Virtual Friday Prayer Practices During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia

Praktik Solat Jumaat Virtual Semasa Pandemik Covid-19 di Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the practice of virtual Friday prayers implemented to provide convenience of worship during the pandemic in Indonesia. Ease of access and fulfillment of social distancing that is relevant to the conditions of the Covid-19 outbreak is considered a solution to solving religious problems in the context of a pandemic. To achieve this goal, this research uses qualitative methods with data collection techniques through observation and documentation which are analyzed using content analysis techniques. Research into the practice of virtual Friday prayers raises two main trends. The first trend is related to the need to shift the practice of conventional Friday prayers to virtual Friday prayers which are considered relevant in dealing with the pandemic. The second trend is related to the impact of changes in practice that produce new terms in the implementation of virtual Friday prayers. The shift in worship practices with various terms that are considered to provide solutions for ease of worship does not go hand in hand with efforts to reconceptualize the main provisions that make Friday prayers valid in Islamic law (fiqh). The concept of the continuity of the movements of the imam and the congregation, which is a requirement for the validity of prayer with the condition of being in one place, is not owned by virtual Friday prayers, so its validity is doubtful. Re-conception is needed to maintain the continuation of the virtual Friday prayer, which is considered easy and relevant to the pandemic context. Ignoring the availability of supporting arguments has an impact on identifying the practice of virtual Friday prayers as an effort to appropriate religion with technology that is prone to conflict and debate in society.

Keywords: Friday prayer; virtual prayer; Covid-19; fiqh of disaster

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis praktik solat Jumaat virtual yang dilaksanakan untuk memberikan kemudahan ibadah pada masa pandemi di Indonesia. Kemudahan akses dan pemenuhan social distancing yang relevan dengan kondisi wabah Covid-19 dianggap sebagai solusi pemecahan masalah keagamaan dalam konteks pandemi. Untuk mencapai tujuan tersebut, penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi dan dokumentasi yang dianalisis dengan menggunakan teknik content analisis. Penelitian terhadap praktik solat Jumaat virtual memunculkan dua kecenderungan utama. Kecenderungan pertama terkait dengan kebutuhan terhadap pergeseran praktik solat Jumaat konvensional ke solat Jumaat virtual yang dianggap relevan dalam menghadapi pandemi. Kecenderungan kedua berkaitan dengan dampak perubahan praktik yang menghasilkan term baru dalam pelaksanaan solat Jumaat virtual. Peralihan praktik ibadah dengan beragam istilahnya yang dianggap memberikan solusi kemudahan beribadah tidak berjalan lurus dengan upaya merekonsepsi ketentuan utama yang menjadikan solat Jumaat sah secara hukum Islam (fiqh). Konsep kubersambungan gerakan imam dan makmum yang menjadi syarat sah solat dengan ketentuan berada dalam satu tempat tidak dimiliki oleh solat Jumaat virtual, sehingga keabsahannya diragukan. Rekonsepsi dibutuhkan untuk mempertahankan keberlanjutan pelaksanaan solat Jumaat virtual yang dianggap memudahkan dan relevan terhadap konteks pandemi. Pengabaian terhadap ketersediaan dalil yang mendukung berdampak pada identifikasi praktik solat Jumaat virtual sebagai upaya apropriasi agama dengan teknologi yang rentan terhadap konflik dan perdebatan di masyarakat.

Kata kunci: Solat Jumaat; ibadah virtual; Covid-19; fiqh bencana

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic situation has brought about many changes in Muslim's way of worships, ranging from the closure of mosques, the ban of regular Friday Prayer, and the offer of virtual Friday prayer as a new alternative. The practice of virtual Friday prayer was introduced by the public virtue congregation and is considered as an alternative form of worship during the pandemic. However, the validity of this practice is subject to much debate. Many media headlines have reported the pros and cons of the practice of virtual Friday prayer (Republika, Detik, Kompas, Suara Muhammadiyah, NU Online). These innumerable controversial reports on the virtual Friday prayer highlight the typical response of Indonesians towards a newly created method of worship during the pandemic in exchange of activities normally conducted in mosques that leads to fierce debate (Aula 2020). Van Dun et al. (2015) has highlighted the debate about the "danger" of online rituals, which is assumed to eliminate the dimension of authenticity and authority of the rituals. However, Van Dun et al. (2015) further explained that authentication of an online ritual is highly dependent on the framework of previous ritual experiences acquired in the offline domain. The only things needed to bring these rituals online are mundane and profane devices, such as computers and desk as online tool.

Studies on the practice of religious worship during the pandemic have given birth to some research trends. The first trend is related to the forms and strategies of worship during the pandemic (Aziz & Wardhani 2021; Fahiza & Zalikha 2021; Jubba 2021; Baidowi et al. 2022; Qudsy et al. 2022; Kuipers et al. 2020; Makmun 2020; Rostiani et al. 2021; Wiguna 2020). Jubba (2021) in his research on the worship of Christians and Muslims during a pandemic articulated that the pandemic not only compels religious people to think about myriad ways of coping strategies for worship, but also opens up a room for the religion to allow its adherents to seek and strive for new ways to ensure the viability of religious practices. The second deals with resistance and opposition against the prohibition of congregational worship during the pandemic (Aziz & Wardhani 2021). Aziz and Wardhani (2020) denoted that the application of the health protocol in places of worship is far from optimal. Likewise, Johnson (2020), who examined the resistance of the Christian community to the banning of religious sermons in churches, also revealed similar results. Apart from these two trends, a study to analyze the appropriation of online worship, especially virtual Friday prayer remains understudied. A few studies on Friday prayer during the pandemic are more concerned with the attempt to reduce religious mass gatherings, for example by holding Friday prayer twice in one mosque during the pandemic. Nonetheless, there has been no research to discuss the ideas and community appropriation of virtual Friday prayer during the pandemic, which underlies the significance of this research.

This research article, in particular, is directed to fill the abovementioned research gap by highlighting that congregational prayer, as a form of long-established regular worship that has always been conducted in the same way, has gradually experienced a shift during this pandemic as a process of reinterpretation and appropriation. Accordingly, three questions are proposed: first, how is the virtual Friday prayer practice held; second, what are the factors that encourage the holding of virtual Friday prayer; third, how does the practice of virtual Friday prayer affect the implementation of worship in the Indonesian Muslim community? These three questions underpin the focus of this research article.

This paper argues that virtual Friday prayer is held as a response to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, given the widely available online platforms during the pandemic. The currently existing online system has necessitated an effort to carry out *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) in Islamic law to solve the problem that *salih li kull zamn wa makan* (relevant in all times and places). The practice of virtual Friday prayer not only requires a solid legal basis in Islamic jurisprudence but also requires Muslims to be ready to accept changes. In this way, the Muslim community will accept new traditions, such as virtual Friday prayers, if they are supported by legitimate Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Otherwise, they will be rejected.

LITERATURE REVIEW

RELIGIOUS WORSHIP DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The proliferation of Covid-19 has altered the widely held religious practices and faith at large. Such rapid changes, on the one hand, may trigger some conflicts between religious adherents and policy makers in the face of Covid-19 policy. On the other hand, the pandemic situation has also strengthened the

religious faith of religious adherents (Kowalczyk et al. 2020). Patience in worship during Covid-19 is a must so that Muslims can remain calm in carrying out worship during this pandemic (Salleh et al. 2022). Hence, religion, the state, and the wider community shall work hand in hand in responding to problems generated by regulations on Covid-19 mitigation (Regus 2022). Religion has an effective role in promoting healthy life in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic through three aspects: explaining the effects of Covid-19 to the community, promoting a religious world-wide view and lifestyle in society, and providing a scientific perspective in facing real-life situation during the pandemic (Barmania & Reiss 2020). The pandemic condition has also urged the quest for solutions regarding future forms of worship, such as the possibility for conducting religious pilgrimage once the spread of Covid-19 is under control (Olsen & Timothy 2020). Religion can be an effective and preventive tool against the pandemic. In fact, the Covid-19 pandemic opens up a room for dialogue between science and religion, which is increasingly considered to play a significant role in fighting against the challenges at stake, such as pandemics to epidemics (Alexander 2020).

Some Christians who carry out virtual religious worship consider it as an alternative to ensure the continuity of religious worship while at the same time complying with government policies (Langfan 2021; Ochs 2020). Nonetheless, several groups oppose the practice of virtual religious worship (Johnson 2020). Apart from a controversy of virtual religious worship, it is noteworthy that the practice of worship is principally a personal relationship between humans and God, which should not be restricted by space and time, and thus can be conducted online by utilizing audio, video devices, and other technological means (Luchenko 2021; Tambunan 2021). The use of online media in religious activities has led to various innovations, such as live streaming of worship services, religious worship software applications, digital prayers, online pilgrimages, and even the soaring demand for virtual prayer in Russia (Berger 2017; Kisser 2020).

VIRTUALIZATION OF RELIGIOUS RITUALS

Virtualization of religious rituals is a condition when religious rituals are practiced using technological devices, such as homepages, weblogs, chat rooms, newsgroups and virtual meeting platforms (Radde-Antweiler 2008). This phenomenon must be understood as a change in social and religious contexts involving new media in religious rituals (Ruah-Midbar 2014). Virtualization in religious rituals connects thousands of people to each other online at the same time, which results in new forms of ritual, management and networking that are influential in a global context (Hutchings 2017). Overall, advances in information technology have contributed greatly to the birth of the virtualization of religious rituals. Such trend is generally resulted from the sophistication of information technology, which thus makes it easier for people to actively seek for information needed and in turn has an impact on society's dependence on technology, especially in the practice of religious rituals (Sururi 2019). Massive use of technology in the practice of religious rituals has changed the form of religious rituals and may transform religious identity. Such changes are obvious in the distinctive identity between the Sufi community in Europe and the Sufi community in eastern countries (Piraino 2016).

A commonplace practice of virtualization of religious rituals is the ODOJ (one day one *juz*) ritual, a collective recitation of the Qur'an using the WhatsApp Group mobile application. Such a semi-virtual Islamic proselytizing movement is deemed as a successful practice since it could recruit 140,000 followers in 2018. ODOJ followers consider this movement as a form of *da'wa* (proselytizing) in the contemporary era given its ability to strengthen religious sentiment through technological intermediaries (Nisa 2018). The virtualization of religious rituals initially started from *da'wa* movement and continued to touch the core rituals, as in the case of St. John's Internet Church, which performs all their rituals of worship virtually through an online platform. One of the virtual religious worships of St. John Internet Church merely requires the audience to press the "in church" button on the screen, which will automatically display a virtual picture of the church and the worship procedures that are commonly done offline (Casey 2006). The myriad virtualization of religious rituals has pinpointed the close correlation between religion and the media, both of which may fuse and correct each other (Wagner 2012).

THE *FIQH* OF DISASTER

The *fiqh* of disaster is a guide for Muslim's worship in disaster conditions (Suyadi et al. 2020). The *fiqh* of disaster serves as a guide for Muslim's worship to provide an alternative to actual and contextual worship procedures (Saenong et al. 2020). The

Fiqh of disaster is highly required by Muslims to guide their worship in times of disaster or epidemic and serves an important reference in carrying out religious orders. In the face of Covid-19 pandemic situation, religious communities are ultimately forced to adapt their religious rituals (Suyadi et al. 2020). Likewise, Muslims are also required to adjust their laws of worship, including by adapting alternative Friday prayer during the Covid-19 pandemic that has hit since 2020 (Idris et al. 2021; Mahmuddin & Akbar 2020; Sahil 2020). In fact, it is commonplace to change the law or way of worship according to the prevailing conditions and situations (Fauzi 2019; Saeed 2011).

The conceptual implementation of the *fiqh* of disaster is carried out in various forms. For instance, there has been a change in the implementation of pilgrimage (*hajj*) during the pandemic to adjust with the prohibition of mass gatherings (Atique & Itumalla 2020; Hoang et al. 2020; Mansyur 2020; Saidun 2020). Although presently still being held, the pilgrimage is highly restricted for some small groups and shall be carried out with a strict health protocol (Ebrahim et al. 2021; Hashim et al. 2021; Jokhdar et al. 2021). In addition to pilgrimage, there has also a significant adaptation in the practice of *tarawih* prayer during Ramadan and Eid prayer during the Covid-19 Pandemic (Darmawan et al. 2020; Hede et al. 2020). These facts highlight that the rules of worship are adjustable in accordance with the applicable context and social conditions in the community, especially during the outbreak of a plague.

METHODS

This is qualitative research that aims to explain the virtual practice of Friday prayer during the Covid-19 pandemic. This topic is selected based on the widespread discussions regarding virtual Friday prayer in social media. It is directed to emphasize the efforts to find out the existing views, knowledge, values, norms, and rules as a legal basis to carry out virtual Friday prayer. The research data were derived both from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were some selected websites, such as www.publicvirtue.id and some social media accounts on Facebook and Instagram, and some YouTube channels. The secondary data were some articles concerning the same topic. These data were obtained in two steps: observation, and documentation. The observations were made by

directly attending and participating in the virtual Friday prayer, while the documentations were collected from some written articles, Friday sermon texts, photos, posters, and so on.

The collected data were then processed through the stages of data reduction, data display, and data verification, by referring to Miles and Huberman (1984). The collected data were reduced by way of summarizing and verifying the existing data. Data were then displayed by categorizing them based on the discussion topic according to the research problems, by adding some visualizations in the form of photos and flyers. Subsequently, data were analyzed using content analysis, by choosing and selecting related views, arguments, and procedures for the virtual implementation of Friday prayer. This data was then dialogued with the public response, through news, social media, and scientific writings related to the virtual implementation of Friday prayer during the Covid-19 pandemic.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The practice of Friday prayer is virtually displayed in this section. The explanation of the practice of virtual Friday prayer is explained in 3 models. The first model is a descriptive explanation that includes the practice of virtual Friday prayer. The second model is a critical explanation of the factors that encourage the enactment of virtual Friday prayer. The third model is a transformative explanation that includes the implications of the practice of virtual Friday prayer on the worship rituals of Indonesian Muslim communities at large.

THE PRACTICE OF VIRTUAL FRIDAY PRAYER

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has turned the conventional practice of congregational Friday prayer into the practice of virtual Friday prayer. The observation revealed the real practice of virtual Friday prayer which took place in *Masjid Jami' Virtual Hilful Fudhul* (*Hilful Fudhul* Congregational Virtual Mosque) organized by the Public Virtue Research Institute (2021c). Virtual Friday prayer is carried out by means of some virtual platforms in the form of Zoom Meeting or Google Meet applications. In practice, the Friday prayer virtually begins with the opening ceremony, the reading of the sermon, and the implementation of the Friday prayer, which is led by an *imam* (leader of prayer) virtually. The practitioners of virtual Friday prayer are required to listen to the virtual reading of the *khutbah* (religious

sermons) as a condition for the validity of Friday prayer. The virtual Friday prayer is led by an *imam* followed by the practitioners through a virtual application. The practitioners are also required to comply with the praying movement of the imam clearly made visible through the computer screens of respective practitioner (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021c). The use of online technological devices during the implementation of virtual Friday prayer is resulted from the enactment of large-scale social restrictions imposed during the pandemic.

The practice of virtual Friday prayer has changed the regular procedures of Friday prayer. The virtual Friday prayer in congregation is scheduled to be present in a virtual room 30 minutes before *bilal* (the caller to prayer) announces the first call to prayer (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021c). Prior to the call to prayer, the committee gives a speech that is framed in a five-minute prologue procession. After *bilal* gives the first call to prayer, *bilal* continues the procession by facing the screen instead of facing the congregation as in the conventional Friday prayer procedure. Afterwards, *bilal* transfers the program to the preacher as a form of virtual handing over of sticks (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021c). The next process in virtual Friday prayer is carried out in accordance with the practice of conventional Friday prayer with the reading of the first and second sermons to the implementation of virtual congregational prayers (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021c). The different form of interaction between the *imam*, preacher, and congregation since they are not in the same place is the main distinctive feature of the practice of virtual Friday prayer from the practice of conventional Friday prayer.

The practice of virtual Friday prayer not only changes the practice of offline to online congregational prayer, but also alters the topics raised in the Friday sermon. Organizers of virtual Friday prayer limits the topic of virtual Friday sermons to contemporary problems existing in the life of society, nation and state. The main issue to deliver generally relates to the democratic regression that befell Indonesia (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021c). The preachers are carefully selected based on their integrity, expertise, and broad insight in guiding and acknowledging the community with the informative knowledge to understand the current situation they currently face and improve the existing problems (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021c). The adjustment of the topic of the sermon is made to comply with the purpose of holding virtual Friday prayer as a way to help the public in understanding the actual problems at stake (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021c). The selected topics for virtual Friday sermons are as follows:

TABLE 1. Sermon Topics for Virtual Friday Prayer

Date	Topics	Khatib/Preachers	Description
March 5, 2021	Islam, Democracy, and Women's Rights	Dr. KH. Imam Nahe'i, MA	First Virtual Friday Prayer
March 12, 2021	The Liberation of Women According to the Qur'an	K.H. Wawan Gunawan Abdul Wahid	2nd Virtual Friday Prayer
March 19, 2021	Democracy: Me, We and Us	Prof. Komaruddin Hidayat	3rd Virtual Friday Prayer
March 26, 2021	Religious Tolerance and Freedom as Human Rights	Dr. Budhy Munawar Rachman	4th Virtual Friday Prayer
April 2, 2021	Substantive Islam	Prof. Dr. H. Fauzul Iman, M.A	5th Virtual Friday Prayer
April 9, 2021	Progressive Zakat, Comprehensive Citizenship & Awareness of Social Justice for All Indonesians	Ghifari Yuristiadhi	6th Virtual Friday Prayer
April 16, 2021	A Model of Independent Muslim Woman	Hatib Rahmawan	7th Virtual Friday Prayer
April 23, 2021	Islam's Call to Protect and Care for Orphans	KH. Abduh Hisyam, S.Ag.	8th Virtual Friday Prayer
April 30, 2021	The Main Points of Fasting: Climate Justice and Intergenerational Justice	Ust. Parid Ridwanuddin	9th Virtual Friday Prayer
May 21, 2021	Palestine and World Peace	Ust. K.H. M. Abduh Hisyam, S.Ag	12th Virtual Friday Prayer
May 28, 2021	Islam and the Future of Democracy in Indonesia	Ust. Joko Arizal, M.A.	13th Virtual Friday Prayer
June 4, 2021	Taqwa and the Challenging Decadence of the Ummah	Ust. Zezen Zaenal Mutaqin, SH.I., LL.M.	14th Virtual Friday Prayer
June 11, 2021	Are Women Really Made of Ribs?	Ust. Hatib Rachmawan	15th Virtual Friday Prayer

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June 18, 2021	Islamic Message to Uphold Social-Ecological Justice	Ust. Parid Ridwanuddin, S.Fil., M.A., M.Ud.	16th Virtual Friday Prayer
June 25, 2021	Corruption: Mental Pandemic that Damages the Elements of the State	Ust. H. Helmi Hidayat M.Ud.	17th Virtual Friday Prayer
July 2, 2021	The Crisis within Our Education Quality	KH. M. Abduh Hisyam, S.Ag.	18th Virtual Friday Prayer
July 9, 2021	Religion, Climate Crisis, and Health Crisis	Ust. Parid Ridwanuddin, S.Fil., M.A., M.Ud.	19th Virtual Friday Prayer
July 16, 2021	Political & Social Riba (Usury) in the Perspective of the Qur'an	Ust. Ir. Yahya 'Abdul Rasyid, M.Ag.	20th Virtual Friday Prayer

The sermon topics were selected based on the actual issues facing the Indonesians. The significance of democracy, women's equality, the issue of usury, environmental and health crises, and widely discusses issues on national development in Indonesia are part of these selected topics. Thus, in addition to the changing procedure in religious activities from offline to virtual Friday prayer, another change is also notable in the selection of issues to be delivered in the virtual Friday sermon.

FACTORS THAT ENCOURAGE VIRTUAL FRIDAY PRAYER

The practice of virtual Friday prayer held by the Public Virtue Research Institute reflects emergency situations given the massive wide spread of Covid-19. This new form of religious worship is introduced to prevent the crowds and thus anticipate the extensive infection of the virus (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021c). This activity is initiated by taking into account the government's recommendation through the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) fatwa regarding restrictions on activities in mosques that involve large numbers of people (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021). Such restrictions are decided based on some considerations on health and religious aspects (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021). However, the community may respond these prohibitions negatively since the ban has deprived them from the right to pray and listen to sermons (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021). The escalation of cases and harmful conditions of the ongoing time of crisis trigger the implementation of virtual Friday prayer as a way to facilitate the community to listen to Friday sermons.

The current restrictions are deemed as the impact of the vulnerable circumstance of the spread of Covid-19, and partly is attributed to the vague political policies of the government. The government lack of control over the pandemic has cost the life of fallen victims (Public Virtue Research Institute

2021). The ambiguous policy also has an impact on the public's negligence on the recommended health protocols, especially during mandatory congregational worship (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021). The current implementation of policies of large-scale social restrictions and public activity restrictions are not substituted with other policies that facilitate religious worship during a pandemic to ease the community (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021). As a way to ease the procedure of religious worship, the virtual Friday prayer is considered as an alternative solution for people in areas imposed with restriction policy.

The implementation of virtual Friday prayer in areas with restriction policies is supported by the valid and strong legal basis of Islamic law (*fiqh*). The problem of religious worship during a pandemic is classified as a state of crisis, which eliminates the debate about the need to follow or prohibit laws that are not stated in sharia (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021). Various fatwas related to policies, both in the context of positive law and religion, as a form of applicable crisis mechanism in *fiqh* that allow the practice of virtual Friday prayer, as issued by Ahmad bin al-Siddiq al-Ghamari, al-Husain Ayit Sa'ide, and Ahmad al-Raisuni became a legal basis in the virtual implementation of Friday prayer (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021). *Fiqh* is a normative argument that encourages the virtual implementation of Friday prayer.

THE EFFECTS OF VIRTUAL FRIDAY PRAYER TO THE FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP AMONG THE INDONESIAN MUSLIM COMMUNITY

Virtual Friday prayer as an alternative form of worship to respond the pandemic situation has prompted the birth of a new concept in the implementation of Friday prayer. The data revealed two aspects to strengthen this argument. The first aspect is the introduction of new terms for the virtual Friday

prayer procession and the regaining awareness on the need to conduct other religious worships in a virtual space. The introduction of new terms in the religious procession has brought about new definition of worship instruments related to virtual Friday prayer, such as a virtual mosque called *Masjid Jami' Hilful Fudhul* (*Hilful Fudhul* Congregational Virtual Mosque). Like a typical mosque, the administrator of the mosque is called the *ta'mir* (manager) of the *Hilful Fudhul* Congregational Virtual Mosque and the congregation is named as the *Jamaah Majlis Ta'lim Hilful Fudhul* (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021a). The naming of virtual space as a mosque, where virtual Friday prayer is hold, is based on its substance as a place of prostration, instead of referring to its physical meaning.

Dear the worshipers to whom Allah showers His countless blessing, as previously stated at the beginning of this *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), we would like to use this group as "a place to learn together about the values of virtue". Please allow us to name it as "*Masjid Jami' Hilful Fudhul*". *Masjid* (mosque) is a place to prostrate, worship God, and conduct activities that benefit humanity, which are highly rewarded by Allah, while "*Jami'*" means "to gather" and "include" all people for worship and strengthen the universal humanitarian movement. Given its virtual nature, the words *masjid* and *jami'* in this context refers to a place of congregational prostration not only in a physical sense, but also in a virtual sense as a way to worship God together through activities that benefit humanity (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021b).

The redefinition of the terms and devices used for the virtual implementation of Friday prayer is done to meet the requirements for the validity of the virtual Friday prayer.

The second aspect is awareness of the need for virtual worship during the pandemic. The adoption of virtual Friday prayer may have an impact on the awareness on the need to create alternative spaces in the implementation of other form of worship during the pandemic. The ease of virtual practice of Friday prayer during the pandemic has sparked the intention of the community to keep on practicing the mandatory Friday prayer (Institute n.d.). The perceived ease in carrying out Friday prayer encourages the intention to carry out other forms of worship in a virtual space.

"Not only do we have this sole virtual mosque, but also do we have other mosques. Other hosts also organize similar events and I have been campaigning for it in many groups (Helmi Hidayat-Member of virtual Friday Prayer) (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021b)."

"I have shared this (activity) with my friends, including the network in my contacts. Alhamdulillah, we have been able to perform virtual Friday Prayer, considering that in our office 42 people were infected with Covid-19, and thank God we were able to meet at the assembly. This activity has beeen very useful for us (Heru Cahyono- Member of virtual Friday Prayer) (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021b)."

Interestingly, it is notable that the virtual Friday prayer has urged a new tradition since some female worshipers have attended the Friday prayer. Typically, women are always excluded from the practice of Friday prayer since they are not obliged to perform Friday prayer, as stated by one of the members.

"I was very moved that I was able to join the virtual Friday prayer. I haven't attended Friday Prayer for a long time because I am a woman. The last time I attended Friday prayer was when I was a student back then in the 1980s, and after that I was no longer allowed to attend the prayer. Thus, I felt very grateful (about this activity) and I will spread it to my extensive range of networks (bini Bukhari – Female member of virtual Friday prayer) (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021b)."

A newly adapted tradition during the process of virtual Friday prayer is the question-and-answer session that takes place after Friday prayer (Hamid 2021). The flexibility provided by technology has overcome the distance-related problems in the implementation of the virtual Friday prayer and gives rise to a new tradition during the process of worship.

The third aspect is the introduction of a virtual space for the implementation of other forms of worship. The comfort and high enthusiasm of the community to participating in virtual Friday prayer may encourage other forms of virtual congregational worship. The data demonstrated several other religious worships that are carried out virtually, such as virtual congregational *tarawih* prayers for a whole month (Public Virtue Research Institute 2021d), virtual Eid prayers, and virtual *Halal bi Halal* (ask and give forgiveness at the end of the fasting period). These two activities were carried out by the *Jama'ah Majlis Taklim Hilful Fudhul* in the 2021 Eid al-Fitr prayer under the same spirit: providing an alternative form of worship during the pandemic. The enthusiasm is well reflected in the comment of one of the following practitioners of virtual Eid prayer. "It was an amazing alternative new form of worship. I was really touched by this activity. I really thanked the preacher for delivering such a great speach (PSIPP ITB Ahmad Dahlan

Jakarta 2021)". The practice of virtual Friday Prayer may trigger the implementation other forms of worship using the same online platforms.

DISCUSSION

The use of virtual media in the implementation of virtual Friday prayers does not have an impact on changes in the rules and requirements for the validity of Friday prayers essentially. The changes occur only in the media used as a result of the use of technology in religious rituals during the pandemic. The limitations of worship caused by the pandemic provide an open space for dialogue between science and religion (Alexander 2020) as a creative mechanism for society to deal with the difficulties experienced (Olsen & Timothy 2020) by producing solutions to the implementation of religious rituals (Barmania & Reiss 2020). The use of media in the virtual implementation of Friday prayers has led to new terms for the completeness of worship and the actual scope of sermon material. Changes in the mention of the completeness of worship are part of the adaptations made in response to the pandemic (Saenong et al. 2020). This statement is reinforced by Suyadi et al. (2020) who mentioned that adjusting the worship mechanism during an outbreak is a necessity that gave birth to the concept of the *fiqh* of disease. Media adjustments as a solution to religious rituals and offering solutions to actual problems as sermon material are carried out without making fundamental changes to the rules and legal requirements for Friday prayers.

The adjustment of Friday prayer rituals using technology is a form of imitation of adaptations that take place in socio-cultural practices that have utilized virtual space. The adaptation of socio-cultural practices into virtual space is considered as an impact of technological determination that can be implemented into religious activities. Religion practiced in new media resulting from technological developments (Radde-Antweiler 2008; Ruah-Midbar 2014) forms new habits in its implementation. Casey (2006) shows a new mechanism in virtual worship centered on technological sophistication. This kind of change is considered a fusion of religion with technology (Wagner 2011) which is also utilized by Muslims. The practice of reciting the Qur'an using WhatsApp Group media (Nisa 2018), online pesantren (Qudsy 2019), and virtual marriage (Hakim & Qodsiyah 2022) are forms of adaptation of Islamic rituals by utilizing technology. The use

of technology as an alternative media framed in an emergency situation has an impact on the ongoing polemic about its validity in the structure of Islamic law (*fiqh*).

The polemics over the validity of virtual Friday prayers in place of conventional Friday prayers due to emergencies are related to the form of dispensation (*rukhsah*) or strictness (*azimah*). The conventional Friday prayer, which is established as an initial law (*ibtida'*) imposed on all determined people (*mukallaf*), is exempted in the form of a waiver (*takhfif isqat*) (Al-Zuhayli 2006) in the presence of an impediment (*uzr*) (Al-Zuhayli n.d.). A waiver of the obligation to perform the Friday prayer may occur when the conditions for performing it in congregation—conducted by forty Muslims, male, burdened (*mukallaf*), free, and settled—are not met. In cases of emergency and unfulfilled conditions, the Friday prayer can be replaced by the Zuhr prayer (Al-Haytami 2000). In fact, the life-threatening emergency of Covid-19 can be a barrier that nullifies the obligation of Friday prayer. This is based on the view of Ibn Qudamah (1997) who made Friday prayer a matter of *Sunnah* (recommendatory) for people who are unable to perform it. The transfer of obligation in the form of an exemption from Friday prayer is related to the fulfillment of mandatory conditions that have been stipulated in Islamic law (*fiqh*).

However, the ability to perform Friday prayers for people who are prevented due to the pandemic through virtual means can restore the fulfillment of the conditions of the obligation to perform them. Ibn Qudamah (1997) provides a basis by stating that the ability to perform Friday prayers for people who are not charged occurs when the obstacle (*mushaqqah*) that prevents them can be overcome. The use of virtual technology is an element used by the *Masjid Jami' Hilful Fudhul* (*Hilful Fudhul* Congregational Virtual Mosque) to eliminate difficulties caused by the pandemic. The virtual practice of Friday prayer follows the legal requirements of its implementation, namely, it is performed in congregation (*jama'ah*), followed by forty people, held in a predetermined place, held at Zuhr time, and held after two sermons (Al-Jawi n.d.). The debate on the legitimacy of this practice arose over the definition of the place and conditions of congregation, which was carried out virtually as an effort to overcome the difficulties caused by the pandemic.

The difference in the concepts of congregation and mosque as the basic components that are

polarized arise in relation to the concept of gathering the imam and the congregation in one place. The unspecified gathering place of the imam and the congregation allows the Friday prayer to be performed in various places (Al-Gharnati 1994; Al-Nawawi 1347). However, the majority of scholars of Jurisprudence agree that the place can have the effect of connecting the movements of the imam and the congregation. On this basis, Abu Zahrah prohibits the Friday prayer from being performed using loudspeakers. Meanwhile, the opinion of Al-Sadiq (1375) that allows the Friday prayer to be performed at home using a microphone is used to fulfill the requirement that the congregation follow the imam's sermon. Meanwhile, the continuity of the movements of the imam and the congregation that arises from the concept of congregation in one place is an unavoidable requirement. This condition is also used by Hassah al-Sudays (2021) as a limitation on the permissibility of praying in congregation using virtual media in a pandemic situation. In fact, Ibn Hajr al-Haytami (2000) made the requirement of gathering in one place a mandatory condition. The place of gathering between the imam and the congregation in one table as a valid condition of the Friday prayer is measured through familiar customs, not by using virtual media (Alam 2020).

The continuity of the *imam* and the congregation as a valid condition of prayer that is not fulfilled in the virtual Friday prayer forms a new relationship between religion and media by borrowing and using it without understanding its terms and conditions. Ignorance of its terms and conditions has an impact on the tendency to change and eliminate the value and conditions of its obligations as a new form of appropriation in religious rituals. This impact is corroborated by the findings of Levrini et al. (2021) who claim that the impact of Covid-19 which creates cultural shock through various forms, including technology, creates new appropriations in the world of education by eliminating the basic values of learning. This is similar to what happened during the Covid-19 era with the change in preaching style (Fauzi et al. 2022). Appropriation in virtual religious rituals also has an impact on the blurring of boundaries between religious and non-religious concepts in society. The existence of a virtual mosque eliminates the sacredness of the mosque with its various worship services. The blurred distinction between the sacred and profane was also found by Saint-Blancat and Cancellieri (2014) in the appropriation process of the Santacruzan ritual in the Philippines. In fact, appropriation can eliminate the original identity of the ritual aspects taken (Boisvert 2020). The loss of identity that emerges in the practice of virtual Friday prayers is the impact of withdrawing mandatory worship (*azimah*) without reviewing its terms and conditions.

The use of technology in virtual Friday prayers, which has an impact on the loss of religious identity as a result of the process of religious appropriation, distinguishes this research from previous studies. Other studies emphasize the influence of the pandemic on changes in the concept (Zaenuri 2020) and practice of religious worship (Kowalczyk et al. 2020), the use of virtual media in worship (Radde-Antweiler 2008), and normative-dogmatic worship rules during the pandemic (Saenong et al. 2020; Suyadi et al. 2020). The ease of worship and the compatibility of newly adapted methods with legal reasoning drive the intention to extend ongoing forms of worship during the pandemic to the adoption of similar forms of worship outside the pandemic. The shift from conventional to virtual rituals in religion is being introduced with the legal polemics that follow (Niu 2023). This makes the pandemic a driver of new changes in social life (de Souza 2020). The aspect of change in rituals by linking to the suitability of the basic concept of religious rituals in the frame of appropriation distinguishes this research from previous studies.

The practice of virtual Friday prayers that took place during the pandemic contains elements of appropriation in religious rituals. Appropriation in religious practice is prone to be present in the type of obligations that have been determined (*azimah*) for those who are prevented from fulfilling them by changing their original form (Al-Ansari n.d.). Legal leniency exists to facilitate the performance of acts of worship for Muslims who find it difficult to perform them. This idea is the basis for the formation of the *fiqh* of disease to find convenience in the implementation of worship in the context of an outbreak that follows the standard of legal change (Atique and Itumalla 2020; Suyadi et al. 2020). Changes in ritual forms that do not have rules for change are still produced by relying on the convenience available by paying attention to the provisions that have been set. Media switching in worship during the pandemic was found to be not in accordance with the requirements of the provisions (Darmawan, Miharja, Sri, et al. 2020; Hede et al. 2020), so that the appropriation of religious rituals is prone to take place significantly.

CONCLUSION

Virtualization of religious rituals, which has been considered as an alternative action to support the ease and resolution of obstacles to worship during the pandemic, is not fully justified. This study reveals that the convenience provided in virtual worship practices through the formation of new concepts obscures the dimensions of the requirements for the validity of Friday prayers. The withdrawal of religious rituals without complete identification of requirements into virtual media gives rise to a new type of appropriation in religious territory. This appropriation can have an impact on the controversy of new religious rituals that are widespread with claims of religious secularization. The resulting impact of the utilization of media in the implementation of virtual Friday prayers requires a review by paying attention to the scope of the requirements of the obligation and its validity. Attention to this scope can open the possibility of implementing worship that has definite provisions into the virtual space.

The completion of the conditions and pillars in the performance of religious rituals can virtually set a new direction for the practice of religious rituals in the public sphere. The new direction is primarily indicated by three types of changes: 1) changes of place, from offline Friday Prayer usually done at mosques to online prayers through cyberspace; 2) changes in the management with the addition of certain practices, such as question and answer session, although this practice is an additional practice out of the core rituals; 3) changes in the content of the Friday sermon. Changes in the latter aspect indicate a shift from reflective-normative to reflective-progressive direction. The typical daily sermons mainly contain contemplation of people's daily lives, but the virtual Friday prayer sermons are more related to the issues of nationality and statehood. The sermon also serves as a form of national-universal reflection that is not only based on the normative side of religion, but also is based on the latest research on the current practice of democracy.

However, this study has two limitations. The first limitation is attributed to the research subject that only focuses on the practice of virtual Friday prayer organized by the public virtue institute community. This fact indicates the need for further research on other forms of religious virtual worship. The second limitation lies on the fact that this study only analyzes worship practices during the pandemic. Hence, there is a need to conduct further studies on the implementation of virtual worship outside the pandemic to support or even criticize the results of this research.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

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