

Islamic Digital Authority: The Shift of Indonesian Muslim Religious Authority in the Social Media Era

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Abstract

Digital transformation has fundamentally changed the pattern of production, distribution, and consumption of religious knowledge in Indonesia. Religious authorities that were previously dominated by Islamic clerics, Islamic boarding schools, and organizations are now shifting towards new actors who gain legitimacy through social media. This study aims to analyze the shifting form of religious authority of Indonesian Muslims in the era of social media and its implications for people's religious practices. The research uses a qualitative method with a library research approach. Data was obtained from books, journal articles, research reports, and various literature that discusses religion and digital media. The analysis was carried out in a descriptive-analytical manner using Max Weber's theory of authority and the concept of digital religion from Heidi Campbell. The results of the study show that social media has given birth to the phenomenon of democratization of religious authority, where individuals without a formal religious education background can gain influence and legitimacy through digital popularity. This shift is marked by the emergence of celebrity ustaz, Muslim influencers, and digital da'wah platforms that have become new references for the public, especially the younger generation. On the one hand, this phenomenon expands access to Islamic knowledge and increases religious participation in the digital space. However, on the other hand, these shifts also give rise to the fragmentation of authority, the commodification of religion, and the dissemination of unverified religious information. This research confirms that religious authority in the digital age is no longer hierarchical, but rather fluid, decentralized, and heavily influenced by the logic of social media algorithms.

Keywords : Religious Authority, Digital Islam, Social Media, Digital Authority, Indonesian Muslim.

Introduction

The development of information and communication technology has brought significant changes in various aspects of people's lives, including in religious practices. The Internet and social media no longer function solely as a means of communication, but also become a new space for the production, distribution, and consumption of religious knowledge. In Indonesia, the increasing penetration of the internet every year has encouraged people to make social media one of the main sources of information, including information on Islamic teachings and various contemporary religious issues. A report by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) shows that internet penetration in Indonesia by 2024 will reach more than 79 percent of the total population, with the majority of users coming from the productive age group who are very active in using social media (Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia, 2024)

These changes in information consumption patterns indirectly change the structure of religious authority among Indonesian Muslims. So far, Islamic religious authority has been built through traditional mechanisms that come from the depth of religious knowledge, scientific sanad, pesantren education, and recognition from the religious community. Ulama, kiai, and Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah are the main actors who have legitimacy in providing religious interpretation and guidance to the community. However, the development of social media has presented

new actors who gain influence and legitimacy not through formal scientific authority, but through popularity, number of followers, and the ability to produce interesting and easy-to-understand religious content.

This phenomenon shows that social media has given birth to a new form of religious authority that is more open and decentralized. Various digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook allow anyone to produce and disseminate religious narratives to the public without having to go through the mechanisms of conventional religious authority. This condition encourages the democratization of religious knowledge while opening up a wider space for contestation among various religious groups and actors. According to (Campbell, 2010), the development of digital technology has changed the way religion is practiced and understood so that religious authority is no longer exclusive, but continues to be negotiated through interaction in the digital space.

The emergence of digital ustaz, Muslim influencers, and social media preachers is an important indicator of this shift in authority. Not a few religious figures on social media have millions of followers and are the main reference for the community in answering various religious issues. In fact, some Muslims, especially the younger generation, prefer to gain religious knowledge through social media rather than attending recitations or consulting directly with scholars and religious institutions. This phenomenon shows that religious legitimacy in the digital age is

increasingly influenced by algorithmic logic, digital visibility, and audience engagement levels (Komara & Widjaya, 2024).

On the other hand, this transformation also raises various new problems. The openness of the digital space allows for the dissemination of unverified religious information, the emergence of extreme religious interpretations, and the increasing polarization among Muslim communities. In addition, social media also encourages the commodification of religion through the monetization of da'wah content and digital religious practices. Hoover (2016) explains that the changing media landscape has shifted the sources of religious authority and created a new competition in determining who has the right to speak on behalf of religion.

A number of previous studies have discussed the use of social media as a means of da'wah and the dissemination of Islamic teachings. However, studies that specifically analyze changes in the structure of Indonesian Muslim religious authorities and the process of forming digital religious authorities are still relatively limited. In fact, understanding these shifts is important considering that social media has become the main arena in the formation of religious understanding and identity in contemporary Muslim society.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to analyze how social media forms a new religious authority among Indonesian Muslims, factors which drives the shift in authority, as well as its implications for

religious practices and the dynamics of Islamic authorities in the digital age.

Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative research method with a library research approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to deeply understand the phenomenon of shifting Indonesian Muslim religious authority in the era of social media and analyze the dynamics of the formation of digital religious authority in virtual public spaces. Meanwhile, the literature study approach is used because the research focuses on conceptual analysis and interpretation of various literature related to digital religion, social media, and contemporary Islamic religious authorities (Sugiyono, 2018).

The data sources in this study consist of primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained from books, journal articles, and scientific publications that discuss the theory of religious authority, digital *religion*, and the transformation of Islamic authority in the social media era. The secondary data was obtained from official agency reports, surveys on internet use in Indonesia, policy documents, and various publications relevant to the development of digital media and religious practices of the Indonesian Muslim community.

The data collection technique is carried out through documentation studies and literature review systematically by identifying, classifying, and selecting various literature sources that are in accordance with the focus of the research.

The literature used includes studies on the transformation of religious authority, the development of digital da'wah, and the emergence of new religious actors in cyberspace.

The data analysis technique uses a descriptive-analytical method that is carried out through three stages. First, data reduction, which is selecting and simplifying data that is relevant to the focus of the research. Second, data categorization, which is grouping data into several themes, such as the transformation of religious authority, the role of social media algorithms, and the emergence of Muslim influencers as new authorities. Third, data interpretation, which is analyzing and interpreting research findings using the theory of authority proposed by Max Weber and the concept of *digital religion* from Heidi Campbell to explain the change in the pattern of religious legitimacy in the digital era.

To improve the validity of the data, this study uses source triangulation, which is comparing information obtained from various books, scientific articles, research reports, and official publications so as to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of *Islamic Digital Authority* and the shift in Indonesian Muslim religious authority in the social media era.

As a literature-based research, this study has limitations because it does not involve direct field data collection. Therefore, the findings of this study are more directed to provide an analytical and conceptual framework regarding the transformation of religious authority in

Indonesian Muslim society in the digital era.

Result and Discussion

Transformation of Religious Authority from Traditional to Digital

The development of social media has brought fundamental changes to the pattern of production, distribution, and consumption of religious knowledge in Indonesia. Before the digital age, Islamic religious authority was built through a relatively hierarchical and institutionalized structure. Ulama, kiai, pesantren, and religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah occupy a central position as authority holders in providing interpretation of Islamic teachings and answering various religious problems of the community. Their legitimacy is gained through mastery of Islamic sciences, clear scientific sanad, formal education, and social recognition given by the Muslim community. In this context, religious authority is exclusive because not everyone has the capacity and legitimacy to speak on behalf of religion (Yazid et al., 2023).

The authority model has undergone a significant transformation along with the development of the internet and social media. The presence of digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and X (Twitter) has created new spaces for the production and dissemination of religious discourse. The digital space removes various geographical and institutional limitations that were previously a prerequisite for a person to gain religious influence. Every individual now has an equal opportunity to produce, disseminate, and interpret religious

teachings to the public at large. Thus, religious authority is no longer monopolized by traditional actors, but rather an arena that is open to various parties who have the ability to manage media and build digital audiences.

This phenomenon shows that social media has changed the pattern of relationships between religious authorities and society. If previously people obtained religious knowledge through face-to-face relationships at Islamic boarding schools, taklim assemblies, or Islamic educational institutions, now people can access various religious information instantly through mobile phones. In fact, the younger generation of Muslims are more likely to seek answers to religious issues through search engines, da'wah videos, or social media accounts than to consult directly with scholars and formal religious institutions. This condition shows the existence of a process of disintermediation, which is the reduced role of traditional intermediaries in the delivery of religious knowledge (Campbell & Tsuria, 2022).

In the perspective of the sociology of religion, the transformation can be explained through the theory of authority put forward by Max Weber. Weber divides authority into three main forms, namely traditional authority, charismatic authority, and rational-legal authority. Islamic religious authority in Indonesia was initially based more on traditional authorities that derive legitimacy from scientific heritage, pesantren traditions, and community recognition. However, the development of social media has prompted

the emergence of a new form of charismatic authority built through popularity, communication skills, and emotional closeness to audiences (Weber, 2019).

In the digital context, charisma is no longer formed through direct relationships between scholars and the community, but through virtual representations displayed on social media. A preacher can gain great influence not only because of the depth of his religious knowledge, but because of his ability to create content that is interesting, simple, and easy to understand by the public. The number of *followers*, the number of views, and the level of audience engagement are new indicators that determine the legitimacy and influence of a religious figure. In other words, social media has shifted the authority base from *scholarly authority* to *popularity authority*.

These changes show that digital technology serves not only as a means of communication, but also as a structure that forms a new configuration of religious authority. According to Campbell, religion and technology influence each other in a process called *digital religion*, which is a condition when religious practices undergo transformation due to interaction with digital technology. In this context, social media is not only a means of da'wah, but also a space for negotiation and contestation of religious authorities.

A similar view is put forward by Eickelman and Anderson who state that the emergence of new media has created an *emerging Muslim public sphere*, which is an Islamic public space that allows for a more open exchange of religious ideas and

interpretations (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003). The digital public space allows various Islamic groups, both moderate, conservative, and transnational, to compete with each other in influencing people's religious understanding. As a result, religious authority became more fragmented and no longer singular.

Furthermore, Bunt explained that the development of *cyber Islamic environments* has given birth to new forms of religious authority built through digital networks. Authority is no longer solely dependent on traditional institutions, but is also determined by the ability of individuals to build connectivity and visibility in cyberspace. This phenomenon can be seen from the emergence of digital ustaz and Muslim influencers who have millions of followers and are the main reference for the community in understanding religious issues (Bunt, 2018).

The transformation of religious authority in the era of social media also shows a shift in the legitimacy mechanism. If in the past legitimacy was obtained through a long educational process and institutional recognition, then in the digital era legitimacy is increasingly determined by the logic of social media algorithms. The algorithm works by promoting content that is capable of attracting attention and generating high interactions. Thus, religious figures who are able to adapt to the logic of digital media will gain greater visibility than those who rely solely on traditional authority.

In this perspective, it can be said that social media has given birth to a new form called algorithmic religious authority, which is a religious authority formed

through the interaction between digital popularity, platform algorithms, and audience engagement. This concept shows that religious recognition in the digital age is not only influenced by scientific capacity, but also by the ability to manage communication technology and utilize algorithmic mechanisms in building influence in the public space.

Nonetheless, the transformation of religious authority from traditional to digital has not completely eliminated the role of traditional religious clerics and institutions. On the contrary, this phenomenon indicates a process of adaptation and negotiation between the old and new authorities. Many Islamic boarding schools, Islamic organizations, and traditional clerics have begun to use social media as a means of *da'wah* and religious education to maintain their relevance in the midst of a changing communication ecosystem. Therefore, the shift in religious authority in the digital age cannot be understood as a process of total replacement, but rather as a transformation that results in a new configuration of the relationship between religion, technology, and society.

Thus, the transformation of religious authority from traditional to digital shows that the development of social media has changed the way authority is built, maintained, and negotiated in Indonesian Muslim society. Religious authority is no longer hierarchical and centralized, but has become more fluid, open, and decentralized. This change also confirms that digital technology has become an important factor in determining who gains legitimacy to speak on behalf of religion in the age of social media.

The Emergence of New Actors in Digital Religious Authority

The development of social media has given birth to a major transformation in the landscape of Indonesian Muslim religious authorities through the emergence of new actors who previously did not have a dominant position in traditional religious structures. If in the past religious authorities tended to be monopolized by ulama, kiai, Islamic boarding schools, and Islamic organizations that have scientific and institutional legitimacy, then the digital era presents new figures who gain influence through cyberspace. The emergence of digital ustaz, Muslim influencers, hijrah celebrities, online da'wah communities, and Islamic content creators shows that social media has opened wider access for individuals to participate in the production and dissemination of religious knowledge (Haryadi, 2020).

This phenomenon marks the democratization of religious authority. Authority is no longer the exclusive right of certain groups that have a long formal religious education or scientific sanad, but can be acquired through the ability to manage digital media and build closeness with audiences. In other words, social media has created a space that allows anyone to become a producer of religious knowledge and gain legitimacy from the public directly. This condition indicates a shift from a hierarchical authority model to a more open and participatory authority model.

According to Campbell (2013), the development of digital technology has created a new form of religious practice called *digital religion*, which is a process when religion is not only present in the digital space, but also undergoes transformation due to the characteristics of technology itself. In this context, social media has become a new arena for negotiation and the formation of religious authorities. Individuals who are able to make effective use of digital technology can gain great influence even if they do not come from formal religious institutions. This shows that technology has changed the way society determines who is considered to have the authority to speak on behalf of religion.

The emergence of new actors in digital religious authorities cannot be separated from changes in people's information consumption patterns, especially among the younger generation of Muslims. The digital generation tends to want information that is fast, practical, and easy to understand. Therefore, religious content that is packaged in a simple, concise, and interesting manner is easier to accept than religious studies that are academic and in-depth. Digital preachers are understanding the changes and are leveraging a variety of social media features, such as short videos, podcasts, live broadcasts, and engaging visual designs to reach a wider audience.

In the perspective of the sociology of religion, this phenomenon suggests that religious legitimacy has undergone a significant shift. If in the past legitimacy was built through the mastery of religious

knowledge and institutional recognition, then in the era of social media, legitimacy is increasingly determined by the level of visibility and popularity in the digital space. The number of *followers*, the number of views, the number of likes, and the level of audience engagement are the new social capital that determines the influence of a religious figure.

Pierre Bourdieu called this kind of phenomenon a form of symbolic capital transformation. In the context of digital religious authority, symbolic capital that previously came from pesantren education and mastery of Islamic sciences has now shifted to digital capital obtained through popularity, media networks, and the ability to build self-image in virtual space. Thus, social media not only changed the way religious knowledge was disseminated, but also changed the sources of religious legitimacy themselves (Haryadi, 2020).

The phenomenon of the emergence of new actors also shows the individualization of religious authority. The community is no longer completely dependent on formal institutions for religious guidance, but can choose for themselves religious figures who are considered to be in accordance with their needs and preferences. Eickelman and Anderson (2003) explain that the new media has created a *Muslim public sphere* that allows individuals to access various religious interpretations without relying on one particular source of authority. Akibatnya, otoritas keagamaan menjadi semakin plural dan kompetitif.

In Indonesia, this phenomenon can be seen from the increasing influence of social media preachers who have millions of followers and are the main reference for

the public in understanding various religious issues. Their influence is not only limited to delivering lectures or religious teaching, but also extends to various aspects of life, such as Islamic lifestyle, sharia economics, education, and even political preferences. Thus, digital religious actors not only function as conveyors of religious teachings, but also as shapers of contemporary Muslim social and cultural identity.

Furthermore, Bunt (2018) explained that the development of *Islamic cyber environments* has given birth to a new network of authorities that transcend geographical and institutional boundaries. A preacher who is in one region can have a huge influence on the community in another region through social media. This shows that the digital space has created a form of transnational authority that allows for the rapid and widespread dissemination of religious ideas and interpretations.

However, the emergence of new actors in digital religious authorities also raises a number of problems. First, the opening of the digital space allows individuals who do not have adequate religious competence to appear as religious authorities. Second, the competition for public attention encourages some religious actors to produce sensational and controversial content to increase popularity. Third, social media algorithms tend to promote content that has a high level of interaction, rather than content that has good scientific quality. This condition has the potential to lead to the spread of unverified religious information and increase polarization among Muslim communities.

From the perspective of Weber's theory of authority, the phenomenon shows that charismatic authority in the digital age is undergoing a redefinition. Charisma is no longer formed through direct relationships between clerics and society, but is built through digital representations that are constructed continuously on social media. Religious figures who are able to create an emotional closeness to the audience and utilize the logic of digital platforms will find it easier to gain influence than those who rely solely on traditional legitimacy.

Thus, the emergence of new actors in digital religious authority suggests that social media has created a new configuration in the relationship between religion, technology, and society. Religious authority is no longer singular and centralized, but has become more plural, fluid, and competitive. This transformation also confirms that religious legitimacy in the digital era is increasingly determined by the ability to manage media, build audience networks, and utilize algorithmic logic in cyberspace.

Social Media Algorithms and the Formation of New Religious Authorities

One of the main characteristics of the digital era is the increasingly dominant role of algorithms in determining the flow of information received by the public. In the context of social media, algorithms are a set of computing systems designed to organize, filter, and recommend content to users based on various indicators, such as the number of interactions, user preferences, search history, watch duration, and

engagement level. The algorithms on platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook work on the principle of maximizing user *attention* and maintaining the duration of using the platform. Consequently, the content that most often appears in the digital space is not the most accurate or of high academic quality, but content that is considered to be able to attract attention and generate great interaction.

This phenomenon has significant implications for the development of religious authority among Indonesian Muslims. In the previous era, religious legitimacy was built through a long process of education, mastery of Islamic sciences, scientific sanad, and recognition from religious communities. However, in the era of social media, the mechanism of legitimacy has shifted. Religious authority is now not only determined by the depth of a person's knowledge, but also influenced by an individual's ability to understand the logic of algorithms, manage digital media, and create content that suits the audience's preferences.

These changes show that social media has given birth to a new form of production and distribution of religious knowledge. Religious content that is short, emotional, and easy to understand tends to get public attention more easily than academic and in-depth Islamic studies. One-minute lecture videos, Islamic motivational quotes, or attractively packaged lecture snippets often garner millions of views and are widely shared by social media users. In contrast, Islamic studies that are long and

require more in-depth analytical skills often have a more limited scope.

This phenomenon can be understood through the concept of *attention economy* introduced by Davenport and Beck (2001). In the mindfulness economy, human attention is seen as a limited, high-value resource. Therefore, various digital platforms compete for users' attention through algorithmic systems designed to promote content that is considered interesting and potentially viral. In the religious context, this logic causes religious messages to also undergo transformation to suit the mechanism of the attention economy. Da'wah is no longer only oriented to the delivery of scientific substance, but also to how the message can attract attention and obtain a great response from the public.

These changes give birth to what can be called algorithmic religious authority, which is a form of religious authority that is formed and strengthened by a social media algorithmic system. In this model, a person's authority is no longer determined only by scientific capacity and institutional legitimacy, but also by the digital visibility gained through algorithmic systems. The number of *followers*, the number of views, the level of engagement, and the frequency of appearances on the user's homepage are new indicators that determine who is considered to have the authority to talk about religion.

The concept of *algorithmic religious authority* suggests that algorithms no longer function as neutral technical instruments, but have become an important actor in the process of forming religious authority. Gillespie (2014)

explains that algorithms have the power to regulate the visibility of information and determine what content is considered relevant by users. In other words, algorithms indirectly act as new "*gatekeepers*" in digital public spaces. If in the past the function of filtering religious information was carried out by ulama, Islamic boarding schools, and religious institutions, then in the digital era some of these functions have been taken over by an algorithmic system that works based on the logic of popularity and interaction.

In the perspective of Michel Foucault's theory of power, algorithms can be understood as a new form of power technology that works subtly and invisibly. Power is no longer exercised through coercive mechanisms, but through the process of information regulation and the formation of user preferences. The algorithm determines what content is worth seeing, who gains greater visibility, and which religious narratives will be more dominant in digital public spaces. Thus, algorithms not only regulate the flow of information, but also shape knowledge and the production of truth (*regime of truth*) in society (Foucault, 1980).

In the context of religious authority, this condition explains why a number of digital religious figures can gain enormous influence despite not having a deep religious education background. As long as they are able to produce content that matches the algorithm's preferences and attracts the public's attention, then the chances of gaining social legitimacy will be even greater. On the other hand, scholars or academics who have high scientific capacity but are less able to adapt to the

logic of digital media often have a more limited audience reach.

Campbell called this phenomenon part of the *digital transformation of religion*, where digital technology not only becomes a means of religious communication, but also changes the structure and practice of religion itself. In this context, algorithms play a role in shaping a new pattern of relationships between religious authorities and society. The public no longer accepts religious authority based on institutional position, but based on the intensity of the presence of religious figures in the digital space.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of *algorithmic religious authority* also has implications for the increasing fragmentation of religious authority. Because the algorithm works based on the user's preferences, each individual can receive different religious information according to their interaction patterns on social media. As a result, what is called *filter bubble* and *echo chamber* are formed, which are conditions when users are only exposed to views that are in line with their preferences and rarely interact with different perspectives (Pariser, 2011). In the religious context, this situation has the potential to strengthen the polarization of Islamic understanding and narrow the space for dialogue between groups.

In addition, the dominance of algorithms also encourages the commodification of religion in the digital space. Religious content is not only produced for the purpose of *da'wah*, but also to gain attention, increase the number

of followers, and generate economic benefits through the monetization of the platform. As a result, some religious actors tend to produce sensational, controversial, or emotional content because it is easier to get high engagement and be promoted by algorithms.

Thus, social media algorithms have become an important factor in the formation of new religious authorities in the digital age. Religious authority is no longer determined only by mastery of religious science and institutional legitimacy, but also by the ability to manage digital visibility and understand the algorithmic mechanisms at work behind social media platforms. This phenomenon shows that digital technology is not a neutral instrument, but has become an actor that has helped determine the production of knowledge, the formation of legitimacy, and the distribution of religious authority in the digital public space.

Implications of the Shift in Religious Authority in the Social Media Era

The shift of religious authority from traditional spaces to digital spaces is one of the most significant social transformations in the development of contemporary Islam in Indonesia. This change not only changes the actors who have religious influence, but also changes the way people acquire religious knowledge, shape Islamic identity, and determine the source of religious legitimacy. This transformation presents various ambivalent implications, namely presenting opportunities as well as challenges for the development of the

religious life of the Indonesian Muslim community.

On the one hand, social media has created a democratization of access to Islamic knowledge. If in the past access to religious studies was relatively limited to certain spaces, such as pesantren, mosques, or taklim assemblies, then the development of digital technology allows people to obtain religious information anytime and anywhere. The internet has eliminated geographical and social restrictions that were previously an obstacle to obtaining religious education. A Muslim living in a remote area, for example, can now access the lectures of scholars from different regions and even from different countries through social media.

This phenomenon shows that social media has expanded the space for religious participation and increased inclusivity in the dissemination of Islamic knowledge. According to Campbell (2013), digital technology has transformed religious practices by creating new spaces that allow individuals to actively participate in the process of producing and consuming religious information. The digital space makes religion more accessible and opens up opportunities for the emergence of virtual religious communities that are no longer limited by space and time.

In addition to expanding access to religious knowledge, social media also provides an opportunity for groups that previously lacked space in religious discourse to express their views to the public. The emergence of various digital da'wah communities, online study forums, and social media-based Islamic movements shows that technology has expanded

people's participation in religious life. In certain contexts, this condition strengthens the democratization of religious discourse because authority is no longer monopolized by certain groups.

However, on the other hand, the openness of the digital space also raises various new problems. One of the main implications of the shift in religious authority is the fragmentation of authority. In the traditional era, people tend to have relatively clear and structured sources of religious reference. Ulama, kiai, and religious institutions are the main authorities in answering various religious problems. On the other hand, in the digital era, people are faced with many sources of religious information that often have different views and interpretations.

This condition causes religious authority to become increasingly plural and decentralized. People have the freedom to choose religious figures that suit their preferences without a standard mechanism of authority. Eickelman and Anderson (2003) refer to this phenomenon as a consequence of the formation of *the Muslim public sphere*, which is an Islamic public space that allows various religious groups and actors to compete with each other in influencing people's religious understanding.

The fragmentation of authority also has the potential to give birth to *religious confusion*, especially when people are faced with various fatwas and conflicting views. In certain situations, society has difficulty determining the most credible and scientifically accountable source of authority. This condition shows that the democratization of religious information is

not always directly proportional to the improvement in the quality of religious understanding.

Another equally important implication is the increasing spread of unverified religious information. The character of social media that prioritizes speed and virality often causes religious information to spread without going through an adequate verification process. Religious content that contains misinterpretations, hoaxes, or even extreme narratives can easily spread and affect public understanding.

According to Bunt (2018), cyberspace has become a new arena for the spread of various religious ideologies and interpretations, including those that are exclusive and radical. In the Indonesian context, this phenomenon has the potential to increase religious polarization and strengthen the development of intolerant religious understanding. Social media algorithms that tend to promote content with high levels of interaction further increase the likelihood of spreading provocative and controversial religious narratives.

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These various implications ultimately put traditional religious institutions, such as Islamic boarding schools, taklim assemblies, and Islamic organizations, at new challenges. These institutions can no longer rely on the conventional hierarchical model of authority, but are required to adapt to the development of digital technology. The adaptation does not mean abandoning the scientific tradition that has been built over centuries, but rather integrating scientific authority with a more effective digital communication strategy.

Strengthening religious digital literacy is one of the urgent needs in dealing with these changes. Digital literacy is not only about the ability to use technology, but also the ability to verify information, understand context, and distinguish between credible religious authorities and authorities built solely on popularity. In addition, increasing the capacity of digital da'wah for Islamic scholars, Islamic boarding schools, and organizations is

important so that science-based religious authorities remain relevant in the midst of the dominance of the digital space.

Thus, the shift in religious authority in the age of social media has resulted in a new configuration of the relationship between religion, technology, and society. Religious authority is no longer singular and centralized, but has become more plural, fluid, and decentralized. These changes open up opportunities for the democratization of Islamic knowledge and the expansion of religious participation, but at the same time they also present challenges in the form of fragmentation of authority, the spread of disinformation, and the commodification of religion. Therefore, the future of religious authorities in Indonesia is highly determined by the ability of religious institutions to adapt to digital transformation without losing the scientific base and social legitimacy that has been the main foundation of Islamic authority.

The Shifting Model of Religious Authority

Aspects	Traditional Authority	Digital Authority
Legitimacy base	Sanad of knowledge, religious education, and scholarly recognition	Digital popularity, algorithms, and audience engagement
Main actors	Ulama, kiai, Islamic boarding schools, Islamic	Muslim influencers, digital ustaz, content

	organizations	creators Religions
Transmission media	Islamic boarding schools, mosques, taklim assemblies	Social media and digital platforms
Relationship with the audience	Hierarchical and one-way	Interactive and participatory
Nature of authority	Centralized and institutional	Decentralized and liquid
Sources of influence	Sources of influence	Visibilitas digital dan popularitas

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study concludes that the development of social media has changed the structure of Indonesian Muslim religious authority from a hierarchical model based on scientific legitimacy to a more open, decentralized, and influenced model by digital logic. The emergence of digital ustaz, Muslim influencers, and online da'wah communities shows that religious authority is no longer determined solely by sanad and institutional recognition, but also by popularity, digital visibility, and the algorithmic mechanisms of social media. This condition gave birth to a new form called *algorithmic religious authority*, which is a religious authority formed through the interaction between digital technology, platform algorithms,

and audience participation in cyberspace. While these transformations have expanded people's access to Islamic knowledge and increased religious participation, they have also posed challenges in the form of fragmentation of authority, religious disinformation, and religious commodification in the digital age.

This study recommends the need to strengthen religious digital literacy for the community, especially the younger generation, to be able to sort and verify religious information circulating on social media. In addition, Islamic boarding schools, ulama, and Islamic organizations need to develop adaptive digital da'wah strategies while maintaining scientific authority and religious moderation values. Further research also needs to use an empirical approach through surveys or field studies to analyze people's religious information consumption patterns and examine more deeply how social media algorithms shape preferences and trust in religious authorities in the digital age.

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