

# Social Media and the Fragmentation of Religious Authority among Muslims in Contemporary Indonesia

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## Abstract

This study examines the massive use of social media, its role, and its influence on splitting religious authority among internal Muslims in contemporary Indonesia. There are two research questions raised in this study: how is the existence and reality of the popularity of Indonesian Muslims amid the rapid development of social media? How does religious authority within Indonesian Muslims experience fragmentation and the massive use of social media? This study is a netnographic research based on qualitative research. Two types and sources of data are used: primary data in the form of text, visual videos, and images obtained from several social media, especially Instagram and YouTube. In addition, there is also secondary data in the form of statistical data and literature. After analysing field data based on the perspective of Max Weber's authority theory, this study found that the massive use of social media among Indonesian Muslims today has triggered the birth of various new religious realities, one of which is the division of religious authority. In Indonesia, this fragmentation is marked by the weakening of the existence and influence of earlier Islamic clergy groups and, simultaneously, the emergence of contemporary clergy members with stronger allure and influence. The latter are popular as millennial ustadz, have a populist style, and are known to be quite active in campaigning for religious activities on online-based social media channels.

## Keywords:

Social media, fragmentation of religious authority, Muslims in contemporary Indonesia



## Introduction

Information media technology has developed rapidly in the last two decades. If previously the process of conveying messages and information was carried out by the community through the use of rudimentary communication facilities, now the process of disseminating information has experienced quite a leap forward. Communication processes and activities no longer rely on conventional information channels (old media) such as magazines, newspapers, radio, and the most sophisticated ones at that time were analogue radio and television (Nurfittria, 2023). The situation has changed significantly, transforming in a more modern and up-to-date direction by using internet networks and digitization, or what is currently popularly known as social media. Interestingly, apart from influencing the space and social activities of the community in terms of communication or social relations, the emergence of social media has also influenced other social dimensions outside of it, including the religious dimension, which incidentally is believed by the community as a holy and sacred reality (Annazilli, 2018).

At the religious level, the influence of internet-based and digital technology and information media is felt along with the emergence of religious disruption. On many occasions, religion and its values, teachings, and ritual practices have undergone quite drastic—not to say radical—changes. In the value aspect, the construction of piety and religiosity which is synonymous with the world of ethics, has shifted to the world of aesthetics. Good and bad are no longer a communal abstraction based on classical texts but have been replaced by a popular social media symbol. In this situation, people's understanding of the meaning of the sacredness of rituals is no longer rigid and exclusive, as shown by the previous society, but has shifted to a new and contemporary direction. Places of public worship, such as mosques, churches, and prayer rooms, are slowly transforming. Switching places to empty spaces in digital platforms (Helland, 2005; Rozaki, 2013). This is also the case with religious authority, the concept of authority previously centralised in certain circles or groups as mass organisations. Now the map has changed since the presence of modern religious actors. At this limit, the concept of authority also undergoes a cultural transformation from what used to be traditional to modern (Bittarello, 2008).

At the academic level, discussions around the phenomenon of shifting religious authority among Muslims in Indonesia have been carried out, some of which came from Saifuddin Zuhri Qudsy (2019), Arnis Rachmadhani (2021), and Mutohharun Jinan (2021). According to him, the division of religious authority among contemporary Muslims is necessary. No one can stop its existence. With all its sophistication and dynamics, social media has changed the relationship pattern of Muslims. Unfortunately, according to him, this shift phenomenon tends to be ignored and not given much attention. Consequently, the negative effect is that Muslim society is still trapped in classic problems such as internal conflicts that lead to acts of violence, discrimination, and even terror among people because they have not been fully successful in managing the diversity of authorities that are born quickly and suddenly. That Islamic authority has caused internal turmoil has

been clearly confirmed as new religious actors have emerged, whose existence often reaps pros and cons (Jinan, 2021; Rachmadhani, 2021; Zuhri Qudsy, 2019). In their study, Eko Saputra and Fadhli (2020) emphasised that these new religious actors emerged with paradigms and cultures that were not only different but also contrasting, so they often sparked debates, and even contradictions in society (Saputra, 2020).

However, even though studies on the fragmentation of religious authority have been carried out, it is still important and interesting because it has significantly impacted people's lives not only in the religious context but also in other social, cultural, economic, and even political realms (Huda et al., 2021). As for it, it is quite interesting because the parties involved in it are mostly new religious actors who incidentally have a much lower level of knowledge and religious insight than previous religious actors. But, thanks to their (new religious actors) abilities and skills in branding themselves in the social media space, this group has succeeded in controlling and winning the struggle for religious authority in contemporary Muslim society, both online and offline (Budiawan, 2020; Lyansari, 2022). Based on these facts, this writing is very fundamentally carried out to enrich the latest scientific and socio-religious studies, especially regarding the fragmentation of Islamic authority amid the proliferation of digital-based information technology and media (disruption).

As for the methodology, this study uses a qualitative approach with two methods: observation methods on social media and discourse analysis. This method is used to understand and interpret a variety of religious phenomena, especially the phonemes of shifts in religious authority, which have been circulating on social media along with all kinds of discourses that have developed in it. Second, the visual netnographic method, Cristine Hine (2016) states that visual ethnography is a method aimed at conducting in-depth investigations of various religious realities in the internet world (Hine, 2000). In addition to investigating the subject side, in this case, the user, visual ethnography also examines all the dynamics and some of the implications that arise from it. In this study, the visual ethnographic method was used to observe, investigate, and analyse the social media accounts of some Islamic religious actors, both former and current religious actors. Look for patterns and analyse how they transmit their existence and influence to the Muslim community in contemporary Indonesia. To make this study focused, the researcher limits the discussion of this article to answering two questions: how is the existence and reality of Indonesian Muslims amidst the massive use of social media? What is the role of social media in shifting religious authority among Muslims in Indonesia today?

## **Social Media as a Contemporary Phenomenon**

The global community is facing the rapid development of information media technology. In a very short and fast period, technology and all its products have made significant advances, bringing about fundamental changes to people's lives on all fronts (Stonehouse & Konina, 2020). Not long ago, the world community adapted to the emergence of In-

dustry 4.0. Now they also have to make adjustments to welcome the presence of Society 5.0, which is considered far more challenging and potentially threatens human existence (Deguchi et al., 2020). In this era, humans will coexist with information media technology. Today's various tools or technology products have become popular media, even a primary need for daily activities (Deguchi et al., 2020; Fukuyama, 2018).

In many developed and developing countries, one of the markers of the presence of the 5.0 era is the massive revolution at the level of the information media industry. In this revolution, there was a radical change in the world of communication and all its activities (Sugiono, 2021). If previously information transfer activities were more mobile or operated in conventional ways, using paper materials in the form of newspapers or newspapers and utilising echo chambers and frequencies in the form of radio and television, now the information media technology industry is undergoing a far more advanced and complex transformation (Verhoef et al., 2021). Through its sophistication and superiority, information media technology no longer functions as a mere communication medium but has evolved as a cultural incubator, rapidly changing global society's order (Fasya, 2020).

In this limitation, Anthony Giddens' grand thesis (in Navarro, 2020) about modernism and all its products—science and information media technology—as a phenomenon of a big giant machine (juggernaut), is slowly but surely finding its truth. Global culture is increasingly flowing to all sectors and elements of people's life without exception, leading to human religious mindsets and behaviour toward a variety of new realities (Navarro, 2020). In this situation, technology, along with all its sophistication and superiority, has controlled and changed the order of life in society on all fronts, starting from the economic, educational, and political order, even in personal and sacred life (Siles et al., 2021). Religion is experiencing a digitalization process in many aspects, so it inevitably creates new consequences, including the changing perspective and construction among adherents of how religious conceptions are now interpreted and practiced as daily worship rituals. Previously synonymous with traditionalism and personal sacred meanings, religion has shifted to more modern ways, contains an artistic dimension, and has even become a kind of public consumption displayed in public spaces (Syahputra, 2016).

On the one hand, some people view this shift as an anomaly. Religion contains the meaning of sacredness and has a set of divine teachings that should be positioned differently from profane activism outside of itself. The meaning of sacredness, sanctity, magical power, and the majesty of religion will be present when adherents place their religious understanding and behaviour in a normative and traditionalist manner, as in classical religious texts (Ahmed & Bashirov, 2020). Therefore, in their view and understanding, when religion and all its dimensions are interpreted and actualised in contemporary ways, different from what was in previous texts and traditions, it is understood as a form of deviation from its origin. It could even be a form of religious absurdity which can reduce the degree of sanctity and sacredness of religion (Hannan, 2022). In Indonesia, there are many groups with this view. The majority are followers of conservative schools who have a relatively rigid understanding. In contemporary religious discourse, conservatism is understood by

many as a religious paradigm that tends to defend pure doctrines in the sense that they have been practiced and adhered to for hundreds of years. In the academic world, conservatism is understood as a paradigm of classical religious thinking and behaviour that tries to adhere to the teachings of the classical scriptures, which are believed to be the truest and purest references (Mudzakkir, 2017).

Meanwhile, different views come from the ranks of progressive Islam, which in terms of thought and religious perspective, has a more flexible and contextual thinking tradition. Information media technology has a special dimension that allows religion to take up space in it so that its existence can play a strategic role and help people make it easier to carry out their daily activities, including religious activities (Sanda et al., 2017). In today's situation, when the global community has considerable dependence on information technology, where more and more social interactions occur in social media channels, religion must take part so that religion still exists and survives in contemporary society (Deuraseh et al., 2011). In Indonesia, it is common for religious groups with this kind of dynamic thinking tendency to emerge from the modernist circle. Almost all religions, including Islam, have this group (Suryanti, nd).

However, apart from the debates and pros and cons above, it must be admitted that religion and its dimensions have been shrinking in the last decade due to the rapid penetration of information media technology. Among internal Muslims in Indonesia today, digital penetration of religion has succeeded in producing new realities. New Islamic phenomena occasionally emerge with different styles and characters than before. One of the contemporary Islamic phenomena that attracts the attention and attention of many groups today is the shift in religious authority (Muttaqin, 2012). If, in the past, the pattern and structure of Islamic authority appeared normative and centralised to certain groups and forces under the domination of communal organisations and movements, now the direction and form have changed with the emergence of new and contemporary religious actors. An explanation regarding the phenomenon of shifting religious authority among internal Muslims in Indonesia, the author will explain in more detail and depth in the next sub-discussion.

## **From Traditional Religious Actors to Millennial Actors**

The millennial Muslim religious learning tradition, which currently takes more place in the online world than offline, has directly encouraged contemporary religious actors to take place in the digital world, utilising social media to spread religious da'wa (Kartina Sari, 2020). Through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, they carry out their da'wa vision to the whole community, especially Muslim netizen groups (millennial generation, Z generation, and Alpha generation) — who incidentally are known as the most active generation using internet services (Mutia Annur, 2022).

Contemporary religious actors, there are quite interesting findings when we measure the extent to which the Muslim community in Indonesia responds to their presence in the current religious dynamics. There is quite a wide gap regarding their recognition and

preference for religious figures between today's religious figures (millennial, Z, and alpha generations) and traditional religious figures boomers-baby bust ) (Mujahadah, 2020). Although no statistical data is available, the gap or distance in popularity can be tracked clearly and openly on both social media accounts. For example, the number of followers, likes, and a row of contemporary religious actors quantitatively dominates friendships.

In line with the thesis above, the results of searching field data show that the religious actors with the highest number of jamaah (followers) are currently dominated by today's religious groups. At the top of the list is the famous millennial ustadz Hanan Attaki with 9.3 million followers, followed by Abdul Somad (6.9 million), Felix Siauw (5.1 million), Adi Hidayat (3.9 million) and a young preacher who has just risen to fame, Syam al-Marusy (1.6 million). In the case of Hanan Attaki, his popularity as a preacher nowadays can be tracked not only on his Instagram account but also on other social media accounts such as Youtube and Facebook. Even the figure of a famous preacher in the same class as Abdullah Gymnastiar (AA Gym) is still less popular. The number of followers is one level below Hanan Attaki's (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Contemporary religious actors**  
**based on the number of followers on Instagram accounts**

No	Religious Actors	Number of Followers
1	Hanan Attaki	9.3 million
2	Abdus Somad	6.9 million
3	Felix Siauw	5.1 million
4	Adi Hidayat	3.9 million
5	Syam al-Marusy	1.6 million

Source: Instagram Account (12/2022)

In contrast with the above data, the level of popularity of previous religious actors with the ownership of the number of followers on social media is much lower, like Quraish Shihab, a renowned Muslim scholar in the field of Qur'anic exegesis. The latest data shows his Instagram followers were around 302 thousand. Likewise, the current vice president KH Ma'ruf Amin has 455 thousand Instagram followers, the former leader of the Nahdatul Ulama Executive Board (2010-2016, 2016-2022) KH. Said Aqil Siroj has 120 thousand Instagram followers. Even the general chairpersons of Indonesia's two largest Islamic organisations, Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, their popularity on social media is still far behind that of contemporary religious actors. For example, Prof. Haedar Nashir, chairman of Muhammadiyah (2015-2022 and 2022-2027) with 41 thousand followers;

Gus Yahya Cholil Staquf as General Chairperson of the Nahdatul Ulama Executive Board (2022-2027) with a total of 37 thousand followers (see Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Traditional Religious Actors Based on Number of Followers on Instagram Accounts**

No	Religious Actors	Number of Followers
1	Prof. DR. KH Ma'ruf Amin	455 thousand
2	Prof. Dr. Muhammad Quraish Shihab, MA	302 thousand
3	Prof. Dr. KH. Said Aqil Siraj, M.A	120 thousand
4	Prof. Haedar Nasir	41 thousand
5	KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf	37 thousand

Source: Instagram Account (12/2022)

Based on the description above, one interesting question arises that needs to be raised in this study: why does the existence of modern religious actors attract more public interest than traditional religious groups? This question may be somewhat paradoxical and difficult to explain, bearing in mind that religious actors have more self-tested capacity than modern ustadz or preachers. At least this thesis can be proven by the fact that they spent years receiving religious education in Islamic boarding schools. The depth and breadth of their religious knowledge are tested and can be proven by their religious books. This fact is inversely proportional to the number of present-day preachers with minimal religious education experience in Islamic boarding schools.

Therefore, the question of why the existence of millennial religious actors such as Han-an Attaki and Felix Siauww have a higher level of popularity than previous religious actors cannot be explained simply by using the variable religion. Beyond that, another explanatory variable is much more relevant and substantial, namely social media. The increasingly sloping existence of former religious actors and the increasing popularity rating of contemporary preachers among Muslim communities in Indonesia at this time have a strong correlation with their style of da'wa which has been actively operating in the new media space, especially popular social media channels with platforms digital (Sharif & Hannan, 2021).

## **Other Currents of Fragmentation of Muslim Authority in Indonesia, from Communal to Personal**

Currently, the total population of Indonesia reaches 275.52 million people, of which 86.88 per cent, or the equivalent of 236.53 million people, are Muslim (Annur, 2023). In terms of Internet use, a survey by the Association of Indonesian Internet Service Providers

stated that as much as 78.19% of Indonesia's total population are active Internet users, with the preferences of the majority of active users being the netizen generation (millennials, Z, and alpha) (Yati, 2023). The fact that as many as 78.19 per cent of Indonesia's population are active internet users directly shows how information media technology has now become an integral part of the life of Muslim communities in Indonesia, including religious life (Kusnandar, 2021). This thesis is confirmed in research, which states that as many as 58 per cent of Muslims in Indonesia prefer to look for religious references online, with the YouTube platform as the most visited reference channel (Soraya, 2020). This finding is also reinforced by a study conducted by Suci Ramadhanti Febriani and Ayu Desrani (2021), that out of a total of 39 respondents from the millennial Muslim group aged 19-25 years, 87.2% claimed to study religion from the internet, especially Youtube (Febriani & Desrani, 2021).

In line with the changing culture of the Muslim religion in Indonesia today, a similar situation also occurs in the flow of power and domination. In the past, when old media dominated the stage of public religious narratives, the map of power and influence of religious discourse was under the domination of cultural currents, especially religious groups or organisations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, the two largest Islamic organisations in Indonesia which so far have a mass audience or followers of the dominant trough (Burhani, 2016). But now, when social media with digital platforms is growing rapidly and taking its place amid Muslim activities in Indonesia, the map of the strength and influence of religious discourse has shifted quite drastically. The current religious dominance at the organisational level is weakening, and at the same time, there is strengthening at the personal level as the emergence of contemporary (modern) religious actors, currently popularly known as ustadz or millennial preachers (Hadiz, 2018).

As for sociologically, the pattern of movements or changes in currents of domination among internal Muslims in contemporary Indonesia is clearly illustrated by the strengthening position and influence of contemporary Muslim religious actors, who on several occasions have gained more place in society than previous Islamic actors. The real portrait of this shifting phenomenon can be traced to major political events, Actions to Defend Islam I, II, and III, which took place on 14 October 2016, 4 November 2016, and 2 December 2016. In the discourse of power fragmentation or domination of religious discourse in Indonesia, the Action movement Defending Islam is one of the most representative events to observe how the fragmentation of religious power occurs in Indonesia (Burhani, 2016; Diprose et al., 2019). This current fragmentation shifted from the communal power of religious organisations, shifted places to the personal space played by the *kekiknian* (contemporary) religious actors. In this case, the term communal power refers to the two largest organisational axes of power in Indonesia, namely NU and Muhammadiyah, which at that time institutionally took a stance against mass mobilization during Actions to Defend Islam I, II, and III. Unfortunately, even though the two chose to disagree, their followers did not fully agree upon the appeals and institutional announcements. Instead of heeding it, the reality was the opposite. Some NU and Muhammadiyah members ignored the call.

They prefer to jump in and take part in the march of the action movement at Monas, under the command of contemporary religious actors such as Habib Rizieq Shihab, Abdullah Gymnastiar, Yusuf Mansyur, Arifin Ilham, Bachtiar Nasir, and Zaitun Rasmin (Ahyar & Alfitri, 2019).

Learning from several events in the last decade, especially after the explosion of various discourses and religious movements at every moment of general elections in Indonesia, the Islamic Defense Action, for example, the polarisation of religious discourse in Indonesia into cyberspace based on internet networks, is not without problems. Moreover, as we all understand, social media in Indonesia is still thick with false information (hoaxes) and has even become one of the main channels or incubators of extremist teachings and movements. The concern about going there is very justified. The findings of the State Intelligence Agency (BIN) reveal that as many as 85 per cent of the millennial generation is an age group that is vulnerable to exposure to teachings of radicalism (Indonesia, 2021b; Nasrudin Yahya, 2021). This finding is also reinforced by data from the National Counterterrorism Agency (BPNT), which states that generations Z and Y are the groups most vulnerable to exposure to terrorist teachings, which in recent years have begun to spread massively on social media (Indonesia, 2021a, 2021 ). Certainly, not a single contributing factor, but a study conducted by Sugihartati (2020) states that the entry of the Muslim generation above into zones prone to extremism and radicalism has a strong correlation with their less critical thinking traditions, tending to receive basic information, without first make check-check efforts (Rahma Sugihartati et al., 2020). In the Indonesian context, this finding is a threat and a very serious challenge, bearing in mind that currently, the religious paradigm of Indonesian society tends to be produced from the internet, which in recent years has been vulnerable to being infiltrated by fake news and slander (hoaxes, fake news).

## **Various Types and Nature of Authorities: a Theoretical Reading**

In Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (Big Indonesian Dictionary), authority means legal power given to institutions in society that enable officials to carry out their functions; the right to act; power; authority; the right to take action or the right to make rules to order others (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) Online, 2023). Referring to this understanding, the terminology of religious authority is closely related to the authority possessed by certain individuals or groups in the context of carrying out the social functions and roles of religion toward their surroundings. The concept of religion has certain elements or scopes that are normative, so understanding of it is often reduced to exclusive meanings and understandings. Perhaps this is why in many discussions about religious authority, the idea of who has the real authority is often called God himself.

As for terminology, the definition of authority came from Max Weber (1864-1920). In his scholarly discourse on social sciences, Weber gave a fairly detailed review of the concept of authority. According to him, authority is not a single entity. It exists in society in various

types and patterns (Spencer, 1970). Weber grouped authority into three types: traditional authority, charismatic authority, and legal/rational authority. Weber's division of authority is a sociological reflection of (political) leadership typologies in society (Weber, 2006). In its development, this concept is then used as a basis for most academics to analyse authority discourse in a broader and more detailed scope, both at the practical and theoretical levels, because it is impossible to exclude the term leadership from the concept of authority or authority. Leadership talks about a model or style of how a person influences reality outside of himself. Meanwhile, authority refers to rights and the existence of legitimacy that allows a person to transmit influence or even impose his will (Rigby, 1966).

The important thing that needs to be explained here is that Weber built his conception of authority based on what he called legitimate *herrschaft*, or what he interpreted as legitimate power or domination. According to him, legitimate *herrschaft* refers to the ability to condition individuals or groups externally and into their community (Houghton, 2010). In Weber's view, the most basic criterion for legitimate *herrschaft* is the emergence of a form of submission to consciousness or collectivity, whether the practice of submission is carried out by force or voluntarily (Blau, 1963). This is where the concept of legitimate *herrschaft* offered by Weber finds its uniqueness because, according to him, the most basic keywords about authority do not only refer to the ability to enforce discipline and the use of sanctions is structural in nature, but sometimes it is subtle or persuasive by exploiting the culture of society at the grassroots level (read: Gramsci's hegemony) (Ritser, 2010).

In other literary sources, Khaled Abou el-Fadl divides authority based on its nature into two, coercive authority and persuasive authority. In the first type, authority is based on the ability and ability to direct others to follow rules or laws. Typically, this type of authority is accompanied by coercion, inducement, or even threats in the form of sanctions (Lathif, 2019). At the practical level, this type of authority is generally used in formal institutions, sourced from government political power, and complemented by legal instruments and normative regulations. Conversely, in the persuasive type, authority is defined as the ability to influence and attract the attention of others based on ideological elements and cultural dimensions. This category includes elements of self-knowledge and charisma (Zainuddin, 2019). Referring to this understanding, it seems clear that Khaled Abou el-Fadl's above conception has little in common with Weber's conception, especially regarding the definition of persuasive authority, which both contain charismatic and religious elements (Iqbal Juliansyahzen, 2019 ).

Apart from the conceptions of the two figures above, there are other sources of literature, which according to the researcher's view, are more relevant and possible to answer the definitive need for the meaning or understanding of religious authority. This definition comes from Marc Gaborieau (in Mutohharun Jinan. 2012). According to him, religious authority is the right to carry out and order rules deemed following God's will. The mention of the term rights here presupposes the existence of authority and power based on certain laws and regulations (Jinan, 2021). Thus, those with religious authority are parties who legally have the legitimacy to make decisions and carry out orders against others. The

big question now is, exactly which party (religious [understanding] figures, religious mass organisations, and government religious institutions) has the most authority to carry out the role of religious (Islamic) authority in Indonesia? At first glance, this question seems normative, and the directions and answers seem simple and predictable. The majority will probably answer that the most authoritative party in matters of religion (Islam) is the religious institution itself, which legitimately has clear and strong legal instruments, the Ministry of Religion.

However, in the context of Islam in Indonesia, the question of religious authority is not that simple. Moreover, as we all understand, Indonesia has a plural typology, plural and full of diversity, including religion (Anwar et al., 2023). Consequently, the discourse has been very dynamic so far, and in many situations, it has often been stuck in a 'gray' area. It is called so because every religion and its understandings and organisations have authoritative standards and institutions. Consequently, it is common for differences to occur in viewing and deciding certain religious cases, thus triggering a debate among adherents. And now, when religion and its dimensions are digitalised along with the massive use of social media in society, discourses around religious authority are increasingly blurred, becoming sumptuous and difficult to digest (Noor, 2012). At this point, religious authority, which should be a controlling institution, a source of creating a safe, peaceful, and calm society, has finally reversed direction.

## **Social Media and Shifting Islamic Authority in Contemporary Indonesia: An Analysis**

Two interesting basic questions are raised in this sub-discussion: how to understand the concept of religious authority during the rapid flow of information and the current development of social media? Who is the party or group most deserving of being called the holder of Islamic authority at a time when religious discourse is experiencing polarisation and multidirectional resonance as it is now? Before answering these two questions, perhaps it is necessary to formulate the definition of social media itself. This is important to present a comprehensive description and understanding of the focus of the research problems raised in this study.

From the perspective of communication science, social media is defined as an information device with a digital platform that provides various tools and facilities for carrying out social activities, especially in terms of establishing communication. Social media allows users to obtain services to build social interaction with the community more practically and efficiently (Aichner et al., 2021). The process of interaction and communication that is offered is also more complex and varied. It can be in the form of writing, images, text, and audio, to moving images in the form of visuals. Another advantage, social media provides information all the time. All the news and content can be accessed and distributed 24 hours daily. On social media, each user can produce certain information freely and freely so that each individual or group can position himself as the subject and object. As an object,

an individual can make news and process it, while as an object, an individual is positioned as a target, consumes news, and enjoys it as a reference in daily life (Wolf et al., 2018).

According to Dave Kapren (2011), social media has elastic and dynamic properties, quickly transforms messages from communicators to communicators, and easily implements self-adaptation systems to any situation and circumstance (Daves, 2011). Because of this elastic and dynamic nature, social media can be used by whoever, wherever, and whenever. Messages or information disseminated in media channels can touch and target every group. Based on these advantages and advantages, it is quite logical that currently, people are flocking to take advantage of social media as a medium of communication and building self-branding, including religious actors (Coletti et al., 2022). In the last decade, the use of social media as a means of preaching has been common among religious actors. The massive use of social media tools among religious actors ultimately impacts Indonesia's map or religious landscape, especially at the discourse level. The space for religious debate and contestation no longer takes place in traditional places but has shifted to virtual space or the internet in the network.

Vin Crosbie (in Mutohharun Jinan, 2021) classifies social media as the most recent type of new media in this century, a form of development and integration of previous communication media (old media). In the old media era, communication in the media generally took place in two types, interpersonal communication, and mass communication. In the first type, the message transfer process applies between individuals only, and the communication media is of an interpersonal (one-to-one) model. As for the second type, communication activities involve individuals with many people, the message conveyed can target the general public using mass media (one to many). Different from the aforementioned types of communication, social media combines both interpersonal media and mass media (many to many) (Jinan, 2021). With these complex patterns and ways of working, social media offers a variety of advantages and disadvantages, producing and reproducing messages in the forms of texts, images, sounds, and scenes simultaneously and in real time. This variety of facilities causes social media to have the sophistication of creating new realities (artificial worlds) by presenting visualisations and images beyond actual reality. On a broader dimension, social media is not only functioning to answer communication needs but also for other needs beyond it, even in the most personal and abstract realms, in matters of religion, for example.

In the context of Islamic dynamics in contemporary Indonesia, social media has encouraged the birth of new realities. This can be seen in the mindset and religious behaviour of the Muslim community today, which is produced and shaped by the media, especially with digital platforms. In studying religion, for example, when the information media was not as fast and sophisticated as it is now, most former Muslim communities studied religion in traditional ways. They come to madrasas and enter Islamic boarding schools to study classic texts such as the yellow books and the like, to study directly from religious leaders such as kyai, nyai, and ustadz (Topan & Hakim, 2023). But now, when social media is present and growing rapidly in society, the flow of digitalisation is entering all lines

of life—including religious life—and religious learning activities are also experiencing significant changes. To study religion, what is needed is only a smartphone and a computer. Then s/he enters a search engine, opens Youtube, or surfs social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Rustandi, 2020a).

Likewise, with other Islamic dimensions, almost all have experienced flexing due to the media's overflow of information and news. The language and construction of religious meanings that used to be rigid, normative, and sacred are now, along with the massive currents of digitalisation and virtualisation, changing dynamically and becoming more fluid (Mustafa, 2023). Religious references are no longer centralised to textual sources in the form of books but are fragmented into social media channels, which are not credible enough as reference sources (Lasmawan, 2019). It is the same with the concept of figurehead, the construction of an understanding of the meaning of Islamic clergy figures, which used to refer to the charisma and big names of kyai or classical clerics, has quite clear kinship paths and is connected to previous clerics or kyai, now has undergone cultural commodification. The meaning of religious figures has shifted to contemporary meanings and perspectives that are synonymous with popular figures on social media with a large number of 'congregations' of followers, appearing in a slang, fashionable and trendy style and appearance that makes them loved by many fans.

The next question is, who is the party or group most deserving to be called the holder of Islamic authority in contemporary Indonesia amid the swift flow of digitalisation of religion as it is today? Based on Max Weber and Khaled Abou el-Fadl's explanation above, the answer can be dynamic because it depends on the perspective used. If based on the principle of traditional authority, the holders of authority are conservative religious figures such as kyai or clerics known in classical Islamic literature as figures of earlier religious figures. Vice versa, if the perspective used is legal or rational authority, then the answer is special institutions in the field of religion that legally have clear and strong legitimacy. It is recorded as an institutional structure authorised to oversee religious issues.

However, it is important to underline that the two theses above are theoretical abstractions, not sociological descriptions of the current situation and conditions. Therefore, within certain limits, these two abstractions are not strong enough to be used as single reference material for photographing the situation and religious culture of Muslim communities in Indonesia today (Sutikno, 2013). This is no exception in interpreting the terminology of religious authority and all its dimensions. If we observe the religious trend of Indonesian Muslims today, it is clear that their religious pattern has been heavily influenced and shaped by what Hellend calls a digital religion (Rustandi, 2020b). Namely, a combination of the digital world and the dimension of belief so that both appear in a form that is not only different but sometimes also contradicts the previous culture or religious tradition (Afna, 2023).

In digital religion, status as a religious figure or figure is no longer determined and shaped by normative aspects such as depth of knowledge and religious works produced. However, it has changed to a symbolic direction by emphasising image and appearance,

namely popularity. In this situation, religion seems to have experienced a commodification of what should contain guiding values. As the digital culture strengthens, religion has become a spectacle. The higher the popularity rating on social media, the more he gets a special place in the audience. Therefore, it is logical that most Indonesian Muslims today, especially Muslim groups today such as the millennial generation and Generation Z, idolise more contemporary religious figures who are viral on social media than previous religious figures such as kyai or ulama (Islamic boarding schools).

In this regard, a study conducted by the Indonesian Survey Circle (LSI) agency Denny JA on 10-19 October 2018 on 1,500 respondents obtained an interesting fact that of the names of religious figures known in Indonesia today, there are five religious leaders with the highest level of influence and most people listen to their appeals. At the top is the name Ustadz Abdus Somad, known by 59.2 per cent of respondents and liked by 82.5 per cent. The second is Arifin Ilham, whose appeal was heard by 25.9 per cent of respondents and was liked by 84.4 per cent. The third rank is Yusuf Mansur, listened to by 24.9 per cent of respondents, has a popularity level of 57.2 per cent, and is liked by as many as 84.9 per cent. Fourth is Aa Gym, with a popularity rate of 69.3 per cent, and 24.9 per cent of their voices are heard. Finally, Habib Rizieq Shihab. The level of popularity is 53.4 per cent, with a liking rate of 52.9 per cent, and 17 per cent of respondents listen to their appeals (Akmaliah, 2018; Akmaliah & Burhani, 2021; Kominfo, 2020).

Thus, based on the theoretical reading above, it is clear that since social media has penetrated the lives of Indonesian Muslim communities, the concept of authority has undergone significant changes and shifts. Its construction is no longer formed from generation to generation. It is bound to previous figures, as is the concept of traditionalist authority, nor is it centralised and runs rigidly under the power of formal government institutions and institutions, as perceived by rational or legal groups. The current construction of religious authority is very flexible, dynamic, and constantly changing from time to time. At certain limits, Max Weber's conception of charismatic authority may find its truth and is still relatively relevant as a basis for photographing the dynamics of religious authority that is currently developing. However, the charismatic concept here is not ethical, as previous religious actors showed. In this perspective, charisma is more to the dimension of symbolic popularity, which is (re)produced by various social media applications and devices. In the end, along with the massive development and progress of information media technology from time to time, the construction of authority and all its dimensions has undergone a real and clear transformation. The current shift tends to lead and focus on those who are culturally able to adapt to the development of the latest information media technology. Able to do self-branding in the public space in a modern way and model (read: populist/pop culture), build image and popularity on social media channels so that he can arouse the adoration and awe of the people at the grassroots level.

## Conclusion

Three concluding points of this research are: first, social media has progressed massively and rapidly in the last two decades. The variety of sophistication and advantages offered in it have succeeded in changing the religious paradigm of the Muslim community in Indonesia, thus giving birth to a new reality in the digitalisation of religion. In general, the digitisation of religion is marked by the reduction of religion into algorithmic search engines that operate via the internet. Internet-based digital communication spaces such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram have now involuntarily become new religious places, both for study purposes and for worship rituals. Second, in its current development, social media has not only reduced religion to a digital system but also changed the construction of Indonesian Muslim understanding regarding religious authority. At the level of meaning, Indonesian Muslims currently understand religious authority no longer in the classical sense espoused by traditionalist groups but in a structural normative sense as a rational-legal approach.

Along with the massive use of social media, the construction of understanding of religious authority among Muslims in contemporary Indonesia has shifted to other elements, such as charisma and popularity. The higher his popularity rating on social media, the more he will get a special place in the audience. As for the subject level, new media has changed the orientation of the values of contemporary Indonesian Muslim figures. In the past, it was based on ethical values such as depth of knowledge, breed or ancestry, and broad religious knowledge. It has now shifted to aesthetic values through symbols and images. Therefore, in the contemporary Muslim religious tradition, the modern religious group is the most influential subject or actor in building religious discourse at the theoretical and practical levels. In Indonesia, this group is popularly known as preachers or *ustadz* today, who are generationally segmented from Muslim netizen groups (millennial generation, Z generation, and Alpha generation).

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