

Socio-Cultural Transformation through Modern Qasidah Music in Semarang City

Kusrina Widjajantie, Sunarto, Udi Utomo, Eko Sugiarto

Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

Abstract:

Modern qasidah music in Semarang has experienced remarkable growth and continues to influence the dynamics of urban Muslim society. This study explores how modern qasidah extends beyond the scope of religious entertainment to function as a platform for cultural acculturation, social interaction, and value transmission. Using a sociological framework of Islamic music, the research highlights that the study affirms that qasidah strengthens Islamic identity while negotiating the relationship between tradition and modernity. The study also emphasizes the inclusive social spaces created by qasidah performances that bring together diverse audiences in urban settings. Data were obtained through literature review, participant observation of festivals and community performances, and documentation of young people's enculturation processes, including artists' adaptation strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings indicate that modern qasidah operates as a performative cultural practice that blends religious values, Javanese cultural identity, and mechanisms of social transformation. This study affirms the position of Qasidah Modern as both a medium for cultural education and a resilient tradition, offering valuable contributions to the global discourse on contemporary Islamic art and urban religiosity.

Keywords: modern qasidah, Semarang, social transformation, Islamic music, cultural identity

Corresponding Author:

kwidjajantie@students.unnes.ac.id

Author Biodata:

Universitas Negeri Semarang

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INTRODUCTION

Semarang is a cosmopolitan city with a long history of trade and cultural exchange, and has long been a melting pot of religious values, local traditions, and modernity (Ganaie and Reyaz 2024). The acculturation of Islamic culture with Javanese traditions is a crucial part of the development of modern qasidah music in the city (Nasution and Arum 2024). Modern qasidah,

derived from a combination of classical Islamic music idioms with modern and popular music, has significantly strengthened the cultural identity of Semarang's Muslim community (Mohamed et al. 2024) (Nasution and Arum 2024). This phenomenon demonstrates that music is more than just a medium of entertainment, but also a tool for sharing values, integrating with others, and sharing identity within urban communities (Fikri and Hj. Tibek 2014). The lyrics, instruments, and performance style of contemporary qasidah, also known as modern qasidah, demonstrate a cultural influence. Although the lyrics of modern qasidah are based on Islamic teachings, they are packaged with communicative language and musicality close to Javanese society (Junaidi 2013). Costumes and stage styles show religious symbols, and traditional musical instruments blend with modern instruments. This shows how effective modern qasidah is in combining religious demands and entertainment for urban communities (ROHMAH 2024) (Otterback 2021). Modern qasidah serves as a tool for interaction and acceptance across all levels of society, as evidenced by citizens of all ages and backgrounds from diverse social backgrounds who can engage in shared musical experiences through performances in festivals, public places, and digital media. Modern qasidah can increase social cohesion and friendly and dynamic Muslim expression (Haryono and Nisa Islami 2023) (Lestari et al. 2023). Modern qasidah also serves as a tool for teaching cultural values to the younger generation, particularly through the process of enculturation, which makes music a way to internalize local moral, religious, and cultural values (Nasution and Arum 2024) (Syabana n.d.).

Over time, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the adaptive capacity of the qasidah community in Semarang. When face-to-face interactions became limited, modern qasidah groups turned to virtual concerts, social media, and cross-arts collaborations (Tian and Tsetsegdelger 2024). These innovations demonstrate that modern qasidah is a living tradition capable of transforming to meet the challenges of the times (Yuan Qiaoyi 2024). This adaptation affirms modern qasidah's position not only as a cultural heritage (Luis and Torres 1996) but also as an agent of social and cultural resilience in urban communities (Ridwan, Hamzah Harun, and Muhaimin 2024).

However, academic research on modern qasidah in Indonesia, particularly in Semarang, remains relatively limited. Studies of Islamic music have focused more on normative, historical, or aesthetic aspects, while the social function and transformative role of modern qasidah in urban spaces have remained largely unexplored. Furthermore, few studies have specifically examined the adaptation strategies of modern qasidah to global challenges such as the pandemic, nor have they explored how this music functions as a medium for cross-generational values education.

Based on this background, this study aims to: (1) How does modern qasidah music in Semarang reflect the acculturation of Islamic culture and local Javanese traditions? (2) How does modern qasidah contribute to strengthening cultural identity and social interaction? (3) How do modern qasidah adapt to social change during the pandemic? (4) How does modern qasidah serve as a medium for values education for the younger generation in urban communities? This research has several important benefits. Theoretically, it enriches the sociology of Islamic music by emphasizing modern qasidah as a contemporary performative practice. Practically, the research findings can serve as a reference for the arts community, educators, and policymakers in formulating strategies for the preservation and innovation of Islamic art. This socio-cultural perspective, this study reinforces the awareness that modern qasidah is not merely a means of entertainment but also an instrument for building social cohesion and strengthening urban Muslim identity. Therefore, the novelty of this study is that it provides a new perspective on modern qasidah as an agent of socio-cultural transformation, not simply a religious expression (Jakaria et al. 2023). It examines the interaction between Islamic tradition, local culture, and urban modernity in qasidah practices in Semarang. It highlights the adaptation strategies of modern qasidah during the COVID-19 pandemic, a topic rarely explored in previous studies. It also positions modern qasidah as a medium for cultural education relevant to the dynamics of the younger generation in the global era.

Therefore, this article contributes not only to the academic understanding of contemporary Islamic music but also to the global discourse on art as a means of social transformation. This study

positions modern qasidah in Semarang as a concrete example of how local cultural practices can combine religious values, cultural identity, and social resilience in the face of changing times.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative methodology because its purpose was to investigate the social meaning of qasidah music, the process of cultural acculturation, and the transformative role of qasidah music in society. Using a qualitative approach, researchers were able to understand the symbolic aspects and subjective experiences of contemporary qasidah performers and listeners. These subjective experiences cannot be explained solely through numbers.

The research was conducted in Semarang, Central Java, known as the center of contemporary qasidah development in Indonesia. The city has a long history as a cosmopolitan port that combines Islamic culture, Javanese tradition, and modernity. Semarang is a strategic and representative location due to the presence of the renowned qasidah group Nasida Ria, making it an important reference point for the study of contemporary qasidah music.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select research subjects based on their familiarity with the contemporary qasidah phenomenon. Qasidah performers, audiences, and the general public, religious and cultural figures, and the younger generation are the four main categories of research subjects. These four categories were chosen because each views qasidah from a different perspective, such as art, a medium for preaching, or a social instrument.

Qasidah performers are the first category. They include singers, musicians, and group leaders. They were selected to provide information on the creative process, production process, and performance adaptation strategies. The second category is the audience and the general public who watch qasidah performances, both in public spaces and on digital platforms. Because they demonstrate the public's acceptance of contemporary qasidah, their perspectives are crucial.

Religious and cultural figures such as ustadz (Islamic teachers), kiai (Islamic scholars), cultural figures, and music observers are included in the third category. The fourth category is the younger generation, which includes students, university students, and youth communities; they provide both normative and reflective perspectives on the position of modern qasidah within the Islamic and Javanese cultural landscape. This group was chosen because they are the primary target for the enculturation of values through contemporary qasidah.

The study involved approximately 25 participants, varying in age, gender, social background, and level of qasidah involvement. Therefore, the data collected reveals the complex social dynamics within Semarang society, not just one group.

Three main methods were used to collect data. First, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' thoughts, experiences, and interpretations of contemporary qasidah. Religious meanings, cultural symbols, social roles, and adaptation strategies in the digital age were the main topics of the interviews.

Second, participant observation was conducted at various qasidah events, such as city festivals, community events, and online concerts. These observations focused on social interactions between performers and audiences, stage design, instrument use, costumes, and audience responses. Having researchers in the field enabled a better understanding of the performative aspects of contemporary qasidah.

Third, documentary research was conducted by reviewing video recordings, lyric texts, song archives, and media publications. It was crucial to track how the themes of the poems, musical forms, and communication methods of qasidah groups changed over time.

The results of the interviews and observations were strengthened by documentary data.

The research tools used included observation sheets, semi-structured interview guides, and audio-visual documentation. The interview guides maintained consistent themes while still allowing participants freedom. Details of the performances were recorded on the observation sheets, while the audio-visual documentation provided empirical evidence that strengthened the

analysis.

Thematic coding was used to analyze the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis stages included data transcription, initial coding, grouping themes, and interpretation based on theory. Three main theoretical frameworks were used: acculturation theory (Berry, Lestari et al.), performativity theory (Schechner, Harwood & El-Manstrly, Harding & Rosenthal), and the sociology of music (DeNora, Roy, Siciliano). Next, the data were interpreted to find solutions to the problem.

By combining interviews, observations, and documentation, data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods; member-checking with multiple informants validated the interview results. Furthermore, ethical considerations were taken into account, such as informant consent, guarantees of anonymity, and the use of data solely for academic purposes. Therefore, this research methodology is not only academically sound but also morally and reflectively sound.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results show that modern qasidah in Semarang is the result of an acculturation between Islam and Javanese traditions. This phenomenon is evident not only in the musical structure but also in the visual symbols and performances. Thus, modern qasidah can be understood as a hybrid art form that grew out of the historical interaction between religiosity and local culture.

Lyrics embodying Islamic teachings are delivered in Indonesian and Javanese, making them more communicative. Modern qasidah lyrics remain rooted in Islamic values, such as piety, peace, and solidarity. Qasidah can be considered a cultural da'wah strategy that adapts to the needs of urban communities, with the use of local languages key to making the message more easily accepted and internalized.

Beyond the lyrics, the musical instruments of modern qasidah reflect this acculturation process. The rebana, an icon of Islamic music, combines with modern instruments such as keyboards, guitars, and drums.



Figure 1. Representation of a modern qasidah group combining rebana and modern musical instruments
(Source: Kusrina, July 2025)

This fusion produces a musical aesthetic that is not only religious but also suited to urban tastes. In other words, modern qasidah adopts popular musical forms to enhance its appeal.

The costumes and stage style of the performers incorporate the hijab and a more confident yet polite style of singing, demonstrating the polite and refined mannerisms of Javanese people. This represents a fusion of religiosity and local identity. Furthermore, the findings suggest that modern qasidah serves as a tool for portraying urban Muslim identity.

Some modern qasidah costumes are a blend of religiosity and local identity.



Figure 1. Representation of modern qasidah, a blend of religious and local identity
(Source: Kusrina, July 2025)

Performances in public spaces such as town squares and cultural festivals are seen as a sign of Islam's welcoming and inclusive public presence. This aligns with Stuart Hall's (1996) theory of cultural identity, which emphasizes that identity is fluid and negotiated through cultural practices. When modern qasidah is performed on a large stage, the younger generation feels proud because it combines religious values with modern nuances that suit an urban lifestyle (Weinstock 1969). Young people in Semarang interpret modern qasidah as a religious expression that fits their urban lifestyle. They feel proud when a qasidah is performed on a large stage or broadcast on digital media, because this art form combines religious values with modernity. Thus, modern qasidah provides a space for the younger generation to negotiate their identity as modern Muslims.

Modern qasidah also serves as a tool for social interaction and strengthening community cohesion. According to observations at several festivals, modern qasidah performances are attended by people of all ages, from children to adults, who sing poetry or recite blessings together. Modern qasidah has been described as a way to "gather sedulur," or unite brothers. This fact indicates that qasidah serves as a medium for inclusion in Semarang's pluralistic society (Draper and Freedman 2010). The term "Ngumpulke sedulur" (gathering together brothers) illustrates the role of qasidah in building a sense of togetherness amidst the heterogeneity of Semarang society.

Modern qasidah helps the younger generation learn values. Moral lessons such as the importance of prayer, silaturahmi (silaturahmi), and brotherhood are conveyed in a fun way through music. Thus, in addition to serving as a means of social interaction, modern qasidah also serves as a medium for values education. Some educational institutions even use modern qasidah songs as arts and culture materials. The goal is to provide children and adolescents with the opportunity to internalize moral and religious principles through music (Rahman and Slamatin Letlora 2018). Thus, modern qasidah is not only an aesthetic product but also a tool for building social capital within the community. This educational function aligns with Schehner's (20026) view of performativity, stating that performances are not only aesthetic but also educational and transformative. Modern qasidah, through its musical performance, successfully communicates religious values, making it more effective than rigid instructional approaches.

According to research, the qasidah community was able to adapt quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic (Furjan, Tomićić-Pupek, and Pihir 2020). Strategies implemented included cross-genre collaborations with pop and dangdut music, song distribution through digital platforms, and virtual performances on YouTube. According to informants, qasidah remains "alive on screen" despite the absence of a physical stage. This demonstrates that modern qasidah is a living tradition capable of surviving and experimenting in the face of global challenges. This digital adaptation expands the qasidah audience to the national and even international levels. Thus, modern qasidah functions not only as a local tradition but also as a contemporary Islamic art form that can compete globally. This phenomenon supports the concept of a living tradition (Yuan, 2024), which states that a living tradition is one that continually adapts to new contexts.

These findings demonstrate that modern qasidah is a multidimensional Islamic art form: religious, cultural, social, and educational. It has succeeded in going beyond mere entertainment to become an agent of socio-cultural transformation. In this case, modern qasidah presents the dynamics of Islam in a fluid, flexible urban space, negotiating with modernity. Therefore, modern qasidah in Semarang can be positioned as a model of contemporary Islamic art that is relevant to

the younger generation, supports social cohesion, and contributes to cultural resilience. The findings of this study reinforce the novelty that modern qasidah is not merely a religious expression but also an agent of transformation that connects religious values, cultural identity, and global adaptation.

Discussion

The results of this study enhance our understanding that modern qasidah in Semarang is a type of art resulting from cultural acculturation. The theory of cultural acculturation (Lee 2022) states that the meeting of two traditions can produce a hybrid that is accepted by society. In this way, contemporary qasidah can remain relevant to urban communities by combining Islamic poetry with Javanese idiom. Music shapes the identity of urban Muslims, as demonstrated by modern qasidah. Identity, according to Stuart Hall's cultural identity theory (Hall and du Gay 2012), develops and changes. Qasidah performances in public spaces demonstrate Islam as a welcoming, flexible identity capable of collaborating with modernity.

Modern qasidah functions as a social practice that strengthens community cohesion, according to De Nora (Siciliano 2020) from the sociology of music. This music not only creates a religious atmosphere but also creates a shared environment that allows people of different backgrounds and ages to interact with one another. This demonstrates qasidah's function as a tool for social integration amidst heterogeneous urban communities. Furthermore, qasidah's role as a tool for teaching values is reinforced by its role as cultural pedagogy. Moral and religious values are taught to the younger generation without dogmatic overtones through memorable lyrics. This phenomenon is related to Schechner's performativity theory (Rusmanan 2022), which states that musical performances have educational and transformational purposes as well as aesthetic appeal. Ultimately, the transformation of modern qasidah that occurred during the pandemic demonstrates that this tradition remains alive and resilient to change.

Qasidah can expand its audience even beyond the local region thanks to digitalization and cross-genre collaboration. This supports the concept of living traditions, which states that traditions that can adapt to changing times will remain relevant and alive (Yuan, 2024).

Qasidah has been shown to reflect acculturation, with Islamic poetry delivered in Indonesian/Javanese. Qasidah reflects acculturation in musical instruments, evident in the tambourine combined with guitar and keyboard instruments, as well as the hijab costume worn in Eastern customs. Its contribution, a reflection of qasidah music on cultural acculturation (in Berry's (1997) theory of acculturation), is to present modern qasidah as a form of cultural integration that successfully maintains Islamic values while accommodating Javanese locality.

Answering the second research question, modern qasidah contributes to strengthening cultural identity and community interaction, as seen in its emergence as a symbol of an inclusive urban Muslim identity. Performances in public spaces build cohesion across ages and social backgrounds. The younger generation views modern qasidah as a religious expression that fits with modern lifestyles. This proceeding adds perspective to Hall's (1996) identity theory and DeNora's (2000) sociology of music, demonstrating that music is not merely an aesthetic expression but also an arena for identity negotiation and social practices that strengthen community solidarity.

Modern qasidah has adapted strategies to face social changes during the pandemic, including shifting their performance spaces to virtual concerts, distribution on digital platforms (YouTube, Spotify), and collaboration with popular genres (pop, dangdut). These adaptations allow qasidah to survive while reaching a global audience. Thus, modern qasidah is a traditional art form that has survived through digital innovation and collaborative strategies.

Modern qasidah also serves as a medium for values education for the younger generation in urban communities. This is evident in the fact that qasidah poetry is considered more effective than formal lectures in conveying moral and religious values. Schools and Islamic schools utilize qasidah songs as arts and culture materials, making them a means of value enculturation. This proceeding emphasizes the role of modern qasidah as a cultural pedagogy, consistent with

Schechner's (2006) performativity theory, namely performing arts that are educational, transformative, and shape the consciousness of the younger generation.

Highlights of the article's contribution (Novelty) include demonstrating modern qasidah as an agent of socio-cultural transformation, not merely religious entertainment. This contribution expands theories of acculturation, identity, and performativity through the context of Islamic music in Semarang. Second, it offers an analysis of the digital adaptation of modern qasidah during the pandemic, a topic rarely explored by previous research. Third, it emphasizes modern qasidah as a medium for cross-generational cultural values education in urban communities.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that modern qasidah in Semarang is a cultural practice that emerged as a result of the acculturation process between Islam and local Javanese traditions. Modern qasidah not only represents a religious musical heritage but also serves as a tool for social transformation, strengthening the city's Muslim identity, creating a space for social interaction, and providing moral and cultural education. Inclusive modern qasidah performances successfully foster social cohesion among diverse communities. Religious values and local pride are embedded in the lyrics and aesthetics of the offerings. Modern qasidah has become a living tradition relevant to global dynamics, as the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates its adaptability through digitalization, cross-genre collaboration, and virtual distribution. Therefore, modern qasidah in Semarang can be considered a type of modern Islamic art that not only provides entertainment but also educates, unites, and transforms society.

From a theoretical perspective, this study incorporates modern qasidah as a case study of a hybrid musical practice imbued with social meaning, enriching the study of the sociology of Islamic music. These findings provide insights into theories such as cultural acculturation, performativity, and cultural identity. This makes modern qasidah a platform for conversation between modernity, local traditions, and religiosity. Music is seen not only as an art form; it is also considered a social practice that creates bonds and identity. Therefore, this research contributes to the global discussion on modern Islamic art and the changing nature of living traditions.

Practically, the findings of this study can serve as a reference for arts communities, teachers, and cultural activists to utilize modern qasidah as a tool for cultural propagation and teaching values. Modern qasidah is proven to be more communicative in reaching the younger generation. Consequently, schools, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), and cultural institutions can incorporate it into their arts programs and extracurricular activities. For artists, the digital adaptation methods used during the pandemic demonstrate that cross-genre collaboration and innovation can expand audiences and foster creativity. This can help strengthen the contemporary qasidah music environment as a platform for sustainable artistic expression.

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