

DIGITAL DA'WAH AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF ISLAMIC AUTHORITY AMONG MUSLIM PREACHERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA


Aisha Nabila Karim^{1*}; Omar Fadli Hidayat²; Sarah Humaira Latif³

¹ Department of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

² Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel, Surabaya, Indonesia

³ Department of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Ushuluddin, Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: aishanabilakarim2025@gmail.com

ABSTRACT	ARTICLE INFO
<p>This study aims to analyze the transformation of Islamic authority among Muslim preachers who use social media as a space for digital da'wah. The study addresses the growing shift of Islamic preaching from conventional religious spaces to digital platforms, where authority is shaped not only by scholarly background but also by visibility, audience interaction, and platform-based communication. This research uses a qualitative approach with a collective case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant digital observation, and digital documentation involving 15 to 20 participants, including Muslim preachers, digital da'wah content managers, and active followers. The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The findings reveal four main themes: platform-based visibility and the reconfiguration of religious authority, adaptation of da'wah messages to platform logic, audience interaction as a space of negotiation, and ethical tensions between popularity, monetization, and religious responsibility. These findings show that digital da'wah creates a hybrid form of Islamic authority that combines traditional religious legitimacy with digital performance, audience trust, and ethical self-regulation. The study contributes to digital religion studies and Islamic communication by explaining how religious authority is reconstructed in social media environments. Practically, the findings suggest the need for digital literacy, ethical guidelines, and stronger scholarly accountability among Muslim preachers. Further research should examine audience reception and algorithmic influence on digital religious authority.</p> <p>Keywords: Digital Da'wah; Islamic Authority; Muslim Preachers; Social Media; Digital Religion.</p>	<p>Article History Received: 2025-02-27 Revised: 2025-04-04 Accepted: 2025-04-22 Published: 2025-05-01</p> <p>Doi: https://doi.org/10.xxxx/rjirs.vxix.xxx</p>  <p>Lisensi: CC BY-SA 4.0</p>

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of social media has transformed the way Islamic preaching is produced, circulated, and received by Muslim communities. Da'wah no longer depends only on mosques, pesantren, majelis taklim, or formal religious institutions. It now moves through YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, podcasts, short videos, and live streaming platforms. This shift has changed the relationship between preachers and audiences because religious messages can reach wider publics without the limits of space, time, and institutional gatekeeping. Solahudin and Fakhruroji (2020) show that the internet has become an important space for Islamic learning in Indonesia because Muslims increasingly use digital platforms to

access religious knowledge. In a broader Muslim context, Zaid et al. (2022) argue that social media influencers reshape Islamic practices by presenting religion through accessible language, personal narratives, and platform-based visibility. Digital da'wah therefore reflects not only a technological change, but also a social change in how Muslims recognize, follow, and evaluate religious authority.

In Indonesia, the rise of Muslim preachers on social media has created a new landscape of Islamic authority. Traditional authority, which usually rests on scholarly lineage, institutional affiliation, pesantren education, and mastery of Islamic sciences, now interacts with digital authority built through followers, engagement, visual identity, communication style, and emotional closeness with audiences. Zamhari and Arifianto (2020) explain that Muslim influencers in Indonesia have gained authority through digital preaching practices that combine Islamic messages with popular media formats. Hannan and Mursyidi (2023) add that social media contributes to the fragmentation of religious authority because audiences can select religious references based on personal preference, ideological affinity, and perceived relevance. This condition makes Islamic authority more open, competitive, and unstable. Febrian (2024) further shows that religious influencers construct authority through visual performance, symbolic piety, and curated self-presentation on Instagram.

The field problem appears in the tension between religious credibility and digital popularity. Muslim preachers must maintain theological accuracy, ethical responsibility, and scholarly legitimacy while also adapting to platform algorithms, short attention spans, visual aesthetics, and audience interaction. Ar-Ridho et al. (2023) found that Islamic da'wah on Instagram requires strategic content management because visual format, message consistency, and interaction patterns shape audience reception. Fauzi (2023) shows that the micro-celebrity ustaz phenomenon demonstrates how religious authority in cyberspace depends not only on formal religious knowledge, but also on the ability to manage digital persona. This tension becomes more complex when preachers use short videos, motivational language, humor, personal branding, and emotional storytelling to attract younger audiences. Ridho et al. (2025) indicate that moderate Islamic da'wah on YouTube uses multimodal strategies that combine verbal explanation, visual framing, and audio elements to strengthen message delivery. These studies suggest that digital da'wah is not a simple transfer of offline preaching into online media. It involves adaptation, negotiation, and reconstruction of authority.

The issue is important because digital da'wah influences religious education, social relations, cultural identity, and public understanding of Islam. In the digital sphere, audiences do not only listen to religious messages. They also like, comment, share, remix, criticize, and reinterpret them. Muttaqin (2020) shows that digital Islamic spaces can reproduce gender bias when religious narratives are shaped by unequal power relations. Rohmatulloh et al. (2022) demonstrate that Gus Baha and Santri Gayeng represent the rise of traditionalist preaching on social media through strategies that combine pesantren-based authority with digital communication. In another context, Hasanah and Tawang (2022) show that debates on standardization and certification of da'i reflect the tension between state regulation, institutional authority, and public trust in religious speakers. A'thoina and Al-Aboosi (2024) also show that digital da'wah can strengthen legitimacy when popular preachers connect their online presence with established Islamic organizations. These findings reveal that digital da'wah affects more than communication style. It shapes the way Muslims define credible religious knowledge in everyday life.

Previous studies have examined digital da'wah from several perspectives, including Islamic learning, religious populism, mosque innovation, influencer culture, and mediatized religious practice. Thoaha and Ibrahim (2023) show that mosque-based da'wah can transform through organizational learning and digital innovation. Hazim and Musdholifah (2021) explain that digital media helps Indonesian Muslims in diaspora settings maintain religious connection and Islamic identity. Fakhruroji (2025) finds that Indonesian digital natives experienced religious practices through mediatized forms during the Covid-19 pandemic. Syafaah et al. (2024) also show that Islamic scholars increasingly move from pulpit-based roles to screen-based religious communication. However, many studies still emphasize content strategy, institutional adaptation, audience engagement, or platform effectiveness. Tabaika et al. (2025) have

discussed the reconstruction of Islamic authority in digital da'wah, but further qualitative inquiry is still needed to understand how Muslim preachers themselves experience, interpret, and negotiate authority while facing algorithmic pressure, public comments, platform visibility, and moral responsibility.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze the transformation of Islamic authority among Muslim preachers who actively use social media as a space for da'wah. The study focuses on how preachers construct legitimacy, manage digital interaction, adapt religious messages to platform logic, and negotiate the relationship between scholarly authority and online popularity. This research uses a qualitative approach because the main concern is not to measure the effectiveness of digital da'wah, but to understand meaning, experience, and social process. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of digital religion studies, Islamic communication studies, and the sociology of religious authority. Practically, the findings may help Muslim preachers, Islamic organizations, digital da'wah managers, and Islamic educators develop more responsible, credible, and context-sensitive digital preaching practices.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a collective case study design. This design is suitable because the study examines several Muslim preachers who use different social media platforms, communication styles, audience segments, and religious affiliations. A collective case study enables the researcher to compare cases and identify patterns across different digital da'wah practices. Mtisi (2022) explains that case study research is useful when researchers seek to understand a contemporary social phenomenon within its real-life context. This design is also relevant because digital da'wah cannot be separated from platform culture, audience interaction, visual performance, and the social identity of the preacher. Miller et al. (2023) emphasize that qualitative case study design allows researchers to explore complex practices through systematic procedures that connect context, participants, data sources, and interpretation. Therefore, this study treats each preacher as a case while also analyzing broader patterns of Islamic authority across cases.

The research site is the Indonesian digital sphere, especially social media accounts used by Muslim preachers for da'wah activities. The study focuses on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook because these platforms are widely used for Islamic lectures, short religious videos, live sessions, visual reminders, and audience interaction. The research is planned to be conducted from August to December 2025. The digital sphere is selected as the main research site because authority, interaction, visibility, and audience response are formed directly through platform-based communication. Febrian (2024) shows that Instagram creates a visual space where religious authority can be performed and recognized through images, captions, symbols, and audience engagement. The study also includes online interviews through Zoom, Google Meet, or WhatsApp Call to reach participants from different regions in Indonesia. This design allows limited replication because the platform criteria, observation period, participant selection, and data collection procedures are clearly defined.

The participants consist of Muslim preachers, digital da'wah content managers, and active followers. The main participants are Muslim preachers who have actively produced da'wah content on social media for at least two years. They must upload religious content regularly, receive visible audience engagement, and be willing to participate in interviews. Content managers are included because they often assist in editing, scheduling, caption writing, account strategy, and audience management. Active followers are included to understand how audiences perceive credibility, authority, and trust in digital preachers. Campbell et al. (2020) state that purposive sampling is appropriate when researchers need participants who have specific knowledge or direct experience of the phenomenon being studied. This research also uses snowball sampling when initial participants recommend other relevant preachers or account managers. The planned number of participants is 15 to 20, consisting of 8 to 10 preachers, 3 to 5 content managers, and 4 to 5 active followers. Hennink and Kaiser (2022) explain that qualitative sample size

should be guided by saturation, which occurs when additional data no longer produces substantially new themes.

Data are collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant digital observation, and digital documentation. Semi-structured interviews are used to explore how preachers understand authority, build legitimacy, select da'wah themes, respond to criticism, manage popularity, and maintain ethical responsibility in online spaces. The interview guide contains core questions, but the researcher may ask follow-up questions based on each participant's experience. Non-participant digital observation is conducted by observing posts, captions, comments, live sessions, visual symbols, audience responses, and interaction patterns on selected accounts. Digital documentation includes screenshots, public comments, account descriptions, video links, posting schedules, and relevant archived content. Naeem et al. (2023) note that qualitative analysis requires systematic engagement with textual and contextual data so that meaning can be developed from repeated reading, coding, and thematic organization. The combination of interviews, observation, and documentation helps the researcher compare what participants say with what they do in their digital da'wah practices.

Data validity is strengthened through source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, and audit trail. Source triangulation is conducted by comparing data from preachers, content managers, and active followers. Method triangulation is conducted by comparing interview data with observation notes and digital documentation. Member checking is conducted by sending interview summaries or preliminary interpretations to selected key participants to confirm whether the researcher's interpretation reflects their experiences. Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasize that qualitative rigor depends on coherence between research questions, data, analytic procedures, and interpretation. Audit trail is also applied by storing interview guides, consent records, field notes, transcripts, coding files, analytic memos, screenshots, and theme development records. This procedure allows the research process to be traced and reviewed. Christou (2023) argues that transparency in thematic analysis helps readers understand how raw qualitative data move into codes, themes, and final interpretation.

Data are analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The analysis begins with repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and digital documents to gain an overall understanding of the data. The second stage involves open coding to identify segments related to religious credibility, digital persona, audience trust, platform logic, algorithmic pressure, ethical boundaries, and the relationship between knowledge and popularity. The third stage groups similar codes into initial themes, such as construction of preacher legitimacy, negotiation between scholarship and visibility, audience participation in authority formation, and adaptation of da'wah messages to platform culture. The fourth stage reviews the themes by comparing them with the full dataset and research focus. The final stage develops an interpretive narrative that connects empirical findings with theories of digital religion, mediatization, and Islamic authority. Braun and Clarke (2021) describe reflexive thematic analysis as an interpretive process that requires active researcher engagement with patterns of meaning. Naeem et al. (2023) further explain that thematic analysis can support conceptual development when coding, theme construction, and interpretation are conducted systematically. Through this process, the study seeks to produce credible findings that explain how Islamic authority is transformed among Muslim preachers on social media.

RESULTS

Platform-Based Visibility and the Reconfiguration of Religious Authority

The findings show that social media has changed how Muslim preachers construct and maintain religious authority. Authority is no longer formed only through formal Islamic education, pesantren networks, institutional endorsement, or recognition from senior scholars. It is also shaped by visibility, consistency, audience engagement, and the ability to communicate Islamic messages in a language that feels close to everyday life. Most participants stated that social media helped them reach audiences who rarely attended mosque-based or classroom-based religious learning. For them, digital platforms function

as an entry point for religious engagement, especially among young Muslims who prefer short, direct, and practical religious explanations.

Several preachers explained that their credibility was initially built through offline religious education, but it became more visible through digital platforms. One participant stated, “I studied in pesantren for years, but many people only knew me after I started uploading short da’wah videos. Social media made my knowledge visible to people who had never met me” (P3). This statement shows that digital visibility does not always replace traditional religious authority. Instead, it can amplify it. Observations of selected accounts also showed that preachers often displayed educational background, pesantren affiliation, organizational identity, or teacher lineage in their profiles, captions, or video introductions. These elements were used to signal scholarly legitimacy while adapting to the communicative style of social media.

The findings also indicate that audiences play an active role in validating religious authority. Followers often judged preachers based on clarity of explanation, consistency of message, humility, personal conduct, and responsiveness to questions. One active follower explained, “I follow a preacher not only because he is famous, but because his explanation is easy to understand and he answers questions without judging people” (P14). This pattern suggests that digital authority is relational. It is not only claimed by preachers, but also recognized, negotiated, and sometimes challenged by audiences. This finding supports the view that social media contributes to the fragmentation of religious authority because audiences can choose religious figures based on personal relevance and perceived trustworthiness, as discussed by Hannan and Mursyidi (2023).

Adaptation of Da’wah Messages to Platform Logic

The second theme concerns the adaptation of religious messages to the logic of social media platforms. Participants described that each platform has different communication norms. Instagram was seen as suitable for visual reminders, short reflections, and carousel-based Islamic education. TikTok was considered useful for brief, emotional, and highly shareable messages. YouTube was preferred for longer lectures and deeper explanations. Facebook was still used to reach older audiences and community-based religious networks. These differences shaped how preachers selected topics, arranged messages, and decided the length of content.

Preachers admitted that they often simplified religious explanations to fit platform formats. However, they also recognized the risk of oversimplification. One preacher stated, “The challenge is how to make Islamic teaching short without making it shallow. A one-minute video can attract people, but not every issue can be explained in one minute” (P5). This statement reflects a key tension in digital da’wah. Preachers must communicate effectively within platform constraints while preserving the depth and accuracy of religious knowledge. Observations showed that some preachers addressed this challenge by using short videos as introductions, then directing audiences to longer YouTube lectures, online classes, or offline study sessions.

The adaptation process also involved visual and emotional strategies. Preachers used subtitles, background music, expressive thumbnails, short hooks, and relatable examples to increase attention. One content manager explained, “If the first three seconds are not strong, people skip the video. So, we help the ustaz start with a question or a problem that people face every day” (P11). This strategy shows how platform logic influences the form of religious communication. Ar-Ridho et al. (2023) found a similar pattern in Instagram da’wah, where visual presentation, message consistency, and audience interaction became important elements of digital preaching. In this study, platform adaptation was not merely technical. It shaped the way religious messages were framed, prioritized, and circulated.

Audience Interaction as a Space of Negotiation

The third theme shows that audience interaction has become an important space for negotiating Islamic authority. Comment sections, direct messages, live sessions, and question-and-answer features

allow audiences to respond directly to religious content. Participants stated that these interactions helped them understand the religious concerns of digital audiences. Common questions included family problems, worship practices, mental health, romantic relationships, halal lifestyles, modest fashion, and moral dilemmas in daily life. These questions influenced the topics that preachers later discussed in their content.

Audience interaction also created pressure. Some preachers experienced criticism, debate, and accusations when discussing sensitive topics. One participant said, “Sometimes people ask sincerely, but sometimes they come to attack. If I answer too briefly, they say I avoid the issue. If I answer too long, they do not read it” (P7). This statement illustrates the unstable nature of authority in digital spaces. Preachers must respond to questions quickly, but they also need caution when dealing with complex religious issues. Observations showed that some preachers avoided responding directly to controversial comments and instead created separate clarification videos. Others invited audiences to attend longer study sessions for topics that required detailed explanation.

The findings reveal that digital audiences are not passive recipients of da’wah. They shape the visibility, relevance, and perceived authority of preachers through likes, comments, shares, criticism, and recommendations. This supports the argument of Zaid et al. (2022), who explain that Muslim millennials engage with religious influencers because they present Islamic messages in accessible and interactive ways. However, this study adds that interaction also produces vulnerability for preachers. Their authority can be strengthened through audience trust, but it can also be weakened by public criticism, misinterpretation, or viral controversy. Therefore, authority in digital da’wah is dynamic and continuously negotiated.

Ethical Tensions between Popularity, Monetization, and Religious Responsibility

The fourth theme concerns ethical tension in digital da’wah. Participants acknowledged that social media offers opportunities for wider outreach, but it also creates pressure to gain followers, increase views, and maintain engagement. Some preachers were concerned that religious content could become too dependent on platform metrics. One participant stated, “I feel happy when many people watch the video, but I also remind myself that da’wah is not only about views. The message must remain correct” (P2). This statement reflects an ethical awareness among preachers who try to balance visibility and sincerity.

Monetization also emerged as a sensitive issue. Some participants accepted income from YouTube ads, brand collaborations, or paid invitations. However, they emphasized the need to avoid products, sponsors, or content formats that could damage religious credibility. One preacher explained, “I do not accept every collaboration. If the product or campaign does not fit Islamic values, I reject it because people trust us as religious figures” (P6). This finding shows that digital da’wah involves moral decision-making beyond content production. Preachers must evaluate how economic opportunities affect public trust and religious responsibility.

The findings also show that preachers use different strategies to protect their credibility. Some consult senior teachers before discussing sensitive issues. Some include references to Qur’an, hadith, classical texts, or recognized scholars in captions or videos. Others openly admit the limits of their knowledge and direct audiences to more qualified experts. This practice indicates that traditional forms of authority remain important in digital settings. Rohmatulloh et al. (2022) show that traditionalist preachers can use social media while still maintaining pesantren-based legitimacy. In this study, the most trusted preachers were not those who rejected digital culture completely, but those who combined digital communication skills with visible scholarly responsibility.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that digital da’wah has transformed Islamic authority from a primarily institution-based model into a more hybrid and relational form of authority. This transformation does not mean that traditional religious authority has disappeared. Instead, traditional authority now interacts with platform-based visibility, audience participation, and digital performance. This finding is consistent with Solahudin

and Fakhruroji (2020), who argue that social media has become a significant site of Islamic learning in Indonesia. However, this study extends their argument by showing that social media does not only change where Muslims learn religion. It also changes how preachers gain recognition and how audiences evaluate religious credibility.

The study also confirms that digital authority is shaped by visibility and self-presentation. Preachers who can communicate clearly, appear consistent, and respond to audience needs tend to gain stronger public recognition. This finding supports Febrian (2024), who shows that religious influencers construct authority through visual presence and symbolic representation on Instagram. However, the present study adds that visual authority alone is not enough. Participants emphasized the importance of scholarly background, ethical boundaries, and religious accountability. This means that digital Islamic authority is not only performative. It remains connected to knowledge, trust, and moral conduct.

Another important finding is the role of platform logic in shaping da'wah messages. Preachers adapt their messages to fit the specific features of Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook. This adaptation creates opportunities for wider outreach, but it also risks simplifying complex religious issues. This finding aligns with Ar-Ridho et al. (2023), who explain that Instagram da'wah requires strategic visual and communicative planning. The present study shows that such planning is not a neutral technical process. It affects the structure, tone, and depth of religious messages. When preachers reduce long theological discussions into short videos, they must decide what to include, what to omit, and how to prevent misunderstanding.

The findings also show that audiences actively participate in the construction of authority. Likes, comments, shares, and direct messages influence the visibility of preachers and the themes they address. This supports Hannan and Mursyidi (2023), who argue that social media contributes to the fragmentation of religious authority among Indonesian Muslims. Yet the present study offers a more nuanced view. Fragmentation does not only create competition among preachers. It also creates a dialogical space where audiences can ask questions, challenge explanations, and demand accountability. In this sense, digital da'wah creates a more interactive form of authority, but also a more fragile one.

The ethical dimension of digital da'wah is also central. The findings show that preachers face pressure to balance religious responsibility with popularity, monetization, and algorithmic visibility. Fauzi (2023) describes the rise of the micro-celebrity ustaz as part of the changing structure of religious authority in cyberspace. This study supports that view, but it also shows that many preachers are aware of the moral risks of becoming digital religious figures. They try to protect credibility by refusing unsuitable collaborations, consulting senior scholars, and directing audiences to more competent authorities when needed. This finding suggests that digital da'wah should not be understood only through the lens of popularity. It must also be read through the lens of ethical negotiation.

Theoretically, this study contributes to digital religion studies by showing that Islamic authority in social media is constructed through the interaction between traditional legitimacy, platform visibility, audience participation, and ethical self-regulation. It also contributes to Islamic communication studies by explaining how da'wah messages are reshaped by platform culture without fully detaching from religious knowledge traditions. Practically, the findings suggest that Muslim preachers need digital literacy, ethical guidelines, and stronger scholarly accountability when producing religious content. Islamic organizations can also use these findings to design training programs for digital preachers, especially in content ethics, audience engagement, source citation, and crisis communication. Future studies may compare digital da'wah across different Islamic organizations, examine audience reception more deeply, or analyze how algorithms influence the circulation of religious authority.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital da'wah has transformed Islamic authority among Muslim preachers on social media into a hybrid, relational, and platform-mediated form of authority. Religious legitimacy is

no longer shaped only by formal Islamic education, pesantren background, institutional recognition, or scholarly lineage. It is also formed through digital visibility, audience interaction, communication style, platform consistency, and the preacher's ability to present Islamic messages in accessible language. The findings show four main patterns: the reconfiguration of authority through platform visibility, the adaptation of da'wah messages to platform logic, audience interaction as a space of negotiation, and ethical tensions between popularity, monetization, and religious responsibility. These findings confirm that digital da'wah is not merely the online transfer of conventional preaching. It is a social and communicative process that reshapes how Muslim audiences recognize, evaluate, and trust religious authority.

Theoretically, this study contributes to digital religion studies, Islamic communication studies, and the sociology of religious authority by showing that Islamic authority in social media emerges through the interaction between traditional legitimacy, digital performance, audience participation, and ethical self-regulation. Practically, the findings suggest that Muslim preachers need stronger digital literacy, ethical awareness, and scholarly accountability when producing religious content for online audiences. Islamic organizations and religious education institutions can use these findings to develop training programs for digital preachers, especially in content ethics, source accuracy, audience engagement, and crisis communication. From a policy perspective, the study highlights the need for guidance that supports credible digital da'wah without limiting religious expression. Future research may examine audience reception in greater depth, compare digital da'wah across Islamic organizations, or analyze how platform algorithms influence the circulation of religious authority.

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