Authority, Contextual Praxis, and Islamic Ethics

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the normalization of prewedding photography among urban Indonesian Muslims as visual culture serving aesthetic documentation, social status display, and love expression, while negotiating tensions with Islamic norms (*khalwat*, *ikhtilath*, *tabarruj*) derived from hadiths. Using *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah* and qualitative textual-cultural analysis, the research reframes prewedding practices not merely as Shari'ah violations but as spaces for reconciling religious authority and societal realities. Findings reveal adaptations like modest attire, non-physical poses, and sessions post-*akad* (marriage contract), reflecting “cultural *ijtihad*” to ethically reinterpret hadiths within digital visual culture. The study repositions hadiths as flexible ethical tools guiding Muslims to preserve honor (*hifẓ al-'irdh*) and marital spirituality (*hifẓ al-dīn*), transforming prewedding into expressions of Islamic values. It concludes that *maqāṣid*-driven reinterpretation fosters harmony between popular culture and religious norms, advancing social hadith hermeneutics and Islamic visual ethics to address modernity's challenges. This approach enables Muslims to navigate evolving traditions while upholding theological commitments through contextual adaptability.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The early 21st century has witnessed a paradigmatic reconfiguration of matrimonial semiotics within urban Muslim communities, particularly through the ascendance of *pre-nikah* visual culture—a complex sociocultural phenomenon where betrothed couples engage in curated photographic performances prior to the *akad* (Islamic marriage contract). These meticulously staged visual narratives, proliferating across Instagram feeds, digital invitations, and ceremonial installations, constitute more than ephemeral romantic gestures; they function as embodied habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) through which neoliberal subjectivities, class aspirations, and religious identities are performatively negotiated. Grounded in Shirazi's (2019) theorization of “halal aesthetics,” this practice exemplifies the digitalization of Islamic lifeworlds—where smartphone-mediated self-representation collides with faith-based ethical frameworks to produce new forms of *visual dawah* (proselytization). The resultant imagery, often saturated with Islamic geometric motifs and Quranic calligraphy, transforms private devotion into public spectacle, blurring boundaries between sacred matrimony and commodified self-branding within late capitalist economies.

This visual praxis operates at the volatile intersection of *fiqh al-wāqī* (jurisprudence of reality) and postmodern identity politics, provoking urgent theological debates about the Islamicity of emergent cultural forms. While proponents frame pre-wedding photography as *bid'a ḥasana* (beneficial innovation) that revitalizes matrimonial rites through creative *ijtihād* (interpretive effort), neo-traditionalist critics decry its potential violation of *qaḍāyā al-nisā* (women's jurisprudential issues)—specifically *khalwat* (impermissible seclusion) and *tabarruj* (immodest display) as codified in classical *uṣūl al-fiqh* (Amri, 2020). The tension crystallizes in contested interpretations of ḥadīth literature, particularly the Prophetic admonition: “No man is alone with a woman except that Satan is their third” (Hadith al-Tirmidhī). This dialectic between cultural innovation and textual fidelity mirrors broader struggles within Global South Islam to reconcile *turāth* (heritage) with *‘aṣrāniyya* (modernity)—a struggle amplified by platform capitalism's reconfiguration of sociality into algorithmically mediated “sociotechnical imaginaries”.

Central to this discourse is the hermeneutic challenge of applying classical *maqāṣid al-sharī'a* (higher objectives of Islamic law) to digitized relational ethics. As Arkoun's (2002) *critique de la raison islamique* posits—via Adriani et al. (2021)—the Qur'anic proscription of *zina* (fornication) in 17:32 demands contextual reinterpretation beyond literalist readings of gender segregation. Contemporary *muftīs* and digital *‘ulamā* increasingly engage in *fiqh al-mumārasāt al-ḥadītha* (jurisprudence of modern practices), weighing photographic sessions against principles of *ṣadd al-dharā'i* (blocking means to sin) while acknowledging Generation Z's *mediated intimacy* practices. This epistemic shift reflects what Agrama (2012) terms “ethical problematization”—a discursive move from blanket prohibition to granular analysis of intentionality (*niyya*), spatial temporality (*mudda*), and visual semiotics (*dalāla*) in determining moral permissibility.

Building upon Hall's (1997) cultural semiotics, pre-wedding photography emerges as a *performative tafsīr*—a dynamic exegesis wherein Muslim couples reconstitute Islamic identity through visual *ijtihād*. These curated images operate as *semiotic jihad*, strategically deploying *syar'ī* aesthetics (modest attire, Quranic calligraphy backdrops) to negotiate what Adriani et al.

(2021) terms the “discursive tradition” of Islam within neoliberal visual economies. Such representations transcend mere identity articulation; they constitute *embodied fatwā*—corporeal rulings that spatially and sartorially demarcate *ḥalāl* boundaries amid capitalism’s hypersexualized visual regimes. Auda’s (2008) maqāṣid framework proves instrumental here: couples’ meticulous choreography of gaze (*naẓar*), proximity (*qurb*), and attire (*libās*) reflects conscious engagement with *ḥifẓ al-‘ird* (honor preservation) as a sixth emergent maqāṣid principle in digital publics (Rahman 2022). Crucially, this visual ethics interrogates the assumed dichotomy between *‘ibādāt* (worship) and *adat* (customs), positioning photography as *‘amal murāqab* (scrutinized praxis) under Ghazālīan *muḥāsaba* (self-accountability) principles.

This cultural negotiation epitomizes what Bhabha (1994) theorizes as third space hybridity—a liminal domain where Islamic orthopraxy and globalized consumerism undergo mutual transformation. The proliferation of *akad*-centric photography packages (post-contract sessions with *maḥram* oversight) exemplifies glocalized *fiqh*—a jurisprudential innovation reconciling TikTok-era influencer culture with classical *kafā’a* (spousal suitability) norms (Bukhari 2002). Gillespie and Michel’s (2010) “selective adaptation” manifests here through algorithmic piety—couples’ strategic use of Instagram filters to soften skin tones (avoiding *tabdīl khalq Allāh*/altering God’s creation) while amplifying Islamic motifs through AR-enabled hijab virtual try-ons. Such practices reflect what Göle (2011) identifies as Islam’s “public visibility” in secular spheres—a conscious resistance to Orientalist binaries through what this study terms *halal spectacle*. The mandatory mahram presence, far from being a patriarchal relic, is resignified as ethical witnessing—a live audit ensuring visual narratives comply with both *fiqhī* boundaries and feminist critiques of the male gaze (Mulki & Al-Sharmani, 2021).

Ultimately, these rituals constitute visual *da‘wah* ecosystems where every curated image functions as a madhhab of modernity—a school of thought navigating revelation through digital existentialism. As Mahmud (2021) observes in pietistic movements, the photographic lens becomes a technology of self-cultivation, disciplining couples to embody *ihsān* (excellence) through aestheticized modesty. The resultant imagery circulates as digital *ṣadaqā jāriyah* (perpetual charity), with 62% of surveyed couples in Jakarta and Istanbul reporting intentional use of geo-tags like #HalalLoveStory to evangelize Islamic marital ideals (Fauzi & Yılmaz, 2023). This phenomenon redefines Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas* as a Quranic memory project—each photoshoot a visual *āya* (sign) affirming Q. 30:21’s matrimonial mercy (*mawadda wa raḥma*). Thus, pre-wedding practices crystallize what Peletz (2020) terms “Islamic reason”—a discursive mode where camera angles and fabric choices become *fatwā*-worthy deliberations on 21st-century *fiqh al-ḥayā’* (jurisprudence of modesty).

The pre-wedding phenomenon exemplifies what Asad (2003) conceptualizes as an Islamic discursive tradition—a dynamic interplay of embodied piety and aesthetic ethics that negotiates modernity’s paradoxes. Building on Mahmood’s (2005) pedagogy of the self, these rituals constitute affective infrastructures through which Muslim couples perform aestheticized *taqwā* (God-consciousness), transmuting neoliberal visual regimes into sites for ethical self-fashioning. This aligns with (Moors and Tarlo (2013) analysis of Islamic fashion as sartorial exegesis, where sartorial choices—veils tailored to Instagram aesthetics, embroidered *akad* gowns merging Ottoman motifs with batik—operate as material hermeneutics. Crucially, such practices disrupt Weberian secularization theses, demonstrating how late modern subjectivities are sacralized through what this study terms digitalized *‘ibādah*—worship reconstituted through algorithmic

curation and pixelated intimacy.

This recalibration demands dismantling the *fiqh* reductionism plaguing contemporary Islamic discourse, wherein complex sociocultural practices are flattened into binary *ḥalāl-ḥarām* binaries. As demonstrated by the Indonesian Ulema Council's 2023 fatwa condemning pre-wedding photography as *khalwat biṣūriyya* (visual seclusion), juridical approaches often neglect the *maqāṣid* dimensions of intentionality (*niyyah*), relational ethics (*adab al-ikhtilāf*), and communal benefit (*maṣlahah*). Barus et al. (2024) propose a *maqāṣid-responsive hermeneutic* that applies Al-Ghazali's scale of five necessities dynamically: Could stage spousal proximity in a public studio advance *ḥifẓ al-nasl* (lineage preservation) by modeling Islamic romance for youth? Does the viral dissemination of #HalalCoupleGoals across TikTok constitute *ḥifẓ al-dīn* by normalizing *syar'ī* aesthetics? Such questions necessitate what Fazlur Rahman (1982) termed a double movement hermeneutic—oscillating between scriptural fidelity and societal transformation.

Reconceptualized through this lens, pre-wedding rituals emerge as third-space piety—hybrid arenas where Muslim agents creatively indigenize global cultural flows. The Malay pre-wedding tradition's adaptation of Korean pre-wedding norms—substituting hanboks for *baju kurung*, integrating Quranic recitation into photoshoot BTS videos—epitomizes what Ong (1999) calls cultural arbitrage: strategic localization that sanctifies popular culture through Islamic semiotics. This positions Muslim couples as *exegetical entrepreneurs* who, rather than passively consuming modernity, engage in creative *tafsīr* to align cultural praxis with core ethical principles. As Nurdin (2021) documents in Bandung's Muslim influencer economy, such agency transforms photography studios into micro-*madrasahs*—spaces where stylists discuss *'awrah* boundaries while adjusting hijabs, and photographers quote Surah Ar-Rum 21 during poses. Thus, these rituals transcend accommodationist narratives, instead embodying Islam's capacity for civilizational renewal through aestheticized orthopraxy.

The methodological synthesis proposed in this study bridges the hermeneutic flexibility inherent in *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* with the analytical rigor of visual semiotics, offering a novel framework to decode pre-wedding rituals as sites of ethical negotiation. Traditional *fiqh* analyses, as critiqued by Shamsuddin (2024), often reduce these practices to binary evaluations of permissibility, overlooking their role in constructing visual piety—a dynamic interplay of faith, identity, and aesthetics. By reorienting the discourse through *maqāṣid* hermeneutics, this framework interrogates how couples navigate *'awrah* (modesty) and *khalwat* (seclusion) not merely as legal prohibitions but as contextualized ethics shaped by urban Muslim lifeworlds. This approach aligns with Rohmah and Subhan's (2021) institutional analyses, yet extends their scope to encompass the semiotic labor of translating scriptural principles into visual narratives—such as stylized poses that symbolically enact *ṣabr* (patience) or *shukr* (gratitude) within the matrimonial journey.

Theoretically, this synthesis disrupts the epistemic hegemony of textualism that dominates works like al-Qaradawi's (2007), which conflate all cross-gender interactions with moral risk. Mahmood's (2005) conceptualization of piety as embodied hermeneutics provides a critical counterpoint, recasting pre-wedding rituals as performative *tafsīr*—spaces where couples reinterpret Prophetic traditions through visual metaphors. Gillespie and Michel's (2010) observations on cultural reinscription further illuminate how these rituals hybridize global visual tropes (e.g., Western bridal poses) with Islamic semiotics (Quranic calligraphy backdrops),

creating a third space of ethical modernity. Such practices challenge the rigid *ḥalāl-ḥarām* binary by privileging intentionality (*niyyah*) and communal benefit (*maṣlaḥah*), thereby redefining piety as a dialectic between adherence and adaptation.

The significance of this framework lies in its capacity to recenter lived experience within Islamic studies, moving beyond the juridical myopia critiqued by Guindi (1999). By foregrounding the visual-discursive dimensions of pre-wedding culture, this study illuminates how urban Muslims negotiate the tension between *turāth* (tradition) and *‘aṣriyya* (contemporaneity) through aestheticized devotion. The resultant framework not only decodes the epistemic agency of couples as exegetes of modernity but also offers clergy and policymakers tools to engage evolving practices without doctrinal compromise. In doing so, it advances a paradigm of interpretive pluralism, where Islamic ethics are dynamically reconstituted through the interplay of text, context, and visibility—a vital corrective to the reductionist tendencies plaguing contemporary scholarship.

2. METHODS

This research adopts a multidimensional hermeneutic approach, synthesizing qualitative textual analysis with critical cultural theory to deconstruct the socioreligious semiotics of pre-wedding photography in Indonesia’s Islamic urban landscapes. The methodology strategically combines systematic bibliographic analysis of classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship with visual-cultural discourse analysis, interrogating the epistemic tensions between prescriptive Islamic orthopraxy—particularly ḥadīth proscriptions on *khalwat* (seclusion), *tabarruj* (immodest display), and *kasyf al-‘awrāt* (exposure of intimate zones)—and the lived realities of urban Muslim semiotic production. Primary data were drawn from a curated corpus encompassing: 1) canonical *ḥadīth* compendia (Bukhārī, Muslim, Tirmidhī); 2) classical *uṣūl al-fiqh* treatises contextualizing gender ethics; and 3) modern *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* exegeses, complemented by secondary critical scholarship in Islamic visual anthropology and digital piety studies.

Analytical rigor was achieved through a triangulated protocol: 1) Systematic coding of *ḥadīth* literature via NVivo 14, identifying recurrent thematic clusters (modesty protocols, visual ethics, spousal interaction norms) through inductive category formation; 2) *Maqāṣid*-aligned hermeneutic interrogation, applying Auda’s (2008) systems theory to evaluate photographic practices against the five essential *ḍarūriyyāt* (religio-ethical necessities) while accommodating emergent *ḥājjiyyāt* (socio-communicative needs) in digital mediascapes. 3) Critical discourse analysis of visual-textual narratives, decoding how couples negotiate Islamic semiotics (Quranic typography, syar‘ī attire) within globalized aesthetic regimes through Foucauldian technologies of self-frameworks.

The interpretive process engaged in dialogical *tafsīr*—simultaneously applying classical exegetical principles (*asbāb al-wuḍū‘*, ‘*illah* identification) and postmodern visual theory (Barthes’ semiotics, Mirzoeff’s visual activism) to transcend juridical reductionism. This bidirectional hermeneutic enabled granular assessment of how photographic intentionality (*niyyah*), spatial temporality (*mudda*), and symbolic resonance (*dalāla*) reconfigure traditional gender ethics within algorithmic modernity.

This investigation synergizes Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with Auda’s *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* framework to dissect the dialectic between Islamic moral theology and the

semiotic ecosystems of pre-wedding culture. The CDA axis deconstructs three interlocking dimensions: 1) textual praxis (visual compositions, Quranic calligraphy integration, spatial proxemics in photographs); 2) discursive formations (Instagram captions deploying *da'wah* rhetoric, TikTok videos framing rituals as *ṣabr* trials); and 3) socioreligious ideologies (naturalization of *syar'ī* aesthetics as markers of upward mobility). Concurrently, Auda's (2008) *maqāṣid* paradigm facilitates a teleological assessment of how these practices reconstitute the five *ḍarūriyyāt* (cardinal objectives)—particularly probing whether stylized couple portraits undermine *ḥifẓ al-ʿird* (honor preservation) or conversely advance *ḥifẓ al-dīn* by sacralizing marital narratives for digital publics.

The methodology operationalizes a contextualized *maqāṣidī* calculus, evaluating photographic sessions through: Chronotopic analysis, scrutinizing temporal-spatial contexts (pre/post-*akad* timelines, studio vs. outdoor settings); Semiotic weighting, grading visual elements (attire opacity, gaze direction, spatial segregation) against classical *khiyār al-ʿayn* (modesty metrics); Teleoethical calibration, balancing cultural *maṣlaḥah* (societal benefit) against potential *mafsadah* (harm) in platformized intimacy.

This dual framework transcends binary *ḥalāl-harām* paradigms by privileging *ʿillah*-based (rationale-driven) hermeneutics. For instance, *akad*-preceding photoshoots exhibiting physical contact are interrogated through the *maqāṣidī* principle of *ḥifẓ al-nasl* (lineage preservation)—assessing whether such imagery risks normalizing *zinā al-ʿayn* (ocular adultery) or conversely models Islamic romance for youth. The analytical synthesis thus positions pre-wedding culture as a contested discursive battlefield where neoliberal visuality and Islamic orthopraxy negotiate the terms of ethical modernity.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Pre-Wedding Photography as an Artifact of Muslim Visual Culture

The contemporary practice of *pre-wedding* photography among urban Muslims has evolved into a potent medium of visual cultural production. Transcending mere matrimonial documentation, it operates as a semiotic construct encoding identity, lifestyle aspirations, and socioreligious values. In an era where visuality dominates communicative practices, pre-wedding imagery functions as a dual-channel medium for personal and collective signification. This necessitates analytical frameworks that transcend reductionist *fiqh* (jurisprudential) evaluations, instead engaging its complexity as a cultural text.

Victor Turner's rites of passage theory offers critical insights into the symbolic architecture of pre-wedding rituals. Turner posits that transitions between social statuses are mediated through liminal phases—threshold states characterized by symbolic inversions and identity renegotiations (Turner and Abrahams 2017). Pre-wedding photography epitomizes such liminality, capturing the interstitial period between bachelorhood and matrimony through curated displays of emotional intimacy and aspirational domesticity. Though absent from classical Islamic traditions, this practice has been culturally appropriated as a visual celebration of social metamorphosis within urban Muslim milieus.

Symbolically, pre-wedding photos serve as public narratives legitimizing the couple's union. In hyper-digitalized societies, these visual texts circulate beyond familial confines to broader social networks, performing what Sara Mahmood (2005) terms the "hermeneutics of

piety”—a dialectic between personal devotion and communal expectations. Within this framework, pre-wedding photography emerges not as mere romantic spectacle but as a deliberate articulation of a modest-modern Muslim subjectivity, blending piety with aesthetic refinement (Mahmud 2021).

Visually, pre-wedding imagery synthesizes Islamic semiotics—*syar'ī* attire, calligraphic Quranic motifs, and decorous poses—with globalized aesthetic conventions: cinematic locales, stylized editing, and narrative-driven concepts. This synthesis epitomizes the “Islamic lifestyle” phenomenon described by Fealy and White (2008), wherein Muslims strategically Islamize cultural forms without wholesale rejection of modernity. However, this hybridization engenders inherent tensions. While reflecting heightened consciousness of visual self-representation, it risks reducing piety to commodified aesthetics—a performative *shar'ī* veneer potentially displacing marriage’s spiritual essence in favor of public image cultivation.

Nevertheless, this cultural practice remains fraught with epistemological and ethical ambiguities. On one axis, it embodies a heightened consciousness of visual self-representation within modernity’s image-saturated landscape. Conversely, it risks reducing piety to commodified spectacle, wherein Islamic semiotics are instrumentalized for aesthetic gratification and social capital. Such dynamics become problematic when the sacrality of marriage is subordinated to performative public image management, necessitating critical engagement that transcends formalistic adherence to *sharī'ah*-cosmetic compliance and foregrounds substantive Islamic ethical principles.

Empirical observations reveal persistent tensions in pre-wedding visual rhetoric between aspirational modernity and *sharī'ah* boundaries. Instances of hand-holding or intimate posing, rationalized through discourses of “good intentions” or “contextual caution,” illustrate how Muslim couples hermeneutically reinterpret normative injunctions within expanded symbolic parameters. These negotiations transcend rote prohibition-compliance binaries, instead reflecting agentive processes of boundary rearticulation that align with Hall’s (1997) theorization of meaning as perpetually contested through representational praxis.

This phenomenon positions pre-wedding rituals as discursive arenas for reconciling scriptural authority with visual-cultural modernity. Muslim couples emerge not as passive cultural mimics but as agentive constructors of Islamic counter-narratives, utilizing imagery to negotiate identity within globalized aesthetics. Such agency underscores the urgency of developing an Islamic visual ethic grounded in *maqāṣid* values—*ḥifẓ al-‘ird* (honor preservation), modesty, and spiritual intentionality—rather than rigid formal compliance (Hall 1997).

Consequently, reducing pre-wedding to *khalwat* (seclusion) violations reflects analytical reductionism. A culturally-nuanced hermeneutic, as advocated by Auda’s (2008) *maqāṣid* paradigm, repositions Islam as a teleological ethical system guiding adherents in preserving matrimonial sanctity while engaging modernity through contextualized wisdom. This framework rejects reactive cultural defensiveness, instead privileging proactive ethical creativity that harmonizes temporal dynamism with transcendental values.

3.2. *Ḥadīth Texts as Ethical Frameworks*

The Prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) have historically functioned as primary references for regulating interactions between unmarried non-*maḥram* individuals in Muslim societies. Noteworthy examples include prohibitions against *khalwat* (seclusion: “No man is alone with a

woman unless Satan is the third,” *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* 2165), *ikhtilāf* (unrestricted gender mixing), and *tabarruj* (immodest public display). These texts underpin classical Islamic social ethics, yet an excessively literal hermeneutic risks ossifying interpretive possibilities, particularly when applied to evolving cultural practices like *pre-wedding* photography.

A rigid, univocal reading of these traditions would axiomatically condemn all premarital visual expressions as *sharīʿah* violations. Such an approach, however, neglects contextual variables, sociocultural functions, and symbolic intentionality. As Muhammad Arkoun (2003) contends, religious texts remain inextricably embedded within their sociopolitical milieus, rendering *ḥadīth* discourses dynamic and perpetually renegotiated through historical and structural lenses. Within this framework, the *khalwat* prohibition transcends mechanistic interpretation as an absolute ban on premarital interaction. Instead, its ethical essence—preserving honor (*ḥifẓ al-ʿird*), preventing defamation, and safeguarding dignity—must be foregrounded. Thus, *pre-wedding* practices adhering to *sharīʿ* parameters (e.g., absence of physical contact, *maḥram* supervision, post-*akad* execution, and modest attire) may align with *ḥadīth* values without negating cultural innovation.

This perspective repositions *ḥadīth* as ethical guidelines rather than rigid legal codices. Fazlur Rahman (2002). emphasizes that the Prophetic tradition’s moral spirit supersedes its literal form, framing Islam as a value-centric system prioritizing ethical consciousness, prudence, and societal welfare. In an era dominated by visual culture and digital aesthetics, such an approach proves more pragmatically and philosophically coherent than formalistic reductionism.

Furthermore, transformations in social spaces—particularly the digital public sphere—necessitate recontextualizing textual authority. Whereas classical norms addressed physical interactions, contemporary social media blurs private and public domains, rendering *pre-wedding* imagery both personal expression and mass-consumed symbolism. Consequently, *ḥadīth* governing social conduct must be reinterpreted through “visual ethics” frameworks that account for intentionality, audience reception, and societal impact in digital environments (Hosen 2019).

This approach further facilitates the conceptualization of *cultural ijtihād*—a creative, context-sensitive hermeneutic through which Muslims reinterpret religious texts while preserving core Islamic values. While *ḥadīth* remains foundational, its application evolves in response to temporal challenges and sociocultural shifts. Within this paradigm, *pre-wedding* practices are not axiomatically deemed immoral but emerge as sites for ethical renegotiation aligned with *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* principles, particularly *ḥifẓ al-ʿird* (honor preservation) and *ḥifẓ al-dīn* (safeguarding faith).

Moreover, *ḥadīth* may be read through the lens of Islamic identity performativity. Empirical studies reveal that many Muslim couples utilize *pre-wedding* photography to visually articulate religious commitment—adopting *syarīʿ* attire, decorous poses, and calligraphic *ḥadīth* inscriptions (Afwadzi 2017). This demonstrates scriptural traditions’ dual role as both normative boundaries and symbolic reservoirs for public religiosity.

Consequently, addressing *pre-wedding* practices necessitates transcending reductionist legal queries (“What is the ruling?”) toward ethical reflection: How might this practice contextually embody Islamic values? Such reframing transforms *ḥadīth* from juridical instruments into dynamic moral frameworks adaptable to modernity’s flux. This aligns with Arkoun’s project of “rethinking Islam”—critical and creative re-engagement with tradition amid evolving historical consciousness. By positioning *ḥadīth* as ethical scaffolding, Muslims may

formulate visual-interactional guidelines that harmonize Islamic ethics with cultural practices, fostering neither wholesale rejection nor uncritical assimilation of popular culture.

Ultimately, this approach advocates for a contextualized Islamic public ethic—inclusive, reflective, and responsive to visual-cultural phenomena like pre-wedding through principled wisdom rather than reactionary prohibition.

3.3. *Negotiating Islamic Norms and Contemporary Cultural Values*

The pre-wedding phenomenon among urban Muslim communities epitomizes the dynamic negotiation between Islamic ethical frameworks and globalized cultural practices. As Muslim societies engage with transnational visual cultures, this ritual has emerged as a site of socioreligious adaptation, where couples reconcile aesthetic expression with *sharī'ah*-aligned principles (Amri 2020). This negotiation manifests in strategic modifications: adherence to modest attire (*syar'ī* dress codes), avoidance of physical contact, and temporal alignment of photoshoots with post-*akad* (marriage contract) phases. Such adaptations reflect a conscious effort to harmonize matrimonial aesthetics with Islamic injunctions against *khalwat* (seclusion) and *tabarruj* (immodesty).

Empirical observations reveal divergent approaches to this negotiation. While some couples proceed with *pre-wedding* sessions under stringent conditions—maintaining spatial boundaries, abstaining from intimate poses, and ensuring full *'awrah* (modesty) compliance—others defer photography until post-*nikāḥ* (marital contract) phases. These practices signify a dual awareness: preserving premarital chastity (*hifẓ al-iffah*) while accommodating modernity's demand for visual self-representation.

The proliferation of sharia-compliant wedding coordination services further institutionalizes this value negotiation. These enterprises curate matrimonial aesthetics that balance modern sensibilities with Islamic norms—employing female photographers, gender-segregated venues, and *sharī'ah* advisors to oversee pre-wedding protocols (Rifa'i et al 2025). As Rohmah and Subhan (2021) note, such services exemplify the commercialization of religious adherence, yet simultaneously underscore Muslim communities' agency in creatively synthesizing faith commitments with contemporary lifestyles.

This process extends beyond pragmatic adaptation to the symbolic rearticulation of Islamic identity. Within visual-cultural economies, pre-wedding rituals transform into semiotic acts: Quranic calligraphy in digital invitations, *hijāb*-styled ensembles, and culturally hybrid backdrops collectively reconstruct the concept of an “Islamic wedding.” Aesthetics here transcend ornamental functions, operating as discursive mediums for encoding spiritual values (*hifẓ al-dīn*) and communal belonging.

Thus, pre-wedding practices epitomize the iterative reimagining of Islamic tradition within modernity's visual regimes—a dialectic where piety is neither static nor compromised but dynamically renegotiated through symbolic praxis.

From Stuart Hall's (1997) theoretical vantage, such practices epitomize meaning negotiation—the process by which social actors reinterpret cultural texts (here, *sharī'ah*) within lived sociocultural contexts. Hall posits meaning as perpetually contingent and polyvalent, subject to iterative reproduction. Thus, when Muslim communities articulate Islamic values through modernity-compatible visual forms, they engage in discursive reconstruction of religious praxis, aligning it with temporal imperatives while preserving core ethics.

This process, however, remains contentious. Conservative factions perceive such adaptations as concessions diluting Islamic orthodoxy, advocating for dichotomous adherence to *sharī'ah* devoid of cultural mediation. Such rigidity, however, overlooks the ontological fluidity of culture and risks rendering religious norms obsolete amidst civilizational evolution. Conversely, uncritical assimilation of popular culture risks secularizing religious symbolism—reducing spirituality to aestheticized lifestyle devoid of ethical intentionality. Thus, value negotiation must transcend mere compromise between Islam and modernity, instead anchoring itself in immutable principles: *ḥifẓ al-iffah* (chastity), *ḥifẓ al-'ird* (honor), and modesty as non-negotiable foundations.

Constructive value negotiation further enables social *ijtihād*—a communal hermeneutic reorienting interaction norms within *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* frameworks. Here, *ḥifẓ al-dīn* (safeguarding faith) and *ḥifẓ al-'ird* emerge as pivotal objectives governing Muslim engagement with cultural forms. Consequently, pre-wedding visual ethics transcend formal compliance, demanding scrutiny of intentionality, processual integrity, and moral messaging (Harun et al 2019).

This dialectic-underscores urban Muslims' agency as cultural producers rather than passive consumers. As Gillespie and Michel (2010) illustrate, contemporary Muslim praxis favors cultural filtering—selective adoption and adaptation of global trends to align with Islamic ethics. In *pre-wedding* contexts, this manifests as aesthetic innovation harmonizing visual appeal with public piety, epitomizing what Mahmood (2005) terms “disciplined spontaneity” in modern religiosity.

Thus, pre-wedding rituals transcend romantic preludes; they constitute hermeneutic arenas where Islamic ethics and visual modernity negotiate coexistence. Islam here emerges not as a cultural ossifier but as a dynamic ethical framework—guiding adherents through adaptive hermeneutics that marry transcendental values with temporal relevance.

3.4. *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah and Islamic Visual Ethics*

In addressing contemporary visual culture, including pre-wedding practices, the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* framework provides a more adaptive and substantive ethical paradigm than formalistic legal approaches. *Maqāṣid* (the higher objectives of Islamic law) constitute foundational principles guiding the ultimate aims of Islamic jurisprudence. The five cardinal *maqāṣid*, as systematized by al-Ghazālī and expanded by al-Shaṭībī, encompass *ḥifẓ al-dīn* (preservation of faith), *ḥifẓ al-nafs* (life), *ḥifẓ al-'aql* (intellect), *ḥifẓ al-nasl* (lineage), and *ḥifẓ al-māl* (property). Within *pre-wedding* as a visual-cultural praxis, *ḥifẓ al-'ird* (honor preservation) and *ḥifẓ al-dīn* emerge as the most salient ethical imperatives (Auda 2008).

Ḥifẓ al-'ird encompasses safeguarding individual dignity, modesty, and communal reputation. Pre-wedding imagery featuring intimate poses, revealing attire, or sensually coded aesthetics in digital public spheres risks eroding these values, particularly when disseminated indiscriminately to mass audiences. In digitized societies where visibility dominates communicative practices, upholding *ḥifẓ al-'ird* necessitates conscientious curation of self-representation to preserve both personal/familial honor and collective perceptions of Islamic ethics.

Ḥifẓ al-dīn, meanwhile, transcends ritual compliance or legal formalism, demanding preservation of Islam's moral-semantic essence in sociocultural practices. Pre-wedding rituals thus engage not merely questions of permissibility (*ḥalāl-ḥarām*) but the ontological sanctity of

marriage as devotional act (*‘ibādah*) and spiritual covenant. When reduced to aesthetic performances catering to social media metrics, such practices risk trivializing matrimony’s sacramental significance.

The *maqāṣid* framework further reorients cultural engagement beyond binary *shar‘ī/non-shar‘ī* dichotomies toward value-laden transformation. Jasser Auda (2008) conceptualizes *maqāṣid* as systemic and context-responsive, urging Muslims to formulate Islamic visual ethics attuned to digital modernity rather than uncritically replicating classical injunctions rooted in disparate sociocultural milieus. Such ethics aim not to suppress visual culture but to channel it toward modesty (*hayā’*), honor, and spiritual intentionality—aligning aesthetic expression with transcendent moral objectives (Auda 2008).

Islam inherently embraces visual culture, as evidenced by its rich historical heritage of calligraphic arts, architectural marvels, and ornamental designs that harmonize aesthetic sophistication with divine symbolism and modesty. The contemporary challenge for Muslims lies not in rejecting visuality but in governing self-representation to prevent its reduction to bodily commodification or the erosion of sacred meaning. Pre-wedding practices conducted with ethical intentionality—adherence to *syar‘ī* attire, avoidance of intimate poses, and post-*akad* execution—exemplify how visual expression can embody Islamic values rather than contravene them (Santoso and Salim 2018).

The *maqāṣid* paradigm further disavows legal formalism, which often stifles cultural creativity. When practices like *pre-wedding* align with piety (*taqwā*), modesty (*hayā’*), and public decorum, they merit consideration as forms of *contemporary ijtihād*. Central to this is the principle of *iḥtiyāt* (prudence), which prioritizes safeguarding visual ethics over absolutist prohibitions on emergent cultural forms.

Applied to visual culture, *maqāṣid* bridges textual orthodoxy and modern expressive needs. This framework facilitates the development of contextualized ethical guidelines emphasizing not merely permissibility (*ḥalāl-ḥarām*) but *how* Muslims might aesthetically articulate piety, love, and commitment within open visual spheres. Ethically curated pre-wedding rituals thus become extensions of Islamic ethics rather than transgressions.

As such, *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* must function as an active ethical lens for engaging Muslim visual culture. It enables critical discernment between practices that uncritically replicate popular trends and those that authentically encode Islamic values through respectful, meaningful aesthetics. This constitutes a vital step toward constructing an Islamic public ethic responsive to the visual realities of globalized modernity.

3.5. *Ḥadīth-Pop Culture Nexus: A Maqāṣidī Approach to Visual Praxis*

The pre-wedding phenomenon in contemporary Muslim societies exemplifies a dynamic dialectic between *ḥadīth* as Islam’s normative textual authority and visual popular culture as a medium of modern identity formation. This dialectic transcends binary *ḥalāl-ḥarām* dichotomies, instead constituting an epistemological interface where scriptural imperatives intersect with evolving sociocultural realities. Within this matrix, the *maqāṣidī* approach emerges as an ethical paradigm enabling constructive engagement between *sharī‘ah* values and modernity’s expressive demands.

Ḥadīth regulating gender interactions—such as prohibitions against *khalwat* (seclusion) and *tabarruj* (immodesty)—originate from the ethical imperatives of *ḥifẓ al-‘ird* (honor

preservation) and *ḥifẓ al-dīn* (safeguarding faith). However, when juxtaposed against pre-wedding practices operating within digital-visual representational systems, a literal hermeneutic proves inadequate. Modernity necessitates a reflexive *ḥadīth* hermeneutics that integrates *maqāṣid* considerations with sociological analysis (Khadduri 1978).

The *maqāṣidī* framework reframes inquiries from “What is the ruling?” to “What ethical objectives underpin the prohibition, and how might these be realized within contemporary cultural contexts?” In practice, *sharʿ*-compliant pre-wedding rituals—eschewing physical contact, adhering to modesty codes, and foregrounding Islamic symbolism—embody *maqāṣid* operationalization within visual culture. This demonstrates *maqāṣid*’s dynamism as a tool for rearticulating Islamic ethics amidst pluralistic, fluid sociocultural landscapes (Auda, 2008).

This dialectic further underscores Muslims’ agency as active re-interpreters—not passive subjects—of modernity. As Hall (1997) theorizes, cultural representations emerge through negotiated processes. Thus, *ḥadīth* interpretation occurs not in textual vacuums but through triadic dialogue among scripture, social actors, and the cultural structures they inhabit. Muslims thereby reconfigure Islamic values within global visual economies, balancing fidelity to tradition with creative cultural adaptation.

Within this framework, pre-wedding rituals transcend individual acts to function as socioreligious identity formation—a symbolic praxis through which Muslims negotiate modernity and piety. Many couples strategically deploy *syarʿ* attire, calligraphic *ḥadīth* inscriptions, and Islamically curated backdrops, transforming photography into platforms for pious self-representation. Such practices exemplify the remediation of Islamic values through digital-visual aesthetics, where religiosity is rearticulated rather than compromised for public consumption.

Yet this phenomenon harbors epistemological and ethical tensions. When Islamic symbolism is reduced to legitimizing veneers for popular aesthetics, spirituality risks devolving into performative banality. Here, the *maqāṣidī* approach assumes critical salience, enabling discernment between superficial *sharʿ* formalism and substantive ethical intentionality. Consequently, *ḥadīth* hermeneutics within popular cultural spaces must adopt evaluative rigor—distinguishing expressions that fortify *maqāṣid* (e.g., *ḥifẓ al-ʿird*) from those eroding its core values.

This dialectic underscores the necessity of cultural *ijtihād*: a hermeneutic of cultural adaptation wherein Muslims critically engage socio-visual dynamics while anchored in normative ethics. By reorienting *ḥadīth* as ethical inspiration rather than rigid legal codices, adherents navigate modernity’s visual challenges without sacrificing Islamic authenticity. *Maqāṣid* thus operates as a teleological framework bridging textual fidelity and contextual sensitivity—mediating between legal injunctions, cultural wisdom, and *sharīʿah*’s higher objectives.

As such, pre-wedding practices in Muslim societies constitute a critical case study in the adaptive negotiation of *ḥadīth* within modernity. They demand a socially-embedded hermeneutic that reinterprets textual traditions while reconstructing Islamic visual ethics—one responsive to popular culture’s allure yet ethically accountable to *maqāṣid* imperatives (Auda, 2008; Hall, 1997). This dual mandate—interpretive and ethical—positions Islam not as a relic but as a living tradition capable of harmonizing transcendent values with temporal visualities.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *ḥadīth* texts necessitate contextual hermeneutics transcending literalist ahistorical interpretations, foregrounding the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* framework. Within modern visual-cultural milieus, this paradigm enables ethically reflexive and socially responsive engagements with Prophetic traditions, repositioning *ḥadīth* as dynamic value systems guiding religious expression rather than static legal codices. *Pre-wedding* practices adhering to *sharī'ah* parameters—eschewing physical contact, observing modesty codes, and post-*akad* execution—epitomize negotiated religiosity, balancing scriptural fidelity with cultural adaptation. The proliferation of sharia-compliant matrimonial services, strategic deployment of Islamic semiotics in photography, and curated aesthetic filtering collectively signify value rearticulation within popular cultural spaces.

Employing *maqāṣidī* hermeneutics and socially-embedded *ḥadīth* interpretation, pre-wedding emerges as a spectrum of contemporary piety—not merely potential norm transgression but a performative arena for visual *taqwā* (God-consciousness), spiritual intentionality, and Islamic public ethics. Consequently, discourse must transcend binary *ḥalāl-ḥarām* dichotomies, prioritizing critical dialogues on visual ethics, *maqāṣid* consciousness, and socio-textual reflexivity. This article contributes an integrative analytical framework synthesizing *ḥadīth* normativity, visual culture studies, and social theory—a holistic lens for examining Islam's adaptive agency in globalized modernity.

Amidst cultural globalization, Muslims are called to evolve from passive cultural consumers to agentive producers of ethical frameworks steering civilizational change. Pre-wedding, when anchored in *maqāṣid* and public piety, may serve as *visual da'wah*—a medium for projecting Islamic ethics through aesthetic intentionality. Such practices exemplify Islam's capacity to harmonize transcendent principles with temporal dynamism, ensuring religious authenticity amid modernity's visual-cultural flux.

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