



DIGITAL DA'WAH AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF ISLAMIC AUTHORITY

Mokhammad A'lan Tabaika*

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia

Correspondence author's email: alantabaika98@gmail.com

Ahmad Barizi

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia

Yunifa Miftachul Arif

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia

Abstract

Keywords:

algorithm;
audience
engagement; digital
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communication;
religious authority;
social media

This study addresses the research gap regarding how Islamic authority is contested and reconstructed in the era of digital media, where social media dynamics disrupt traditional hierarchies. It aims to analyze how online Islamic preaching is transformed by social media logics, aesthetic strategies, and audience engagement, emphasizing the participatory and dialogical nature of comment sections. This research adopts a qualitative design using a netnographic approach, observing and analyzing social media content produced by prominent Indonesian Islamic figures, including Hanan Attaki, Abdul Somad, and Habib Husein Ja'far. The dataset comprises YouTube sermons, Instagram posts, TikTok videos, and user interactions, including comments and shares. Findings reveal the emergence of "religious influencers" who blend piety with branding, the commodification of Islamic preaching, and the evolution of comment sections into semi-public arenas of theological debate and negotiation. These interactions show how authority is no longer solely institutional but co-produced with audiences in real time. This study demonstrates that digital da'wah democratizes access to religious discourse while raising concerns about theological integrity, commercialization, and regulation challenges. It argues that understanding these dynamics is essential for developing critical digital religious literacy and fostering more inclusive, reflective, and ethically grounded online Islamic communication.

	Abstrak
Kata kunci: algoritma; keterlibatan audiens; dakwah digital; komunikasi Islam; otoritas keislaman; media sosial;	Penelitian ini menjawab kesenjangan kajian mengenai bagaimana otoritas keislaman dipertarungkan dan direkonstruksi di era media digital, ketika dinamika media sosial mengganggu hierarki tradisional. Tujuan utama studi ini adalah menganalisis bagaimana dakwah Islam daring mengalami transformasi melalui logika media sosial, strategi estetika, dan keterlibatan audiens, dengan penekanan pada sifat partisipatif dan dialogis dari kolom komentar. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif dengan pendekatan netnografi, melalui pengamatan dan analisis konten media sosial yang diproduksi oleh tiga tokoh Islam populer di Indonesia: Hanan Attaki, Abdul Somad, dan Habib Husein Ja'far. Data yang dikaji meliputi ceramah YouTube, unggahan Instagram, video TikTok, serta interaksi warganet berupa komentar dan pembagian konten. Temuan menunjukkan munculnya sosok " <i>influencer</i> religius" yang memadukan kesalehan dengan strategi pencitraan, komodifikasi dakwah Islam, serta berkembangnya kolom komentar menjadi ruang semi-publik untuk perdebatan dan negosiasi teologis. Interaksi ini memperlihatkan bahwa otoritas keislaman tidak lagi sepenuhnya bersifat institusional, melainkan turut dibentuk secara real-time oleh audiens. Studi ini menegaskan bahwa dakwah digital membuka akses yang lebih demokratis terhadap wacana keagamaan, meskipun juga menghadirkan tantangan dalam hal integritas teologis, komersialisasi, dan regulasi. Pemahaman terhadap dinamika ini penting untuk membangun literasi keagamaan digital yang kritis, inklusif, reflektif, dan berlandaskan etika.

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INTRODUCTION

Background Of The Study

The rapid advancement of digital technology and the widespread use of social media platforms have significantly transformed the landscape of religious life in contemporary societies. In the context of Islamic preaching (*da'wah*), social media has emerged as a powerful channel for disseminating religious knowledge, promoting moral values, and engaging diverse audiences beyond traditional religious spaces. This digital shift reflects not merely a change in medium but a more profound transformation in how authority, identity, and religiosity are negotiated in the public sphere (Hidayat & Nuri, 2024).

Scholars such as Campbell (2020) and Evolvi (2022) have explored how online religious communication reshapes traditional authority structures and fosters new forms of spiritual expression. However, many of these studies are still focused on Western religious contexts. In contrast, studies on Islamic digital preaching in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, remain underdeveloped. This presents a significant research gap given Indonesia's position as the world's largest Muslim-majority country and its active digital religious culture.

Within this digital ecology, platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have enabled the rise of a new category of religious actors: preachers who are also influencers. These figures strategically tailor their content to appeal to millennial and Gen-Z audiences by blending theological insights with popular culture, psychological motivation, and even entrepreneurial branding (Widiutomo, 2024). Despite a growing body of literature on religious influencers, there remains a limited in-depth analysis of how these preachers construct symbolic authority and engage in ideological contestation through their content and interactions with followers in online comment sections. This transformation not only redefines the methods of religious communication but also alters the structure of Islamic authority and spiritual legitimacy in the digital age (Zaid et al., 2022).

Moreover, the comment sections beneath Islamic content have evolved into semi-public forums where contestations of religious meaning frequently unfold. These digital interactions, ranging from expressions of faith and support to debates and even vitriolic exchanges, demonstrate how ordinary Muslims participate in the construction and deconstruction of Islamic discourse. Netizens often invoke theological references, political arguments, or personal experiences to assert their interpretations of Islam, thereby reshaping the boundaries of orthodoxy and religious legitimacy in the online space (Sebihi & Moazzam, 2024). The rapid and decentralized nature of these conversations creates both opportunities for pluralistic engagement and risks of disinformation or sectarian polarization. Yet, despite the discursive significance of these digital spaces, little is known about how religious authority is actively negotiated in these comment sections. This study attempts to fill that theoretical and empirical gap.

Significantly, the phenomenon of digital *da'wah* and comment-based contestation cannot be detached from larger sociopolitical dynamics, including the state's role in managing religious narratives. In countries like Indonesia and Kazakhstan, governments

have sought to moderate online religious discourse through institutional fatwas, cyber surveillance, or the promotion of "moderate Islam" narratives (Adeni, 2024). These interventions further complicate the online religious landscape, as digital preachers must navigate not only theological and audience pressures but also regulatory frameworks. Studying this intersection between religious performance and digital politics offers a critical rationale for understanding how Islamic discourse is shaped, contested, and mediated in algorithm-driven public spheres.

Among the many Islamic preachers active online, this study focuses on three influential Indonesian digital religious figures: Hanan Attaki, Abdul Somad, and Habib Husein Ja'far. These figures were selected for their broad influence, distinct *da'wah* styles, and representative positions within Indonesia's contemporary Islamic spectrum. Hanan Attaki appeals to urban millennials through emotionally driven, youth-oriented content; Abdul Somad embodies a more traditional, scripturally grounded style of preaching; while Habib Husein Ja'far positions himself as a moderate, dialogic figure who frequently engages with interfaith themes and popular culture. By focusing on these three distinct personas, this research offers a comparative lens that captures the fragmented yet dynamic spectrum of digital Islamic authority.

Literature Review

The intersection of Islam, authority, and digital media has been a growing area of scholarly inquiry, reflecting how religious communication adapts to technological shifts. Bunt (2024) introduced the concept of *cyber-Islamic environments*, highlighting the Internet's role in enabling new forms of religious authority beyond traditional institutions. Bunt's work demonstrates that online spaces allow for decentralized interpretations of Islamic teachings, while also raising questions about authenticity and legitimacy.

In the Indonesian context, Lim (2017) examined the emergence of a digital Islamic public sphere, arguing that social media provides a platform for negotiation and contestation among competing religious authorities. Lim's ethnographic work reveals that online preachers utilize social media affordances to expand their reach and shape popular religious discourse, particularly among urban youth. This finding resonates with Muchtar & Ritchey (2014), who investigated how Indonesian Islamic sound

practices (e.g., sermons, recitations) are transformed through digital mediation, contributing to shifts in religious aesthetics and experiences.

Barizi et al. (2024) offered an essential gendered perspective by analyzing Muslimah influencers on Instagram. She shows how women leverage social media for *da'wah* while simultaneously engaging in commercial branding, highlighting the tension between piety and market logics. Meanwhile, Beta (2024) examined mobile technologies and religious practices in Indonesia, demonstrating how the everyday adoption of technology reshapes Islamic rituals and social relations.

Recent scholarship also addresses the political implications of digital *da'wah*. Pranoto (2023) analyzed YouTube sermons in Indonesia, finding that preachers negotiate populist, conservative, and pluralist identities in response to audience feedback. Similarly, 'Ulyan (2023) critiqued the homogenization of religious meaning in digital NU communities, arguing that while inclusive rhetoric is deployed, it may conceal epistemic exclusivity that limits pluralism and critical engagement.

Globally, Campbell (2020) and Evolvi (2022) have examined how religious authority is contested on social media, with users co-producing meaning through interactive features such as comments and likes (Abdurrahman, 2020). Their research underlines that authority is no longer unidirectional but negotiated in participatory contexts. This aligns with Lövheim's (2020) concept of the mediatization of religion, in which religious communication is shaped by media logics, thereby encouraging new forms of visibility, branding, and market-oriented dissemination.

Together, these studies illuminate the complexity of Islamic preaching in digital environments. They show that authority is negotiated through aesthetics, market strategies, and audience participation. However, most existing research has focused either on the production side (preachers and content creation) or on user engagement in a broad sense, leaving limited investigation into how comment sections function as semi-public spaces in which Islamic meaning is debated, contested, and co-constructed in real time. This study addresses this gap by closely examining the comment sections of YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok in Indonesia, revealing how these platforms function as dialogical arenas for theological negotiation that reshape Islamic authority and practice.

Research Gap

Despite extensive scholarship on Islamic preaching in digital environments, there remains a critical gap between the ideality of theory and the reality of online interactions in Indonesia. Existing theories, such as Hjarvard's (2008) *mediatization of religion*, suggest that digital media democratize religious authority and foster pluralistic debate. However, a preliminary observation of TikTok comment sections reveals that, rather than facilitating open, pluralistic dialogue, these spaces often exhibit polarized, doctrinally rigid, and exclusionary discourse. Users do not simply negotiate meaning; they also mobilize collective identity in ways that reinforce in-group/out-group boundaries, thereby contradicting the ideal of dialogic, democratized religion online.

This population gap arises because most prior studies have focused on religious leaders or content producers (e.g., ustadz, influencers, and institutional channels; Lim, 2017), while paying limited attention to *audience discourse* as it unfolds in comment sections. These user-generated discussions are crucial semi-public spaces where theological meanings are negotiated, yet they remain underexplored.

There is also a methodological gap, as many prior works rely on interviews with preachers or on surface-level content analysis, without systematically analyzing audience interactions in context. Studies like Pranoto (2023) examine YouTube sermons but do not capture comment-based negotiations that constitute everyday, vernacular theology. A netnographic approach focused on comment sections can capture these micro-levels, situated meaning-making practices.

A knowledge gap is evident in conflicting interpretations of digital *da'wah's* impact. While some research celebrates its democratizing potential (Indriyani & Khadiq, 2023), others warn of homogenization and epistemic closure (Wong-A-Foe, 2023). There is insufficient empirical data on how such tensions manifest in comment interactions on high-engagement platforms such as TikTok in Indonesia.

Furthermore, a theoretical gap exists in applying Social Identity to online Islamic communication (Abanoz, 2022). Prior studies rarely examine how platform logics, visual content, and comment interactions co-produce social identities that oscillate between inclusivity and exclusivity. By integrating Social Identity Theory with mediatization frameworks, this research offers a more nuanced lens to understand identity construction in digital Islamic spheres.

Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by investigating the dynamics of comment sections on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok in Indonesian Islamic preaching videos. It highlights how audiences do not passively receive religious authority but actively co-construct, contest, and negotiate it in ways that can both democratize and polarize Islamic discourse.

Problem Formulation

Based on the identified research gap, this study formulates the following problem: How do the comment sections of YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok in Indonesia function as semi-public spaces for negotiating, contesting, and co-constructing Islamic religious authority?

This question arises from the contradiction between theoretical ideals of democratized, pluralistic online religious discourse and the observed reality of polarized, identity-based negotiations in comment interactions. The research specifically seeks to understand how audience participation, platform logics, and social identity dynamics shape inclusive and exclusive religious meanings within digital *da'wah* contexts.

Purposes Of The Study

This article examines the reconstruction of Islamic authority in the era of digital *da'wah*, particularly how social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram transform the dynamics of religious communication. The purpose is to examine how comment sections and audience interactions function as dialogical arenas in which Islamic meanings are negotiated, contested, and co-produced, thereby shifting the locus of authority from institutions to digital publics. Furthermore, this study analyzes how visual aesthetics, algorithmic structures, and digital participation influence the emergence of inclusive and exclusive narratives of Islam, while also highlighting the ethical challenges posed by commercialization and regulation. Grounded in Social Identity Theory and a netnographic approach, this article aims to contribute both theoretically and empirically to digital religion studies by situating the voices of audiences at the center of meaning-making processes, responding to the scholarly gap on how online *da'wah* redefines the nature of religious legitimacy in contemporary Indonesia (Hidayat & Nuri, 2024).

Rationale Of The Study

Indonesia's position as the world's largest Muslim-majority nation with a highly active social media user base presents a vital case study for examining how religious authority is negotiated in digital spaces. While existing scholarship has robustly explored online *da'wah* from the perspectives of content creators, including influential preachers and religious institutions (Campbell, 2020), there remains a significant gap in understanding how audiences actively shape religious meaning through participatory interactions, particularly within comment sections.

Addressing this gap is essential not only for a comprehensive theoretical understanding but also for its practical implications on religious harmony and social cohesion. On platforms like TikTok, with their algorithm-driven, high-engagement design, comment interactions can rapidly escalate from nuanced discussions into toxic echo chambers, reinforcing in-group identities while polarizing religious discourse and amplifying digital intolerance. This dynamic can lead to a fragmentation of the *ummah* into rival factions, making constructive dialogue increasingly difficult. Furthermore, it allows for the unregulated dissemination of misinformation and radical views, posing a significant challenge to democratic and multicultural societies (Ameen et al., 2024). Without a deep understanding of these audience practices, theories of digital religion risk overemphasizing the role of preachers while neglecting how audiences actively negotiate, subvert, or even weaponize their messages, leaving us unprepared to address the emergent challenges of religious fragmentation and digital radicalism (Syafaah et al., 2024).

Furthermore, this research is theoretically significant as it applies Social Identity Theory to analyze how online users construct religious boundaries and group identities, revealing the tension between inclusive and exclusive narratives within contemporary Indonesian Islam (Hamzah et al., 2025). On a practical level, the findings will be valuable for religious educators, policymakers, and community leaders. The insights gained can inform strategies to foster more dialogical, inclusive, and critically aware digital religious spaces. By centering audience perspectives, this study provides a more complete understanding of digital *da'wah* and its evolving role in shaping contemporary Islamic authority in Indonesia (Jamil & Khusairi, 2025).

Novelty Of The Study

This research offers apparent novelty by combining thematic, methodological, theoretical, and object-level innovations that distinguish it from prior studies on digital Islamic preaching. In terms of theme, while many existing studies focus on the production side of online *da'wah*, examining preachers, influencers, and institutional channels (Campbell, 2020), this research centers on audience interactions within the comment sections of three prominent Indonesian Islamic figures: Hanan Attaki, Abdul Somad, and Habib Husein Ja'far across YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. This shift in focus to the micro-level negotiation of religious authority by lay users provides a fresh and critical perspective that fills a significant gap in the literature, which has largely overlooked the crucial role of audience agency and engagement.

Methodologically, this study employs a netnographic approach that systematically analyzes the textual, affective, and discursive dynamics of comment sections. This approach provides a significant contrast to prior works. For instance, much of the existing research, such as Hannan & Mursyidi (2023) on influencer strategies and Ul-Haq & Kwok (2024) on the fragmentation of authority, relies primarily on content analysis of videos or interviews with preachers. These studies focus on the supply side of digital religion. In contrast, our study delves into the demand side and the dynamic social interactions that shape the meaning and reception of religious messages.

Theoretically, this research advances the field by being among the first to systematically apply Social Identity Theory (Rašković, 2020) to unpack how platform logic and interactional practices co-produce inclusive and exclusive religious group identities. Most existing studies on digital Islam in Indonesia have not utilized this specific theoretical lens to understand identity construction and negotiation in social media environments. For example, while studies by Jahroni & Bakti (2023) address the fragmentation of authority and the role of algorithms, they do not explore the social psychological processes of ingroup/outgroup formation and identity-based conflict that are central to this research (Shin & Shin, 2024).

In terms of research object, this study is unique in providing a comparative analysis of how religious authority is co-constructed and contested across three distinct platforms: YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. By examining the comment sections in the Indonesian Muslim context, the research reveals how religious authority is not a static

attribute of clerics but a contested outcome shaped by the participatory and algorithmic nature of digital spaces.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design using a netnographic approach, which is suitable for understanding how Islamic preaching is produced, received, and negotiated in online environments. The research focuses on digital *da'wah* content on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, especially videos and interactive threads from three influential Islamic figures in Indonesia: Hanan Attaki, Abdul Somad, and Habib Husein Ja'far. These figures were selected purposively for their extensive online followings and distinct religious communication styles, thereby enabling a comparative lens on digital authority and audience engagement.

The content analyzed in this study comprises a combination of long-form sermons uploaded to YouTube and short-form *da'wah* clips distributed across TikTok and Instagram. These videos were selected because they reflect popular and socially resonant discourses from three prominent Indonesian preachers, *Ustadz* Abdul Somad, Hanan Attaki, and Habib Husein Ja'far. To ensure relevance and audience engagement, the dataset includes sermons exceeding 20 minutes that reached more than 100,000 views, as well as short clips (under 3 minutes) that generated significant interactions, measured through likes, comments, and shares. This selection illustrates not only the diversity of platforms and preaching styles but also the range of public responses, from modest interactions to millions of views and tens of thousands of comments. The following table presents a summary of the content used as research objects.

Table 1.

Research Data Source

Preacher	Video Title	Platform	Upload Date	Durati on	Likes	Comm ents	Views	Source Link
Ustadz Abdul Somad	Hukum Meminjam Uang di Bank	Youtube	19 Feb 2025	24:49	13,000+	646	1.2M+	https://youtu.be/WGK60GQjBN8?si=JZwVE3jPMAbs74bV
Hanan Attaki	Petunjuk bagi Orang yang Mau Memperbaiki Diri	Youtube	28 Sep 2024	38:53	7,800+	68	167K+	https://youtu.be/jjap4ImUqCY?si=sb4YZ2WE4lqGHYNQ

Preacher	Video Title	Platform	Upload Date	Durati on	Likes	Comm ents	Views	Source Link
Habib Husein Ja'far	<i>6 Pemuka Agama Jadi 1 di Lebaran</i>	Youtube	9 Apr 2024	1:41:05	120,000+	17,498	3.4M+	https://youtu.be/5ACmPpEPWks?si=U72H6vGoargUQ9bY
Ustadz Abdul Somad	<i>Hukum Saham Online, Crypto, Bitcoin</i>	TikTok	2 Jun 2024	01:30	24,000+	1,987	5,000	vt.tiktok.com/ZSHgwdC83FdF2-jWMRS/
Hanan Attaki	<i>Agar Ujian Sampai Ada di Level Syukur</i>	Instagram	28 Aug 2024	00:58	59,000+	403	5,085	www.instagram.com/reel/C_M7ggjSSqw/?igsh=MTI2bGl2eGJjNXJmNw==
Habib Husein Ja'far	<i>Minoritas, Ucapan Natal Hingga Yang Sedang Viral</i>	TikTok	22 Dec 2024	00:56	50,000+	1,089	1,401	vt.tiktok.com/ZSBTVFV4X/

Data were collected over two months using purposive sampling techniques. To ensure validity, the study employed data triangulation by cross-analyzing content across platforms and by conducting inter-coder reliability checks during thematic coding. The data were analyzed using a two-stage process: 1) thematic coding to identify dominant patterns and discursive themes, and 2) critical discourse analysis (CDA) to interpret how religious authority, identity, and symbolic boundaries are constructed and challenged in digital interactions. This approach recognizes that online *da'wah* is not simply a top-down process of message delivery, but a contested symbolic space shaped by algorithmic visibility and user agency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the most significant features of digital *da'wah* is its ability to reshape religious authority through new forms of visibility and symbolic influence. In the digital sphere, Islamic preachers no longer rely solely on traditional scholarly credentials but increasingly on media performance, audience engagement, and viral dissemination. The emergence of “religious influencers” illustrates this transformation, as their legitimacy is constructed through charisma, aesthetic presentation, and relevance to contemporary youth cultures. Unlike conventional ulama within institutional frameworks, these digital

preachers often operate independently, using social media algorithms to reach vast and diverse audiences.

A key element in this transformation is the adaptation of religious messages to platform-specific logic. On YouTube, preachers typically deliver structured sermons or lectures, often with embedded textual references and theological arguments. In contrast, TikTok encourages concise, emotionally charged content, normally formatted as short clips featuring music, humor, or trending challenges that, by design, convey religious messages. On the other hand, Instagram promotes visual aesthetics and branding, allowing preachers to cultivate personal image, lifestyle appeal, and symbolic identity. These differences demonstrate that religious actors are not only content producers but also strategic users of digital infrastructure (Rahmah et al., 2024).

The content style delivered by each digital preacher is closely shaped by the target audience's psychological orientation, media preferences, and spiritual needs. Hanan Attaki, for instance, adopts a youth-oriented tone that combines casual language, relatable personal narratives, and streetwear aesthetics. His use of motivational rhetoric and themes of spiritual self-development strongly appeals to the *hijrah generation* of young Muslims navigating their faith identity amid the pressures of urban modernity. Drawing on the psychology of preaching, this approach addresses the need for emotional resonance, identity reinforcement, and belonging, particularly among youth engaged in spiritual searching (Lövhelm, 2020). The preacher becomes not only a religious teacher but a symbolic role model, reinforcing aspirational Islamic lifestyles that appear compatible with creativity, community, and coolness.

In contrast, Abdul Somad maintains a more scriptural and didactic style, rooted in traditionalist Islamic knowledge (*tafaqquh fi al-dīn*). Yet, even he adapts to the affordances of digital media by incorporating provocative rhetorical questions, polemical moments, and concise Q&A formats, a strategy that increases virality. From a psychological perspective, this method leverages cognitive triggers such as curiosity and doctrinal certainty, attracting an audience seeking authoritative, "black-and-white" religious clarity in complex sociopolitical contexts (Rosidi et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, Habib Husein Ja'far positions himself in the middle spectrum by using humor, interfaith engagement, and philosophical inquiry. His communication style reflects a dialogic and inclusive model that appeals to pluralistic and urban audiences fatigued by confrontational preaching. Psychologically, his method stimulates critical

thinking, emotional openness, and parasocial trust, in which audiences feel they know and are close to the influencer (Pratama & Husen, 2024).

These stylistic differences are not incidental but reveal deliberate audience segmentation strategies. The preacher's style, tone, and rhetoric are shaped not only by theological orientation but also by media literacy, branding goals, and affective attunement with the emotional tone of their audiences. In short, preaching has become psychologically performative, in which the success of da'wah is partly measured by resonance, relatability, and the capacity to mobilize followers in real time.

This shift marks a departure from one-directional preaching models toward interactive religious communication, where audiences co-construct meanings, contest interpretations, and even correct preachers. Comment sections become effective spaces for moral negotiation, peer correction, or digital *taqlid*. In such contexts, the authority of preachers is not only asserted but also evaluated, validated, or rejected by the crowd. This dynamic underscores the transformation of religious leadership from charismatic imposition to dialogical negotiation, mediated through emotional tone, storytelling, and comment-driven engagement.

Moreover, the authority of preachers is increasingly influenced by audience metrics views, likes, shares, and subscriptions, rather than solely by institutional endorsement. This quantitative visibility contributes to the symbolic capital of digital preachers, enabling them to expand their influence across platforms, collaborations, and even commercial ventures. While this metric-based recognition enhances their reach, it also raises concerns about the commodification of religious discourse, where Islamic teachings risk being diluted to attract engagement. The balance between authenticity and popularity becomes a central tension in the ethics of digital preaching (Kerim et al., 2025).

Another important aspect of digital *da'wah* is the interactive dimension embedded in comment sections and direct messaging features. Unlike traditional sermons, where feedback is delayed or mediated through community leaders, digital preachers receive immediate responses ranging from praise and testimonials to criticism and theological challenges. These interactions create a new dialogic space where religious authority is constantly negotiated. Comment sections thus become not merely spaces of passive reception, but dynamic arenas of meaning-making, debate, and collective interpretation.

In this sense, the audience is not simply a recipient of *da'wah* but an active co-producer of religious discourse (Rokibullah & Laksana, 2025).

YouTube And Digital Religious Authority: Style, Audience, And Reception

YouTube has become one of the most influential platforms for Islamic preaching in the digital age. Its affordances, such as audiovisual immersion, long-form video, and algorithmic recommendation, enable preachers to elaborate on theological topics, respond to questions of contemporary morality, and foster audience relationships (Meriza et al., 2023). Compared to TikTok or Instagram, YouTube's extended format (10–90 minutes) allows for structured sermon-like content, yet adapted for on-demand viewing and immediate feedback via comment sections.

This study focuses on three prominent Indonesian digital preachers: *Ustadz Abdul Somad* (UAS), *Ustadz Hanan Attaki*, and *Habib Husein Ja'far*, analyzing how each leverages YouTube to shape distinct religious personas and influence audience interpretations of Islam.

Ustadz Abdul Somad: Authoritative Preaching And Ethical Anxiety

In a YouTube video titled “*Hukum Minjam Uang di Bank*” uploaded on 19 February 2025, UAS strongly condemns the act of borrowing money with interest, labeling it unequivocally as *riba*, a grave sin in Islamic law. His delivery is direct, emotionally charged, and laced with juridical certainty. This style reinforces his image as a preacher rooted in traditional orthodoxy who offers firm guidance amid moral ambiguity.



Figure 1. Youtube Video By Ustadz Abdul Somad On The Topic Of 'Hukum Meminjam Uang Di Bank' (The Ruling On Borrowing Money From Banks), posted on 19 February 2025. The video has generated over 13,000 comments (source: <https://youtu.be/WGK60GQjBN8?si=JZwVE3jPMAbs74bV>).

Audience responses reflect inner conflict between theological conviction and financial reality. For instance:

“Ya Allah... beri hamba rezeki yang halal untuk menutup hutang ke bank, ampuni hamba ya Allah...” @ucikingsih3134

“Aku sadar itu riba, tapi aku bisa jualan untuk nafkahi keluargaku. Boleh pinjam dari bank?” @FairuzSyahfutra

These comments exemplify a psychological tension: the authority of religious law collides with socioeconomic hardship. From a *psychology of preaching* perspective (Stanley & Kay, 2022), UAS’s message elicits both submissive acknowledgment and emotional distress, especially among lower-income audiences grappling with survival ethics.

Hanan Attaki: Emotional Da’wah And The Psychology Of Hope

In contrast, *Ustadz Hanan Attaki’s* preaching, as in the YouTube video “Petunjuk Bagi Orang yang Mau Memperbaiki Diri,” uploaded on 28 September 2024, adopts a soothing, empathetic tone. Thematically, his *da’wah* focuses on self-healing, repentance, and divine love. Rather than legal rulings, he offers spiritual companionship.

Figure 2. YouTube video by Hanan Attaki titled 'Petunjuk bagi Orang yang Mau



Memperbaiki Diri' (Guidance for Those Who Want to Improve Themselves), posted on

28 September 2024. The video has generated over 7,800 comments (source:

<https://youtu.be/jjap4ImUqCY?si=sb4YZ2WE4lqGHYNQ>).

Comments illustrate deep affective resonance:

“Bimbing hati aku untuk selalu memperbaiki diri di jalan yang Engkau ridhai ya Robb.” @saonahonah6800

“Semoga aku dan keluargaku menjadi pribadi yang lebih baik lagi. Terima kasih ya Allah atas semua nikmat ini.” @mukarromahomah

"Satu2nya Ustadz yang ketika saya dengarkan ke anak saya yang ABK tunanetra langsung tertarik dengan dakwah2nya." @admindwp9758

These responses suggest a therapeutic religiosity where *da'wah* is less about law and more about healing. Attaki's content psychologically uplifts viewers by validating their imperfections and inviting gentle transformation, matching the *millennial hijrah* movement's aspiration for meaningful, modern spirituality (Muharrifah & Sikumbang, 2025).

Habib Husein Ja'far: Tolerant Preaching In A Plural Arena

Habib Ja'far's approach exemplifies dialogical, humorous, and intellectually pluralistic *da'wah*. In the viral video "LOE LIAT NIH LOGIN: 6 Pemuka Agama Jadi Satu di Lebaran" uploaded on 9 April 2024 on Deddy Corbuzier's channel, Habib Ja'far appears with Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian religious leaders in an interfaith dialogue. His light-hearted but substantive contributions portray Islam as open, humanistic, and tolerant.



Figure 3. YouTube video by Habib Husein Ja'far titled '6 Pemuka Agama Jadi 1 di Lebaran' (6 Religious Leaders Become One in Eid al-Fitr), posted on 9 April 2024.

The video has generated over 120,000 comments (source:

<https://youtu.be/5ACmPpEPWks?si=U72H6vGoargUQ9bY>).

Audience comments affirm the moral clarity and emotional impact of his inclusive messages:

"Puncak keimanan dan kedewasaan adalah mengakui perbedaan dan mengedepankan toleransi." @archiebox2680

"CINTA TIDAK BERAGAMA, TETAPI SEMUA AGAMA MENGAJARKAN CINTA." @hamuktipw10

This type of *da'wah* shapes tolerant subjectivities. According to Evolvi (2022), such performances reflect a shift toward *mediated moderation*, in which Islamic identity is negotiated not through exclusivist claims but through shared moral universals that resonate strongly with urban, educated Muslims navigating plural societies.

Digital Preaching Styles And Audience Engagement In YouTube Comments

The *da'wah* style of Ustadz Abdul Somad (UAS) on YouTube illustrates a traditional yet adaptive rhetorical strategy. In a video uploaded on February 19, 2025, titled "*Hukum Minjam Uang di Bank*", UAS delivers a firm and authoritative judgment regarding the permissibility of bank loans within Islamic law. The video garnered over 731,000 views and received substantial engagement in the comments section. Comments like, "*Ya Allah... beri hamba rezeki yang halal untuk menutup hutang ke bank...*" and "*Saya kepepet, saya sampai sekarang alhamdulillah belum pernah pinjam uang dari bank,*" reveal the audience's deep moral anxiety and spiritual struggle in navigating everyday financial realities.

Psychologically, UAS's content appeals to audiences seeking doctrinal certainty and divine legitimacy amid moral ambiguity. His rhetorical power lies not merely in knowledge transmission but in reinforcing a collective conscience shaped by fear of sin and hope for divine mercy. As Abusharif (2024) suggests, such traditional *da'i* function as "epistemic stabilizers" in turbulent digital spaces, where religious identity is negotiated through both personal crisis and collective endorsement. This dynamic demonstrates a continuum of traditional authority in the digital age, where formal credentials and a firm pedagogical style still provide a sense of authenticity and security for a specific segment of the Muslim audience (Yazid et al., 2023).

In contrast, Hanan Attaki offers a more introspective and affective model of digital *da'wah*. In a video uploaded on September 28, 2024, titled "*Petunjuk Bagi Orang yang Mau Memperbaiki Diri*", which has attracted 168,000 views, Hanan speaks with soft intonation, relaxed visual aesthetics, and empathetic framing. Viewers respond with emotionally intimate comments such as, "*Semoga aku dan keluargaku menjadi pribadi yang lebih baik lagi. Terima kasih ya Allah atas semua nikmat ini,*" and "*Satu-satunya ustadz yang ketika saya mendengarkan ke anak saya yang ABK Tunanetra langsung tertarik dengan dakwahnya.*" These interactions suggest a form of "healing *da'wah*," where the preacher becomes not just a teacher, but a psychological companion. Hanan's approach resonates with the concept

of *mau'idhah hasanah*, gentle exhortation rooted in compassion, which, according to Muhajir (2024), fosters a non-threatening path to spiritual growth, particularly for younger, emotionally burdened, or neurodivergent audiences. His affective presence enables a safe space for emotional vulnerability and religious longing.

Meanwhile, Habib Husein Ja'far positions himself as an interfaith bridge builder, as evident in the YouTube podcast episode "*Loe Liat Nih Login!! Ini Indonesia Bung!!*" uploaded on April 9, 2024. The video has surpassed 8.1 million views, featuring a panel of six religious leaders from diverse faiths discussing religious tolerance during Eid. The comment section reveals overwhelming public support for his pluralistic message. For instance, one comment reads, "*Puncak kedewasaan seorang manusia dalam beragama adalah mengakui adanya perbedaan dan mengedepankan cinta kasih,*" while another echoes, "*I love U saudara Kristen, Hindu, Buddha... proud to be Indonesia.*" These responses indicate a shift in *da'wah* reception from theological alignment to civic harmony and shared moral values.

Drawing on the framework of social identity theory (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019), Ja'far's content demonstrates how inclusive religious discourse can affirm multiple identity layers, being Muslim, Indonesian, and a global citizen, simultaneously. This process aligns with recent scholarly work on pluralistic identity formation in the digital sphere, which argues that online platforms facilitate the negotiation of hybrid identities that transcend traditional binary categories of religious and national affiliations (Shahin, 2021). His style exemplifies dialogic *da'wah*, in which meaning is co-created through conversation rather than imposed by authority.

Taken together, the divergent styles of these three *da'i* underscore the evolving psychology of digital religiosity. UAS anchors his followers with theological certainty amid fear-based morality; Hanan nurtures affective healing through intimate empathy; and Ja'far projects civic Islam through rational dialogue and pluralism. These modes of preaching correlate with differentiated audience needs: the anxious moralist, the wounded seeker, and the tolerant citizen. In line with recent scholarship (Kim et al., 2022), these case studies confirm that digital *da'wah* is no longer merely the delivery of sacred messages but rather a negotiation of symbolic power, psychological reassurance, and communal belonging on algorithmically governed platforms such as YouTube.

Preaching On TikTok And Instagram (Expanded And Analyzed)

In contrast to YouTube's long-form, immersive style, platforms such as TikTok and Instagram emphasize speed, brevity, and algorithm-driven visibility. These platforms encourage preachers to condense complex theological concepts into concise, emotionally charged, and visually attractive content. The unique affordances of TikTok and Instagram, such as vertical videos, music overlays, text animations, and story-driven formats, have redefined the aesthetics and rhetoric of Islamic *da'wah* (Jalaluddin et al., 2024). This shift not only reflects technical adaptation but also signals more profound transformations in how religious knowledge is performed, perceived, and contested in algorithmic spaces.

To examine these dynamics more closely, we analyzed recent posts from three prominent digital preachers: *Ustadz Abdul Somad* (UAS), Hanan Attaki, and Habib Husein Ja'far. Their content provides insight into how Islamic *da'wah* is framed differently across platforms, audience expectations, and rhetorical goals.



Figure 4. TikTok video by Ustadz Abdul Somad on the permissibility of crypto trading, posted by @saifannur on 2 June 2024. The video has generated 1,987 comments (source: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSHgwdC83FdF2-jWMRS/>)

In a TikTok video, UAS addresses whether crypto trading is halal or haram, citing Islamic legal norms regarding certainty (*yaqin*) in economic transactions. However, the comment section reveals substantial skepticism and criticism from digitally literate users. One user wrote, “*jawaban ini menandakan ustad ini gapaham teknologi!*”, suggesting a disconnect between classical religious reasoning and contemporary technological contexts. This clash indicates a broader tension between authoritative religious

knowledge and participatory digital cultures, where audiences feel entitled to question, correct, or even mock religious figures.

This dynamic challenges the traditional top-down model of communication and instead emphasizes horizontal, dialogical engagement, a key shift in how religious authority is perceived and negotiated online (Lubis, 2023). UAS's traditionalist scriptural style, when condensed for a digital context, is sometimes perceived as inadequate or tone-deaf by tech-savvy netizens, leading to interpretive resistance. This phenomenon is a direct result of how social media platforms, with their algorithmic logic, have democratized the production and critique of religious content, fundamentally altering the power balance between preachers and their followers (Campbell, 2023).

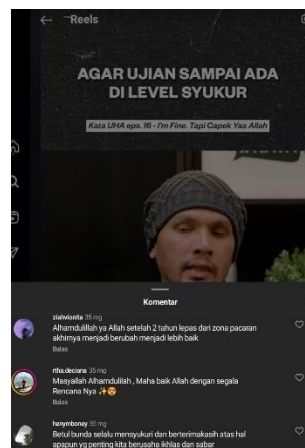


Figure 5. Instagram Reel from @attaki featuring Hanan Attaki's video titled "Agar Ujian Sampai di Level Syukur," posted on 28 August 2024 with 403 comments.

(source:

https://www.instagram.com/reel/C_M7ggjSSqw/?igsh=MTI2bGl2eGJjNXJmNw
==)

Hanan Attaki represents a distinct model of emotional-spiritual *da'wah* aimed primarily at urban youth and the so-called *hijrah* generation. His Instagram reel depicts him calmly encouraging gratitude amid hardship, set to soft lighting, mellow music, and warm, empathetic language. The response from viewers is overwhelmingly positive and emotionally expressive. A follower comments: "Alhamdulillah ya Allah setelah 2 tahun lepas dari zona pacaran akhirnya menjadi lebih baik." These testimonials function as co-narratives that reinforce the content's emotional message. The audience does not merely consume the message; they extend and personalize it. Aesthetic choices, such as font

selection, background music, facial expressions, and camera angles, serve theological purposes by crafting a mood of spiritual calm and sincerity. As Evolvi (2022) notes, the aestheticization of religion in social media enables the construction of affective religious identities that are both authentic and aspirational. This aestheticization of religion in social media enables the construction of affective religious identities that are both authentic and aspirational (Ergen, 2023).

This model aligns with therapeutic preaching, in which religion is understood as a healing journey rather than a doctrinal lecture. Attaki's success demonstrates how emotional connection, authentic storytelling, and gentle aesthetics can act as powerful tools for religious authority in a fragmented media landscape. His content is not only spiritually meaningful but also optimized for virality by algorithmic systems, leveraging platform dynamics to increase engagement without sacrificing authenticity (Fitriansyah, 2023).



Figure 6. TikTok video featuring Habib Husein Ja'far and Merry Riana, posted by

@merryriana on 22 December 2024 with 1,089 comments (source:

<https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSBTVFV4X/>)

Habib Husein Ja'far offers a radically inclusive form of *da'wah* that blends humor, interfaith dialogue, and civic empathy. In the video analyzed, he explains why greeting Christians during Christmas is permissible, citing ethical reasoning and compassion over rigid dogmatism. The comments reveal personal interfaith experiences, such as:

"*Saya Muslim, ibu saya Kristen... kita saling menghargai.*" These responses exemplify the co-construction of religious meaning in digital spaces: the preacher sets the tone, but the audience expands the interpretation through lived experience. Habib Ja'far's use of storytelling, friendly gestures, and pop-cultural references allows him to function not merely as a scholar but as a cultural mediator.

His dialogic and inclusive model reflects what Campbell (2020) and Evolvi (2022) describe as "*networked religion*," where authority is distributed across nodes of conversation rather than concentrated in a single clerical voice. Habib's *da'wah* resonates especially with young Muslims who value empathy, pluralism, and contextual understanding. Moreover, his performance of Islam is intensely visual: his attire, body language, camera framing, and linguistic choices work together to embody a "cool Islam" that is morally grounded but socially aware.

Across all three preachers, we observe a core tension: while TikTok and Instagram empower religious figures to reach large audiences, they also reduce theological complexity to visual snippets, creating opportunities for both *engagement* and *misunderstanding*. Algorithmic visibility does not always correspond to theological soundness, and the performative nature of *da'wah* sometimes invites charges of superficiality or commodification (Affandi et al., 2022).

This tension highlights a core paradox of digital religion: the logic of the medium, driven by virality and engagement, can fundamentally clash with the slow, contemplative nature of traditional religious knowledge. Yet, as these cases show, when handled skillfully, even 60-second videos can become platforms for profound spiritual reflection and meaningful community interaction (Williams & Krisjanous, 2023). This demonstrates a strategic adaptation in which religious authority is not lost but reconfigured to leverage platform dynamics while still providing spiritual meaning to a digitally native audience.

From Preaching To Religious Blogging

The shift from conventional oral preaching to religious blogging, whether in the form of extended captions, threads on X (formerly Twitter), or reflective posts on Instagram, represents a more profound transformation in the performance of *da'wah* in digital environments. In this format, Islamic messages are no longer delivered solely through one-directional sermons but are embedded in personal narratives, social

commentary, and curated daily reflections. The message becomes relational, intimate, and emotionally charged. This model emphasizes what Evolvi (2022) terms “affective religiosity,” in which spiritual authority derives from resonance with lived experience rather than clerical credentials.

Among the three figures studied, Hanan Attaki consistently utilizes extended Instagram captions as a space for spiritual mentoring. For instance, in his post titled “*Agar Ujian Sampai di Level Syukur*” (uploaded 28 August 2024), he combines motivational advice with Quranic allusions, encouraging followers to persevere through suffering with gratitude. His caption narrates personal moments of fatigue and surrender to divine will, followed by reflection and self-talk: “*Ada kalanya hidup berat, tapi itu bukan alasan berhenti. Justru di situlah Allah sedang mendidik kesabaran.*” The hundreds of responses in the comment section, including testimonials like “*Setelah dua tahun dari zona pacaran akhirnya aku berubah*”, show that followers interpret and extend his narratives as part of their spiritual process. Here, *da’wah* occurs through affective bonding and co-storytelling rather than top-down instruction.

In the case of Abdul Somad, his Facebook and Instagram accounts often feature religious microblogs, short paragraphs discussing current issues or popular questions from followers. One notable post discusses *cryptocurrency trading*, arguing for its prohibition based on the Islamic finance principle of *uncertainty (gharar)*. Rather than elaborate formal arguments, UAS presents this opinion in a concise textual block embedded in a designed poster. The comment section, however, is rife with debate. One viewer replies: “*Ustad ini gak paham blockchain, konsepnya belum tentu haram.*” This illustrates that while UAS adopts a text-centered style to preserve his scholarly authority, the informal blog-like format invites direct challenge and contestation from digitally literate users. His authority thus becomes negotiable, and his blog posts function less as legal fatwas than as discursive starting points (Fauzi, 2024).

Habib Husein Ja’far, by contrast, regularly publishes caption-based interfaith reflections on Instagram and X. In a viral TikTok repost from Merry Riana’s podcast (shared again on his Instagram in December 2024), he states: “*Saya Muslim, ibu saya Kristen. Saya ngucapin Natal, ibu saya ngucapin Idul Fitri. Itu bagian dari kasih sayang, bukan akidah.*” Although delivered orally in the video, this message was later recontextualized as a written post that included extended reflections and quotations. The comment threads, with responses like “*Hanya ucapan, bukan keyakinan. Terima kasih Bib atas*

pencerahannya”, reveal how followers reinterpret theological positions through their daily interreligious realities. Habib’s digital blogging, in this sense, becomes a forum for intersubjectivity, bridging theology with emotion and personal ethics with public discourse (Syatar et al., 2024).

This transformation marks a paradigmatic shift: *da’wah* is no longer merely an act of transmission, but also of self-disclosure. Each preacher's success depends on their ability to create cohesive spiritual branding, a persona that blends religiosity with vulnerability, social relevance, and moral storytelling (Syarif & Nurjannah, 2024). Their written posts are less concerned with theological finality and more with inviting reflection, empathy, and dialogue. In contrast to traditional blogging, which demands long-form argumentation, these microblogs emphasize relational trust, in which followers feel heard, guided, and emotionally affirmed (Todjeras et al., 2025).

Yet, this rise in personalized digital *da’wah* also brings challenges. The blurred boundary between religious guidance and self-promotion is evident, especially in influencer aesthetics. While none of the three preachers overtly advertise commercial products, their visual stylization, fashionable clothing, curated feeds, and cinematic videography signal the adoption of digital branding logics. This risks reducing *da’wah* to aspirational consumption, in which authenticity is judged more by visual coherence than by theological depth (Putra et al., 2024). This phenomenon points to a growing scholarly concern about the commodification of piety in the digital economy, where religious content is produced and circulated according to the logic of platforms rather than the logic of mosques or classrooms (Amri et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, the case of Hanan Attaki, UAS, and Habib Ja’far demonstrates how religious blogging has become a legitimate and powerful pulpit. Their informal, mediated expressions of faith enable broader access to Islamic discourse, particularly among millennials and Gen Z Muslims who prefer affective storytelling to didactic preaching (A’thoina & Al-Aboosi, 2024). In a digital age marked by information overload and attention scarcity, the success of these religious bloggers lies in their ability to embed Islam within emotional truth, personal struggle, and shared humanity. This shift reflects a broader trend of the "humanization of faith" in digital spaces, in which religious authority is no longer based solely on doctrinal knowledge but also on the ability to forge an authentic, personal connection with followers (Febrian, 2024).

Charity Or Business?

The blurred boundary between Islamic missionary efforts (*da'wah*) and commercial interests has become increasingly evident in the digital era. While many preachers initially entered the digital space with sincere intentions to spread Islamic values, their online presence has gradually evolved into monetized ecosystems that integrate advertisements, merchandise, endorsements, and branded experiences. This commercialization trend is evident in the digital footprints of figures such as Abdul Somad (UAS), Hanan Attaki, and Habib Husein Ja'far, in which religious outreach is often accompanied by economic enterprise (Husnuddlon, 2022).

For instance, Ustadz Abdul Somad is prominently featured in various promotional materials for exclusive Umrah packages, including those published on Instagram on July 7 and 11, 2025. One post advertises a "12-day exclusive Umrah" with UAS for 45.4 million rupiah, departing from Kuala Lumpur, and includes stays at high-end hotels such as Taibah Front and Fairmont. Another post, under a different travel provider, features a "Sultan Package" priced at 46.9 million rupiah for an Umrah experience with UAS, starting from Jakarta. These visuals combine elements of religious pilgrimage with luxury branding, transforming the spiritual journey into a curated experience where access to the *da'i* becomes a value-added service. In another instance, UAS appears in a school registration campaign for a private TK-SD school under his guidance, again blurring the line between religious education and institutional promotion (Ni'am, 2023).

Similarly, Hanan Attaki's digital *da'wah* is intertwined with product endorsements that reflect his youthful and lifestyle-oriented brand. On March 22, 2025, he appeared in an Instagram Reels video promoting Sidomuncul's *Sari Kunyit Plus* herbal supplement, while in another post from March 23, 2025, he collaborated with *Preview Muslimwear*, a premium fashion brand with over 128K followers. These collaborations not only support his sustainability as an independent preacher but also embed his *da'wah* within lifestyle narratives, thereby appealing to middle-class Muslim millennials who seek piety and consumption within a single frame (Romadi et al., 2022).

Habib Husein Ja'far, though known for his inclusive and dialogic preaching style, is no stranger to commercial integration. During a podcast appearance on April 9, 2025, on the show *Login*, various branded products, including Le Minerale, Khong Guan, ABC Qohwa, and Formula toothpaste, were prominently displayed throughout the set. Although not always explicitly endorsed, this spatial branding contributes to an

environment in which religious dialogue is staged in consumer-friendly settings, thereby implicitly merging sacred discourse with market aesthetics (Rijal, 2020).

These examples challenge traditional notions of *ikhlas* (sincerity) in *da'wah*. On the one hand, monetization can be seen as a practical strategy that allows preachers to sustain content creation without institutional backing, especially in an age where attention is capital. Viewers often support them through digital *infaq* or *shadaqah jariyah*, believing that enabling their favorite preacher is a pious act. On the other hand, critics argue that this commercialization may dilute theological depth and prioritize algorithm-friendly content over substance (Nisa, 2024).

Moreover, public reactions reveal the ambivalence surrounding these preacher-entrepreneurs. Some netizens praise the creativity and modernity of integrating faith with lifestyle, while others accuse preachers of exploiting Islam for profit or fame. These comment sections serve as moral battlegrounds in which the legitimacy of online religious authority is continually negotiated and contested (Fakhruroji, 2023).

Thus, the intersection of charity and business in digital *da'wah* should not be reduced to a binary of sincere versus corrupt. Instead, it reflects the broader logic of platform capitalism, where survival often depends on relevance, branding, and networked influence (Hamdani & Aziz, 2024). As Islamic preachers navigate this new terrain, they must balance market appeal with theological credibility, ensuring that their message remains spiritually nourishing despite the economic currents surrounding it.

Reconstructing Religious Authority In The Age Of Digital Da'wah

The digital migration of Islamic preaching has fundamentally altered how religious authority is constructed, contested, and regulated. Traditionally, Islamic authority in Indonesia was vested in institutions such as *pesantren*, *majelis taklim*, and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), which were rooted in formal scholarship and hierarchical endorsement (Feener, 2013). Preachers were recognized for their mastery of Islamic sciences, their *sanad* (lineage of knowledge), and their institutional legitimacy. However, the rise of digital platforms, particularly YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, has enabled new actors to gain religious influence without institutional backing, signaling a decentralization and personalization of Islamic authority (Zaid et al., 2022). This shift represents a move from a centralized, institution-based authority to a

networked model, in which influence is determined by reach, resonance, and audience engagement rather than by formal credentials alone.

This transformation is not a single, isolated event but is driven by a convergence of several factors. First, the pragmatic demand of a modern audience plays a significant role. Many people, particularly generasi muda, seek religious content that is practical, concise, and easily accessible, fitting into their fast-paced digital lifestyles. This demand encourages preachers to present their messages in new, engaging formats tailored to social media, such as short video clips and livestreams, rather than lengthy traditional sermons (Gunawan et al., 2024).

Second, the rise of religious entrepreneurship and aesthetic branding allows new figures to build authority. Many preachers, or "preacherfluencers," now combine their religious messages with a strong personal brand, monetizing their content and leveraging their followers' trust in ways that resemble a modern digital business model. This commodification of piety shifts the locus of authority from scholarly credentials to market metrics such as followers, likes, and views (Hakim & Dahri, 2025).

Finally, the algorithmic logic of social media platforms acts as an influential gatekeeper. Algorithms prioritize content that generates high engagement, whether through emotional, humorous, or even controversial topics, thereby amplifying the voices of charismatic figures over those of traditional scholars. This algorithmic influence means that authority is no longer merely about who you are, but also about how well your content performs in the digital economy (Ichwan et al., 2024). This dynamic helps explain why figures like Hanan Attaki and others.

This reconstruction is vividly embodied by figures like Abdul Somad, Hanan Attaki, and Habib Husein Ja'far, who each represent distinct models of religious authority adapted to the affordances of digital culture. Abdul Somad continues to embody scripturalist populism, relying on textual references and traditional Islamic jurisprudence while adopting provocative and viral rhetorical styles. His authority derives from a blend of institutional credentials and digital populism, allowing him to speak with both ulama-level gravity and "ordinary people" resonance. The comment sections under his videos often show audiences seeking his fatwa-like rulings, blurring the line between religious teaching and public adjudication. This dynamic reflects the democratization of religious knowledge, in which lay audiences now feel empowered to

seek direct, personal guidance from digital preachers, bypassing traditional institutional gatekeepers (Nata et al., 2024).

In contrast, Hanan Attaki constructs authority through affective charisma and spiritual intimacy, bypassing traditional clericalism, rather than focusing on jurisprudential rulings, his *da'wah* centers on self-healing, emotional resilience, and moral motivation. The trust he earns stems from his relatability as a spiritual companion rather than a formal scholar. His followers often express gratitude in therapeutic terms, using words like “tersentuh,” “menangis,” or “tenang.” This model reflects affective piety rather than textual mastery (Haq, 2024), positioning him within what scholars term soft-Islamic authority.

Meanwhile, Habib Husein Ja'far introduces a third model: dialogical pluralism. Drawing on his sayyid lineage and *pesantren* background, he bridges tradition and interfaith dialogue through humour and media literacy. His authority derives from a symbolic representation of tolerant Islam, in which he simultaneously embodies an elite Islamic lineage and modern cultural capital. His success is due not only to the message but also to the methods he employs, including podcasts, meme culture, and reaction videos. Through this, he constructs a form of discursive moderation that aligns religious identity with civic pluralism (Nisa, 2024).

These three figures illustrate the plural reconstruction of religious authority in the digital age, ranging from jurisprudential populism (Somad) to spiritual affect (Attaki) and dialogic pluralism (Ja'far). Each appeals to different audience segments shaped by socio-religious orientation and digital behavior. The algorithmic nature of platforms rewards engagement over theological rigor, creating a marketplace of authorities rather than a hierarchy (Hamdani, 2023). As a result, religious legitimacy today is increasingly relational, performative, and platform-dependent, rather than solely scholastic or institutional.

In this context, debates about regulating online religious sermons must be understood not merely as regulatory challenges but as responses to shifting patterns of religious legitimacy. The proposed certifications by MUI and Kemenag seek to reassert institutional gatekeeping, but they face resistance from digital preachers who claim autonomy on the grounds of freedom of expression. This tension is a central theme in contemporary studies of religion and media, where the centralized authority of religious bodies is increasingly challenged by the decentralized nature of digital platforms

(Syafira et al., 2024). As public authority migrates online, it is audience trust, algorithmic visibility, and emotional resonance that now dictate who speaks for Islam, not just credentials or fatwa councils. This shift highlights a new paradigm where the credibility of a preacher is less about formal education and more about audience engagement and perceived authenticity, factors that are heavily mediated by algorithmic platforms (Tang, Deng, & Liu, 2025).

Thus, rather than focusing solely on top-down censorship, a more productive approach may involve developing public religious literacy, enhancing transparency in digital algorithms, and co-creating ethical da'wah standards among religious scholars, tech platforms, and civil society (Dewi & Hidayat, 2024). This collaborative model recognizes the inevitability of digital religious plurality, while safeguarding the integrity of Islamic teachings in a fragmented media landscape.

The Audience Speaks Back: Reconstructing Authority Through Digital Engagement

In the digital sphere, audiences are no longer passive recipients of religious messages; they are active co-creators of meaning. This transformation is evident in the comment sections of popular Islamic content on YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, where theological debate, emotional expression, critique, and support intersect. The interactive nature of these platforms enables a dialogical model of *da'wah*, where symbolic authority is continuously shaped by public responses (Romadlany & Hasibuan, 2025).

For instance, in a YouTube video uploaded on February 19, 2025, titled "*Hukum Meminjam Uang di Bank*", Ustadz Abdul Somad (UAS) delivers a scripturally grounded fatwa-style explanation rejecting bank interest. The video drew thousands of comments. While many users agreed with the doctrinal clarity, others challenged his interpretation, citing alternative *ijtihad* and contemporary perspectives on *maqasid al-shariah*. One user argued, "Di zaman sekarang, kalau tanpa pinjaman bank, sulit bangun ekonomi umat. Bukankah ada riba darurat?", a response that reflects critical engagement and growing Islamic literacy among digital audiences. This demonstrates how UAS's jurisprudential populism is both authoritative and contestable in the online arena (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2019).

On September 28, 2024, Hanan Attaki posted a short spiritual reflection video titled *“Petunjuk bagi Orang yang Mau Memperbaiki Diri”*. The comment section overflowed with emotional testimonials. A viewer confessed, *“Ustadz, saya tadinya jauh dari Allah. Video ini bikin saya nangis dan mau berubah.”* These comments function not only as feedback but as affective co-productions of *da’wah*. Hanan’s audience often responds in affective terms, affirming his preaching style, which blends emotional healing with religious guidance. However, some users questioned the oversimplification of repentance, asking whether such a transformation requires more profound structural change rather than merely motivation. This tension illustrates how affective-based authority, while powerful, remains open to critique when perceived as superficial (Zulfikar et al., 2025).

In a contrasting tone, Habib Husein Ja’far’s interfaith dialogue titled *“Enam Pemuka Agama dalam Satu Meja Lebaran”*, uploaded on April 9, 2024, generated a different form of engagement. Audiences praised the inclusive message with comments like *“Kalau semua pemuka agama seperti ini, Indonesia pasti damai.”* Yet, others raised concerns about theological boundaries, asking whether such pluralist discourse dilutes Islamic identity. These comments reflect how Habib Ja’far’s model of discursive pluralism invites not only admiration but also negotiation and resistance from more conservative viewers (Bagas & Firyal, 2024).

Across all three cases, audience comments serve as a mirror to authority, amplifying, questioning, and sometimes reframing the preacher’s intended message. This highlights a fundamental shift from top-down transmission to the horizontal negotiation of religious meaning. Preachers no longer solely control the reception of their messages; instead, authority is performed, debated, and at times destabilized in real time by users who remix, caption, or refute their content (Nasution & Tumanggor, 2025).

Moreover, audience creativity plays a central role in extending *da’wah* narratives. Fan-made quotes, TikTok remix clips, and memes often reinterpret sermons into viral formats with altered nuances. For instance, a quote from Hanan Attaki on *“hijrah”* was turned into a meme juxtaposed with Korean pop culture, generating humorous yet spiritually infused discourse. This reflects the plurality of Islamic expressions in digital media and the recontextualization of religious content within broader frameworks of youth culture (Qudratullah & Syam, 2024).

Limitations Of The Study

This study adopts a netnographic approach to explore how digital Islamic preaching is constructed, contested, and received in online spaces. However, the application of this method remains limited to publicly accessible content, particularly video materials and comment sections on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. While such data reveal valuable patterns of audience interaction and symbolic authority, the study does not include engagement with private digital environments, such as WhatsApp groups, Telegram channels, or Instagram DMs, where more intimate and community-specific religious negotiations may occur.

Furthermore, the scope of this research is confined to three male Sunni digital preachers, potentially overlooking alternative models of religious authority represented by women, Shia scholars, or progressive Muslim voices, including queer and reformist perspectives. As a result, the findings may not fully capture the diversity and plurality of Islamic discourse in the digital age. Future studies should expand the netnographic lens both demographically and methodologically, integrating more immersive and multimodal strategies to understand better hidden, hybrid, and evolving expressions of Islamic identity online.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

This study concludes that digital *da'wah* has catalyzed a profound reconstruction of Islamic religious authority, shifting it from traditional, institution-based legitimacy toward a more fluid, interactive, and media-driven model. Through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, religious figures such as Hanan Attaki, Abdul Somad, and Habib Husein Ja'far negotiate their authority not merely through formal knowledge but also through visibility, emotional appeal, and responsiveness to audience engagement. Each represents a distinct model of authority from populist charisma to dialogic inclusivism, reflecting broader changes in how Islam is mediated and consumed in digital culture. The participatory nature of online preaching has turned audiences into co-producers of religious meaning, complicating top-down interpretations and challenging conventional hierarchies. However, this transformation is not without tensions, as commercial interests, algorithmic logic, and fragmented publics introduce ethical and theological challenges. Ultimately, digital platforms emerge not only as tools

for religious transmission but also as arenas in which the contours of Islamic authority are continually debated, reshaped, and reimagined.

Suggestions

This study offers several practical recommendations for various stakeholders engaged in the discourse of Islamic preaching and digital religiosity. For Islamic preachers and influencers, it is essential to balance engagement strategies with theological depth. While leveraging digital aesthetics and interactive formats can increase reach, content creators must also ensure the integrity of religious messages, avoiding oversimplification or commodification of faith. Structured training in media literacy and digital communication ethics is recommended, particularly for younger preachers navigating algorithmic platforms such as TikTok and YouTube.

For religious institutions, such as Islamic universities, *pesantren*, or the Ministry of Religious Affairs, there is a pressing need to incorporate digital *da'wah* competencies into their curricula and training programs. Institutions should support the development of critical thinking and narrative framing skills, enabling preachers to communicate inclusive, tolerant messages while responding to online contestation and misinformation. Collaborative initiatives between state institutions and religious communities can also help promote healthy digital ecosystems for faith-based communication.

For platform providers and social media companies, it is imperative to develop content policies that are sensitive to religious diversity while also preventing the spread of extremist ideologies. Promoting verified religious content creators and algorithmic amplification of peaceful, educational material can help foster a pluralistic digital environment. Finally, for scholars and future researchers, it is recommended that comparative studies be conducted across different religious communities and regions to understand better how algorithmic structures influence digital religious authority globally.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors of this article declare no conflict of interest.

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