

DIGITAL AUTHORITY AND SACRED KNOWLEDGE: THE REFORMATION OF ISLAMIC AUTHENTICITY IN ALGORITHMIC SPACES

Indah Renjani Putri¹, Muammar²

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram

rinjaniputriindah@gmail.com, muammar@uinmataram.ac.id

Abstract: This study examines how Indonesian Islamic influencers construct authority claims within algorithmically-mediated digital spaces, and how religious audiences navigate the relationship between digital authority and institutionally-rooted Islamic traditions. Employing netnographic methodology combined with algorithmic analysis and institutional interviews, we analyze five prominent Islamic content creators across YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok platforms over an 18-month period. Our findings reveal that Islamic authority in digital environments emerges through dynamic negotiation among: (1) content creators' rhetorical authority strategies; (2) algorithmic visibility mechanisms; and (3) audience interpretive frameworks rooted in Indonesian institutional traditions. Rather than representing wholesale displacement of institutional Islamic authority, digital authority constitution involves sophisticated engagement with multiple legitimation mechanisms, including a fourth, algorithmically-mediated mechanism that interacts with Weber's classical typology of traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational authority. The study offers practical insights for Islamic institutions navigating digital transformation and policy implications for platform designers and regulators.

Keywords: Islamic authority; algorithmic mediation; digital religiosity; Indonesia; netnography; platform studies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The transformation of religious authority through digital platforms represents one of the most significant shifts in contemporary religious practice. Across global Islamic communities, social media, video, and podcasting have become primary spaces through which sacred texts and religious instruction circulate. Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-majority nation with approximately 204 million Muslims and internet penetration reaching 68 percent of the population as of 2024, presents a significant context for examining these dynamics.

The rise of digital Islamic content creation has generated scholarly and organizational concern regarding the authenticity, legitimacy, and epistemological foundations of digitally disseminated Islamic knowledge, questions that cannot be adequately addressed through simplistic narratives of tradition versus modernity.

Recent research shows that the fragmentation of religious authority in Indonesia's digital sphere has become an empirically documented phenomenon, in which non-institutional actors, ranging from millennial preachers to media-based mujtahid, operate without the control of traditional ulama while still drawing on Weber's typology of authority to reinterpret forms of religious legitimacy in digital space (Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023). This condition creates a diversity of authorities competing for public legitimacy through digital metrics, while simultaneously giving rise to hybridization, in which digital actors combine online charismatic influence with symbolic affiliation to established

institutions such as Nahdlatul Ulama or Muhammadiyah (Arifianto, 2020).

This article examines how Islamic authority is negotiated at the intersection of algorithmic mediation, human agency, and institutional context in contemporary Indonesia. Rather than treating digital authority as a wholesale displacement of institutional authority, we examine the granular mechanisms through which Islamic authority emerges through the interaction of algorithmic systems, content creators' authority strategies, audiences' interpretive frameworks, and institutional traditions.

Scholarly Landscape: From Religion Online to Digital Religion

The concept of “Digital Religion” developed by Campbell (2013) established foundational terminology for examining how religious communities adapt institutional practices to digital environments, showing that online religious spaces generate their own modes of authority constitution rather than merely replicating offline practice. A crucial distinction has been drawn between “religion online,” sites that merely provide information without interaction, and “online religion,” which opens space for active participation, enabling individuals to negotiate authority independently (Hoover, 2016).

In the Islamic context, the theoretical framework developed by Alatas (2021) emphasizes that religious authority is not the result of inheritance, power, or charisma alone, but is formed through ongoing articulative work, comprising three components: sunnah (connection to an authoritative past), connectors (the ability to translate past values into the present context), and community (the capacity to build compliance without coercion). This approach constitutes one of the principal theoretical frameworks of this article.

Algorithmic Authority as a New Legitimation Mechanism

Platform studies scholarship has documented how algorithmic systems exercise regulatory power over the visibility of digital content. Gillespie's (2010) concept of "algorithmic authority" identifies how algorithmic systems establish themselves as arbiters of relevance and quality through processes that appear technical yet carry profound ideological consequences. When algorithms privilege certain content creators, this is not a neutral operation but a process of authority construction that actively reshapes which Islamic knowledge becomes visible.

Research on short-form video platforms reinforces this argument: TikTok's algorithm curates feeds based on engagement patterns, which can reinforce selective exposure and foster echo chambers (Li, Cheng, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2025). Research on "Christian TikTok" found a spiritual algorithmic imaginary, in which users understand platform algorithmic logic as part of their own religious experience (Reinis & Laughlin, 2025), a dynamic analogous to Islamic da'wah content on similar platforms.

The study by Lohlker and Wahid (2026), which analyzed seven prominent Islamic digital authority figures through actor-network theory and Alatas's framework of articulative labor, shows that religious authority in algorithmic space is not a fixed attribute of individuals but the outcome of network configurations between human and non-human actors that selectively mediate religious meaning. This finding aligns with the concept of "religious filter bubbles" (Andok, 2023), which shows that online communities tend to fragment into echo chambers based on algorithmic preference.

The Indonesian Context: Between Platform Globality and Institutional Locality

For Indonesian Islamic communities, this algorithmic dynamic intersects with longstanding tensions concerning the relationship between formal Islamic education, grassroots leadership, and emerging digital religious influence. Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Islamic mass organization with moderation (*al-tawassut wa al-i'tidal*) as its core character (Burhani, 2012), entered the Islamic social media arena relatively late compared to a more media-literate generation of preachers.

Glocalization theory offers an important framework for understanding how global processes interact with locally rooted institutions. A study of the Salafi da'wa movement in Jakarta shows that global platforms encounter local institutions, creating “institutional friction” (Fakhrullah, Bakti, Hermansah, & Fanshoby, 2023). Indonesian Islamic authority emerges through the interaction between global algorithmic logic and local institutional context.

Research Gap and Research Questions

Three knowledge gaps structure this research: studies of religious algorithmic authority remain concentrated on the Western Christian context; few studies examine how cross-platform algorithmic logics create contradictory authority landscapes; and insufficient attention has been paid to how religious communities themselves interpret algorithmically mediated authority.

This article poses three research questions: (1) How do Islamic content creators employ rhetorical strategies to establish authority on digital platforms? (2) How do algorithmic systems shape which authority claims gain visibility? (3) How do audiences navigate the relationship between algorithmically amplified authority and institutionally rooted authority traditions?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article draws on three interconnected theoretical frameworks: authority theory and multiple legitimation mechanisms, actor-network theory, which treats algorithms as actors, and glocalization theory, which explains the friction between global platform logic and local institutions.

Authority Theory and Multiple Legitimation Mechanisms

Weber's (1978) classical sociological theory conceptualizes authority as the power to secure compliance through legitimation mechanisms accepted as valid. His typology distinguishes traditional authority (historical precedent), legal-rational authority (codified rules), and charismatic authority (perceived extraordinary qualities).

The construction of Islamic authority in Indonesia has historically involved all three types simultaneously: a pesantren kiai's authority contains traditional elements (sanad), charismatic elements (personal charisma), and legal-rational elements (formal organizational position). Recent research shows that the transformation of digital religiosity gives rise to "algorithmic authority" as a fourth legitimation mechanism rooted in the mathematical optimization of platform engagement metrics: when an algorithm recommends particular content, it implicitly certifies its relevance and quality, creating legitimacy that appears mathematically objective, yet operates distinctly from Weberian types, rooted not in explicit value assertions but in technical optimization.

Algorithmic authority does not replace the three Weberian types but interacts within a hybrid configuration. As shown in the study by Lohlker and Wahid (2026), in the context of digital clerics, forms of authority no longer appear in "pure" form as categorized by Weber: a cleric may be respected for scholarly lineage (a trace of traditional authority), possess

appeal through personal charisma on social media (a trace of charismatic authority), and gain public trust through a consistent da'wah distribution system (a trace of legal-rational authority), merging into a single network of praxis.

Alatas's (2021) framework enriches this understanding by shifting focus from fixed attributes toward ongoing articulative work among sunnah, intermediaries (the ulama), and the congregation. These three components, in the digital context, undergo a transformation of form without losing their essence: sunnah remains an authoritative reference yet is now mediated through digital visualization; intermediaries remain connectors yet now operate across diverse platforms; the congregation continues to determine legitimacy through uncoerced compliance, yet this compliance is now negotiated through searching, comparison, and online debate.

Actor-Network Theory: Algorithms as Actors

Actor-network theory (ANT) provides tools for analyzing authority as emerging from networks of heterogeneous actors rather than being inherent in individual agents, directing attention to algorithms as active participants rather than neutral tools. In Latour's (2007) formulation, "the social" is a process that emerges through the interconnection of various elements, technology, artifacts, texts, and institutions, with agency distributed across every element of the network.

Assuming that religious authority results from the configuration between human actors and technological devices, two pathways of delegation can be identified: private delegation (the delegation of self-representation and da'wah content through visual media on an ongoing basis) and institutional figure-function delegation (in which digital platforms represent individuals while simultaneously attaching legitimacy to institutions). The implication is that clerical authority becomes

a dynamic and emergent entity, continuously reproduced through symbolic repetition within digital flows.

Glocalization Theory

Glocalization theory attends to how global processes interact with locally rooted institutions. In the Indonesian Islamic context, global platforms encounter local institutions (pesantren networks, Nahdlatul Ulama's organizational infrastructure) with their own authority mechanisms, creating "institutional friction" (Fakhrullah et al., 2023): tension between platform-determined da'wah success metrics (followers, views) and traditional metrics (sanad, recognition by fellow ulama); between algorithmic logic that privileges concise, emotional content and a teaching tradition that values gradual elaboration; and between formal, verified institutional affiliation and informal symbolic affiliation in digital space.

Integrating the Three Frameworks

These three frameworks are integrated to produce a comprehensive analytical model: Weberian authority theory, enriched by Al-Atas's concept of articulative labor, provides the vocabulary for classifying content creators' legitimation claims; ANT provides the framework for analyzing how algorithms actively participate in distributing the visibility of these claims; glocalization theory provides the lens for understanding how tension between global platform logic and local institutions shapes the specific contours of Indonesian digital Islamic authority construction. This tripartite model avoids both technological determinism and institutional nostalgia, enabling the research to capture the complexity of an ongoing negotiation.

3. METHOD

Epistemological Positioning

This research operates from a critical realist epistemological orientation, which assumes that social reality possesses a structure independent of individual perception, yet remains necessarily accessed through theoretical interpretation. This position allows for the combination of qualitative investigation of meaning with attention to the material operation of algorithmic systems. A purely constructivist approach risks reducing algorithmic authority to mere discursive construction; conversely, a purely positivist approach risks neglecting the dimension of meaning central to religious phenomena. Critical realism bridges these two risks.

Research Design

This article employs a qualitative comparative case study design situated within netnographic methodology, an ethnographic methodology adapted for online contexts, involving immersive observation of online community practices (Kozinets, 2012). Netnography offers no “one-size-fits-all solution,” requiring contextual adaptation to the specific characteristics of the community and platform under study (Costello, McDermott, & Wallace, 2017).

The research design comprises four integrated components: (1) netnographic observation of Islamic influencer content on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok; (2) algorithmic analysis tracing platform visibility mechanisms; (3) audience interpretation analysis examining the evaluation of authority claims; and (4) institutional interviews with Islamic leaders. The combination of these four components enables data triangulation and avoids the reductionism of relying on a single methodological lens.

Sampling and Data Sources

Five Indonesian Islamic content creators were selected through purposive sampling to achieve maximum variation: substantial audience reach (a minimum of 500,000 followers), primary engagement in disseminating Islamic knowledge, geographic distribution across Java and eastern Indonesia, variation in relationship to formal institutions, and presence across multiple platforms. Data collection spanned 18 months (January 2023–June 2024), encompassing 287 videos, more than 4,500 Instagram posts, more than 8,000 TikTok videos, more than 12,000 coded audience comments, and 12 semi-structured interviews.

The five creators represent distinct spectra of authority: a traditional pesantren type, a populist-rhetorical type, a textual-literalist type, a type oriented toward an urban middle-class audience, and a transnational type. This variation was designed to capture the diversity of authority strategies within Indonesia's digital da'wah ecosystem.

Analytical Procedures

Content analysis examined how creators construct authority through rhetorical strategies, knowledge claims, and identity presentation, attending to references to sanad and institutional affiliation, personal narratives, visual aesthetics, and strategies of audience interaction. Algorithmic analysis used platform-specific tools (YouTube Studio, Instagram Insights) to trace engagement metrics and retention patterns.

Audience interpretation analysis involved thematic coding of comments (Cohen's kappa > 0.75), developed iteratively through a grounded process. Semi-structured interviews examined institutional leaders' perspectives on digital authority, involving pesantren caretakers, regional religious organization administrators, Islamic studies

academics, and some content creators who also hold formal institutional affiliations.

Validity and Limitations

Validity was strengthened through methodological, source, analyst, member-checking, and theoretical triangulation. Limitations are reported transparently: a focus on prominent influencers, reliance on public data alone, limitations in algorithmic inference, an elite institutional perspective, and an 18-month temporal window. Despite these limitations, this research provides rigorous analysis of authority construction in digital environments, with findings applicable beyond this specific case study.

4. RESULTS

This section presents findings in five sub-sections: content creators' authority construction strategies; patterns of algorithmic visibility and amplification; patterns of audience interpretation; institutional perspectives; and an analytical schema of the interaction among multiple authority mechanisms.

Content Creators' Authority Construction Strategies

Analysis of the five creators shows that each develops a distinctive combination of rhetorical strategies, yet all contain elements of the three Weberian authority types adapted to the affordances of digital platforms.

The first creator (traditional pesantren type) consistently references a lineage of scholarly transmission: in 78 percent of the videos analyzed, this creator explicitly cites the name of a teacher, a reference text, or the educational institution from which he obtained his credentials, representing a digital adaptation of Weberian traditional authority. The second creator (populist-rhetorical type) relies on emotional closeness and oratorical skill, using personal narratives and humor;

explicit reference to formal sanad is relatively rare (only 23 percent of videos), yet compensated for by a high posting frequency, representing charismatic authority mediated algorithmically.

The third creator (textual literalism) constructs authority as a direct interpreter of primary sources without the mediation of school-of-thought interpretation, attracting audiences seeking definitive normative certainty, yet provoking the most intense contestation in the comment sections. The fourth creator (oriented toward an urban middle-class audience) builds credibility through contextual relevance, linking Islam to stress management and career concerns. The fifth creator (transnational type) develops cross-linguistic adaptation, positioning himself as a bridge between Indonesian Muslim communities at home and abroad.

This variation confirms that the construction of digital Islamic authority is a contextual negotiation among scholarly tradition, platform affordances, and audience expectations, not a uniform process.

Table 1. *Authority Construction Strategies Across the Five Content Creators*

Creator Type	Primary Authority Strategy	Distinguishing Evidence
Traditional (pesantren)	Lineage of scholarly transmission	Cites teacher, reference text, or institution in 78% of videos analyzed; digital adaptation of Weberian traditional authority
Populist-rhetorical	Emotional closeness and oratorical skill	Formal sanad cited in only 23% of videos; compensated by high posting frequency;

		algorithmically mediated charismatic authority
Textual literalism	Direct interpretation of primary sources	Bypasses school-of-thought mediation; attracts audiences seeking normative certainty; provokes most intense comment-section contestation
Urban middle-class oriented	Contextual relevance	Links Islam to stress management and career concerns
Transnational	Cross-linguistic adaptation	Positions creator as a bridge between Indonesian Muslim communities at home and abroad

Note. Compiled from the study's analysis of authority construction strategies across five content creators.

Patterns of Algorithmic Visibility and Amplification

The most significant finding: content emphasizing emotional resonance or moral certainty consistently receives higher algorithmic amplification than nuanced theological exposition, creating a systematic bias in visibility. This pattern aligns with research on political content on TikTok, which shows that content with negative sentiment receives significantly higher engagement (Li et al., 2025), a pattern that appears to operate across content domains, both political and religious.

Retention analysis shows that the second creator's videos have a 23 percent higher average watch duration than the first creator's videos of comparable length, even though the first creator's content was rated by institutional informants as more theologically substantive; the second creator's videos were

recommended to 3.4 times more new accounts within the first seven days after upload. A similar pattern was observed on TikTok, consistent with research on the spiritual algorithmic imaginary (Reinis & Laughlin, 2025), in which audiences associate the appearance of certain content as a spiritual “sign.”

Amplification patterns differ across platforms: on YouTube, longer videos still receive adequate visibility given that its algorithm has historically privileged cumulative watch time; on TikTok and Instagram Reels, short clips under 60 seconds with an emotional punchline receive the highest visibility. This disparity creates “algorithmic stratification,” tiers of authority distinguished by algorithmic visibility rather than formal credentials.

Table 2. *Algorithmic Visibility and Engagement Metrics Reported in the Findings.*

Metric	Comparison	Value	Context
Average watch duration	Creator 2 vs. Creator 1 (comparable length)	+23%	Creator 1's content rated more theologically substantive by institutional informants
New-account recommendation rate	Creator 2 vs. Creator 1, first 7 days post-upload	3.4×	Indicates algorithmic amplification favors emotional/charismatic style over theological depth
Sanad/credential citation rate	Creator 1 (traditional)	78%	Of videos analyzed for this creator
Sanad/credential citation rate	Creator 2 (populist-rhetorical)	23%	Of videos analyzed for this creator

Audience comments analyzed	All five creators, combined	12,000+	Basis for the five audience-interpretation patterns (Table 3)
Institutional interviews conducted	Islamic leaders and academics	12	Basis for institutional perspectives findings

Note. Compiled from retention analysis and interview data reported in the study's findings on algorithmic visibility and institutional perspectives.

Patterns of Audience Interpretation

Despite this significant algorithmic bias, audiences display sophisticated interpretive capacity. Analysis of more than 12,000 comments identified five consistent patterns: (1) scholarly-ideological verification, in which audiences question sanad and affiliation before accepting authority claims, showing that the traditional logic of verification in Islam persists despite the changed medium; (2) personalization of the figure, an interest in creators' personal lives, showing that digital authority is shaped by emotional-psychological dimensions; (3) comparison and network mapping, in which audiences actively compare creators against their own values; (4) the social function of content as collective identity, in which da'wah content is consumed as a shared symbol of identity; and (5), particularly with the third creator, contestation as a testing ground, in which controversy expands the reach of attention.

Overall, audiences draw on institutional Islamic knowledge to evaluate digital content rather than accepting algorithmic amplification as a certification of authority, showing that algorithmic systems, while consequential, do not determine religious authority deterministically.

Table 3. *Five Patterns of Audience Interpretation Identified from Comment Analysis*

Pattern	Description
Scholarly-ideological verification	Audiences question sanad and affiliation before accepting authority claims, showing that traditional verification logic persists despite the changed medium
Personalization of the figure	Interest in creators' personal lives, showing that digital authority is shaped by emotional-psychological dimensions
Comparison and network mapping	Audiences actively compare creators against their own values
Social function as collective identity	Da'wah content is consumed as a shared symbol of identity
Contestation as a testing ground	Particularly evident with the textual-literalist creator; controversy expands the reach of attention

Note. Compiled from analysis of more than 12,000 comments across the five creators' content

Institutional Perspectives

Interviews with twelve Islamic leaders and academics reveal an ambivalent perspective. Most informants acknowledge that digital platforms have become an unavoidable arena, yet a consistent concern emerges regarding “instant da’wah,” the simplification of complex religious messages at the expense of theological depth.

Informants from pesantren backgrounds display caution toward short-video platforms while acknowledging that their institutions are beginning to develop a more systematic digital presence, an institutional dilemma: rejecting algorithmic systems risks irrelevance, yet uncritical acceptance may compromise institutional authority. Informants from national organizations cite initiatives to train young preachers to

produce digital content still rooted in traditional scholarly authority, a hybridization strategy combining institutional legitimacy with digital production competence.

Analytical Schema: Multi-Mechanism Authority Interaction

This research proposes an analytical schema visualizing digital Islamic authority as the outcome of dynamic interaction among three mechanisms: content creators' rhetorical strategies (message production), platform algorithmic logic (distribution-visibility), and audiences' interpretive frameworks (reception-evaluation). The three mutually shape one another: creators' strategies adapt to algorithmic logic while still accounting for audiences' demands for institutional legitimacy; algorithms reinforce visibility based on metrics that are themselves shaped by audiences' interpretive frameworks; while audiences' interpretive frameworks are shaped by institutional tradition yet continue to adapt to algorithmically selected content.

This tripartite interaction explains why Indonesian digital Islamic authority cannot be reductively understood as either the "replacement" of traditional authority by algorithmic authority or the "total resistance" of traditional authority to algorithmic pressure, but rather as an ongoing negotiation whose outcome varies according to platform, content type, and audience characteristics.

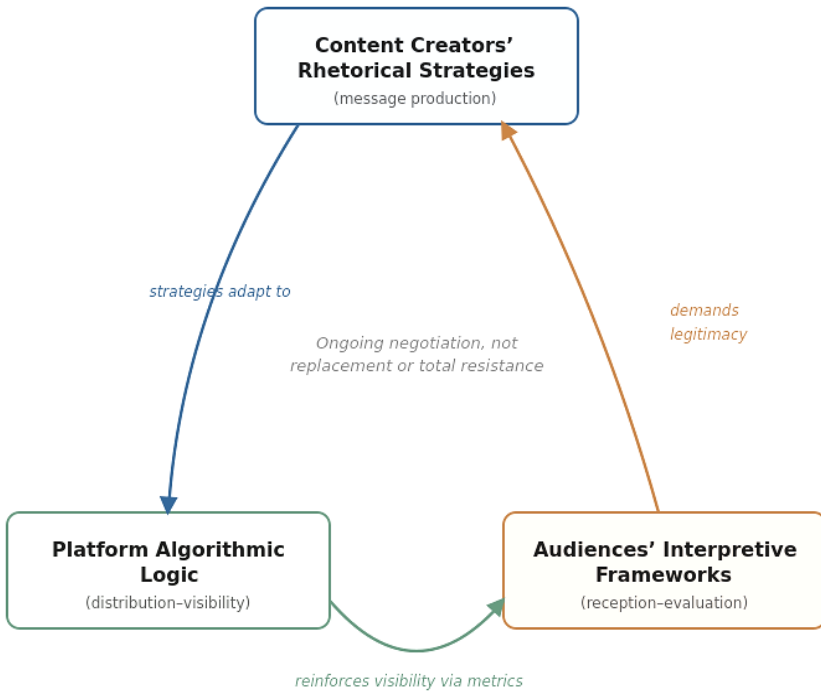


Figure 1. *Tripartite Interaction Model of Digital Islamic Authority*

The three mechanisms content creators' rhetorical strategies, platform algorithmic logic, and audiences' interpretive frameworks mutually shape one another, producing an ongoing negotiation rather than the replacement or total resistance of traditional authority by algorithmic systems.

5. DISCUSSION

This research examines how Indonesian Islamic influencers construct authority in algorithmically mediated digital space and how audiences navigate digital authority in relation to institutionally rooted Islamic tradition. Findings reveal that Islamic authority in digital environments emerges through dynamic negotiation among content creators' authority strategies, algorithmic amplification mechanisms, and audiences' interpretive frameworks.

Algorithms as Active Participants in Authority Construction

A significant finding of this research is that algorithmic systems function as active participants in authority construction, not merely a neutral channel. This finding reinforces Gillespie's (2010) argument concerning algorithmic authority as a legitimation mechanism that appears technical yet carries profound ideological consequences: democratizing access to religious knowledge while also creating a systematic bias that privileges emotional resonance over theological depth.

This bias is not a technical accident but a structural consequence of platform business logic optimized to maximize engagement, creating "algorithmic stratification" distinguished by visibility rather than formal credentials, consistent with broader findings that negatively valenced content receives higher engagement across domains. What distinguishes this research is its emphasis on how Indonesian religious audiences respond to this bias: contrary to deterministic predictions, audiences display sophisticated interpretive capacity, frequently and skeptically questioning the institutional legitimacy of algorithmically amplified content.

Audience Agency and the Limits of Algorithmic Determinism

Audiences retain substantial agency, drawing on institutional knowledge to evaluate content rather than accepting algorithmic amplification as a certification of authority. This finding carries important implications for the debate over technological determinism in platform studies: as emphasized by ANT, agency is distributed among the actors within a network, yet this does not mean that non-human actors possess full determination over social outcomes.

The pattern of scholarly-ideological verification consistently found in audience comments shows that the basic logic of authority verification in the Islamic tradition persists

despite the changed medium, consonant with Alatas's (2021) framework of articulative labor. However, this agency should not be romanticized, given that controversy, which should weaken problematic authority claims, instead frequently expands the reach of attention, a paradox in which audiences' critical skepticism may inadvertently contribute to further amplification.

Implications for Islamic Institutions and Platform Governance

Islamic institutions cannot simply reject algorithmic systems, as doing so risks irrelevance, yet uncritical acceptance may compromise institutional authority. Interview findings, in which informants cite initiatives to train young preachers to produce digital content rooted in traditional scholarly authority, show that such hybridization strategies have already developed organically within some Indonesian Islamic institutions.

This research also offers implications for platform design: designers should attend to how algorithmic systems shape the construction of religious authority, developing transparency mechanisms that allow audiences to understand why particular content is recommended to them. Without such transparency, there is a risk that religious audiences will uncritically interpret purely commercial algorithmic decisions as spiritually meaningful, blurring the boundary between substantive religious legitimacy and commercial engagement optimization.

Positioning the Findings within the Broader Scholarly Landscape

In contrast to Lohlker and Wahid (2026), who used semantic search data to map global public perception, this research employs a more immersive netnographic approach with a focus on Indonesia. The two approaches complement one

another: their typology of public search clusters, scholarly-ideological verification, personalization of the figure, comparison-networking, the social function of content, and controversy as a testing ground, converges strikingly with the five patterns of audience interpretation identified independently in this research through comment analysis, reinforcing the validity that these patterns represent a robust phenomenon rather than a mere methodological artifact.

This research differs in its emphasis on the specific institutional friction within Indonesia, consistent with glocalization theory. This research also nuances the argument concerning religious filter bubbles (Andok, 2023): although fragmentation is observed, particularly among the textual-literalist creator's audience, audiences simultaneously display the capacity to cross filter-bubble boundaries through active comparison among authoritative figures.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

A focus on five creators with large audiences means that authority dynamics at a smaller scale remain uncovered. A focus on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok means that messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram, which operate under a different distributional logic, have not been analyzed. The 18-month temporal window does not allow for a longitudinal analysis of the evolution of institutional strategy. Future research should extend the analysis across additional religious traditions and geographic contexts, examine institutional responses longitudinally, and engage directly with platform algorithm developers.

6. CONCLUSION

This article examined how Islamic authority emerges in algorithmic contexts, showing that authority in digital environments is constituted through ongoing negotiation

among algorithmic systems, content creators' authority strategies, audiences' interpretive frameworks, and institutional traditions. This research contributes to religious studies, Islamic studies, platform studies, and media scholarship by illuminating how religious authority functions in algorithmic contexts while highlighting the importance of attending to institutional specificity, audience agency, and the active role of technical systems.

The findings of this research challenge technological determinism while taking seriously how algorithmic systems shape the possibilities and constraints of religious authority. Religious communities possess agency in interpreting and responding to algorithmic systems, yet this agency operates under conditions not entirely of the community's own choosing. Understanding this dialectical relationship requires careful attention to specific institutional contexts, avoiding both naive technological utopianism and reflexive institutional conservatism.

Three principal contributions can be identified. First, theoretically, this research extends Weberian authority typology by proposing algorithmic authority as a fourth legitimation mechanism that interacts hybridly with the three classical types, while showing how Alatas's framework of articulative labor can be productively applied to understand the transformation of the sunnah-intermediary-community relationship in digital contexts. Second, methodologically, this research demonstrates the value of a multi-method design combining netnography, algorithmic analysis, audience interpretation analysis, and institutional interviews. Third, empirically, this research provides granular evidence concerning the interaction between algorithmic bias and audience agency within the Indonesian Islamic context, a

context thus far underrepresented in algorithmic authority scholarship still dominated by Western Christian case studies.

Ultimately, the transformation of Islamic authority in algorithmic space is not a story of linear replacement, from traditional authority toward digital authority, but a story of negotiation that is complex, contextual, and ongoing. Understanding this negotiation adequately requires scholarship willing to resist the temptation to simplify this complexity into a single narrative, whether optimistic regarding the democratization of religious knowledge or pessimistic regarding the erosion of traditional authority by commercial platform logic. A richer and analytically more useful reality lies between these two poles, in a space of negotiation continuously inhabited by content creators, algorithms, audiences, and religious institutions that continue to adapt to one another.

7. REFERENCES

- Alatas, I. F. (2021). *What is religious authority? Cultivating Islamic communities in Indonesia*. Princeton University Press.
- Andok, M. (2023). Religious filter bubbles in digital environments. *Religions*, 14(11), 1359. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14111359>
- Arifianto, A. R. (2020). Rising Islamism and the struggle for Islamic authority in post-Reformasi Indonesia. *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia*, 8, 37–50. <https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2019.10>
- Astor, A., Khir-Allah, G., & Martinez-Cuadros, R. (2024). Anonymity and digital Islamic authority. *Religions*, 15(12), 1507. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15121507>
- Beta, A. R. (2019). Commerce, piety and politics: Indonesian young Muslim women’s groups as religious influencers. *New Media & Society*, 21(10), 2140–2159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819838774>
- Burhani, A. N. (2012). Al-Tawassut wa-l i’tidal: The NU and moderatism in Indonesian Islam. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 40(5–6), 564–581. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685314-12341262>
- Campbell, H. A. (2013). *Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in new media worlds*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203076910>
- Costello, L., McDermott, M., & Wallace, R. (2017). Netnography: Range of practices, misperceptions, and missed opportunities. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917700647>

- Fakhrullah, A., Bakti, A. F., Hermansah, T., & Fanshoby, M. (2023). The salafi da'wa movement in Jakarta from the perspective of media glocalization. *IJISH: International Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities*, 6(2), 113–130. <https://doi.org/10.26555/ijish.v6i2.8728>
- Gillespie, T. (2010). The politics of platforms. *New Media & Society*, 12(3), 347–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809342738>
- Hannan, A., & Mursyidi, A. F. (2023). Social media and the fragmentation of religious authority among Muslims in contemporary Indonesia. *Digital Muslim Review*, 1(2), 84–104. <https://doi.org/10.32678/dmr.v1i2.10>
- Hoover, S. M. (2016). *The media and religious authority*. Penn State University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780271072388>
- Kozinets, R. V. (2012). Marketing netnography: Prom/ot(ulgat)ing a new research method. *Methodological Innovations Online*, 7(1), 37–45. <https://doi.org/10.4256/mio.2012.004>
- Latour, B. (2007). *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*. Oxford University Press.
- Li, Y., Cheng, Z., & Gil de Zúñiga, H. (2025). TikTok's political landscape: Examining echo chambers and political expression dynamics. *New Media & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448251339755>
- Livingstone, S. (2004). Media literacy and the challenge of new information technologies. *The Communication Review*, 7(1), 3–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714420490280152>
- Lohlker, R., & Wahid, S. H. (2026). The transformation of Islamic religious authority. *Religions*, 17(4), 493. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel17040493>

- Ma'rufah, H. (2023). The transformation of religious authority in the era of new media: Analyzing disparities in opportunities between female and male ulama in the Nahdlatul Ulama online media. *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif*, 18(1), 63–88. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsr.v18i1.2956>
- Reinis, S., & Laughlin, C. (2025). “God is my sponsored ad!! My algorithm!”: The spiritual algorithmic imaginary and Christian TikTok. *New Media & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448251315128>
- Tsuria, R. (2021). Digital media: When God becomes everybody—the blurring of sacred and profane. *Religions*, 12(2), 110. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020110>
- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology* (G. Roth & C. Wittich, Eds.). University of California Press.
- Zaid, B., Fedtke, J., Shin, D. D., El Kadoussi, A., & Ibahrine, M. (2022). Digital Islam and Muslim millennials: How social media influencers reimagine religious authority and Islamic practices. *Religions*, 13(4), 335. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040335>