Transformation of religious authority in the digital era: A post-normal times analysis by Ziauddin Sardar on the phenomenon of social media da'wah

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Transformation of religious authority in the digital era: A post-normal times analysis by Ziauddin Sardar on the phenomenon of social media da'wah

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Post-normal times, religious authority, digital da'wah.

Abstract

Purpose — This study aims to analyze how digital transformation in Islam has altered the structure of religious authority, using the PostNormal Times (PNT) approach developed by Ziauddin Sardar.

Method — This research employs a qualitative-descriptive approach, analyzing the digital da'wah phenomenon, specifically social media's role in shaping religious authority.

Result — The findings indicate that the digitalization of religion has caused a shift in religious authority from the traditional hierarchy dominated by scholars and religious institutions to a popularity-based authority, where figures like celebrity preachers and Islamic influencers have become dominant. Social media facilitates the spread of da'wah, but also gives rise to phenomena such as instant fatwas, fragmentation of religious teachings, and the commodification of religion. In the Post-Normal Times framework, the uncertainty of authority increases, where algorithms and popularity replace traditional scholarly credibility.

Implication — This study has significant implications for managing digital da'wah, religious literacy, and the need for regulation to minimize negative impacts, such as spreading misinformation and oversimplifying religious teachings.

Originality/Value — This study offers an original contribution by applying the Post-Normal Times theory to analyze changes in religious authority within the context of digital da'wah, a topic not widely discussed in the literature on religion and social media.

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Kata kunci:

Zaman pasca-normal, otoritas agama, dakwah digital.

Abstrak

Tujuan - Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana transformasi digital dalam Islam telah mengubah struktur otoritas agama, menggunakan pendekatan Post-Normal Times (PNT) yang dikembangkan oleh Ziauddin Sardar.

Metode - Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatifdeskriptif, menganalisis fenomena da'wah digital, khususnya peran media sosial dalam membentuk otoritas agama.

Hasil - Temuan menunjukkan bahwa digitalisasi agama telah menyebabkan pergeseran otoritas agama dari hierarki tradisional yang didominasi oleh ulama dan lembaga agama ke otoritas berbasis popularitas, di mana figur seperti pendakwah selebriti dan influencer Islam menjadi dominan. Media sosial memfasilitasi penyebaran da'wah, tetapi juga menimbulkan fenomena seperti fatwa instan, fragmentasi ajaran agama, dan komodifikasi agama. Dalam kerangka Post-Normal Times, ketidakpastian otoritas meningkat, di mana algoritma dan popularitas menggantikan kredibilitas ulama tradisional.

Implikasi – Studi ini memiliki implikasi signifikan dalam mengelola da'wah digital, literasi agama, dan kebutuhan regulasi untuk meminimalkan dampak negatif, seperti penyebaran informasi yang salah dan penyederhanaan berlebihan ajaran agama.

Orisinalitas/Nilai – Studi ini memberikan kontribusi asli dengan menerapkan teori Post-Normal Times untuk menganalisis perubahan otoritas agama dalam konteks da'wah digital, topik yang belum banyak dibahas dalam literatur tentang agama dan media sosial.

Introduction

The development of digital media has brought significant changes to religious life. Religious authority, which was previously held by scholars, spiritual guides, and religious institutions, is now shifting toward a more dynamic and open form. Rani explains that the proliferation of digital media has radically reshaped religious authority, decentralizing it from traditional scholars and institutions to dynamic, often informal actors. Where religious legitimacy was once derived from formal education and institutional endorsement, social media platforms enable self-styled preachers, including influencers, converts, and celebrities, to amass vast followings, redefining how religious knowledge is produced and consumed (Rani, 2023).

The phenomenon of digital da'wah has gained popularity with the emergence of figures like JID | 109 Ustaz Hanan Attaki, Habib Ja'far Al Hadar, Ustaz Adi Hidayat, and Ustaz Khalid Basalamah, who have successfully reached millions of followers through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. With their light, communicative, and youth-relevant delivery styles, they have been able to convey religious values in formats that are easy to access and understand. Additionally, preachers like Felix Siauw and Dennis Lim have added a new dimension to da'wah with their backgrounds as converts, offering a unique perspective on Islamic teachings (Nawaffani, 2023).

However, this phenomenon also brings challenges, especially regarding the emergence of "sudden" preachers from among Instagram celebrities, influencers, YouTubers, and content creators who frequently appear on social media and television screens. Society must approach this phenomenon cautiously, as not all celebrity preachers have adequate religious educational backgrounds. Although the content they present is sometimes engaging, their interactions in responding to comments on social media often reveal a lack of deep understanding. Their main appeal lies in their physical appearance and rhetorical skills, which attract many young people and social media users. However, the limitations in their knowledge often lead to controversial material being shared, as seen in the statements by Teuku Wisnu and Sascia Mecca, who considered prayers for the deceased as bid'ah. This reflects their lack of in-depth understanding and ability to present arguments and evidence related to such issues (Mahmudah, 2023; Karim & Riyadi, 2024).

This phenomenon raises various questions regarding the validity and legitimacy of religious authority in the digital era. Whereas previously religious authority was determined through formal education paths and recognition by religious institutions, social media has altered how society chooses and follows its spiritual leaders. This creates uncertainty in determining who has the right to speak on behalf of religion and how the truth of religious teachings is constructed in the digital space.

Post-Normal Times (PNT), a concept developed by Ziauddin Sardar, provides a relevant theoretical framework for understanding this phenomenon. PNT describes an era marked by uncertainty, complexity, and contradictions, where the understanding of authority is no longer linear

and hierarchical but fluid and constantly evolving. In PNT, uncertainty refers to a condition where truth or authority can no longer be definitively established due to the development of various interpretations and differing perspectives (Sardar, 2010). In the religious context, this means that religious authority is no longer solely rooted in traditional institutions such as Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), Islamic universities, or religious scholars, but is also influenced by figures who gain legitimacy through digital popularity.

The complexity in PNT reflects the increasingly layered interactions between religion, politics, economics, and culture, which shape how religious authority is understood and applied in society. In the virtual world, digital platform algorithms determine who receives greater exposure, often based on popularity and user engagement, rather than academic credibility or religious scholarship (Saumantri et al., 2024). This creates a landscape where someone can gain religious authority simply by having many followers, even without a deep religious education. On the other hand, traditional scholars with profound knowledge may lose their influence due to a lack of adaptability to digital technology.

The contradictions in PNT are evident in the clash between old values and the changing times, creating paradoxes in applying religious teachings in the digital era. While the access provided by digital da'wah offers advantages in spreading religious teachings broadly, this phenomenon also increases the risks of misinformation and fragmentation of religious understanding. Globalization further accelerates this process, where Muslims from various cultural backgrounds are now connected and share views that often contradict one another.

Previous research has extensively discussed how the digitalization of religion impacts religious practices and authority. For instance, a study by Murjani (2022) revealed that new media have given rise to alternative authorities in Islam. Additionally, Fanindy & Mupida (2021) explored how extremist groups have utilized the internet to spread religious ideologies. Another study by (Ibnu Kasir & Awali, 2024) showed that digital platforms like YouTube and Instagram have become primary mediums for preachers to spread da'wah more personally and directly, transforming how Muslims access religious knowledge. According to Irmawati & Aziz Ridha (2022), the use of digital applications for worship, such as prayer reminder apps and digital Qur'ans, has altered the interaction between Muslims and their sacred texts and religious rituals, creating new dynamics in digital spirituality.

However, these works predominantly focus on descriptive analyses of platform use or ideological dissemination, neglecting the theoretical framing of authority shifts as a systemic rupture. Crucially, prior research fails to account for the non-linear, paradoxical nature of digital religious authority, a gap this study fills by employing Ziauddin Sardar's Post-Normal Times (PNT) theory. PNT's framework, centered on uncertainty, complexity, and contradiction, provides a distinct advantage over conventional theories (e.g., Habermas's public sphere or Weberian authority) by capturing digital religiosity's fluid, algorithm-driven dynamics (Sardar, 2010). For instance, where traditional theories assume hierarchical legitimacy, PNT explains how a preacher like Teuku Wisnu gains authority through viral controversy despite limited religious training

Data obtained from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2020 revealed that internet penetration in Indonesia reached 143.26 million people (54.7% of the population), with 79% accessing the internet daily. Users averaged 8 hours and 36 minutes online daily, of which 2 hours and 52 minutes were spent consuming digital content, including da'wah videos (Chudzaifah et al., 2021). These figures underscore digital media's profound influence on religious engagement in Indonesia.

This study offers a new approach by integrating the Post-Normal Times theory in analyzing the transformation of religious authority in the digital era. The research aims to identify the challenges and opportunities arising in digital da'wah and its impact on traditional religious institutions. The primary objective of this study is to analyze how religious authority is experiencing transformation in the digital era, using the Post-Normal Times perspective developed by Ziauddin Sardar. This understanding is expected to provide broader insights for academics, religious practitioners, and the general public in responding to the increasingly complex religious landscape. The shift of religious authority from traditional institutions to the digital realm may lead to a more superficial understanding of religion, as religious information is often packaged in more concise formats and tends to lose its original context.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach with a phenomenological analysis JID | 111 method to understand the transformation of religious authority in the digital era from the PostNormal Times perspective. The focus is examining how digital da'wah develops, is constructed, and influences religious legitimacy on

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social media. The research subjects include the phenomenon of religious authority on social media and patterns of user interactions in online religious discussions on digital platforms.

Data were collected through social media content analysis, examining posts, interactions, and algorithmic patterns in recommending da'wah content. The analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, identifying key themes based on the characteristics of Post-Normal Times, namely uncertainty, complexity, and contradiction. This study aims to reveal how social media shapes new religious authority and how the public navigates uncertainty in selecting religious authority figures in the digital era.

Results and Discussion

Ziauddin Sardar: A Brief Biography and His Thought

Ziauddin Sardar is a contemporary Muslim thinker known for his critical ideas on the development of the Islamic world and how Muslim civilization interacts with modernity. Born in Dipalpur, Punjab, Pakistan, on October 31, 1951, Sardar was raised in the United Kingdom and developed his intellectual career in the Western world. His life background, straddling two cultures, East and West, shaped his unique and multidimensional perspective.

Sardar's education began at City University, London, focusing on physics and information science. However, his interest in Islam and Muslim civilization led him to explore other fields of study, including political science, culture, and futures studies. His academic career began with work at the Hajj Research Centre at King Abdul Aziz University in Saudi Arabia, where he researched various aspects of the Hajj pilgrimage and the development of science and technology in the Islamic world. Since then, he has been recognized as one of the Muslim thinkers working to bridge Islam with the modern world.

His interest greatly influenced his thoughts on the future of Islamic civilization. One of his early works, *The Future of Muslim Civilisation*, highlights how Muslims must prepare for the challenges of modernity while preserving their spiritual values (Sardar, 2010). In *Islamic Futures: The Shape of Ideas to Come*, Sardar explores the possibilities the Islamic world

can take in facing the progress of the times, criticizing rigid traditional approaches, and offering a more dynamic and open perspective (Sardar, 2005).

His intellectual contributions are evident in his involvement in various media and academic institutions. He has served as the editor of the journal *Futures* and was involved in research projects concerning the relationship between Islam and science. His works often focus on critiques of Orientalism and how the Western world views Islam, as discussed in his book *Orientalism* (Sardar, 1999). Additionally, in *Postmodernism and the Other*, he criticizes the dominance of Western thought in defining other civilizations, including Islam (Sardar, 2008).

One key idea Sardar developed is the concept of *Post-Normal Times* (PNT), which seeks to explain an increasingly uncertain, complex world full of contradictions. According to him, the world today can no longer be understood through linear thinking or pre-existing models (Sardar, 2010). In the context of Islam, PNT shows how religious authority is no longer hierarchical and static, but dynamic and continuously adapting to the evolution of time and technology. This perspective is highly relevant in understanding how religious authority is transforming the digital age, particularly with the rise of da'wah through social media.

Transformation of *Religious Authority* in *the Digital Era*

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes to the structure of religious authority. Previously, religious authority was hierarchical and centered around formal institutions such as pesantren, madrasahs, and Islamic universities. Ulama and recognized religious scholars were the main references in interpreting religious teachings. However, with the advent of digital media, religious authority has been decentralized. New figures have emerged and gained legitimacy through popularity on social media platforms. This phenomenon is known as the "dissemination of religious authority," where authority is no longer centralized in formal institutions but is spread across various digital platforms (Ilaihi, W., Zuhriyah, L. F., & Yusuf, 2024; Mudhofi & Karim, 2024).

According to Burhanudin & Baedhowi (2013), new media have facilitated the emergence of alternative religious authorities that are increasingly fragmenting the social-religious landscape of contemporary society. This is supported by factors such as mass education, increasing literacy rates, and the liberalization of the economy, politics, and information. Furthermore, Hidayatulloh argues that the digital world provides various accessible religious narratives, which certain groups often exploit to

foster conflict and revive identity politics (Hidayatulloh et al., 2023). The fading of affiliation with traditional religious institutions marks this phenomenon. A concrete example of this phenomenon is the emergence of the rise of "celebrity ustazs" and "instant fatwas," which reflects a broader erosion of traditional religious institutions' credibility. For example, in Indonesia, platforms like YouTube and TikTok have enabled figures like Ustaz Hanan Attaki (with 10M+ followers) to rival the influence of established scholars from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) or Muhammadiyah. This shift challenges the gatekeeping role of institutions like pesantren, which historically validated religious knowledge through rigorous curricula (Pabbajah, 2024).

A 2023 survey by Pew Research Center revealed that 62% of young Indonesian Muslims trust social media preachers over kyai (traditional scholars) for daily religious guidance, citing "accessibility" and "relatability" as key factors (Andok, 2024). Traditional institutions now invest in digital outreach to retain relevance, but struggle to match the viral appeal of populist content. The algorithm-driven "filter bubble" exacerbates confusion. For instance, a 2024 study found that 78% of TikTok users exposed to a viral fatwa banning vaccines failed to cross-check with authoritative sources like MUI (Indonesian Ulema Council), leading to public health risks (Dahle et al., 2018).

In 2022, celebrity preacher Felix Siauw's TikTok video claiming "music is haram" sparked nationwide debates. The video, which omitted nuanced fiqh opinions from Al-Azhar scholars, garnered 5M+ views but was later debunked by MUI as overly simplistic (Pabbajah, 2024). A 2023 hoax about "halal-certified COVID-19 vaccines containing pork DNA" spread via WhatsApp, causing vaccination rates to drop in East Java. The rumor originated from an unverified "ustaz" without a formal fatwa-issuing authority. The PNT framework clarifies that uncertainty is inherent in digital religious landscapes. However, proactive measures can mitigate fragmentation (Sardar, 2010b). Combining traditional scholarship with digital engagement, as seen in Habib Ja'far Al JID | 113 Hadar's use of Instagram for *tahlilan* (ritual) tutorials backed by *kitab kuning* (Pabbajah, 2024).

However, not all research indicates that digital media displaces traditional religious authority. Rachmadhani found that the presence of social media as a new model of dakwah does not shift the influence of traditional religious authority, but rather strengthens it (Rachmadhani, 2021). Thanks to social media, traditional Islam remains a source of authoritative religious

understanding for the majority of Muslims. Social media uses algorithms that prioritize content based on engagement levels and viral potential. As a result, emotional, controversial, or populist content tends to spread more widely than scientifically deep content but delivered in a more conventional way (Muthiah, 2021). This leads to popularity often replacing scholarly authority in public perception.

For example, a sermon delivered in an engaging and emotional style tends to receive more attention and is shared more by users, even though it may lack theological depth. Social media algorithms reinforce this phenomenon by continually recommending similar content to users, ultimately shaping perceptions of religious authority based on popularity and engagement, rather than credentials or religious expertise (Haroni et al., 2024).

This phenomenon can be explained through the theory of the attention economy, where the value of content is measured by how well it captures the audience's attention, rather than the depth of its substance (Goldhaber, 2007). In the context of digital dakwah, celebrity ustazs and religious influencers who can present content engagingly and emotionally are more likely to gain widespread exposure compared to Islamic scholars or academics who deliver in-depth studies but are less visually and rhetorically compelling (Hjarvard, 2011).

According to Gillespie (2018), social media algorithms operate on the "filter bubble" principle, where users are only presented with content that aligns with their interests and beliefs. This reinforces cognitive biases and reduces the likelihood of society accessing more diverse, academically grounded religious perspectives. A study by Lewis (2018) in the context of YouTube revealed that recommendation algorithms often lead users to more extreme or sensational content, which in the world of digital dakwah, could translate into sermons with a black-and-white approach, lacking the rich academic nuance.

Campbell and Tsuria explain that religious authority in the digital world is no longer determined by academic credentials or affiliation with formal religious institutions, but rather by the number of followers and the level of digital engagement they generate. This creates a condition where religious figures are more motivated to produce content that aligns with digital

market tastes rather than maintaining strict scholarly standards (Campbell & Tsuria, 2022).

The impact of this mechanism is the emergence of a culture of "instant fatwas" and the fragmented spread of religious teachings. For example, issues such as the legality of music, hijab, or jihad are often debated virally without considering the historical context, fiqh methodology, or indepth studies from various schools of thought. According to (Sardar, 2010), in the digital age, which is filled with uncertainty and an overwhelming amount of information, Muslims face new challenges in building a more reflective and scholarly-based understanding of religion.

In the context of Post-Normal Times (PNT), characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and contradiction, the structure of religious authority has undergone significant changes. Previously, society had clarity in determining the sources of religious authority, such as scholars, Islamic academics, and formal religious institutions (Sardar, 2005). However, in the digital era, anyone can become a "digital scholar" by leveraging social media platforms. This has confused the public in determining credible authorities, which may lead to disorientation and fragmentation in religious understanding.

The impact of this phenomenon is the emergence of various religious interpretations that do not always align with traditional teachings. Furthermore, the fragmentation of religious authority can lead to divisions within the Muslim community, as there is no longer a single reference point that is universally recognized. Within the framework of PNT, this situation reflects the conditions of uncertainty and complexity that require a new approach to understanding and managing religious authority in the digital age.

The Phenomenon of Social Media Da'wah and Contradictions in Post-Normal Times

Social media development has revolutionized how da'wah is delivered and received by the public. Within the Post-Normal Times (PNT) framework, characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and contradictions, social media da'wah brings significant positive and negative impacts (Sardar, 2010). Social media provides broader access to religious material, allowing anyone to learn about religion easily through various digital platforms, without being bound by formal institutions. This increases accessibility and allows individuals to acquire religious knowledge at their own time and convenience. Furthermore, digital da'wah has the potential to reach Muslims worldwide, strengthen ukhuwah Islamiyah, and build a globally connected community.

However, this ease of access also brings significant challenges. Da'wah content on social media is often presented in short and engaging formats to capture the audience's attention. As a result, religious understanding can become superficial due to brief sermons that may lack sufficient context. The "instant fatwa" phenomenon has also emerged, where individuals provide religious interpretations without going through a rigorous ijtihad process (Hablun Ilham, 2022). This can lead to misunderstandings and the spread of inaccurate information, potentially confusing Muslims in understanding religious teachings correctly.

For example, debates about the legality of music, the hijab, and jihad often go viral on social media, but these discussions may lack a foundation in deep academic study. On social media, controversial opinions or one-sided interpretations regarding these topics are often found, which do not encompass broader sectarian perspectives or historical contexts (Azhar Irfansyah, 2021).

This can lead to fragmentation of religious understanding among the public, where diverse and sometimes conflicting interpretations spread widely without clear authority.

In the context of Post-Normal Times, this contradiction reflects the challenge of maintaining the integrity of religious teachings while utilizing modern technology to disseminate da'wah. PNT reflects how religious authority is no longer hierarchical and exclusive, but widely distributed across various digital platforms (Sardar, 2010). In the digital age, anyone can become a "digital preacher" with a large following on social media, creating confusion among the public in determining credible authority. The boundary between valid religious authority and authority based solely on popularity becomes blurred, exacerbating fragmentation and disorientation in religious understanding (Gillespie, 2018).

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According to Lewis (2018), social media algorithms prioritize content that generates more engagement, often emotional, controversial, or provocative content. As a result, more sensational and emotionally charged sermons tend to go viral more easily than academically based and deeply researched sermons. This creates a feedback loop where shallow content is further amplified, while deeper and more informative content receives less exposure.

Digital literacy is increasingly important in this context, where society needs to be trained to filter the information they receive, especially regarding religious teachings. Therefore, a wise approach is needed in utilizing social media as a tool for da'wah, ensuring that the content shared remains accurate, contextual, and profound. This approach must be accompanied by adequate digital literacy among the public, enabling them to understand and critically assess the truth of the information they receive more reflectively and thoughtfully (Karim & Riyadi, 2024; Safitri, 2023).

Commodification of Religion: When Faith Becomes Trending Content

In the digital era, religion has undergone a significant transformation, especially in how it is conveyed through social media platforms (Saumantri & Zikrillah, 2020). This phenomenon has given rise to what is known as "celebrity preachers" or "Islamic influencers," who utilize social media to spread religious teachings to a wider audience. However, behind its positive potential is the commodification of religion, where religious teachings and symbols are treated as commodities to gain popularity and economic profit. The commodification of religion refers to transforming religious teachings, symbols, and practices into goods that can be traded or consumed massively (Rustandi, 2020).

The digital age has ushered in a new era of religious expression, where holy scriptures compete with viral trends for attention on social media feeds. Across Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, a new breed of "celebrity preachers" has emerged, young, tech-savvy, and media-trained religious figures who package divine messages in bite-sized, shareable formats. Ustaz Hanan Attaki exemplifies this shift with his stylish leather jacket and smartphone-ready sermons, attracting millions of young followers who might never set foot in a traditional mosque (Qudratullah & Syam, 2024).

But beneath the glossy filters and motivational captions lies a growing tension. Once considered sacred and immutable, religion is increasingly being moulded to fit the demands of the attention economy. The Quranic verse that once required hours of study now gets condensed into a 15-second TikTok dance challenge. Complex Fiqh discussions about Islamic finance become simplified infographics designed more for retweets than deep reflection (Abdullah, 2017).

Habib Ja'far, one of Indonesia's most followed digital preachers, perfectly illustrates this balancing act. His YouTube channel masterfully blends religious teachings with modern storytelling techniques, complete with cinematic visuals and emotional background scores. While this approach has brought classical Islamic wisdom to millions who might otherwise remain disconnected, critics worry about what gets lost in translation. When a 1,400-year-old theological concept must compete with cat videos and celebrity gossip, does it inevitably get reduced to spiritual soundbites?

This phenomenon raises its dilemmas in the framework of Post-Normal Times, characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and contradictions. On the one hand, social media offers opportunities to spread religious messages widely and effectively. However, on the other hand, there is pressure to simplify religious teachings to attract greater attention from the audience. This creates a tension between maintaining the authenticity and depth of the religious message and the demands to appear attractive and popular in the digital world.

The emergence of celebrity preachers on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok has changed the landscape of contemporary preaching. They leverage personal branding strategies to attract a broader audience. As explained by Fadhlurrahman et al. (2024) in their study on Habib Ja'far's branding on YouTube, emphasizing authenticity, integrity, consistency, specialization, authority, differentiation, relevance, visibility, perseverance, goodwill, and performance as key elements in building a strong personal image. However, more attention is often given to visual and aesthetic aspects rather than intellectual depth and substantive content in building personal branding.

A study by M. Hamdan Yuwafik & Nuriyah Nazilah (2025) shows that Ustadz Hanan Attaki has built an image as an inspirational and fashionable young preacher through social media, attracting the millennial generation's interest. This phenomenon raises the question of how far the religious messages conveyed still maintain the substance of religious teachings, considering that most of the audience is more interested in appearance and lifestyle rather than deep religious studies.

In social media, religious content is often packaged in short and engaging formats to meet the demands of algorithms that prioritize audience engagement. As a result, emotional and controversial content tends to be more popular and easily spread than content that is more in-depth and based on scholarly studies. This phenomenon

simplifies complex religious teachings, which are often presented superficially without considering deeper theological or historical contexts (Zaid et al., 2022).

Nowhere is this commodification more evident than in the booming market for "Islamic lifestyle" products. Scroll through any Muslim influencer's feed, and you'll find Quran verse-embroidered hoodies, prayer mats endorsed by celebrity preachers, and even "halal" cryptocurrency schemes. While these products aren't inherently problematic, they represent how religious identity has become enmeshed with consumer culture. The line between spiritual guide and brand ambassador grows increasingly blurred when the preacher who explains the five pillars of Islam also promotes a particular brand of dates or Muslim-friendly investment apps.

This phenomenon reaches its most concerning form in what scholars call "instant fatwa" culture. Complex religious questions that traditionally required consultation with trained scholars now get answered in Instagram story polls or 60-second YouTube shorts. A recent controversial case saw a popular preacher declare all modern music haram based on a simplified interpretation. This ruling spread like wildfire across social media despite contradicting centuries of nuanced Islamic scholarship on the arts.

In line with the findings of Mohammad Fattahun Ni'am (2023) in his research, which explains that religion is often simplified to meet the demands of the market and media, prioritizing popularity over authenticity and the depth of religious teachings. In the context of Post-Normal Times, this phenomenon reflects the contradiction between spiritual values and economic demands. On one hand, social media offers an effective platform to spread religious teachings. However, on the other hand, to remain relevant and popular, preachers often adopt strategies that sacrifice the depth and authenticity of their message.

Darojatun explains the commodification of religion in the sports media, which shows how JID | 117 religious values are used for commercial purposes, ultimately obscuring the original meaning of those teachings (Darojatun et al., 2022). Similarly, in the context of digital dakwah, there is a risk that religion is treated as a tool to gain economic profit through content monetization, endorsements, or merchandise sales.

Yet for all its challenges, digital dakwah isn't without promise. When done thoughtfully, it can make religious knowledge more accessible. The key lies in finding the middle ground - leveraging digital tools without

compromising theological depth, embracing new formats while maintaining scholarly integrity. As we navigate these post-normal times, where religious authority is more democratized and more contested than ever, the challenge will be preserving the soul of faith in the age of the algorithm.

The solution may lie in developing what we might call "digital tafaqquh" - a new model of religious engagement that combines

traditional scholarship with digital literacy. Some institutions are already leading the way, like the pesantren that teach young scholars not just classical texts but also content creation skills, or the verification systems that help audiences distinguish between credentialed scholars and self-appointed experts. In this rapidly evolving landscape, one truth remains constant: the most valuable commodity in the marketplace of ideas will always be authentic wisdom (Larkin, 2021).

Faith in the Digital Age: Navigating Polarization and Radicalization on Social Media

The digital transformation has significantly reshaped many aspects of human life, particularly how religion is practiced and understood. With the advancement of information and communication technologies, especially social media, people now access, interpret, and engage with religious teachings in ways that are faster, more personalized, and more far-reaching than ever before (Saumantri, 2023). However, while this transformation has made religious knowledge more accessible, it also brings complex and serious challenges, especially in changing religious behaviors and the rise of polarization and online radicalization.

Polarization refers to the growing ideological divide between individuals or groups, where differing religious or political views lead to increasingly entrenched and hostile positions. Radicalization, on the other hand, describes the process through which individuals adopt extreme viewpoints that can ultimately lead to violent actions. These processes are deeply influenced by the algorithms that govern social media platforms. Designed to prioritize content aligned with users' existing interests, these algorithms create "filter bubbles" and "echo chambers" in which people are repeatedly exposed to views that reinforce their own beliefs while filtering out alternative perspectives (Gani et al., 2024). Over time,

this leads to a narrowing of worldview, a deepening of division, and a decline in mutual understanding and tolerance.

This problem is especially evident among younger generations who increasingly turn to social media as their main source of religious knowledge, bypassing traditional learning from classical texts or scholars. With their fast-paced, engaging content, social media platforms often reduce complex theological discussions into brief, emotionally charged messages. This format encourages superficial engagement and reactive thinking, fostering fragmented understandings of religious issues and discouraging deeper reflection.

Empirical data highlight the real-world consequences of this phenomenon. In Indonesia, the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) reported in 2020 that over 80% of radicalization cases in the country were linked to exposure via social media, particularly through platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Telegram. Zain and Mutaqin argue that this trend is worsened by the lack of regulatory mechanisms that effectively prohibit the spread of radical religious ideologies online, making it difficult to contain the threat of terrorism-related radicalization. Similar patterns have been observed in other countries. In Myanmar, for instance, Facebook was heavily criticized for enabling the spread of hate speech and inflammatory content against the Rohingya Muslim minority, with a 2018 UN report implicating the platform in inciting mass violence and displacement. In Europe, several lone-wolf terrorist attacks have been traced back to online radicalization, where individuals consumed extremist content through forums and videos that reinforced their isolation and hatred (Zain & Mutaqin, 2022).

Extremist groups have become adept at using digital platforms to disseminate propaganda, manipulate religious narratives, and recruit followers. Their content often relies on provocative, emotionally driven messaging that aligns with the logic of social media algorithms, which are designed to maximize user engagement. Fanindy and Mupida illustrate how YouTube, in particular, has been leveraged to spread radical ideologies, with its recommendation system favoring sensational and extremist content due to its high interaction rates (Fanindy & Mupida, 2021).

Addressing the negative impacts of digital transformation on religious practices requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. Digital and religious literacy must be strengthened so that individuals are better equipped to critically evaluate online religious content, distinguish between credible sources and manipulative narratives, and understand the deeper context of religious teachings. As noted by

(Kosasih, 2019), navigating and assessing information critically is essential in building public resilience against misinformation and ideological manipulation. At the same time, cooperation among government institutions, religious authorities, and technology companies is essential to monitor, regulate, and, where necessary, remove harmful content that promotes polarization and radicalization.

Rumahuru emphasizes the importance of developing and enforcing regulations to curb the spread of radical ideologies while maintaining a balance with freedom of expression (Rumahuru, 2021). Equally important is the active participation of scholars, educators, and religious thinkers in the digital sphere. They are increasingly expected to produce and disseminate religious content that is engaging, rich in meaning, and grounded in sound theological principles. Urges religious intellectuals to adapt their delivery methods to the characteristics of digital media while maintaining depth, coherence, and contextual relevance in their teachings. In this way, digital platforms can be reclaimed as spaces not of division and extremism, but of thoughtful dialogue, inclusive education, and shared understanding (Hefni, 2020).

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that social media da'wah has transformed the landscape of religious authority. Religious authority, which was previously centralized in formal institutions, is now more distributed, with the emergence of digital figures who gain legitimacy through popularity, such as celebrity preachers and religious influencers. This has created uncertainty, complexity, and contradictions in religious understanding, where society is often exposed to views that are not JID | 119 always based on scholarly depth but rather on popularity. Although social media provides opportunities to expand the reach of da'wah, significant challenges arise in maintaining the integrity of religious teachings amidst the simplification and fragmentation of content. Therefore, it is important to enhance digital and religious literacy and foster collaboration between the government, religious institutions, and social media platforms to ensure that the dissemination of religious teachings remains substantive.

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