Indonesian *Muballigh* and Religious Authority: From *Sanad* to Algorithmic Transformation of Islamic Knowledge Transmission in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at how the authority of *'ulamā'* has changed from a *sanad*-based epistemic system to forms of legitimacy that are increasingly based on digital algorithms. This change has a big impact on modern Islamic education. This transformation signifies a profound reconfiguration of Islamic epistemic authority; wherein scholarly legitimacy is no longer solely derived from traditional knowledge transmission but is also influenced by emotional appeal and platform visibility. This research employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical framework that synthesizes Islamic studies and media theory, illustrating how digitalization expedites the disintermediation of religious authority, favoring popularity, emotional resonance, and engagement metrics over methodological rigor and scholarly validation. The cases of Adi Hidayat and Hanan Attaki exemplify divergent yet converging strategies for negotiating authority within digital religious environments, highlighting the concurrent functioning of epistemic, affective, and algorithmic legitimacy. This study delineates three interrelated dimensions of transformation epistemological, structural, and interactional that contribute to the diminishing relevance of traditional institutions and the fragmentation of Islamic educational curricula. a. In response, the article suggests a mixed model of Islamic education that combines epistemic depth, digital literacy, critical competence, and ethical formation. n. The study's main theoretical contribution is coming up with a three-part framework of religious legitimacy that explains the contradiction between democratization and trivialization in modern Islamic discourse. e. In practice, it suggests adding digital-religious literacy to core curricula and creating structured standards for digital da'wah legitimacy.

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INTRODUCTION

The *'ulamā'* have been very important in Islamic history because they have kept Islamic teachings true and scholarly traditions alive. In Islam, intellectual authority is usually gained by going through a strict process of mastering classical texts and getting a *sanad* from qualified teachers whose legitimacy is accepted by the scholarly community (Zaman, 2010, p. 43). For hundreds of years, scholars have shared Islamic knowledge through networks that were hard to understand. To keep things going, the *'ulamā'* were important people who taught, wrote, and did da'wah. In the past, passing on Islamic knowledge in Indonesia has relied on direct teaching, authority based on *sanad*, and the spread of classical texts (*kutub turāth*). *Pesantren* and *madrasah* have served as the primary institutional structures for the cultivation of scholarly authority through ongoing intellectual and spiritual socialization (Daud Lintang et al., 2025). A lot of people have written about the family history of Islamic scholarship in Indonesia. Azra explains the transregional scholarly networks that linked Indonesian *'ulamā'* from the 17th and 18th centuries to schools in the Middle East (Azra, 2004).

Bruinessen, on the other hand, shows how the *Naqshbandiyyah* order links Indonesia, Kurdistan, and the *Ḥijāz* (Bruinessen, 1992). Dhofier examines the importance of scholarly genealogies in Javanese *pesantren* traditions throughout the 20th century (Dhofier, 2011). These studies illustrate that the propagation of Islamic knowledge in Indonesia is deeply intertwined with the classical Muslim intellectual tradition. This tradition links local religious practices to global Islamic thought, which has made the intellectual history of the archipelago very interesting. Arabic-speaking classical and modern *'ulamā'* have greatly influenced the intellectual life of Indonesian Muslims. These books are still great for learning about many aspects of Islam (Facal, 2014). These texts are the basis for a lot of traditional Islamic learning (Shiddiq, 2016). Islamic schools, like *pesantren*, teach them a lot. People can learn about morality and spirituality (ta'dīb), internalize scholarly ethics (*adab al-'ilm*), and build their religious identity at *pesantren* (Nashihin, 2017, p. 64).

The *'ulamā', pesantren,* and Islamic schools all work together in Indonesia to keep Islam alive. In the past, there were ways to check that scholars were smart enough to teach before they were allowed to do so. These included checking family trees (*sanad*), group evaluations (*ijāzah*), and teaching at a slow pace. Without these cultural, religious, and intellectual frameworks, Islam in Indonesia would not have grown and changed in the same way (Munip, 2010, p. 1). The way people teach Islam has changed a lot over the years. In the past, the only way to share information was to talk to other people in person. That isn't true anymore. Munip says that between 1950 and 2004, a lot of Arabic Islamic books were translated into Indonesian. This made it much easier for people to find books about Islam that were written by experts. This was the start of making religious knowledge accessible to all, not solely to Arabic speakers or individuals residing near Islamic schools (Munip, 2010). In the last twenty years, digital technology has grown a lot, which has made this process even harder.

People have changed a lot about how they teach each other about Islam. Muhammad Wildan's 2017 study of the debate over Islamic ideas on Facebook shows that Indonesian Muslims can now talk about religion on social media. In the digital age, the spread of knowledge has reached an unprecedented level, allowing almost anyone to create and share religious interpretations without following the traditional methods of education or scholarly validation that have historically supported religious authority. This change is taking place in a broader cultural and social context. Young people in Indonesia are "digital natives," which means they use information in ways that are very different from how older people do (Larson, 2024). YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are becoming increasingly popular among young Muslims who want religious advice. Unlike traditional *pesantren*, these platforms don't have set ways to check academic work or structured curricula. They use algorithmic logics that put emotional appeal ahead of methodical rigor, virality ahead of depth, and engagement ahead of accuracy.

In simpler terms, modern Muslim communities no longer only rely on *'ulamā'* from traditional institutions. They are increasingly depending on young preachers, Muslim celebrities, and digital influencers who possess limited formal Islamic education or training in Islamic sciences (Jannah & Al Ayubi, 2025). People are more interested in people like Adi Hidayat. On Instagram, he has more than 5.6 million followers, and on YouTube, he has more than 6.1 million subscribers (Adi Hidayat Official – YouTube, n.d.; Adihidayatofficial-Instagram, n.d.). Many people online like Hannan Attaki. He has over ten million followers on Instagram and almost three million subscribers on YouTube (Hanan Attaki YouTube, n.d.; Hanan_attaki Instagram, n.d.-a).

These numbers show different ways to talk to religious leaders online. They also show a bigger shift from legitimacy based on knowledge to legitimacy based on how popular something is. Hoesterey calls this trend the rise of "religious celebrities," whose popularity is mostly due to media exposure and personal charm rather than intellectual depth (Hoesterey, 2016, p. 3). In this case, Adi Hidayat, who comes from a *pesantren* background and is an expert on classical texts, and Hannan Attaki, who takes a modern, emotional view on da'wah, show how the study of the shift from *sanad*-based authority to affective and algorithmic legitimacy works. This change is a huge problem for schools that teach Islam. How can they maintain high academic standards and extended teaching hours when digital metrics can confer religious legitimacy instantaneously, bypassing conventional learning methods? These changes are changing who has power over what people know.

This means that the biggest changes are in how people talk about, trust, and check what they know about religion. New media not only supplant traditional authority but also facilitate the dissemination of religious ideas and foster a sense of identity within groups (Ronaldi et al., 2023). More people are using digital religious practices, and this is leading to new ways of being legitimate that are different from the old ones (Aida et al., 2024). Islamic schools are less stable now because they have always relied on slow communication, group verification, and close contact between teachers and students. This change is becoming increasingly important because Indonesian Muslims don't all agree on what their religion means anymore. *Fatwās* that are quickly shared on social media often lack a sound methodology, historical context, or an assessment of *maṣlaḥah–mafsadah*, all of which are essential components of *ijtihād* (Bunt, 2003, p. 142). This is why "self-proclaimed authorities" exist: people who make religious decisions based on wrong information they find online. So, traditional Islamic schools are on the defensive, trying to stay relevant as people trust social media figures more than scholars from *pesantren* and trust institutions less.

We need to think about the standards, trustworthiness, and responsibility of how religious knowledge is shared. We also need to think about whether Islamic schools can change without losing their main teachings. The problem is not just technical or methodological; it is also philosophical and epistemological: can a school system based on oral and written traditions survive in a world full of pictures and videos? Digitalization opens new ways to share religious knowledge, and it also makes us rethink what we know about authority based on classical era *'ulamā'* (Feener, 2014). This change has had a lot of effects on Indonesian Muslim communities, which shows how complicated it is. Some groups of *santri* still learn the old-fashioned way and don't use digital media very much. On the other hand, Muslims who live in cities rely heavily on digital sources for religious information (Alam et al., 2023). A significant portion of Muslims engages in both *traditional pengajian* and digital religious consumption (Mustofa et al., 2023) within these two extremes.

There are so many kinds of people at Islamic schools that it's hard for them to stay true to their roots while also being open to change. The main problem with modern Islamic education is keeping *pesantren* and *madrasah* relevant as religious authority moves more to digital platforms. It is important to keep the depth of classical scholarly traditions alive while also giving *santri* the skills they need to do well in the digital world (Harmathilda et al., 2024). Because of this, the idea of changing the

curriculum has gone from being just a thought to something that must happen. This is to make sure that Islamic knowledge is shared in a world where information spreads quickly, content flows quickly, and public spaces that are mediated by technology are common.

In this context, the current study investigates the influence of the digital age on the dissemination of Islamic knowledge and the resulting transformation of religious authority, historically rooted in the tradition of the *'ulamā.'* This study looks at how traditional and digital paradigms negotiate authority, focusing on people like Ustadz Hannan Attaki and Ustadz Adi Hidayat. This study looks at the reasons why traditional knowledge was spread in the past and how digital media is changing the way we learn. It offers a fresh viewpoint on the changing ideas of authority, legitimacy, and Islamic teaching methods in today's information ecosystem. This study amalgamates *"ulamā"* networks, social media, and religious figures into a cohesive framework. It focuses on the ongoing conflict between *sanad*-based epistemology and the affective-algorithmic logic that is built into digital platforms. It talks about how classical transmission models can be changed to work in a digital world that is always changing, which shows how people can be pushed to the edges.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical methodology utilizing a library research design. This approach is selected for its efficacy in examining the complex evolution of *'ulamā'* authority in the digital era, a phenomenon that includes interrelated social, cultural, theological, and technological dimensions. Creswell posits that qualitative research enables an in-depth analysis of the construction of meaning pertaining to social phenomena, especially regarding the changing dynamics of religious authority in contemporary settings (Creswell, 2013, p. 4). The study utilizes library research because it focuses on analyzing conceptual and theoretical dynamics rather than performing empirical variable testing through fieldwork. Zed (2008, p. 3) asserts that library research constitutes a methodical process of collecting, reading, documenting, and organizing library-based resources.

This method makes it easier to look closely at classical literature on *"ulamā"* authority, historical studies of Nusantara scholarly networks, and modern research on digital Islam and religious authority. The descriptive component of this study elucidates the characteristics of traditional *'ulamā'* authority, classical methods of Islamic knowledge transmission, and emerging forms of authority in digital contexts. The analytical dimension examines the driving factors, mechanisms, and implications of the transition from epistemic authority to affective–algorithmic legitimacy, including its theological, epistemological, and educational consequences. The principal data sources include scholarly literature from Islamic studies, Islamic education, and digital media studies. Additionally, primary qualitative data is derived from a methodical analysis of the official YouTube and Instagram accounts of Adi Hidayat and Hannan Attak. Searches for literature were conducted utilizing academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest, and university library collections. s.

Key sources were also checked against each other d. s. The data was analyzed in four steps: making a list of the literature, grouping it by theme, reading it critically, and putting it all together. r. s. These stages made it easier to see long-lasting patterns, conceptual conflicts, and gaps in analysis, which formed the basis for interpretive conclusion. s. s. This library-based study is limited by the absence of direct empirical field data. a. a. However, its integrative methodology creates a strong conceptual framework for understanding how the authority of *'ulamā'* has changed in the digital age and sets the stage for future empirical studies in Islamic education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Transformation of *'Ulamā'* Authority: From Epistemic Sanad to Algorithmic Legitimacy

The *"ulamā"* have always been very important to Muslims. Their deep knowledge of religion and moral integrity give them power (Chairi, 2019). But this power has never been set in stone; it's an epistemic relationship that is always being worked out as social, political, and technological situations change. This negotiation is particularly evident in the works of Adi Hidayat and Hannan Attaki, who possess divergent perspectives on the establishment of religious authority in the digital realm. Weber's three types of authority legal-rational, traditional, and charismatic help us understand this change (Weber, 1997). Islamic scholarly authority predominantly derives from traditional authority, supplemented by a charismatic component. s. Its legitimacy derives from the transmission of knowledge (*isnād*) and the spiritual authority acknowledged by the community (Ali, 2024, p. 25).

Weber's concept of tradition is more rigid than Islamic scholarly authority, which relies on the transmission of knowledge and moral integrity upheld through *sanad* to authorize the interpretation of sacred texts. s. Al-Attas says that the *'ulamā'* are not just people who teach others about religion; they are also protectors of adab and truth. He asserts that moral authority is associated with scholarly lineage (Al-Attas, 1998, p. 148). In the Indonesian *pesantren* context, *al-tafaqquh fī al-dīn* is regarded as more than an intellectual endeavor; it serves as a genuine means for individuals to cultivate their morals and character within a rigorous scholarly community (Bruinessen, 1995, p. 156). In this way, classical authority is based on relationships and is shown in the ongoing interaction between teachers and students. This model is very different from Hannan Attaki's digital da'wah style, which has short, emotionally powerful content that cuts down on physical interaction and replaces it with intimacy that is mediated by technology (Rejeki et al., 2024).

On the other hand, Adi Hidayat is a mix of different types of authority that keeps the text's rigor while using digital platforms smartly to reach more students (Adi Hidayat Official, 2025c). In the past, the scholarly authority in Islam was based on three things that were all connected: a continuous *sanad*, being a member of well-known religious groups, and long-term intellectual socialization in structured educational settings (Whyte, 2024). These parts work together to make sure that the information is correct, that society accepts it, and that the methods are the same. Digital transformation, on the other hand, has changed this setup. p. p. People can say they know a lot about religion on social media without having to show proof based on *sanad*, which makes traditional ways of checking less reliable (Campbell, 2010, p. 6).

In this case, people like Hannan Attaki get their power not so much from their degrees as from how close they are to their fans, especially young people in cities (Hanan_attaki-Instagram, n.d.-a). Affective legitimacy and algorithmic visibility are increasingly significant, either complementing or supplanting epistemic authority. y. The concept of cultural capital by Bourdieu effectively elucidates this change. Bourdieu (2011) says that authority doesn't just come from knowing things; it also comes from being able to use that knowledge to get symbolic recognition in a certain social domain. n. Adi Hidayat is an example of how traditional cultural capital, like being able to read classical texts and *sanad*, can be turned into digital capital that can be shared widely. Hannan Attaki, on the other hand, gains power through cultural capital that is based on lifestyle. e. He does this by using everyday language, pictures that are appealing, and stories that make young people feel something. e.

In the digital age, this change could lead to something called "algorithmic capital." This means being able to figure out how platforms work, get people to notice your content, and get them to pay attention to it (Lundahl, 2022). Increasingly, things like views, likes, and shares are more important than long-term theological knowledge when it comes to deciding who is an authority. Benkler posits that digital media foster networked publics, resulting in the decentralization of information production and the circumvention of conventional gatekeepers (Benkler, 2006). This structural condition facilitates

the emergence of novel authority models predicated on performative visibility rather than institutional endorsement.

Eickelman and Anderson refer to this phenomenon as the emergence of New Muslim Publics, characterized by the diffusion of religious authority across informal digital platforms rather than its concentration within academic institutions (Eickelman & Anderson, 2005, p. 5). In this instance, Adi Hidayat embodies a hybrid authority that maintains epistemic depth while facilitating digital mediation. Conversely, Hannan Attaki embodies affective authority rooted in emotional resonance and aesthetic performance. These models are not linked by a common academic heritage, but rather by their capacity to generate affective legitimacy, defined as authority rooted in emotional identification, relatability, and aspirational narratives (Perelló-Sobrepere, 2017). Digital religious figures must exercise caution in their presentation across various platforms, including their appearance, language, and interaction cues, to maintain their credibility (Goffman, 2023, p. 82).

This is based on Goffman's idea of managing how others see you. Adi Hidayat stresses a formal academic style, while Hannan Attaki encourages familiarity through informal aesthetics and stories about *hijrah*. From a Weberian perspective, this transformation can be interpreted as a modification in charismatic authority facilitated by algorithms. People used to be charismatic if they were religious and known as scholars. It is becoming increasingly important to be visible and involved in digital capitalism. So, religious authority doesn't go away in the digital age; it changes all the time as epistemic, affective, and algorithmic legitimacy fight for power.

This change is happening in the bigger picture of the attention economy, where religious discourse must compete with a lot of other types of content for the limited attention of its audience (Ibrahim, 2024). This is why people often make theological ideas simpler so that they can be shared and are more appealing to the heart. Algorithms prefer simplicity to depth at the same time. Context collapse makes this situation even worse because digital platforms put people with different expectations into one space to talk to each other (Boyd, 2014, p. 29). Digital preachers often use vague words and safe topics to keep their messages interesting to as many people as possible. They don't want to have conversations that are interesting but controversial.

The move from *sanad*-based authority to algorithmic legitimacy is a big change in how Islamic religious authority works. This change makes it easier for everyone to understand religious talk, but it also runs the risk of making complicated teachings seem less important by using the logic of virality and emotional appeal. So, the power of the *'ulamā'* in modern Indonesia is affected by a constant fight between deep knowledge and digital prominence. To handle this tension, Islamic schools need to teach their students how to think critically about religion when they read and write about it. They also need to come up with plans that can change as religion does.

Transformation of Media and Methods of Islamic Knowledge Transmission

Digitalization has completely changed how Muslims learn, teach, and share religious knowledge. Authority structures have transitioned from hierarchical and institution-centric frameworks to more horizontal, open, and networked systems that do not necessitate proximity or adherence to rigid academic protocols. People like Adi Hidayat and Hannan Attaki have gained a lot of religious power without going through the usual channels of transmission and Hannan Attaki mostly used digital platforms to grow the Pemuda Hijrah movement. Adi Hidayat turned his YouTube channel into an online madrasah that tens of thousands of people go to every week. d. s. This change is closely related to how social media algorithms work, which put user engagement ahead of source validity or scholarly verification (Sierocki, 2024). This makes it easier to get rid of religious leaders from the middle.

The decentralization of authority enabled by digital media has significant ramifications for Islamic education. n. n. In the past, scholarly legitimacy was based on being part of an institution, long

study, and *sanad*. In the digital world, these paths are less clear, and power is shifting to places where people know how to use media and algorithms. s. e. The fame of people like Hannan Attaki and Adi Hidayat shows that people can now come up with their own ideas about religious authority without having to rely on traditional scholarly sources. As Uyuni and Adnan (2020) say, Islamic education is having a harder time keeping moral and spiritual values alive in a world where information is easy to find, share, and communicate quickly. So, the problem isn't just changing the curriculum; it's also about changing where *"ulamā"* authority comes from, from institutional structures to a more fluid and populist digital space. s. The ways that Islamic knowledge is passed on have also changed a lot along with this structural change.

Digital religious content is typically formatted in brief, visually engaging, and easily comprehensible styles, incorporating graphic design and audiovisual components that facilitate access at any time and from any location (Nirwan Wahyudi Ar, 2022). Campbell says that the digital generation likes religious communication that is quick, visual, and closely related to their daily lives (Campbell, 2013, p. 88). Hanan Attaki's Instagram posts are mostly graphic quotes and short motivational videos (Hanan_attaki-Instagram, n.d.-b), and Adi Hidayat's YouTube lecture highlights are short videos with explanations (Adi Hidayat Official, 2025a).

These are examples of how religious people change what they say to fit how digital platforms work. k. Eickelman and Anderson refer to this transformation as the emergence of a New Muslim Public Sphere, characterized by the decentralization of religious authority from formal institutions to various digital platforms (Eickelman & Anderson, 2005, p. 2). In this area, authority isn't just based on knowing how to read *kitāb kuning* or having an *ijāza*. It also depends on being able to use digital visual language, understand platform algorithms, and package religious messages in ways that make them more likely to spread (Tarwiyyah, 2025). Because it is easier to get but also more likely to be challenged and replaced, religious authority is both easier to get and more dangerous (Zaid et al., 2022).

Algorithmic dominance changes what is considered legitimate. Engagement metrics, such as followers, views, likes, and shares, function as symbolic indicators of credibility, often surpassing traditional evaluations of scholarly competence (Dessindi & Andalas, 2022). Recommendation systems make this even worse by always showing users content that fits their interests. This creates echo chambers where people value agreement over critical thinking. In this context, virality replaces truth, enabling religious content that is overly simplistic or erroneous to disseminate broadly, while methodologically rigorous discussions remain confined to small groups. The ease of creating and using digital religious content has both positive and negative effects on how well people understand Islam. Digital media significantly enhances access to religious knowledge, particularly for communities distant from conventional educational institutions, and provides students with opportunities for supplementary learning beyond the classroom (Tolchah & Arfan Mu'ammar, 2019). On the other hand, having too much unfiltered information can lead to cognitive overload, the oversimplification of complex doctrines, and the spread of unverified or intolerant interpretations. This makes public religious literacy worse overall.

By looking at how traditional and digital models of authority are different, we can get a rough idea of this change. Traditional authority relies on hierarchical *sanad*, institutional validation, prolonged study, and localized transmission to generate knowledge that is both systematic and contextual. Digital authority, on the other hand, is based on how well you can use algorithms, how many people you can get to interact with your content, and how well you can make content. It has a worldwide reach and makes things that are broken up and driven by feelings. Empirically, individuals such as Adi Hidayat and Hannan Attaki suggest that the future of religious authority is increasingly hybrid, merging epistemic depth with digital expertise, academic credentials with algorithmic significance, and formal education with media literacy. Studies on the religious beliefs of young Muslims indicate a preference

for emotional, inspirational, and entertaining content rather than dense conceptual exposition.

This indicates a transition from "learning to know" to "learning to feel" (Husein & Slama, 2018). This trend makes it more likely that people will see religious knowledge as something they can throw away instead of something that shapes their character over time. This kind of content makes things easier to get to, but it also makes *pesantren* and *madrasah* look for new ways to teach that don't lose the rigor of their knowledge. In response to these issues, Campbell proposes a model of adaptive adjustment that incorporates digital technology while preserving fundamental religious values (Campbell, 2010, p. 118). In this context, *'ulamā'* and Islamic educators are encouraged to engage actively in digital environments, perceiving technology as an educational tool rather than a substitute for scholarly authority.

Digital platforms facilitate rapid access to information; however, the depth and authenticity of religious understanding require guidance from *'ulamā'* grounded in *sanad* and contextual knowledge of Islamic tradition. Changing the media and ways that Islamic knowledge is shared doesn't get rid of traditional authority; it just changes it. The *'ulamā'* continue to be significant sources of knowledge, and their authority is increasing due to their ability to adapt to digital environments and modern communication methods (Uyuni & Adnan, 2022). This change happens on both a structural and an epistemological level. For instance, algorithmic validation is becoming more common for legitimacy, and networked forms of transmission are taking the place of hierarchical knowledge systems. Because of this, Islamic schools need to think about what they do again. They are not just keepers of knowledge; they are also important curators and validators who help Muslim communities find their way in a digital religious world that is getting increasingly complicated.

Fragmentation of Authority and Authoritative Religiosity

The shift in religious authority in the digital age has led to a fragmented state of authority, marked by the dispersal of Islamic reference sources that were previously more centralized. In the past, religious guidance came from stable chains of transmission (*sanad al-ʿilm*), which were represented by traditional *ʿulamāʾ* and institutional *fatwā* authorities like the *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI). Today, though, Muslim communities have a lot of different sources to choose from, and not all of them are reliable or consistent. This fragmentation engenders collective uncertainty regarding the qualifications necessary to lead religious understanding, particularly when public legitimacy is conferred upon prominent individuals lacking epistemic authority, who gain recognition due to popularity rather than adherence to established standards of scholarly competence (Hakim & Mukhlis, 2023).

In this broken ecology, people often think that Adi Hidayat and Hannan Attaki are on opposite ends of a spectrum. People think that Adi Hidayat is more "scholarly" because his intellectual background and textual references are well-known (Adi Hidayat Official, 2025b). Hannan Attaki, on the other hand, is often thought of as more "popular" because he gives modern-style motivational messages and lifestyle-oriented *daʿwah* (Hanan_attaki-Instagram, n.d.-c). But they both work in the same competitive digital space, where trust and attention are always up for grabs. One clear example of this dynamic is how people reacted to Hannan Attaki. Young people like her because of the Pemuda Hijrah movement and the way she talks that is easy to understand. At the same time, traditional *ʿulamāʾ* often criticize this model of authority for allegedly oversimplifying Islamic teachings without a solid methodological basis (Sulistia Salsabiilaa et al., 2024).

In these situations, authority based on *sanad* and institutional legitimacy may be eclipsed by individuals whose power comes from their online presence and emotional closeness. So, fragmentation not only changes the way authority is recognized and judged in public opinion, but it also makes authority more diverse. This change is not only affecting individual preachers, but also religious services held on platforms and micro-influencers. Digital initiatives such as *Konsultasi Syariah*, which

employs Instagram Stories to address *fiqh* inquiries, and accounts like @husein_hadar, which utilize concise infographics to disseminate Islamic messages, illustrate the increasing prevalence of religious guidance within platform logics and everyday digital interactions (A'yuni & Nasrullah, 2022). At the same time, Islamic values are becoming more common in Indonesia, moving from traditional religious spaces to more modern ones like shopping malls, office buildings, and other places. At the same time, industries that follow *sharīʿah*, such as hijab fashion, cosmetics, tourism, and food, have become very popular all over the archipelago.

The internet is a great way for people to talk about religion (Muhammad Wildan, 2017, p. 1), and it makes religious authority stronger and more open to debate. This dispute must be situated within a more extensive historical context, in which modernization altered religious leadership and the public domain. Feener notes that modern academics work increasingly in crowded and contentious settings where traditional figures can no longer hold sway over authority. Modern discussions create complex ways of talking about belief and practice, rights and responsibilities, and standards of public morality. These discussions constantly change the limits of what is considered legitimate authority (Feener, 2014). Digitalization makes this happen faster by making it easier to share and challenge claims of authority.

One important effect of changes in media and transmission methods is that they make it easier to understand complex Islamic teachings. It is important for digital knowledge economies that things are quick, easy to reach, and look good. This means that religious content should be given in short, easy-to-read forms (Turner & Nasir, 2013, p. 97). As a result, teachings that have historically required deep thought and extensive study may lose some of their meaning. Theological and philosophical concepts that depend on historical-contextual and interdisciplinary understanding often lose their epistemological depth when restated as concise statements. Even *ijtihad* an interpretive process grounded in *uṣūl al-fiqh, qawāʿid*, and *maqāṣid* can be rhetorically utilized as a symbol of authority while remaining detached from the methodological frameworks that substantiate it.

Islamic values, once imparted through rigorous methods such as *talaqqī*, classical text analysis, and spiritual mentorship, are now propagated as slogans, soundbites, and visually appealing snippets (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2019). Platforms such as Mubadalah.id, which promote gender-egalitarian interpretations of religious texts (Ilmiati et al., 2022), illustrate how digital mediation can improve interpretive engagement while also provoking criticisms regarding the oversimplification of discussions that, in the classical tradition, are conducted through complex methodological reasoning. In this way, social media is set up to favor content that is easy to understand and fun over content that requires deep thought and intellectual patience.

The state that results is like the idea of hyperreality, in which religious meanings are increasingly felt through symbolic representations that are not connected to their epistemic foundations. So, dividing up power has two effects that are the opposite of each other. It makes religious discussions more open to everyone and makes it easier to learn about Islam. On the other hand, it weakens the epistemic depth that has historically supported scholarly authority, leading to uncertainty in standards of credibility and interpretive accountability. This situation poses considerable challenges for Islamic education: how can institutions sustain their relevance when religious knowledge is easily accessible beyond formal educational structures? How can teachers and *ustādhs* uphold pedagogical authority when students can access various alternative sources that may be visually appealing but lack methodological coherence? These questions show how important it is for institutions to have plans that not only share information but also teach people how to think critically about credibility, context, and methodology in digital religious settings.

In conclusion, authority, once established through systematic transmission and methodological verification, is increasingly replaced by affective engagement based on popularity, personal appeal, and

content virality. Digital democratization increases participation but decreases depth, gives more people a voice but makes it harder to understand what is true, and makes it easier to include more people but makes it harder to teach complex ideas. The rise of figures like Hannan Attaki indicates that the present transformation extends beyond the mere pluralization of religious authority. There is also a deeper change in the way Islamic discourse is set up epistemically. It has gone from being about passing on verified knowledge to being about a digital attention economy where popularity can stand in for truth. This change leaves Muslim communities and schools with a problem that will last for a long time: how to be open to new ideas while keeping the quality of knowledge high.

Implications of the Transformation of Authority for Contemporary Islamic Education

The transition from a *sanad*-based epistemic framework to algorithmic legitimacy in clerical authority has significantly influenced contemporary Islamic education. This change is not only a technical or pedagogical issue; it is a structural upheaval that undermines the foundational principles of *tarbiyah, ta'līm*, and *ta'dīb* that have historically sustained the Islamic intellectual tradition. Because of the logic of digital popularity, epistemic authority is losing power. This is a big problem for Islamic schools: how can they keep their teaching relevant and their students' understanding deep in a world that values virality over validity and quick consumption over long-term understanding?

Pesantren and *madrasah* in Indonesia are having a harder time staying important. This is because there are gaps in technology and they are stuck between old ways of teaching and the needs of students who are used to learning online. Hefner observes that modern *pesantren* must harmonize traditional education with the exigencies of modernization, especially digitalization (Hefner, 2009, p. 57). But this balancing act has gotten harder: too much resistance to change could turn off younger people, and adapting too quickly could make epistemic identity weaker. Because of this, Islamic schools are in a middle ground, trying to keep their intellectual heritage safe while also being open to new ideas and technologies. The rise of "*digital santri*," who read old texts and watch religious videos on sites like YouTube, is a clear example of this tension.

These students must deal with two different types of authority that often clash: teachers who are based on *sanad* and methodological rigor, and digital preachers who are based on charisma and engagement metrics. When there are contradictions, students often believe that digital figures are more relevant or up to date, which makes them value their own interpretations more than those of teachers who have been trained formally (Lukens-Bull, 2013). This pattern indicates the gradual decline of traditional teaching authority as disciplined, cumulative learning diminishes in favor of fragmented and immediate knowledge acquisition.

Historically, Islamic education has emphasized not only intellectual excellence but also moral and spiritual growth through close pedagogical relationships and the concept of exemplarity (*uswah*) (Huda et al., 2024). These emotional and moral dimensions, cultivated through direct engagement and communal living, are challenging to replicate via screen-based learning. As religious education becomes more about transactions and content, it might not be able to change how people think and act. Islamic education has always been about shaping a person's whole personality, not just giving them information. This change goes against that idea.

The change in authority also makes it harder to plan the lessons. In a world where digital numbers can become real without going to school, more people are questioning classical curricula that focus on mastering texts and scholarly depth. Bano's analysis highlights the growing conflict between curriculum piety and curriculum relevance, a conflict that becomes more intense in the digital age (Bano, 2012). It becomes harder to agree on what to teach, how to teach it, and what makes a student successful in school when people don't share their standards for authority anymore. The same thing has happened with standards for academic ability. Communication skills, visual presentation, and

psychological attunement to audiences are becoming more important than traditional signs of success like mastering *matan*, understanding *sharḥ*, and being good at *istinbāṭ*. Digital literacy and emotional appeal are now two of the most important things that affect how well da'wah works (Lim, 2018). This alteration engenders an epistemological dilemma: communicative visibility may be perceived as superior to methodological depth, thereby altering the criteria for the dissemination and evaluation of religious knowledge.

The digital age makes learning resources even more spread out and changes how teachers, students, and knowledge interact with each other. Students no longer depend on teachers as their primary sources of information; rather, they obtain information from various digital sources, some of which are contradictory. Empirical research demonstrates that a significant number of young Indonesian Muslims interact with religious content from diverse online sources characterized by limited coherence (Slama, 2017), leading to a bricolage of interpretations lacking a unified epistemological framework. Because of this, people don't just assume that teachers are in charge; they question it all the time (Günther, 2020). This means that beginners can join advanced theological debates even if they don't have the right training. This division gives the wrong impression that you understand lots of exposure without real knowledge.

Hirschkind asserts that individuals engaging with religion online are more inclined to perform rather than transform, prioritizing self-presentation over profound comprehension and consistent practice (Hirschkind, 2009, p. 103). These conditions cultivate false confidence, enabling individuals to claim expertise on complex issues based on superficial digital engagement rather than thorough academic preparation. Digitalization presents a considerable threat to a core component of Islamic education: character development (*tarbiyah*) and moral internalization (*ta'dīb*). The *pesantren* tradition teaches values through a hidden curriculum that includes role modeling, getting used to things, and living in a community (Dhofier, 2011, p. 79). No matter how inspiring, digital content can't replace these embodied ways of learning, like seeing patience, humility, and consistency in everyday life. You need to be a part of a community of practice for a long time, where values are lived out instead of just talked about (Nilan, 2009).

Digital religious content often inspires people mentally and emotionally, but it doesn't help them build good habits. Research on digital *hijrah* movements shows that changes brought about by online motivation often don't last because there isn't enough community support or long-term mentorship (Nisa, 2018). The attention economy also structurally favors content that is emotionally engaging and entertaining, pushing aside reflective ethical teachings like *ṣabr*, *tawāḍu'*, and *mujāhadah*, which require patience and depth. So, algorithms steer religious discussions toward what's popular instead of what's important for learning. These changes show that Islamic education needs more than just new technology; it needs a whole new way of thinking. Institutions must reconceptualize the relationship between traditional and digital knowledge as synergistic rather than antagonistic at the epistemological level.

Fadl asserts that the Islamic intellectual tradition possesses an intrinsic capacity for adaptation through *ijtihād*, *maṣlaḥah*, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (Fadl, 2014, p. 89). These are rules that can help people use digital realities in a meaningful way without changing the way they do things. Reconfiguration at the structural and institutional levels necessitates the integration of traditional depth with digital competencies in learning organizations, competency standards, and accreditation systems. We need models that combine digital literacy with knowledge of Islamic sciences. Technology should not take the place of scholarly interaction; instead, it should improve it. New ideas must help students focus, think about what they're learning, and use critical thinking skills even when they're not paying attention (Mujani & Liddle, 2009).

Lastly, on the ethical-normative level, Islamic education needs to be clear about what its main

goal is: to make viral content creators or *ʿulamāʾ* who are smart and can stay true to their values no matter how popular they are. If Islamic schools don't change in a way that makes sense at all these levels, they could be pushed to the edges of modern religious life and not be able to pass on the depth, rigor, and transformative power of the Islamic scholarly tradition. So, adaptation isn't just a way for institutions to stay alive; it's also a very important way to keep knowledge safe from the pressures of trivialization that come with the way digital platforms work.

CONCLUSION

The alteration in *ʿulamāʾ* authority during the digital era signifies a profound transition from a *sanad*-based epistemic framework to a complex legitimacy system grounded in emotional resonance and algorithmic facilitation. The cases of Adi Hidayat and Hannan Attaki illustrate that this transformation extends beyond technological progress; it is fundamentally epistemological, redefining the validation, dissemination, and trust of Islamic knowledge in contemporary Muslim societies. Digitalization has moved the center of religious authority from physical scholarly transmission to networked spaces that are controlled by visibility, participation, and emotional resonance. This change makes it easier for everyone to talk about religion, but it could also make Islamic teachings seem less important and lower the standards for knowledge. This creates a long-lasting conflict between being open to everyone and having deep intellectual understanding.

This research introduces a hybrid framework of religious authority that integrates three interrelated dimensions of legitimacy: epistemic legitimacy grounded in *sanad* and scholarly expertise, affective legitimacy stemming from emotional connection and identity formation, and algorithmic legitimacy shaped by platform visibility and engagement metrics. This three-part model goes beyond a simple binary distinction between traditional and digital authority by showing how they coexist, interact, and compete to shape modern Islamic discourse. Scholarly authority is not disappearing; rather, it is evolving within a diverse context that requires both profound expertise and the capacity to convey information through various means.

The results show that Islamic education needs to change because of these changes. Islamic schools can no longer rely on monopolistic ways of passing on knowledge; they need to change their roles and become important keepers of religious knowledge. This means learning how to use your brain, your digital skills, and your knowledge all at once. The goal is not to get rid of traditional teaching methods, but to make them better by using digital media in a smart way. This way, the broader reach doesn't hurt the quality of the methods used. A big part of this job is teaching teachers who know how to use both digital and epistemic tools. This will help them connect with students on an emotional level without lowering academic standards.

Future research should expand this conceptual analysis through empirical investigation of digital religious practices. Digital ethnography can clarify the everyday processes through which authority and legitimacy are challenged in online religious communities, while social network analysis may reveal the structural patterns that influence algorithmic visibility. Further research is required to evaluate the effectiveness of hybrid Islamic education models, to compare institutional approaches to digital adaptation, and to develop curricula focused on digital-religious literacy. A major focus of future research will be to investigate how these changes have long-term effects on Indonesian Muslims' understanding of theology, religious practices, and social unity.

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