



## ISLAMIC COMMUNICATION FROM A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE: POWER RELATIONS, DISCOURSE, AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

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**Abstract:** *This study analyzes Islamic communication from a critical perspective by examining the relationships among power, discourse production, and the construction of religious authority in the digital era. This study employs a qualitative approach, integrating Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with a sociological perspective on communication. The empirical data consist of 12 digital da'wah content items collected from YouTube, Instagram, and Spotify podcasts published between January and March 2025. Data were collected through document analysis of verbal transcripts, captions, audience interactions, and non-participant observation of communication practices in digital religious spaces. Data analysis follows Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, including textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. The findings reveal that Islamic communication in digital spaces functions not merely as a medium for transmitting religious messages, but also as a contested arena where actors negotiate symbolic power and construct religious legitimacy. The study further demonstrates that digital media reconfigures religious authority from institution-based legitimacy to audience-driven, algorithmically mediated authority. Theoretically, this study contributes to Islamic communication studies by integrating discourse, power, and digital religious authority into a critical analytical framework.*

**Kata kunci:** *Islamic Communication; Power Relations; Discourse; Religious Authority; Digital Media*

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis komunikasi Islam dalam perspektif kritis dengan menyoroti relasi antara kekuasaan, produksi wacana, dan konstruksi otoritas keagamaan di era digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) yang dipadukan dengan perspektif sosiologi komunikasi. Data empiris penelitian terdiri atas dua belas konten dakwah digital yang dikumpulkan dari platform YouTube, Instagram, dan podcast Spotify pada periode Januari–Maret 2025. Data dikumpulkan melalui analisis dokumen terhadap transkrip verbal, caption, interaksi audiens, serta observasi nonpartisipatif terhadap praktik komunikasi dakwah di ruang digital. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan kerangka tiga dimensi Fairclough, yaitu analisis teks, praktik diskursif, dan praktik sosial. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi Islam dalam ruang digital tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai medium penyampaian pesan keagamaan, tetapi juga menjadi arena kontestasi simbolik dalam pembentukan legitimasi dan otoritas keagamaan. Penelitian ini juga menunjukkan bahwa media digital telah mentransformasi otoritas keagamaan dari legitimasi berbasis institusi menjadi legitimasi yang semakin dipengaruhi oleh audiens dan logika algoritmik. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini memperkaya kajian komunikasi Islam melalui integrasi antara wacana, kekuasaan, dan otoritas keagamaan dalam konteks digital.

**Kata kunci:** *Komunikasi Islam; Relasi Kekuasaan; Wacana; Otoritas Keagamaan; Media Digital*

## INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, Islamic communication cannot be understood solely as a normative, linear process of conveying religious messages. Instead, it has evolved into a complex arena where meaning, authority, and power are produced, negotiated, and contested through various discursive practices, both in conventional public spaces and in digital media. The development of communication technology, particularly digital media, has expanded the space for religious interaction and created new dynamics in the production and distribution of Islamic discourse <sup>1</sup>.

From a sociological perspective, religious discourse is not neutral but is always bound by the power relations that underlie it. The critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach emphasizes that language and communication are social practices that play a role in shaping and reproducing power structures in society <sup>2</sup>. Through discourse, religious actors not only convey normative values but also construct legitimacy, authority, and specific social positions. Thus, Islamic communication can be understood as a strategic space in the contestation of religious ideology and representation.

Several recent studies have shown that digital media has become a key arena for the production and contestation of Islamic discourse. For example, recent research indicates that digital platforms play a crucial role in shaping Islamic narratives, including promoting religious moderation and strengthening specific religious identities <sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, other research reveals that da'wah practices in digital spaces serve not only as a means of disseminating moral messages but also as a mechanism for establishing a new, more dialogical and rationally based religious authority <sup>4</sup>.

On the other hand, religious discourse can also function as an ideological instrument that reproduces domination or even legitimizes power. Recent studies have shown that da'wah, in certain contexts, can shape narratives that support social structures while marginalizing other perspectives<sup>5</sup>. This confirms that Islamic communication cannot be separated from the social,

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<sup>1</sup>A. Aminuddin, "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islami.co and IBTimes.id." *Journal of English Research Studies* 4, no. 1 (2024).

<sup>2</sup>Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. London: Routledge (2013).

<sup>3</sup>Danu Aris Setiyanto, "Promoting Patriotism and Religious Moderation: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Sanadmedia.com." *Harmoni* 23(1) (2024). <https://doi.org/10.32488/harmoni.v23i1.716>

<sup>4</sup>Muhammad Ikram Firda, "Rationality in Digital Da'wah: A Critical Discourse Study of the 'Belajar Islam Pake Logika' Podcast." *Dialogia* 23(2) (2025). <https://doi.org/10.21154/dialogia.v23i02.11208>.

<sup>5</sup>A. Munib, "Misuse of Da'wah as Religious Tyranny in the Film Bidaah: A Critical Discourse Analysis." *Religion and Humanities Journal* (2025).

political, and cultural contexts that frame it.

With the increasing penetration of digital media into the religious life of Muslim communities, the study of Islamic communication has undergone significant development in the past decade. International studies show that the digitalization of religion has transformed the production, distribution, and consumption patterns of religious authority, from one previously based on formal institutions to one that is increasingly fluid, decentralized, and influenced by the logic of digital media <sup>6</sup>. <sup>7</sup>Digital media no longer merely serve as a channel for disseminating religious messages, but have also become an interactive space where religious authority, identity, and legitimacy are formed through interactions between da'wah actors and audiences.

More specifically, several studies have shown that religious communication in digital spaces is always intertwined with power relations, identity production, and ideological contestation. Evolvi demonstrates that the internet has become a discursive arena where religion is negotiated through symbolic representations, collective identities, and digital mediation practices <sup>8</sup>. Meanwhile, Eickelman and Anderson assert that new media have formed an emerging Muslim public sphere, a new public space where religious actors, Muslim communities, and audiences interact to shape Islamic authority, legitimacy, and discourse <sup>9</sup>.

In the Indonesian context, the development of digital Islamic communication has also attracted academic attention. Several studies have shown that social media has given rise to new forms of religious authority through the emergence of digital preachers, Islamic influencers, and platform-based Islamic preaching content. Aminuddin's research shows that digital Islamic media such as Islami.co and IBTimes.id construct a moderate Islamic discourse through specific discursive strategies <sup>10</sup>. Meanwhile, Firda demonstrates that digital religious podcasts have created a more dialogical, rational, and engaging model of Islamic preaching communication for the younger generation of Muslims <sup>11</sup>.

Although the study of digital Islamic communication has developed quite rapidly in recent years, most previous studies still focus on the normative, strategic, and effectiveness aspects of conveying da'wah messages, without explicitly positioning Islamic communication as an arena for

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<sup>6</sup>Heidi A. Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*. New York: Routledge, 2022.

<sup>7</sup>Gary R. Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023.

<sup>8</sup>Giulia Evolvi, "Religion and the Internet: Digital Religion, (Hyper)Mediated Spaces, and Materiality." *Religion* 52, no. 3 (2022): 1–19.

<sup>9</sup>Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*. 3rd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2023.

<sup>10</sup>A. Aminuddin, "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islami.co and IBTimes.id." *Journal of English Research Studies* 4, no. 1 (2024).

<sup>11</sup>Muhammad Ikram Firda, "Rationality in Digital Da'wah: A Critical Discourse Study of the 'Belajar Islam Pake Logika' Podcast." *Dialogia* 23, no. 2 (2025).

the production of power and discourse contestation. For example, Tabaika's research emphasizes the transformation of digital da'wah through the logic of social media, audience interaction, and the reconstruction of religious communication, but it has not elaborated in depth on how the language and symbols of da'wah work as mechanisms of discursive domination<sup>12</sup>. Rachman's study shows a shift in religious authority from traditional ulama (Islamic scholars) to popularity-based digital figures, but his analysis still focuses on changes in authority structures, without unraveling the discursive practices that produce this legitimacy<sup>13</sup>.

On the other hand, Setiyanto's research on religious moderation in digital media emphasizes the representation of tolerance values and communication strategies, without explicitly examining the power relations at work behind the production of religious messages<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, Firda's study on digital da'wah podcasts highlights the rationality of religious communication and its closeness to young audiences, but has not explicitly linked it to the dimensions of hegemony, symbolic capital, or contestation of legitimacy in the digital public sphere<sup>15</sup>.

Thus, there are still limitations in Islamic communication studies that explicitly integrate critical perspectives, particularly Critical Discourse Analysis, symbolic capital, and hegemony, to explain how religious discourse is produced, negotiated, and used to establish authority in the digital public sphere. This research aims to fill this gap by positioning Islamic communication not merely as a medium for da'wah, but as a discursive practice fraught with relations of power, legitimacy, and ideological contestation.

Using a critical discourse analysis approach, this article aims to uncover how power relations, discourse production, and the construction of religious authority are intertwined in contemporary Islamic communication practices. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich Islamic communication studies with a more reflective, analytical, and critical perspective. Practically, the results are expected to contribute to the formulation of da'wah strategies that are more inclusive, dialogical, and responsive to evolving social dynamics.

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<sup>12</sup>MA Tabaika, "Digital Da'wah and the Reconstruction of Islamic Communication in the Contemporary Era." *Al-Balagh: Journal of Da'wah and Communication* 10, no. 1 (2025).

<sup>13</sup>A. Rachman, "Transformation of Religious Authority in the Digital Era." *Jurnal Dakwah* 45, no. 1 (2025).

<sup>14</sup>Danu Aris Setiyanto, "Promoting Patriotism and Religious Moderation: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Sanadmedia.com." *Harmony* 23, no. 1 (2024).

<sup>15</sup>Muhammad Ikram Firda, "Rationality in Digital Da'wah: A Critical Discourse Study of the 'Belajar Islam Pake Logika' Podcast." *Dialogia* 23, no. 2 (2025).

## **METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative approach with a critical discourse analysis design. This qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to deeply understand meanings, social practices, and discourse constructions that cannot be reduced to quantitative data. Within this paradigm, social reality is understood as constructed through complex social interactions, language, and discursive practices<sup>16,17</sup>

Methodologically, this research employs an interpretive-constructivist approach, positioning the researcher as the primary instrument in the data collection and analysis. Creswell and Poth assert that qualitative research aims to explore how individuals or groups construct meaning within a specific social context, emphasizing depth, context, and interpretation<sup>18</sup>.<sup>19</sup> This approach is relevant for examining Islamic communication as a social practice imbued with symbols, values, and power relations.

The data in this study were obtained through three main techniques: document analysis, non-participatory observation, and literature review. To enable empirical, measurable critical discourse analysis, this study established a specific data corpus comprising digital Islamic preaching content published between January and March 2026 across three digital media platforms with broad audience reach in Indonesia: YouTube, Instagram, and Spotify podcasts.

The unit of analysis for this study consisted of 12 digital Islamic preaching content, including: (1) four religious lecture videos from YouTube channels with over 100,000 views; (2) four Islamic preaching uploads from popular Islamic preachers' Instagram accounts with high engagement rates (over 5%); and (3) four Islamic podcast episodes discussing issues of religious authority, digital Islamic preaching, and contemporary Muslim identity. Data selection was conducted using purposive sampling, with the following criteria: (1) the content was produced by religious actors with significant digital influence; (2) it contained explicit narratives about Islamic authority, morality, or identity; and (3) it received a high public response through comments, likes, shares, or views.

Document analysis was conducted on verbal transcripts, captions, audience comments, and visual elements within each content. Non-participatory observation focused on communication

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<sup>16</sup> Ozlem Isik, "Qualitative Research Approaches and Data Collection Methods: Understanding Meaning and Experience." *Journal of Humanities and Educational Development* 7, no. 6 (2025).  
<https://doi.org/10.22161/jhed.7.6.3>.

<sup>17</sup>R. Alyaqoub et al., "Elaboration of Underpinning Methods and Data Analysis in Qualitative Communication Research." *Intercultural Communication Studies* (2024).

<sup>18</sup>John W. Creswell, and Cheryl N. Poth. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Ozlem Isik, "Qualitative Research Approaches and Data Collection Methods: Understanding Meaning and Experience." *Journal of Humanities and Educational Development* 7, no. 6 (2025).  
<https://doi.org/10.22161/jhed.7.6.3>.

patterns, rhetorical styles, the use of religious symbols, and interactions between preachers and audiences in digital spaces. Meanwhile, a literature review was used to strengthen theoretical interpretations of Islamic communication, power relations, and the transformation of religious authority in the digital era<sup>20</sup>.

Data analysis was conducted using the critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework developed by Fairclough, which includes three dimensions of analysis: (1) text analysis (language structure and narrative), (2) discursive practices (the process of production, distribution, and consumption of discourse), and (3) social practices (social, political and cultural contexts that underlie the discourse). This approach allows researchers to identify how language is used to construct meaning, reproduce power, and shape religious authority in Islamic communication. Furthermore, the analysis is conducted thematically and interpretively by categorizing emerging discourse patterns, including representations of authority, religious legitimacy, and relations of domination and resistance in the practice of da'wah.

To ensure data validity, this study uses several strategies, namely: (1) source triangulation, by comparing data from various types of sources (text, media, and literature), (2) observational persistence, to understand communication patterns in depth, and (3) researcher reflexivity, to minimize subjective bias in the interpretation process.

In qualitative research, the validity of data is not measured through statistical generalization, but rather through the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of research findings, collectively known as the principle of trustworthiness in qualitative research<sup>21, 22</sup>. This approach ensures that research results have high analytical rigor and contextual relevance.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Islamic Communication as Social Practice**

Islamic communication is not only a process of conveying religious messages but also a social practice that shapes meaning, identity, and social relations. In the context of da'wah, Islamic communication works through language, symbols, narratives, and media to convey Islamic values while simultaneously building the collective consciousness of the community. Recent studies show that digital da'wah has shifted Islamic communication from a one-way to a more interactive, participatory, and social-network-based model. Social media has become not only a channel for

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<sup>20</sup>Ozlem Isik, "Qualitative Research Approaches and Data Collection Methods: Understanding Meaning and Experience." *Journal of Humanities and Educational Development* 7, no. 6 (2025).  
<https://doi.org/10.22161/jhed.7.6.3>.

<sup>21</sup>SK Ahmed, "The Pillars of Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research." *Journal of Advanced Research in Healthcare* (2024).

<sup>22</sup>Lim, WM 2025. "What Is Qualitative Research? An Overview and Guidelines." *Journal of Marketing Analytics*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1441358224126>

da'wah, but also a space where religious meaning is produced, negotiated, and contested<sup>23,24</sup>

From a critical perspective, Islamic communication cannot be separated from the social structures that surround it. Islamic messages are always produced within a specific context: who speaks, to whom, through what media, and for what social purpose. Therefore, Islamic communication should be understood as a discursive arena that connects religious texts, Islamic actors, religious institutions, media, and audiences.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis in Islamic Communication**

Critical discourse analysis views language as a non-neutral social practice. Language not only represents reality but also shapes it through processes of legitimacy, domination, and resistance. In the study of Islamic communication, this approach is crucial because da'wah discourse not only conveys moral teachings but also shapes how people understand authority, identity, truth, and obedience.

Fairclough emphasizes that discourse needs to be analyzed across three dimensions: text, discursive practice, and social practice. In the context of Islamic communication, texts can include lectures, sermons, social media content, podcasts, Islamic preaching videos, or articles. Discursive practice relates to how messages are produced, disseminated, and consumed. Meanwhile, social practice refers to the social, cultural, political, and religious structures that influence the production of these discourses.

This approach is relevant to contemporary studies of digital Islamic platforms in Indonesia. Aminuddin, for example, shows that platforms like Islami.co and IBTimes.id construct moderate Islamic discourse through narrative strategies and specific religious interpretations. This demonstrates that digital Islamic media is not merely an information space but also an arena for the production of religious discourse with ideological and social orientations.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis approach not only helps identify how religious language and symbols are produced in Islamic communication practices but also opens up space to understand how these discourses are converted into forms of social legitimacy. In this context, the discursive practices analyzed through CDA are closely related to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, as religious language, narratives, and representations not only shape meaning but also function as sources of social recognition that can generate authority and dominant positions in the religious public sphere.

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<sup>23</sup>M. Ulyan, "A Narrative Review of Islamic Preaching in the Social Media Era." *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Studies* 11, no. 2 (2023).

<sup>24</sup>MA Tabaika, "Digital Da'wah and the Reconstruction of Islamic Communication in the Contemporary Era." *Al-Balagh: Journal of Da'wah and Communication* 10, no. 1 (2025).

<sup>25</sup>A. Aminuddin, "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islami.co and IBTimes.id." *Journal of English Research Studies* 4, no. 1 (2024).

## **Power Relations in Religious Discourse**

In Islamic communication, power is not always present in coercive or formal forms, but also operates symbolically through language, interpretation, moral narratives, and religious authority. Da'wah actors who have the capacity to speak on behalf of religion can influence how society understands right and wrong, halal and haram, appropriate and inappropriate, and Islamic and un-Islamic. Thus, religious discourse can be an instrument for establishing social legitimacy.

Power relations in da'wah can also be seen in the ability of certain actors to determine which issues are considered important, which interpretations are legitimate, and whose voices gain space in the Islamic public. In the digital context, this power is wielded not only by traditional clerics or formal religious institutions but also by popular preachers, Muslim influencers, YouTube channels, Instagram accounts, TikTok, and digital platform algorithms.

Rachman's study shows that the digitalization of religion has shifted religious authority from traditional hierarchical structures to popularity-based authority, including the emergence of celebrity preachers and Islamic influencers. This shift demonstrates that religious power in the digital space is increasingly determined by visibility, engagement, and the ability to manage public image.<sup>26</sup>

From this perspective, the symbolic capital possessed by da'wah actors does not operate within a closed social space but is produced and contested in an increasingly open arena of public communication through digital media. Therefore, Bourdieu's concept needs to be read dialogically alongside Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere, because religious legitimacy is not only shaped by mastery of symbols and narratives but also by participation, interaction, and public recognition in the digital discursive space.

## **Religious Authorities and Digital Media**

Religious authority in Muslim societies has historically relied heavily on mastery of religious knowledge, the chain of knowledge, community recognition, and institutional legitimacy. However, digital media has transformed the way this authority is produced and received. Audiences no longer rely solely on religious scholars or formal religious institutions but can also access a variety of religious resources through social media.

Lubis points out that traditional religious authority now intersects with online authority, a form of authority built through digital presence, communication skills, and closeness to audiences. This situation doesn't necessarily erase traditional authority, but rather creates new

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<sup>26</sup>A. Rachman, "Transformation of Religious Authority in the Digital Era." *Jurnal Dakwah* 45, no. 1 (2025).

configurations between clerics, institutions, influencers, and digital communities.<sup>27</sup>

This phenomenon also demonstrates the ambivalence of digital media. On the one hand, digitalization opens wider access to religious knowledge. On the other hand, it can give rise to the fragmentation of authority, the commodification of religion, instant proselytization, and competition between discourses. Therefore, religious authority in contemporary Islamic communication must be understood as fluid, negotiated, and influenced by media logic.

However, the digital public sphere does not always operate neutrally or deliberately as the Habermasian ideal suggests. In practice, the digital sphere also becomes an arena for struggles over symbolic dominance, where certain actors have a greater capacity to influence opinion, build legitimacy, and direct collective consciousness. In this context, Habermas's concept of the public sphere is directly related to Antonio Gramsci's perspective on hegemony, as the production of religious discourse in digital media reflects not only public participation but also processes of consensus-building, ideological domination, and social resistance.

### **Islamic Communication, Hegemony, and Legitimacy**

From a critical perspective, Islamic communication can function as an emancipatory space, but it can also be a means of hegemony. Hegemony occurs when a religious view is accepted as universally true without question, while other views are dismissed as deviant, weak, or illegitimate. In this sense, da'wah is not merely the act of conveying values, but also the process of shaping social consciousness.

Studies on digital da'wah and hegemony show that social media can influence the preferences, attitudes, and socio-political orientations of generations of Muslims. Digital da'wah not only conveys religious teachings but can also shape how audiences understand social issues, politics, morality, and collective identity.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, Islamic communication from a critical perspective requires viewing da'wah as an arena for a struggle for meaning. Da'wah discourse can reinforce values of justice, moderation, and humanity, but it can also reproduce exclusivism, symbolic domination, and the marginalization of certain groups if not accompanied by critical reflection.

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<sup>27</sup>N. Lubis, "Intersection of Traditional Religious Authority and New Online Authority in Contemporary Islam." *Fikrah: Journal of Faith and Religious Studies* 11, no. 2 (2023).

<sup>28</sup>Fatimah, and F. Pribadi. "The Digital Da'wah (Preachers) and Hegemony in Digital Age: A Study of Muslim Generations' Political Preferences by Social Media." *Journal of Southern Sociological Studies* 1, no. 2 (2025): 206–223. <https://doi.org/10.26740/jsss.v1i2.40520>

## **Theoretical Framework of the Research**

Based on the description above, this study uses a theoretical framework that combines three main perspectives. First, Islamic communication is understood as a social practice that conveys religious messages while simultaneously shaping social relations. Second, critical discourse analysis is used to examine how the language, symbols, and narratives of da'wah shape relations of power and legitimacy. Third, the theory of digital religious authority is used to understand how digital media shifts the positions of da'wah actors, religious institutions, and audiences.

In the Indonesian context, integrating these four theoretical perspectives is relevant because religious authority is shaped not only by mastery of religious knowledge but also by social position, institutional affiliation, and adaptability to digital media. Religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah have historically enjoyed strong institutional legitimacy, but the development of digital media has also given rise to new da'wah figures who gain influence through digital popularity, audience engagement, and algorithmic visibility. Furthermore, the role of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in constructing formal religious legitimacy demonstrates that Islamic authority in Indonesia is the result of the constant negotiation among institutions, digital public spaces, and discursive practices.

Within this framework, Islamic communication is no longer seen as a neutral process, but as a discursive practice connected to power, discourse, and authority. This perspective allows research to uncover how Islamic messages are produced, who gains the authority to speak, how legitimacy is constructed, and how digital media reshapes the contemporary landscape of religious communication.

## **Islamic Communication as an Arena for Discourse Contestation**

Based on an analysis of 12 digital Islamic preaching content collected between January and March 2026 from YouTube, Instagram, and Spotify Podcast platforms, it was found that Islamic communication in the digital space displays a diversity of religious narratives that represent different ideological orientations, communication styles, and legitimacy bases. Of the four YouTube videos analyzed, for example, two channels presented Islamic preaching narratives emphasizing the purification of teachings through phrases such as "return to the Qur'an and Sunnah purely" and "don't follow religion based on public opinion." In contrast, the other two channels emphasized a moderate Islamic narrative through messages such as "Islam is present as a blessing for all groups" and "differences are part of the social sunnatullah."

On Instagram, the four pieces of Islamic preaching content analyzed demonstrated a more visual, concise, and emotional communication style. One highly engaged post featured the caption, "A strong Muslim is not the loudest, but the one most capable of maintaining morals in the digital

space," which garnered over 18,000 likes and 1,200 comments. Meanwhile, on the Spotify Podcast platform, religious discussions tended to employ a reflective, argumentative approach, as in the episode "Does religious authority still belong to Islamic boarding schools?" which addressed the changing legitimacy of ulama (Islamic scholars) in the social media era. This diversity in the corpus demonstrates that digital Islamic communication is not homogeneous but rather an arena for discursive contestation in which various actors attempt to construct religious legitimacy through different strategies.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, this diversity demonstrates that religious language, symbols, and narratives function not only as a medium for conveying moral messages but also as instruments for producing meaning and social legitimacy. These findings demonstrate that digital platforms have become a strategic space for the formation of religious identity, as well as an arena for symbolic competition between <sup>29</sup>preachers.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, the findings show that Islamic discourse in digital media tends to use simplistic, narrative, and emotional language to increase audience appeal. This strategy not only broadens the reach of da'wah (Islamic outreach) but also has the potential to simplify the complexity of Islamic teachings into easily digestible messages, thus opening up space for diverse, even contradictory, interpretations.

### **Power Relations and the Production of Religious Authority**

An analysis of 12 pieces of digital da'wah content shows that religious authority in the digital space no longer rests solely on institutional legitimacy or formal educational background, but is also shaped by digital visibility, interaction intensity, and audience recognition. On one of the YouTube channels analyzed, for example, a preacher with over 1.2 million subscribers consistently uses phrases such as "many people learn religion from the internet, but not all understand the correct method" and "follow a teacher with a clear chain of transmission." The video received over 430,000 views and generated over 3,800 comments, most of which displayed symbolic forms of recognition such as "this preacher always opens our minds," "the most scientific study I've ever followed," and "this is the best digital teacher."

Meanwhile, on Instagram, one Islamic preaching account with over 850,000 followers demonstrates a different pattern of legitimacy. In a post titled "Becoming a Relevant Muslim in the Digital Age," the caption emphasizes emotional connection, popular language, and engaging visual symbols. The post garnered over 21,000 likes and 1,500 comments, with audience

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<sup>29</sup>Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, "Religion and Digital Media." *Annual Review of Sociology* 47 (2021): 273–291. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-090820-020049>.

<sup>30</sup>Giulia Evolvi, "Religion and the Internet: Digital Religion, (Hyper)Mediated Spaces, and Materiality." *Religion* 52, no. 3 (2022): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2022.2042842>

responses reflecting social recognition, such as "the most relatable preacher for young people" and "learning religion becomes easier to understand." These findings suggest that religious authority in the digital space is built not only through mastery of religious texts, but also through the ability to build symbolic closeness with the audience.

From Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, this pattern suggests that digital language, symbols, and representations can be converted into forms of symbolic capital, a source of social legitimacy that enables da'wah actors to gain influence and a dominant position in the digital public sphere. Thus, actors who can master digital media, build engagement, and gain collective recognition from their audiences tend to possess greater religious authority than those who rely solely on formal institutional legitimacy.

Recent studies show that the digitalization of religion has created a new, fluid, and competitive form of religious authority. Authority is no longer determined solely by the chain of knowledge, but also by popularity, platform algorithms, and audience interaction <sup>31</sup>. <sup>32</sup>This demonstrates that Islamic communication in the digital era is not only about disseminating messages but also about the struggle for legitimacy within the religious public sphere.

### **Digital Media and the Transformation of Islamic Public Space**

An analysis of 12 pieces of digital Islamic preaching content shows that digital media has transformed the Islamic public sphere in Indonesia from a previously institutional and centralized pattern of religious communication to a more open, participatory, and fragmented discursive space. In the four YouTube videos analyzed, for example, it appears that religious discussions no longer proceed in a one-way fashion, as in conventional lectures, but develop through active interaction between preachers and audiences in the comments section. One video, titled "Is it permissible to learn religion from social media?" received over 5,200 comments, demonstrating the emergence of a variety of discursive positions—from support for the authority of traditional ulama, to support for digital ustaz, to criticism of formal religious authority.

Similar findings were also seen on Instagram and Spotify podcasts. In one Instagram post titled "Islam and Tolerance in the Digital Space," the audience was divided into several interpretive groups. Some comments supported the narrative of religious moderation, with statements such as "Islam must be presented with a peaceful face," while others rejected this approach, with comments such as "religion should not follow the logic of social media." On the Spotify Podcast platform, an episode titled "Who Has the Right to Speak in the Name of Religion?" generated

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<sup>31</sup>Gary R. Bunt, "Islamic Hashtags: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority". Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023.

<sup>32</sup>Heidi A. Campbell, "Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds". New York: Routledge, 2022.

audience discussion that demonstrated the contestation between legitimacy based on scientific chains of narration and legitimacy based on digital popularity. This pattern suggests that the digital Islamic public sphere in Indonesia is no longer homogeneous but has become a deliberative arena rife with negotiations of meaning, conflicts of interpretation, and competition for legitimacy.

Within Jürgen Habermas's framework, these findings suggest that digital media has expanded the religious public sphere by opening participation to a wider range of social actors. However, contrary to the ideal of a purely rational public sphere, the research data also indicates a tendency toward fragmentation of opinion, the strengthening of group identities, and the formation of discursive communities that tend to reinforce individual ideological preferences. Thus, the digital Islamic public sphere in Indonesia is not only an arena for deliberative communication but also for symbolic contestation influenced by algorithmic logic, ideological affiliations, and the dynamics of digital participation<sup>33</sup> In the context of Islamic communication, this has resulted in the emergence of segmented discourse groups, each constructing its own religious narrative. As a result, Islamic communication is no longer homogeneous, but pluralistic and sometimes conflictual.

### **Da'wah as a Practice of Hegemony and Resistance**

An analysis of 12 digital Islamic preaching content pieces shows that Islamic preaching in the digital space not only serves as a medium for disseminating religious values but also serves as an arena for the production of hegemony and the emergence of resistant discourse. In one YouTube video titled "The Dangers of Liberal Islam in the Digital Era," the preacher consistently uses phrases such as "the people must return to a straight understanding," "don't be trapped by thoughts that damage the faith," and "religious truth cannot be determined by public opinion." The video received more than 380,000 views and 2,900 comments, with the majority of the audience expressing support with comments such as "this is the preaching that saves the people" and "finally, there is a religious teacher who dares to fight deviations." This pattern demonstrates how religious language is used to build ideological consensus and strengthen the position of dominant discourse.

However, within the same corpus, forms of resistance to this dominant narrative were also found. In a Spotify Podcast episode titled "Religion, Authority, and Freedom of Thought," the speaker criticized the tendency for monopolization of religious interpretation, with statements

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<sup>33</sup>Nicole C. Krämer et al., "Social Media and Echo Chambers: The Dynamics of Selective Exposure." *New Media & Society* 25, no. 4 (2023): 987–1005. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211067450>

such as “religion should not be monopolized by one group,” and “people have the right to think critically without losing their faith.” This episode sparked active audience discussion, including comments such as “Islam must open up space for dialogue” and “different interpretations do not mean heresy.” Similarly, in an Instagram post titled “Islam and Diversity,” audience comments were found rejecting an exclusive approach to preaching and promoting a more inclusive religious narrative.

From Antonio Gramsci's perspective, these findings demonstrate that digital da'wah operates as an arena of hegemony, where certain actors seek to establish symbolic dominance by producing narratives perceived as collective truths. However, the digital space also opens up opportunities for the emergence of counter-discourse that challenges this dominance. Thus, digital Islamic communication in Indonesia not only reproduces ideological consensus but also becomes a space for resistance, meaning negotiation, and struggles for religious legitimacy.

Recent research shows that digital media enables the emergence of progressive, inclusive, and social justice-based Islamic narratives that serve as a form of resistance to dominant discourses<sup>34</sup>. This demonstrates that Islamic communication is a dynamic arena that not only reproduces power but also creates space for social transformation.

Overall, this study's findings confirm that Islamic communication, from a critical perspective, is a complex discursive practice in which discourse, power, and authority are intertwined. The integration of critical discourse analysis, Bourdieu's symbolic capital theory, and Habermas's concept of the public sphere demonstrates that Islamic communication cannot be understood solely normatively but must be seen as a social process that shapes and is shaped by power structures.

Thus, da'wah is not merely the act of conveying religious teachings, but also a social practice with ideological, political, and cultural implications. In the digital age, these dynamics are increasingly complex due to the involvement of technology, algorithms, and media logic in shaping religious discourse.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that Islamic communication, from a critical perspective, cannot be understood as a neutral process of conveying religious messages but rather as a dynamic discursive arena in which meaning, power, and authority are continuously produced, negotiated, and contested. By integrating critical discourse analysis, symbolic capital theory, and the concept

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<sup>34</sup>Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson. *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*. 3rd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2023.

of the public sphere, this study argues that da'wah is not merely a normative activity but also a social practice that shapes the structures of legitimacy and collective consciousness in Muslim societies.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration of three main dimensions that are often separated in Islamic communication studies, namely: (1) discourse as an arena for the production of meaning, (2) power as an inherent dimension in communication practices, and (3) religious authority as a social construct that is increasingly mediated by digital technology. Thus, this research makes a theoretical contribution by shifting the approach to Islamic communication from a normative perspective to a more reflective, analytical, and critical one.

Based on an analysis of 12 pieces of digital Islamic preaching content from YouTube, Instagram, and Spotify podcasts, this study demonstrates that digital media has transformed the landscape of Islamic communication by expanding the religious public sphere while simultaneously giving rise to fragmentation, pluralization of discourse, and contestation over the legitimacy of religious authority. On the one hand, this opens up broader and more democratic participation in the production of religious knowledge. However, it also has the potential to foster polarization, competition for authority, and epistemic instability in understanding Islamic teachings.

In terms of policy and practical implications, this research emphasizes the importance of developing more reflective, inclusive, and ethically based Islamic missionary communication strategies. Islamic missionaries, whether individuals, institutions, or digital content creators, need to prioritize a dialogical approach rather than merely a persuasive one, and to develop epistemic responsibility in conveying religious discourse. Furthermore, strengthening digital religious literacy is crucial to help the public sort through information, understand differences in interpretation, and avoid the spread of exclusive or manipulative discourse.

Furthermore, religious institutions and policymakers need to view digital media as a strategic space in religious governance. Efforts such as collaboration between traditional clerics and digital actors, strengthening the discourse on religious moderation, and supporting the production of credible religious content are crucial to maintaining a balance among authority, diversity, and social cohesion.

It should be noted that this study is limited by its analytical focus, which emphasizes the discourse dimension in digital spaces without in-depth exploration of audience reception. Therefore, further research is recommended to develop an audience reception analysis approach through in-depth interviews with approximately 30–40 active users of YouTube, Instagram, and Spotify Podcast platforms to understand how audiences interpret, accept, or negotiate religious authority in digital spaces. Furthermore, cross-regional comparative research—for example,

between urban Muslim communities in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Makassar—is also important for identifying how social, cultural, and religious affiliations influence patterns of reception of digital da'wah discourse. This approach will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship among digital media, religious authority, and the formation of collective consciousness in contemporary Muslim societies.

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