



Hadith Authority in the Digital Age: Continuity, Contestation, and Transformation

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Abstract

The expansion of digital platforms has transformed the conditions under which religious knowledge is circulated, encountered, and recognised. This study examines how Hadith authority is maintained, contested, and transformed within digital environments, focusing on the relationship between classical epistemic legitimacy and mechanisms of public recognition. Employing qualitative document analysis and theory-informed thematic analysis, the study examines literature and accessible digital materials concerning Hadith scholarship, religious authority, digital religion, platform visibility, and technological mediation. The analysis draws on Talal Asad's concept of discursive tradition, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic capital and the religious field, and Heidi Campbell's digital religion framework. The findings demonstrate, first, that the epistemic legitimacy of Hadith authority remains anchored in established scholarly practices, including isnad evaluation, source verification, transmission, narrator criticism, matn analysis, and mastery of Hadith sciences. Second, digital platforms diversify the mechanisms through which religious authority becomes publicly recognised and contested. Visibility, audience engagement, communicative performance, and networked reputation can generate public influence but do not independently establish Hadith authenticity or scholarly competence. Third, technological mediation shapes the circulation, visibility, and exposure of religious claims through platform infrastructures, recommendation systems, engagement metrics, and communicative formats. The study therefore distinguishes three analytically interconnected dimensions of contemporary Hadith authority: epistemic legitimacy, public recognition, and technological mediation. Rather than displacing classical authority, digitalisation reconfigures the conditions through which inherited scholarly legitimacy is communicated, encountered, recognised, and translated into social influence. This framework offers a nuanced account of Hadith authority beyond the binary opposition between traditional and digital authority.

Keywords: Hadith Authority, Epistemic Legitimacy, Public Recognition, Technological Mediation, Digital Religion, Religious Authority

Introduction

The rapid development of digital technologies has transformed how religious knowledge is produced, disseminated, encountered, and recognised. Digital platforms have become important spaces for religious communication beyond conventional institutional settings, enabling scholars, preachers, influencers, and other religious actors to reach wider audiences through social media, online lectures, digital repositories, and other networked environments. In Muslim societies, this transformation has contributed to a changing ecology of religious communication in which religious authority is shaped not only by established



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scholarly institutions but also by digital practices, audience engagement, and technological infrastructures.¹

The transformation has generated sustained debate concerning the relationship between digital media and religious authority. Earlier studies emphasised the capacity of digital media to decentralise religious communication by expanding participation beyond established institutional structures.² Subsequent scholarship has shown that digital environments do more than facilitate communication: they shape how religious actors and messages become visible and recognised through audience interaction, communicative performance, and platform infrastructures.³ Recent studies in Indonesia similarly demonstrate that digital platforms have become arenas in which religious interpretations, actors, and forms of authority are negotiated and publicly recognised.⁴ These developments suggest that digitalisation does not simply replace traditional authority with digital actors; rather, it changes the social conditions through which religious legitimacy becomes visible and recognised.

This issue is particularly significant for Hadith because its scholarly authority possesses a distinctive epistemic foundation. Classical Hadith scholarship developed specialised procedures for establishing the credibility of transmitted reports, including the evaluation of *isnād*, narrator reliability, *matn*, source verification, transmission, and mastery of the established sciences of Hadith.⁵ Hadith authority is therefore grounded not merely in institutional affiliation or public recognition but in demonstrable scholarly competence within an established epistemic tradition. The emergence of digital databases, online repositories, and computational representations of *isnād* may change the form and conditions of access to Hadith without necessarily displacing these underlying criteria of scholarly legitimacy.

At the same time, digital circulation introduces new conditions through which Hadith knowledge is encountered. Religious content increasingly reaches audiences through recommendation systems, search rankings, engagement metrics, and platform-specific formats. Consequently, a highly qualified Hadith scholar may possess substantial epistemic legitimacy while receiving limited digital exposure, whereas a religious communicator with less formal training may achieve extensive visibility because their content is more compatible with the communicative and algorithmic logic of digital platforms.⁶ Recent scholarship on digital religious authority likewise demonstrates that visibility, audience engagement, communicative performance, and algorithmically structured reputation increasingly

¹ Gary R Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

² Dale F Eickelman and Jon W Anderson, eds., “New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere” (Indiana University Press, 2003).

³ Heidi A Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (Routledge, 2013).

⁴ Arif Zamhari, Muhamad Ibtissam Han, and Zulkifli, “Traditional Religious Authorities in New Media: Cariustadz.Id Platform as An Alternative Cyber Fatwa and Da’wah Media among the Middle-Class Urban Muslims,” *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 21, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v21i1.20300>.

⁵ Jonathan A C Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oneworld Publications, 2009).

⁶ Tarleton Gillespie, “The Relevance of Algorithms BT - Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society,” ed. Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J Boczkowski, and Kirsten A Foot (MIT Press, 2014), 167–94.

influence how religious actors are perceived and recognised.⁷ Research on Hadith in digital spaces further identifies tensions between the requirements of classical transmission and the demands of social-media popularisation.⁸ These developments point to an important distinction between epistemic legitimacy and public recognition: digital visibility may increase the circulation and social influence of a religious claim, but it cannot independently establish the authenticity of a Hadith or the methodological adequacy of its interpretation.

Despite the growing literature on digital religion, Islamic authority, and Hadith, an important analytical gap remains. Existing studies have demonstrated the diversification of religious actors, the role of platforms in shaping visibility, and the adaptation of traditional religious authority to new media. Hadith scholarship, meanwhile, has extensively examined authenticity, transmission, *isnād*, textual criticism, and computational approaches to Hadith data. These strands, however, have rarely been brought together to explain how the continuity of Hadith's epistemic foundations relates to the changing social and technological conditions through which that authority becomes publicly recognised. The issue is therefore not simply whether traditional Hadith authority survives in digital environments, but how its epistemic legitimacy is communicated, encountered, recognised, and contested under conditions of platform-mediated communication. Treating "traditional authority" and "digital authority" as opposing categories may obscure the simultaneous operation of scholarly legitimacy, public recognition, and technological mediation.

The present study addresses this gap by examining Hadith authority through three interconnected dimensions: continuity, contestation, and transformation. Continuity refers to the persistence of classical epistemic principles underlying Hadith legitimacy. Contestation concerns the diversification of actors and the emergence of competing pathways through which religious authority becomes publicly recognised. Transformation refers to the changing technological and communicative conditions through which scholarly legitimacy is circulated and encountered. The study therefore does not assume that digitalisation either preserves traditional authority unchanged or replaces it with a new form of digital authority. Instead, it examines how inherited epistemic legitimacy operates within a transformed environment of public recognition and technological mediation.

The analysis is guided by three complementary theoretical perspectives. First, Talal Asad's concept of discursive tradition explains the continuity of Hadith authority as a historically situated process of transmission, interpretation, discipline, and reproduction.⁹ Second, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic capital and the religious field help explain how religious legitimacy depends upon recognition and how actors compete for recognition through different forms of capital.¹⁰ Third, Heidi Campbell's concept of digital religion situates religious authority within the interaction between religious traditions, technological

⁷ Achmad Sulfikar and Daisy Indira Yasmine, "Platformized Religious Authority: Rethinking Legitimacy in the Age of Social Media Influencers," *Epistémé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 20, no. 2 (2026): 141–71, <https://doi.org/10.21274/epis.2025.20.02.141-171>.

⁸ Muhammad Sabari et al., "Reconfiguration of Living Hadith in the Digital Space: Between Authenticity of Transmission and Popularization of Islamic Education Content on Social Media," *Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 15, no. 1 (2026): 18–31, <https://doi.org/10.15408/quhas.v15i1.51404>.

⁹ Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986).

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J G Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241–58.

environments, communities, and practices.¹¹ Together, these perspectives allow Hadith authority to be examined as an epistemic tradition, a socially contested form of legitimacy, and a technologically mediated process.

Accordingly, this study asks three interrelated questions, How is the epistemic legitimacy of Hadith authority maintained within digital environments? How do digital platforms diversify the social mechanisms through which Hadith authority becomes publicly recognised and contested? How do epistemic legitimacy, public recognition, and technological mediation interact in the reconfiguration of Hadith authority in digital environments? The objective is to explain how classical Hadith legitimacy persists while the social and technological conditions of its recognition undergo transformation.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in distinguishing epistemic legitimacy, public recognition, and technological mediation as analytically distinct but interconnected dimensions of contemporary Hadith authority. This three-dimensional formulation is proposed by the present study as a synthesis of the preceding analysis rather than adopted from a single theoretical model. Epistemic legitimacy concerns why a Hadith claim should be regarded as credible; public recognition concerns how such credibility or competing claims to authority become acknowledged by audiences; and technological mediation concerns the infrastructures through which such recognition is enabled, constrained, and distributed. The study therefore argues that digitalisation has not fundamentally displaced the epistemic foundations of Hadith authority. Rather, it has transformed the conditions under which that authority becomes visible, accessible, recognised, and socially influential.

Method

This study employed a qualitative document analysis to examine the continuity, contestation, and transformation of Hadith authority within contemporary digital environments. Document analysis is appropriate for interpreting published texts and documentary materials as social artefacts through which knowledge, legitimacy, and authority are constructed and communicated.¹² The data consisted of scholarly publications and publicly accessible digital materials concerning Hadith scholarship, religious authority, digital religion, platform visibility, and technological mediation. Sources were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research questions, scholarly or institutional credibility, and explicit engagement with Hadith authority or its transformation in digital environments. The corpus brought together literature on the classical epistemic foundations of Hadith—including *isnad*, transmission, source verification, narrator criticism, and *matn* analysis—with contemporary studies of digital religious authority, social-media practices, algorithmic visibility, and platform-mediated communication. This combination was necessary to examine Hadith authority not as an isolated textual phenomenon but as an epistemic tradition operating within changing social and technological conditions. Campbell's concept of digital religion was used to situate these changes within the interaction between religious traditions, technological environments, communities, and practices.¹³

¹¹ Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*.

¹² Glenn A Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40, <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>.

¹³ Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*.heidi

The analysis employed theory-informed thematic analysis, combining deductive coding based on the study's theoretical framework with inductive attention to recurring patterns across the selected literature and digital materials.¹⁴ The initial coding focused on concepts including *epistemic legitimacy*, *isnad*, *scholarly competence*, *transmission*, *symbolic capital*, *public recognition*, *digital visibility*, *audience engagement*, *algorithmic mediation*, and *platform selection*. These codes were subsequently compared and organised into broader analytical categories corresponding to the three theoretical perspectives: Asad's *discursive tradition* for examining the continuity of inherited Hadith authority; Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic capital and the religious field for analysing recognition and contestation; and Campbell's digital religion for examining technological and communicative mediation.¹⁵ The resulting analysis was then synthesised into three analytically distinct but interconnected dimensions—epistemic legitimacy, public recognition, and technological mediation—which structure the interpretation of the findings. This formulation is proposed by the present study as an analytical synthesis rather than adopted as a pre-existing model. The analysis consequently traces how classical Hadith legitimacy persists, how alternative forms of religious recognition emerge, and how digital infrastructures mediate the visibility and circulation of competing claims to authority.

Continuity of Hadith Authority: Preserving Classical Epistemic Legitimacy in Digital Spaces

The analysis demonstrates that the digital circulation of Hadith has not displaced the classical epistemic foundations through which Prophetic reports are authenticated and scholarly authority is established. Instead, digital environments have largely functioned as new infrastructures for reproducing an older regime of scholarly legitimacy based on *isnād*, source verification, critical evaluation of transmitters, and engagement with established Hadith collections. This continuity is significant because the authority of Hadith does not derive simply from the availability of a report in digital form; it depends upon the scholarly procedures through which a report is attributed, evaluated, interpreted, and situated within the broader tradition of Hadith scholarship.¹⁶ For example, emphasise the importance of *takhrīj* as a methodological process for verifying Hadith sources and determining the evidentiary basis of legal and religious claims. Similarly¹⁷ demonstrate that Hadith scholars in the Malay-Indonesian world historically contributed to the construction of Hadith authority precisely through processes of scholarly transmission, interpretation, and authentication. The digital transformation therefore changes the conditions of access and

¹⁴ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* (Sage, 2021).

¹⁵ Tarleton Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media* (Yale University Press, 2018).

¹⁶ J Dakir, F A Shah, and A L F Avivy, "Research Methodology of Hukum (Legal Ruling) and Fatwa (Edict): The Importance of Hadith takhrīj (Verification and Authentication)," *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences* 6, no. 8 (2012): 352–56, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84870410785&partnerID=40&md5=ba0015ea0ff0bfb387f9ec08c9309df2>.

¹⁷ H Monady, M Hasan, and A Sagir, "Building Hadith Authority: The Pioneering Role of Malay Archipelago Scholars," *AlBayan* 23, no. 1 (2025): 73–100, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-20250167>.

circulation, but does not by itself eliminate the epistemic criteria that historically distinguish authoritative Hadith knowledge from unverified religious claims.

A central indicator of this continuity is the persistent significance of *isnād* as a mechanism of scholarly authentication and transmission. The classical formulation attributed to Ibn al-Mubārak—*al-isnād min al-dīn, wa lawlā al-isnād la-qāla man shā'a mā shā'a*—captures the epistemic function assigned to transmission chains within the Hadith tradition: claims attributed to the Prophet require identifiable lines of transmission rather than anonymous attribution. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's *Muqaddimah* subsequently systematised the sciences through which Hadith reports and transmitters were evaluated, making questions of continuity, narrator reliability, and transmission conditions central to the classification of reports.¹⁸

Modern historical scholarship has demonstrated that *isnād* should not be reduced to a purely technical authentication device. Noor in his study of Muḥammad Yāsīn al-Fādānī, shows that the continuation of *sanad* practice into the modern period also functioned as a means of preserving scholarly tradition and connecting contemporary Muslims with earlier generations of transmitters.¹⁹ This observation is particularly important for the digital age: when Hadith is detached from its original book, chapter, or chain and presented as an isolated quotation, its digital accessibility may increase while its traditional epistemic context becomes thinner. The persistence of *isnād*, therefore, represents not simply the survival of an old technical method but the continuation of a distinctive mechanism through which scholarly credibility is constituted.

The historical continuity of transmission is also visible in the material documentation of Hadith scholarship. Research on Indonesian Hadith scholars demonstrates that *tsabat* and related manuscript traditions preserved chains of scholarly transmission across geographical and generational boundaries. Daud's study of Mahfuz al-Tirmasi, for instance, shows how manuscripts such as *Kifāyat al-Mustafid* documented chains of transmission and functioned as markers of scholarly authenticity; the study further argues for the importance of digitising such materials as part of the preservation of Islamic intellectual heritage.²⁰ More broadly, contemporary computational projects demonstrate that digital technologies can make precisely these traditional structures more visible rather than rendering them obsolete. Contemporary computational projects further demonstrate that digitalisation can make classical structures of Hadith transmission more visible and analytically accessible. Large-scale datasets have been developed to represent Hadith narrators and transmission chains, while computational models have also been employed to map and analyse multiple *isnād*

¹⁸ Ibn al-Salah, *Muqaddimah Ibn Al-Salah Fi 'Ulum Al-Hadith*, ed. Nur al-Din 'Itr (Dar al-Fikr, 1986).

¹⁹ U M Noor and M N Sahad, "The Salafis and the Preservation of Isnād Tradition," *Kemanusiaan* 27, no. 2 (2020): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.21315/KAJH2020.27.2.1>.

²⁰ A Daud et al., "THE CONTRIBUTION OF INDONESIAN HADITS SCHOLAR MAHFUZ AL-TERMASI ON TSABAT: A Study of Kifayat Al-Mustafid," *Miqot: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 49, no. 1 (2025): 248–68, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v49i1.1381>.

structures in major Hadith collections.²¹ These developments are analytically important because they indicate that digitisation can function as an extension of Hadith's transmission infrastructure: although the technological form of representation has changed, the underlying objects of scholarly attention—the relationships among narrators, transmission chains, sources, and transmitted reports—remain recognisably rooted in the classical Hadith tradition.

This continuity can be understood through the concept of discursive tradition, in which authoritative knowledge is sustained not simply through the preservation of texts but through continuing practices of transmission, interpretation, discipline, and argument.²² From this perspective, the emergence of Hadith databases, digital repositories, and computational *sanad* tools should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of epistemological rupture. Rather, digital scholarship can reproduce elements of the inherited tradition through new technical forms. The persistence of *sanad* practices in modern scholarly contexts demonstrates that mechanisms of transmission may adapt to changing historical and technological conditions without necessarily losing their symbolic and scholarly significance.²³

Digitalisation, therefore, may transform the form and conditions of transmission while preserving important elements of the epistemic logic through which Hadith authority is constituted. At the same time, the digital environment introduces a methodological tension that classical scholarship did not encounter in the same form. Search engines and databases can make a report immediately retrievable, but retrieval is not equivalent to authentication. A digital result can provide access to a text while leaving unresolved questions concerning the report's classification, variant transmission, contextual meaning, or scholarly interpretation. Thus, digital accessibility should be distinguished analytically from epistemic legitimacy.

The evidence therefore supports a more nuanced understanding of continuity than the simple claim that “traditional authority survives online.” What persists is a layered epistemic structure in which digital technologies increasingly facilitate access, preservation, comparison, and computational representation, while classical Hadith scholarship continues to provide the criteria by which transmitted reports acquire scholarly legitimacy. This relationship is evident in contemporary Hadith research: the digital representation of narrators and *isnād* networks does not independently establish authenticity but makes traditional structures available for new forms of analysis.²⁴ At the institutional level, the authority of Hadith scholars similarly remains connected to recognised scholarly competence

²¹ M Mghari, O Bouras, and A El Hibaoui, “Narrator2Vec: An Efficient Narrator Representation in Hadith Literature Using Word Embedding,” *Arabian Journal for Science and Engineering* 49, no. 3 (2024): 4479–94, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13369-023-08224-7>. Ar Miftah Al Farouqy And M Fahrur Ridla, “Etika Komunikasi Media Sosial Perspektif Hadis (Kajian Living Sunnah),” *Wardah* 23, No. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.19109/Wardah.V23i2.7536>.

²² Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*.

²³ Noor and Sahad, “The Salafis and the Preservation of Isnād Tradition.”

²⁴ M Mghari, O Bouras, and A El Hibaoui, “Sanadset 650K: Data on Hadith Narrators,” *Data in Brief* 44 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dib.2022.108540>.

and established traditions of verification rather than to digital accessibility alone. This finding extends Asad's concept of discursive tradition by showing that continuity should not be conceptualised as resistance to technological change. Instead, continuity operates through selective technological appropriation, whereby new media and computational tools are incorporated into existing epistemic practices.²⁵ The theoretical implication is that digitalisation produces a transformation of the *medium and infrastructure* of Hadith scholarship without necessarily producing a corresponding transformation of its fundamental epistemic criteria. The principal finding of this section, therefore, is that the digital age has expanded the reach, preservation, and analytical accessibility of Hadith knowledge while retaining *isnād*, source criticism, and scholarly transmission as central mechanisms of epistemic legitimacy.

Contestation of Hadith Authority: Competing Religious Legitimacies in Platform-Based Environments

The analysis demonstrates that digital platforms have transformed the field of Hadith authority into a more competitive environment in which classical scholarly legitimacy increasingly coexists with platform-mediated forms of religious recognition. The principal finding is not that traditional Hadith scholars have been displaced, but that the conditions under which religious authority becomes publicly visible and socially recognised have multiplied. In the classical scholarly tradition, authority was strongly associated with recognised chains of transmission (*isnād*), mastery of religious sciences, scholarly training, and institutional or pedagogical recognition. Digital platforms, however, have expanded the range of actors able to participate directly in the circulation and interpretation of Islamic knowledge, including preachers, public intellectuals, social media influencers, and religious content creators.²⁶ This expansion enables religious messages to circulate beyond the institutional and pedagogical settings traditionally associated with the transmission of Islamic knowledge, while also creating new possibilities for audiences to encounter and recognise religious claims.²⁷ The diversification of participation, however, should not be interpreted as an equalisation of epistemic authority. Rather, it indicates a diversification of the social pathways through which religious authority becomes visible and influential, while classical forms of scholarly legitimacy continue to provide an important basis for epistemic credibility.

The diversification of actors produces a corresponding contestation over the sources from which religious legitimacy is derived. Religious authority can be understood as a form of symbolic capital whose value depends upon recognition within a particular social field.²⁸ In the traditional Hadith field, such capital is accumulated through scholarly credentials,

²⁵ Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*.

²⁶ B Zaid et al., "Digital Islam and Muslim Millennials: How Social Media Influencers Reimagine Religious Authority and Islamic Practices," *Religions* 13, no. 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040335>.

²⁷ Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*.

²⁸ J M F Fernández, "Symbolic Capital, Domination and Legitimacy: The Weberian Roots in the Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu," *Papers* 98, no. 1 (2013): 33–60, <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/papers/v98n1.342>.

isnād, mastery of *‘ulūm al-ḥadīth*, recognised teachers, publication, teaching institutions, and participation in established scholarly networks. Platform environments, however, introduce additional resources for public recognition, particularly communicative competence, audience size, visibility, relatability, and the ability to translate complex religious questions into accessible digital narratives. Zaid, for example, demonstrate through their analysis of Muslim influencers that strong communicative and media capabilities can enable religious actors to influence religious identities and practices even when their authority does not originate from classical institutions of Hadith transmission.²⁹ This does not mean that digital popularity is equivalent to Hadith expertise. Rather, the platform environment creates a second register of recognition in which epistemic competence and communicative attractiveness can operate simultaneously without possessing the same basis of legitimacy. This distinction is particularly important for Hadith studies because a highly visible religious account may acquire substantial symbolic recognition without possessing the same epistemic credentials as a formally trained Hadith scholar.

The contestation becomes more complex when platform infrastructures themselves participate in determining which religious voices become visible. Contemporary digital platforms can be understood as socio-technical environments in which datafication, commodification, algorithmic selection, and content organisation shape the circulation and visibility of information.³⁰ Consequently, religious authority in digital environments is not produced solely through interactions between scholars and audiences; it is also mediated by technological systems that influence what content is recommended, encountered, repeated, or made prominent. This creates an important distinction between epistemic authority and platform visibility. A Hadith scholar may possess extensive scholarly credentials but remain comparatively invisible if their communication does not generate sustained platform engagement, whereas a less formally trained religious communicator may achieve greater exposure because their content is highly compatible with the communicative logic of social media. Empirical research involving authoritative Islamic figures further indicates that digital platforms participate in the mediation and transformation of religious authority through interactions among religious actors, media technologies, and audiences.³¹ Contestation, therefore, should not be conceptualised merely as a struggle between scholars and influencers; it also involves a structural transformation in which platform infrastructures become intermediaries in the distribution of religious attention and recognition.

²⁹ Zaid et al., “Digital Islam and Muslim Millennials: How Social Media Influencers Reimagine Religious Authority and Islamic Practices.”

³⁰ Jose van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal, *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World* (Oxford University Press, 2018). Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media*.

³¹ R Lohler and S H Wahid, “The Transformation of Islamic Religious Authority,” *Religions* 17, no. 4 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel17040493>.

This transformation nevertheless does not render classical scholarly authority irrelevant. Rather, the evidence points toward a process of negotiation between different regimes of legitimacy. Campbell's concept of digital religion is particularly useful here because digital environments should be understood not as separate spaces detached from religious institutions but as contexts in which established religious identities, practices, and authorities are continuously renegotiated.³² The evidence presented by Lohlker and Wahid is significant in this respect because their analysis encompasses actors representing different forms of Islamic authority rather than treating digital influencers as a homogeneous category.³³ Their findings demonstrate that digital authority is constructed through interactions among religious actors, media technologies, and audiences.³⁴ This complicates the technologically deterministic assumption that digital media simply democratise religious knowledge. Instead, digitalisation creates a more complex field in which traditional scholarly authority can be strengthened through digital dissemination while simultaneously being challenged by actors who possess greater communicative or platform capital. For Hadith studies, this means that the authority of a Hadith explanation can no longer be analysed exclusively by asking who possesses religious credentials. It is also necessary to examine how those credentials are translated into digital visibility, how audiences recognise them, and how competing actors construct alternative claims to religious legitimacy.

The theoretical implication of these findings is that the contestation of Hadith authority in the digital age represents a reconfiguration of the religious field rather than a linear decline of traditional scholarship. Bourdieu's framework explains how actors within a social field compete for recognition by mobilising different forms of symbolic capital, while Campbell's concept of digital religion emphasises the negotiation of religious authority across interactions among religious actors, institutions, technologies, and audiences.³⁵

The theoretical implication of this transformation is that the contestation of Hadith authority in the digital age should be understood as a reconfiguration of the religious field rather than a linear decline of classical scholarship. Digital participation has created a more plural environment in which scholarly credentials, communicative competence, audience recognition, and digital visibility operate as different bases of religious influence. Bunt demonstrates that cyber-Islamic environments have expanded participation in Islamic discourse beyond established institutional structures, while studies of Muslim social media influencers show how digital communication contributes to the construction of religious identities and practices.³⁶ Recent studies in Indonesia further demonstrate that digital

³² Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*.

³³ Lohlker and Wahid, "The Transformation of Islamic Religious Authority."

³⁴ Lohlker and Wahid.

³⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Harvard University Press, 1991). Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*.

³⁶ Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*.

platforms have become arenas in which different interpretations, actors, and forms of religious authority are negotiated and publicly recognised.³⁷

Research on contemporary Islamic authority likewise indicates that these processes involve interactions among religious actors, digital media, audiences, and technological infrastructures.³⁸ These developments, however, should not be interpreted as evidence that digital visibility constitutes epistemic authority. Rather, they indicate that the mechanisms through which religious legitimacy becomes socially recognised have become more plural. For Hadith studies, scholarly competence, *isnād*, transmission, and methodological credibility remain the principal bases of epistemic legitimacy, while visibility, communicative performance, audience recognition, and digital participation increasingly shape how such legitimacy—or competing claims to legitimacy—is publicly recognised. The transformation, therefore, lies less in the disappearance of classical Hadith authority than in the diversification of the social mechanisms through which religious authority is recognised and contested. Transformation of Hadith Authority: Algorithmic Visibility and the Reconfiguration of Scholarly Legitimacy

The analysis demonstrates that the transformation of Hadith authority in digital environments occurs not primarily through the disappearance of classical scholarly legitimacy, but through the emergence of algorithmically mediated visibility as an additional condition for the public recognition of authority. In the classical Hadith tradition, scholarly legitimacy was constituted through identifiable mechanisms of knowledge transmission, including *isnād*, mastery of *‘ulūm al-ḥadīth*, recognised teachers, scholarly reputation, and sustained participation in established intellectual networks. Digital platforms introduce a different mechanism into this process: religious knowledge is increasingly encountered through systems that rank, recommend, and personalise content. Gillespie argues that algorithms are not merely technical instruments for retrieving information but mechanisms that participate in determining relevance and visibility.³⁹

He further demonstrates that platforms exercise institutional power through decisions concerning the organisation, ranking, and circulation of content.⁴⁰ Applied to Hadith scholarship, this means that the visibility of a scholar or a particular interpretation of Hadith is no longer determined exclusively by its position within the scholarly field. A digitally disseminated Hadith explanation must also pass through a technological environment that

³⁷Tsabituddin Al Khozi et al., “Religious Authority in the Digital Age: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamic Debates on Music in Indonesia,” *Fikrah: Jurnal Ilmu Aqidah Dan Studi Keagamaan* 13, no. 2 (2025): 277–98, <https://doi.org/10.21043/fikrah.v13i2.33880>. Mila Faila Shofa, Ainun Yudhistira, and Syafawi Ahmad Qadzafi, “Digital Religion and Shifting Religious Authority: Understanding People’s Behaviour in Accessing Islamic Websites,” *Al-A’raf: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam Dan Filsafat* 22, no. 1 (2025): 118–46, <https://doi.org/10.22515/ajpif.v22i1.10454>.

³⁸Lohlker and Wahid, “The Transformation of Islamic Religious Authority.”

³⁹Gillespie, “The Relevance of Algorithms BT - Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society.”

⁴⁰Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media*.

influences the probability of its being encountered by particular audiences. Thus, the principal transformation concerns the conditions under which scholarly authority becomes visible, rather than the immediate replacement of the epistemic foundations of that authority.

The operation of algorithmic visibility introduces a significant distinction between epistemic legitimacy and communicative visibility. A Hadith scholar may possess extensive knowledge of *'ulūm al-ḥadīth*, established scholarly credentials, and recognised transmission networks, yet these qualifications do not automatically guarantee broad visibility within platform-based environments. Conversely, religious content that is concise, emotionally engaging, visually attractive, or highly interactive may receive greater circulation regardless of the depth of the scholarly argument it contains. Bucher conceptualises this condition through the notion of the *algorithmic imaginary*, referring to the ways in which users develop assumptions about algorithmic operations and adjust their behaviour in anticipation of algorithmic selection.⁴¹

This mechanism is important for understanding contemporary religious communication because content producers may increasingly adapt the form and presentation of their messages to perceived platform preferences. In the context of Hadith communication, this may involve presenting a lengthy scholarly discussion in short-form video, reducing complex disagreements over *sanad* and *matn* to easily consumable statements, or framing a theological argument through emotionally compelling narratives. Such adaptation should not automatically be interpreted as a decline in scholarly quality. Rather, it demonstrates that scholarly knowledge must increasingly negotiate with the technical conditions of digital visibility. The resulting tension is therefore between the temporal and methodological demands of Hadith scholarship, which often require contextualisation and detailed verification, and the communicative pressures of platforms that privilege rapid recognition and sustained user attention.

The reconfiguration of visibility also changes the relationship between scholarly authority and symbolic capital. Bourdieu conceptualises symbolic capital as a form of recognised legitimacy whose value emerges within a particular social field.⁴² Within traditional Hadith scholarship, such capital is accumulated through scholarly education, transmission from recognised teachers, mastery of specialised disciplines, publication, teaching, and recognition by other scholars. Digital platforms do not eliminate these forms of capital, but they introduce additional mechanisms through which symbolic recognition can be accumulated. Followers, views, comments, shares, subscriptions, and repeated audience engagement can function as indicators of public recognition, even though they do not constitute equivalent evidence of epistemic competence.

This distinction is particularly important because platform metrics can create the appearance of authority through numerical visibility. A religious communicator with millions

⁴¹ Taina Bucher, *If... Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁴² Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*.

of views may become more socially recognisable than a specialist Hadith scholar whose scholarly work receives little algorithmic exposure. The difference between being authoritative and appearing authoritative consequently becomes analytically significant. From this perspective, the transformation should not be understood as the disappearance of the religious field but as a modification of the mechanisms through which scholarly legitimacy is converted into public recognition. Digital visibility can therefore be understood as a supplementary mechanism of recognition that interacts with, but should not be conflated with, classical scholarly capital.

The transformation is further illuminated by the concept of digital religion developed by Campbell. Rather than treating online religion as a completely separate sphere, digital religion emphasises the interaction between religious traditions, technological infrastructures, communities, and patterns of religious practice.⁴³ In this framework, digital platforms become spaces in which existing forms of religious authority are adapted to new communicative conditions. The significance of algorithms is therefore not simply that they distribute content more efficiently, but that they participate in structuring the environment within which religious authority is negotiated. Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal describe this broader condition through the concept of the platform society, in which social interaction increasingly takes place through infrastructures characterised by datafication, commodification, and algorithmic selection.⁴⁴

Applied to Hadith scholarship, this framework reveals a methodological problem that is often overlooked: visibility metrics cannot be treated as proxies for epistemic validity. A Hadith explanation that receives high engagement may have greater social reach, but engagement alone cannot establish the authenticity of the Hadith, the reliability of its *isnād*, the quality of its *matn* analysis, or the adequacy of its interpretation. The digital environment therefore produces a separation between the mechanisms that determine what people encounter and the scholarly mechanisms that determine what should be regarded as reliable knowledge.

The theoretical implication of these findings is that the digital transformation of Hadith authority should be conceptualised as a process of legitimacy reconfiguration rather than authority substitution. Classical scholarly legitimacy remains grounded in epistemic mechanisms such as *isnād*, methodological competence, source criticism, and scholarly transmission, but the social recognition of that legitimacy increasingly depends upon an additional layer of digital visibility. Gillespie's work helps explain how algorithmic systems participate in organising public visibility,⁴⁵ while Bucher demonstrates how actors adapt their

⁴³ Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*.

⁴⁴ van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*.

⁴⁵ Gillespie, "The Relevance of Algorithms BT - Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society." Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media*.

behaviour in anticipation of algorithmic selection.⁴⁶ Bourdieu's framework further explains how different forms of capital compete for recognition within a social field,⁴⁷ whereas Campbell's concept of digital religion and the notion of the platform society developed by van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal clarify the broader socio-technical environment in which these processes occur.⁴⁸

The methodological implication is that future research on Hadith authority should not measure digital influence solely through follower counts, views, or engagement rates. Instead, it should examine the relationship between scholarly credentials, content characteristics, platform visibility, and audience recognition. This distinction constitutes an important analytical contribution because algorithmic visibility should be understood as a mediating mechanism through which authority becomes publicly recognisable, rather than as a replacement for epistemic authority. Accordingly, the principal finding is that digital platforms have transformed the conditions through which Hadith scholars become publicly recognisable: classical scholarly legitimacy continues to determine the epistemic credibility of Hadith, while algorithmic visibility increasingly influences the extent to which that credibility is encountered, recognised, and socially converted into public authority.

Reconfiguring Hadith Authority: From Epistemic Legitimacy to Mediated Public Recognition

The findings demonstrate that the transformation of Hadith authority in digital environments is better understood as a reconfiguration of the conditions through which scholarly legitimacy becomes publicly recognised rather than as the replacement of classical religious authority. Digital circulation has expanded access to Hadith through websites, digital libraries, social media, online lectures, and computational databases, yet classical foundations such as *isnād*, scholarly competence, source verification, transmission, narrator evaluation, *matn* criticism, and mastery of Hadith sciences remain important to epistemic legitimacy.⁴⁹ At the same time, digital environments have expanded the range of actors participating in Islamic knowledge production and dissemination. Studies of Muslim social media influencers and cyber-Islamic environments demonstrate that religious discourse is increasingly shaped by actors operating beyond traditional scholarly institutions.⁵⁰ Recent digital ethnographic research further shows that contemporary Islamic authority is negotiated

⁴⁶ Bucher, *If... Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics*.

⁴⁷ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*.

⁴⁸ van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*. Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*.

⁴⁹ Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*. Scott C Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Hadith Literature, and the Articulation of Sunni Islam: The Legacy of the Generation of Ibn Sa'd, Ibn Ma'in, and Ibn Hanbal* (Brill, 2008).

⁵⁰ Zaid et al., "Digital Islam and Muslim Millennials: How Social Media Influencers Reimagine Religious Authority and Islamic Practices." Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*.

through interactions among religious actors, digital media, audiences, and technological infrastructures.⁵¹

Taken together, these developments indicate that the principal transformation occurs less in the epistemic basis of Hadith authority than in the conditions through which that authority becomes visible, accessible, and publicly recognised. Digitalisation has therefore created a more plural environment of religious communication without necessarily eliminating classical scholarly authority. Rather, classical credentials continue to provide the epistemic basis of Hadith legitimacy, while digital environments increasingly shape how that legitimacy is encountered and recognised by audiences.

This distinction can be understood through the concept of discursive tradition, which views Islamic tradition as an historically situated process through which authoritative knowledge is transmitted, interpreted, disciplined, and reproduced under changing social conditions.⁵² From this perspective, the persistence of *isnād*, scholarly transmission, and methodological competence indicates continuity in the epistemic formation of Hadith authority. The availability of Hadith through digital databases does not, by itself, determine the authenticity of a report, the reliability of its transmission chain, or the methodological adequacy of its *matn* interpretation. Classical Hadith scholarship has likewise established that religious authority depends upon disciplined practices of criticism, transmission, and scholarly competence.⁵³ Digitalisation can therefore be understood as a transformation of the material and communicative conditions through which Hadith tradition is reproduced rather than as an epistemological rupture with that tradition. The continuity of Hadith authority remains anchored in its epistemic principles, while its transformation becomes increasingly visible in the changing conditions of circulation and public recognition.

At the same time, digital environments have significantly diversified the actors involved in the production and dissemination of Islamic knowledge. Religious scholars, preachers, public intellectuals, social media influencers, content creators, and other digitally active actors can increasingly address audiences beyond the institutional boundaries traditionally associated with religious education. Research on Muslim social media influencers demonstrates that digitally mediated religious communication can contribute to the construction of religious identities and practices.⁵⁴ Studies of cyber-Islamic environments, meanwhile, indicate that digital media have expanded the range of actors capable of participating in Islamic discourse and engaging with religious audiences beyond conventional institutional settings.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Lohlker and Wahid, "The Transformation of Islamic Religious Authority."

⁵² Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*.

⁵³ Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*.

⁵⁴ Zaid et al., "Digital Islam and Muslim Millennials: How Social Media Influencers Reimagine Religious Authority and Islamic Practices."

⁵⁵ Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*.

This diversification, however, does not imply that all participants possess equivalent epistemic authority. Rather, it indicates that the social field in which religious legitimacy is negotiated has become more plural. Classical Hadith authority may continue to rest upon scholarly training, *isnād*, recognised teachers, institutional affiliation, and methodological competence, while other actors may gain public recognition through communicative accessibility, audience engagement, personal charisma, or digital visibility. The significance of this diversification, therefore, lies not in the disappearance of scholarly authority but in the emergence of multiple pathways through which religious actors can acquire public influence.

The changing relationship between competence and recognition can be understood through the concept of symbolic capital, in which authority depends upon forms of recognition accumulated within a particular social field. In the religious field, such recognition may be associated with education, established scholarly networks, institutional positions, publications, teaching, and demonstrated mastery of specialised knowledge.⁵⁶ Digital environments, however, introduce additional mechanisms through which public recognition can be accumulated, including audience size, networked reputation, communicative performance, interaction, and sustained platform visibility. These mechanisms should not be treated as equivalent to epistemic competence. Rather, they may influence the extent to which existing scholarly credentials become socially visible and recognised.

Recent research further demonstrates that religious authority is increasingly negotiated through interactions between religious actors, digital media, audiences, and technological infrastructures.⁵⁷ Other studies show that religious authority can also be renegotiated through visual symbolism, cultural capital, and communication strategies directed toward digitally oriented audiences.⁵⁸ Taken together, these findings suggest that contemporary religious authority involves not only the possession of recognised knowledge but also the capacity to make that knowledge intelligible, accessible, and socially recognisable within changing media environments.

The distinction between epistemic legitimacy and public recognition becomes particularly important when algorithmic systems enter the process of religious communication. Digital platforms do not simply provide neutral channels through which religious content travels from producers to audiences. Rather, they organise visibility through recommendation systems, ranking mechanisms, data-driven selection, and engagement-based circulation, thereby influencing which forms of knowledge become more likely to be encountered and amplified.⁵⁹ Algorithms embedded in search engines, social media

⁵⁶ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*.

⁵⁷ Lohlker and Wahid, "The Transformation of Islamic Religious Authority."

⁵⁸ Rauha Salam-Salmaoui, Shazrah Salam, and Shajee Hassan, "Motorcycles, Minarets, and Mullahs: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis on Pakistan's Journey to Rebrand Islam," *Semiotica* 2024, no. 258 (2024): 115–42, <https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2023-0178>.

⁵⁹ M Didik R Wahyudi, Noorhaidi Hasan, and Agung Fatwanto, "From Pulpit to Platform: Algorithmic Mediation and the Transformation of Religious Authority on YouTube," *Profetik: Jurnal Komunikasi* 18, no. 2 (2025): 352–77, <https://doi.org/10.14421/pjk.v18i2.3622>.

platforms, and recommendation systems increasingly participate in determining what information is considered relevant, while platforms themselves function as important curators of public discourse.⁶⁰ Users and content producers may also develop expectations about algorithmic selection and adapt their practices in response to their perceptions of how these systems operate.⁶¹ Within religious communication, such processes are particularly significant because the circulation of religious knowledge increasingly takes place within platform environments in which visibility is shaped by technological infrastructures, communicative strategies, and audience participation.⁶²

In the context of religious authority, recent scholarship indicates that digital environments have introduced new mechanisms through which religious actors and messages gain public recognition alongside established forms of religious legitimacy. These mechanisms involve not only the possession of religious knowledge but also communicative performance, audience engagement, and platform-mediated visibility.⁶³ Social media environments have likewise enabled actors operating outside conventional structures of religious scholarship to participate in the construction of religious identities and practices.⁶⁴ These developments, however, do not imply that visibility itself constitutes epistemic validity. Rather, they indicate that the mechanisms through which religious legitimacy becomes publicly recognised have expanded beyond traditional institutional and scholarly structures. The growing importance of visibility and engagement should therefore be understood as a transformation in the conditions of recognition rather than as a replacement of the epistemic foundations of religious authority.

In the context of Hadith, this development creates a critical distinction between the question of whether a religious claim is epistemically credible and the question of whether that claim is likely to be encountered by a particular audience. A highly qualified Hadith scholar may possess substantial epistemic legitimacy while remaining relatively invisible within platform environments, whereas a religious communicator with limited formal training may receive extensive exposure because their content is more compatible with the communicative and algorithmic logic of the platform. The significance of algorithmic mediation, therefore, lies not in its capacity to determine whether a Hadith is authentic, but in its capacity to influence which religious claims, interpretations, and authorities become visible within the public sphere.

⁶⁰ Tarleton Gillespie, "The Politics of 'Platforms,'" *New Media & Society* 12, no. 3 (2010): 347–64, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809342738>.

⁶¹ Taina Bucher, "The Algorithmic Imaginary: Exploring the Ordinary Affects of Facebook Algorithms," *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 30–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1154086>.

⁶² van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*.

⁶³ Sulfikar and Yasmine, "Platformized Religious Authority: Rethinking Legitimacy in the Age of Social Media Influencers."

⁶⁴ Zaid et al., "Digital Islam and Muslim Millennials: How Social Media Influencers Reimagine Religious Authority and Islamic Practices."

This condition produces an important analytical separation between visibility and validity. Views, followers, likes, shares, comments, and recommendation frequency may indicate public attention, but they cannot independently establish the authenticity of a Hadith, the reliability of its *isnād*, the quality of its *matn* criticism, or the methodological adequacy of its interpretation. Algorithmic visibility should therefore not be treated as a substitute for scholarly verification. Rather, its significance lies in its mediating function: it influences which scholarly claims, interpretations, and religious voices enter the field of public attention. This distinction also demonstrates why digitalisation should not be understood as an uncomplicated democratisation of religious authority. Although digital platforms lower some barriers to participation, they simultaneously introduce new forms of selection through which technological infrastructures and communicative practices shape the distribution of attention. Digital religion provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding this condition because it emphasises the interaction between religious traditions, technological environments, communities, and religious practices.⁶⁵ From this perspective, digital media create new conditions in which religious authority is performed, circulated, and negotiated, without automatically determining the epistemic validity of the knowledge being communicated.

The resulting configuration can therefore be understood through three analytically distinct but interconnected dimensions: epistemic legitimacy, public recognition, and technological mediation. These dimensions emerge from the preceding analysis rather than being adopted as a pre-existing model from a single theoretical framework. Epistemic legitimacy refers to the scholarly basis through which Hadith claims acquire credibility, including *isnād*, source verification, narrator criticism, *matn* analysis, transmission, and mastery of *‘ulūm al-ḥadīth*.⁶⁶ Public recognition, by contrast, concerns the extent to which religious actors and their claims are acknowledged, trusted, and followed by particular audiences and communities. In digital environments, such recognition may be influenced by communicative performance, audience engagement, networked reputation, and platform visibility.⁶⁷

Technological mediation refers to the infrastructures through which religious knowledge is circulated, ranked, recommended, encountered, and repeatedly exposed to users.⁶⁸ These dimensions should not be collapsed into a single category of “digital authority.” They operate relationally but perform different functions: epistemic legitimacy concerns why a Hadith claim should be regarded as credible; public recognition concerns whether that credibility is acknowledged by an audience; and technological mediation concerns how

⁶⁵ Heidi A Campbell, *Digital Creatives and the Rethinking of Religious Authority* (Routledge, 2021).

⁶⁶ Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*.

⁶⁷ Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital.” Sulfikar and Yasmine, “Platformized Religious Authority: Rethinking Legitimacy in the Age of Social Media Influencers.”

⁶⁸ Wahyudi, Hasan, and Fatwanto, “From Pulpit to Platform: Algorithmic Mediation and the Transformation of Religious Authority on YouTube.”

extensively and through which channels such recognition can occur. This distinction provides a more precise analytical framework for understanding the contemporary transformation of Hadith authority by separating the epistemic basis of religious claims from the social processes through which those claims become recognised and the technological infrastructures through which such recognition is mediated.

In the context of religious authority, the expansion of digital platforms has introduced new mechanisms through which religious legitimacy becomes publicly recognised alongside established forms of scholarly authority. Digital religious authority is increasingly shaped by the interaction between religious knowledge, communicative practices, audience recognition, and technological mediation. Research on digital religious authority shows that online visibility, digital expertise, and algorithmically structured reputation can influence how religious actors are perceived and recognised in digital spaces.⁶⁹ This development indicates that the recognition of religious authority is no longer determined exclusively by established institutional and scholarly structures.

The transformation is also visible in the changing relationship between religious practice and media environments. Research on digital religion in Indonesia demonstrates that social media does not merely function as a channel for transmitting religious messages but creates new spaces in which religious practices, identities, communities, and forms of authority are negotiated.⁷⁰ In the specific context of Hadith, recent research demonstrates that the circulation of Hadith-based Islamic educational content on social media generates tension between the requirements of classical transmission and the demands of digital popularisation. The study identifies an “authenticity-popularity paradox,” showing that algorithmic platform logic may favour forms of content that are more accessible and engaging, while the scholarly apparatus of Hadith transmission requires processes of verification and methodological scrutiny.⁷¹

At the same time, the emergence of digital religious authority does not necessarily indicate the disappearance of traditional scholarly authority. The use of new media by established religious institutions and scholars demonstrates that digital platforms can also become instruments through which traditional authority adapts to new communicative environments and competes with emerging religious actors.⁷² Taken together, these studies indicate that digitalisation has not simply replaced traditional religious authority with a new

⁶⁹ Rahmat Hidayatullah, “Otoritas Keagamaan Digital: Pembentukan Otoritas Islam Baru Di Ruang Digital,” *Ushuluna: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin* 10, no. 2 (2024): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ushuluna.v10i2.42831>.

⁷⁰ Hanung Sito Rohmawati, Zulkifli, and Nashrul Hakiem, “Mediatization and Hypermediation in Digital Religion and the Transformation of Indonesian Muslim Religious Practices through Social Media Usage,” *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama* 18, no. 2 (2024): 133–50, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsa.2024.182-01>.

⁷¹ Sabari et al., “Reconfiguration of Living Hadith in the Digital Space: Between Authenticity of Transmission and Popularization of Islamic Education Content on Social Media.”

⁷² Zamhari, Han, and Zulkifli, “Traditional Religious Authorities in New Media: Cariustadz.Id Platform as An Alternative Cyber Fatwa and Da’wah Media among the Middle-Class Urban Muslims.”

form of digital authority. Rather, it has altered the conditions under which existing religious legitimacy becomes visible, accessible, and socially recognised. In the case of Hadith, this distinction is particularly important because public visibility and audience engagement may expand the circulation of a Hadith claim without necessarily determining its epistemic validity.

This distinction has important methodological implications for the study of Hadith in digital environments. Research should not treat follower numbers, views, engagement rates, or platform popularity as direct indicators of religious expertise. Such indicators measure visibility and audience response, whereas Hadith scholarship requires independent evaluation of the sources, transmission chains, narrator reliability, textual variants, matn, contextualisation, and interpretive methodology of a report. A rigorous study of digital Hadith authority therefore needs to bring classical Hadith criticism into dialogue with approaches capable of analysing digital circulation, platform infrastructures, communicative strategies, and audience reception. This methodological integration allows researchers to distinguish between the credibility of a religious claim and the extent of its circulation, thereby preventing the technological success of a particular piece of content from being mistaken for evidence of its scholarly validity.

The theoretical contribution of this study consequently lies in identifying a structural distinction between epistemic legitimacy and mediated public recognition. This distinction moves the analysis beyond the binary opposition between “traditional authority” and “digital authority.” Classical Hadith scholarship continues to provide the principal epistemic basis for determining the credibility of Prophetic reports, while digital environments increasingly shape the conditions under which that credibility is communicated, encountered, recognised, and converted into broader social influence. The transformation is therefore neither a simple preservation of traditional authority nor a replacement of it by digital actors. It is a reconfiguration of the relationship between knowledge, recognition, and mediation. Hadith authority remains epistemically anchored in the inherited sciences of Hadith, but its contemporary social effectiveness increasingly depends upon the communicative and technological environments through which that authority reaches Muslim audiences. The principal conclusion is therefore that digitalisation has transformed the conditions of recognition and circulation surrounding Hadith authority without fundamentally displacing its classical epistemological foundations.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the transformation of Hadith authority in digital environments is better understood as a reconfiguration of the conditions through which authority is maintained, recognised, and contested, rather than as a replacement of classical scholarly authority by digital actors. First, the epistemic legitimacy of Hadith authority remains anchored in the established scholarly foundations of Hadith, including *isnād*, source

verification, transmission, narrator evaluation, *matn* criticism, and mastery of Hadith sciences. Digital technologies have expanded access to Hadith through databases, online repositories, social media, and other digital platforms, but these developments have not fundamentally displaced the epistemic criteria through which Hadith claims acquire scholarly credibility. Digitalisation therefore represents transformation in the medium and conditions of circulation rather than an epistemological rupture with the classical Hadith tradition.

Second, digital platforms have diversified the social mechanisms through which Hadith authority becomes publicly recognised and contested. The expansion of digital participation allows scholars, preachers, influencers, public intellectuals, and content creators to participate in Islamic knowledge production beyond conventional institutional boundaries. Visibility, audience engagement, communicative performance, networked reputation, and platform exposure can generate substantial public recognition, but these mechanisms should not be equated with epistemic competence. The findings consequently establish an important distinction between epistemic legitimacy and public recognition: a religious actor may possess substantial scholarly legitimacy without achieving extensive digital visibility, while another actor may gain considerable public influence without equivalent expertise in Hadith. Digitalisation has therefore produced a more plural field of religious recognition without eliminating the epistemic authority of established Hadith scholarship.

Third, the relationship between epistemic legitimacy, public recognition, and technological mediation explains the broader reconfiguration of Hadith authority in the digital age. Platform infrastructures, recommendation systems, engagement metrics, and communicative formats influence which religious claims and actors become more visible and repeatedly encountered by audiences. Yet algorithmic visibility cannot determine the authenticity of a Hadith or substitute for scholarly verification. The principal transformation consequently lies in the conditions of recognition and circulation, through which classical scholarly legitimacy is communicated, encountered, and converted into broader social influence. The study therefore proposes these three dimensions—epistemic legitimacy, public recognition, and technological mediation—as an analytical synthesis for understanding contemporary Hadith authority. Rather than a simple opposition between “traditional” and “digital” authority, the findings reveal an ongoing interaction between inherited epistemic foundations and changing technological conditions.

The study nevertheless has several limitations. Because it employs qualitative document analysis, the findings are based primarily on scholarly literature and publicly accessible digital materials and do not directly capture how audiences interpret, trust, or negotiate Hadith authority in their everyday digital practices. The study also does not directly examine proprietary recommendation algorithms or platform-level data, meaning that claims concerning algorithmic visibility are interpreted through available scholarship rather than through computational analysis of platform operations. These limitations leave important opportunities for further research. Future studies could combine digital ethnography,

interviews, audience-reception studies, and computational methods to examine how epistemic legitimacy is actually perceived and negotiated by users. Comparative research across different platforms, Muslim societies, and scholarly traditions could also investigate whether the relationship among epistemic legitimacy, public recognition, and technological mediation varies according to platform architecture, religious context, and audience characteristics. Such research would further test and refine the analytical formulation developed in this study while providing a more empirically grounded understanding of how Hadith authority continues to evolve in increasingly platform-mediated religious environments.

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