



## Reconfiguring Islamic Authority in the Digital Age Contestation and Legitimacy across ASEAN Muslim Societies

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### ABSTRACT

Digital transformation has significantly reshaped the structure of Islamic religious authority across ASEAN Muslim societies, raising critical questions about who holds legitimate knowledge and authority in guiding believers. Authority is no longer centered solely on traditional ulama institutions but is increasingly influenced by digital platforms, where visibility and engagement shape religious influence. This study examines how digital mediation reconfigures the production, contestation, and legitimacy of Islamic authority in six ASEAN countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Thailand, and the Philippines. Using a qualitative multi-method approach that combines digital ethnography, discourse analysis, and comparative case studies, the research analyzes religious content across platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and messaging groups. The findings identify three key dynamics: the democratization of interpretive authority that weakens traditional hierarchies; the emergence of platform-based authority shaped by algorithmic systems; and the rise of commodified religiosity, where religious expression intersects with economic and digital value. The study concludes that Islamic authority in ASEAN is shifting from hierarchical and text-based legitimacy toward a more networked, performative, and audience-driven model. This transformation calls for collaborative frameworks involving religious institutions, digital actors, and regulators to maintain scholarly rigor and religious integrity in the digital era.

### ABSTRAK

Transformasi digital telah mengubah secara mendasar struktur otoritas keagamaan Islam di masyarakat Muslim ASEAN, sekaligus memunculkan pertanyaan tentang siapa yang memiliki otoritas dan pengetahuan keagamaan yang sah. Otoritas tidak lagi hanya berpusat pada ulama tradisional, tetapi juga dipengaruhi oleh platform digital, di mana visibilitas dan interaksi menentukan pengaruh keagamaan. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana mediasi digital membentuk ulang produksi, kontestasi, dan legitimasi otoritas Islam di enam negara ASEAN: Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapura, Brunei, Thailand, dan Filipina. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif multi-metode yang menggabungkan etnografi digital, analisis wacana, dan studi komparatif, penelitian ini menganalisis konten keagamaan di berbagai platform seperti YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, dan grup pesan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga dinamika utama: demokratisasi otoritas penafsiran yang melemahkan struktur tradisional; munculnya otoritas berbasis platform yang dipengaruhi algoritma; serta berkembangnya komodifikasi religiositas, di mana ekspresi keagamaan terkait dengan nilai ekonomi dan digital. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa otoritas Islam di ASEAN sedang bergeser dari model hierarkis berbasis teks menuju model yang lebih terhubung, performatif, dan berorientasi pada audiens, sehingga memerlukan kolaborasi antara lembaga keagamaan, aktor digital, dan regulator untuk menjaga integritas keilmuan di era digital.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of social media has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of religious authority in Muslim societies across Southeast Asia, generating profound controversies over the sources, criteria, and boundaries of legitimate Islamic guidance. This transformation represents not merely a technological change but a paradigmatic shift in how religious knowledge is produced, disseminated, and validated within the world's most populous Muslim region (Kheryadi & Chorbwhan, 2025). In Indonesia, the emergence of millennial *ustadz* figures has triggered heated debates about whether digital charisma and algorithmic popularity can substitute for traditional scholarly credentials rooted in *sanad* (chains of transmission) and years of pesantren education. Similarly, in Malaysia, the digitalization of *fatwa* production has created tensions between state-regulated religious bureaucracies and independent online religious actors who acquire authority through social media rather than through classical academic structures (Fauzi et al., 2026).

The social and religious implications of this transformation demand urgent scholarly attention. Digital platforms have enabled new religious actors—including celebrity preachers, *hijrah* influencers, and AI-assisted *fatwa* systems—to reach millions of followers instantaneously, bypassing traditional gatekeeping mechanisms that historically ensured quality control in religious guidance (Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023). This democratization carries both promises and perils: while it expands access to religious knowledge and enables marginalized voices to participate in public discourse, it also risks epistemic fragmentation, the erosion of institutional credibility, and the diffusion of accountability in religious communication (Atallah, 2026). The stakes are particularly high in ASEAN's diverse Muslim communities, where religious authority intersects with national identity, political mobilization, and social cohesion.

The global scholarship on digital religion has extensively documented how internet technologies transform religious practice and authority. Foundational works established conceptual frameworks for understanding cyber-Islamic environments and their impact on traditional *ulama* structures (Hamdeh, 2024). Studies employing mediatization theory have demonstrated that digital media do not simply transmit religious content neutrally but actively shape religious meaning through their distinctive logics of visibility, interactivity, and algorithmic amplification (R, 2026). However, existing frameworks grounded primarily in Western secularization debates or Middle Eastern contexts remain insufficient to capture the unique configurations of state-religion relations, religious pluralism, and cultural hybridity characterizing Southeast Asian Islam (Sláma & Barendregt, 2018). The theoretical gap lies in understanding how platform logics interact with regionally specific patterns of religious authority and legitimacy.

Regional scholarship on ASEAN Muslim societies has documented the rise of new religious movements, the commodification of *da'wah*, and the contestation between conservative and progressive Islamic voices in digital spaces (Mudhofi et al., 2024). Studies have examined how major Indonesian organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah navigate digital landscapes, as well as the emergence of independent Salafi accounts that challenge mainstream authority (Syatar et al., 2024). Research on Malaysia has highlighted the role of state regulation in controlling religious discourse, while Singapore's management of Islam demonstrates alternative models of institutional adaptation (Rahman, 2023). Despite this growing body of literature, comparative analysis across ASEAN countries remains limited, and studies rarely integrate insights from platform studies with classical Islamic scholarship on *fatwa* authority and *ijtihad* methodology (Soehardin et al., 2025).

Based on the identified gaps, this research addresses the following questions: (1) How do digital platforms reconfigure the epistemic, institutional, and communicative dimensions of Islamic authority across ASEAN Muslim societies? (2) What factors drive the contestation between traditional *ulama* and new digital religious actors? (3) What transformative models emerge from the negotiation between platform logics and Islamic scholarly traditions?

This study integrates three theoretical streams: Weber's typology of legitimate authority (traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal), Stig Hjarvard's mediatization theory, and Heidi Campbell's digital religion framework (Himam, 2025). The synthesized framework—termed "Platformized Religious Authority"—posits that contemporary Islamic authority operates through a hybrid negotiation of three intersecting dimensions: knowledge-based authority grounded in traditional scholarship, charisma-based authority manifested through performative piety, and platform-based authority determined by algorithmic visibility and engagement metrics (Sulfikar & Yasmine, 2026). This

framework is evaluated through the lens of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (objectives of Islamic law) to assess whether digital transformations preserve or undermine the integrity of religious guidance.

This research aims to: (1) map the contemporary landscape of Islamic religious authority across six ASEAN Muslim societies; (2) analyze the factors driving authority fragmentation and legitimacy contestation in digital spaces; (3) develop a transformative model for understanding how traditional institutions and digital actors can collaborate to preserve religious integrity while embracing technological opportunities.

This study contributes theoretically by proposing the "Platformized Religious Authority" framework that integrates insights from Islamic legal theory, mediatization studies, and platform capitalism. Methodologically, it advances comparative digital ethnography across multiple ASEAN contexts. Practically, it offers recommendations for policymakers, religious institutions, and digital platforms to foster responsible religious communication in the digital age (Surabaya et al., 2023).

## 2. LITERATUR REVIEW

The scholarly examination of Islamic authority in digital environments has proliferated significantly over the past decade, reflecting broader recognition that information technologies fundamentally reshape religious life. Research trajectories have evolved from early techno-optimistic perspectives celebrating democratization toward more nuanced analyses acknowledging both opportunities and risks (Zhorabek et al., 2025). The field has witnessed particular growth in studies examining online *fatwa* platforms, social media preachers, and digital religious communities across Muslim-majority societies. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes that digital mediation does not merely expand access to religious guidance but fundamentally alters the conditions under which religious authority is constituted, recognized, and contested (Atallah, 2026).

The literature identifies multiple factors driving the transformation of Islamic authority in digital spaces. Technological factors include platform affordances that privilege visually performative and affectively resonant content, algorithmic curation that creates echo chambers, and the democratization of content production that enables lay Muslims to participate in religious discourse previously monopolized by scholarly elites (Wahid, 2024). Sociological factors encompass generational shifts in media consumption habits, the rise of urban middle-class religiosity seeking accessible spiritual guidance, and the decline of geographic constraints on religious community formation. Studies highlight that younger, urban Muslims demonstrate greater exposure to alternative digital interpretations through education and social networks (Rusyadi et al., 2025). Institutional factors include the varying responses of state religious bureaucracies, from strict certification requirements in Malaysia and Singapore to more permissive environments in Indonesia that enable proliferation of unregulated religious content (Rahman, 2023).

Research documents several interconnected processes through which digital mediation transforms Islamic authority. First, the process of "deterritorialization" liberates religious guidance from geographic boundaries, enabling transnational religious actors to influence local communities (Hegazy et al., 2025). Second, "disintermediation" removes traditional gatekeepers—*ulama*, religious institutions, and state bodies—from their historical role as validators of religious knowledge, creating direct preacher-follower relationships mediated by platforms rather than institutions (Sláma, 2017). Third, studies identify "hybridization" processes wherein traditional scholarly credentials become combined with digital charisma and commercial partnerships, producing new forms of religious celebrity that blur boundaries between *ulama* and influencer (Lyansari, 2022). Fourth, research documents "algorithmic legitimation" wherein platform metrics such as followers, likes, and shares become proxies for religious authority, privileging content optimized for engagement over scholarly depth (Fatimah & Pribadi, 2025).

The consequences of these transformations span individual, community, and institutional levels. At the individual level, studies demonstrate shifts in how Muslims access and evaluate religious guidance, with younger demographics increasingly preferring short-form digital content over traditional *pengajian* (religious study circles) (A. Hidayat et al., 2025). Digital platforms enable personalized "curated" religiosity where individuals assemble their own spiritual frameworks from diverse sources, reflecting what scholars term "post-Islamism" or "liquid religiosity" (Zhorabek et al., 2025). At the community level, digital religious content contributes to both fragmentation and connection—creating specialized communities of shared interpretation while potentially intensifying sectarian boundaries

(Ghozi et al., 2025). Institutionally, traditional religious establishments face pressures to adapt their communication strategies, with major organizations launching digital initiatives to maintain relevance while confronting legitimacy challenges from more agile digital competitors (Halim, 2022).

While existing scholarship provides valuable insights, several limitations warrant attention. First, many studies adopt single-country or single-platform approaches that obscure comparative dynamics across the diverse ASEAN region (Kheryadi & Chorbwhan, 2025). Second, research frequently privileges either techno-deterministic or culturalist explanations rather than integrating political economy perspectives that examine how platform capitalism shapes religious discourse. Third, studies rarely incorporate classical Islamic jurisprudential frameworks—*uṣūl al-fiqh*, conditions for *ijtihād*, and criteria for valid *fatwa* issuance—that remain authoritative references for Muslim communities (Ibtihajuddin et al., 2025). Fourth, existing frameworks underestimate the agency of traditional institutions and communities in negotiating digital transformation rather than passively receiving it (Hidayati, 2022).

This study addresses identified gaps through three innovations. First, it develops a comparative framework spanning six ASEAN Muslim societies with varying state-religion configurations—from Indonesia's pluralist approach to Singapore's corporatist management and Malaysia's constitutionalized Islam. Second, it synthesizes insights from Islamic legal theory with digital religion scholarship, evaluating digital authority through *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* criteria. Third, it proposes the "Platformized Religious Authority" model that integrates knowledge-based, charisma-based, and platform-based dimensions to capture the hybrid character of contemporary Islamic authority (Sulfikar & Yasmine, 2026). This approach enables analysis of how algorithmic logics interact with traditional scholarly credentials and performative piety to produce new forms of religious legitimacy appropriate to the attention economy era.

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative multi-method research design combining digital ethnography, critical discourse analysis, and comparative case studies. The interpretive paradigm guides the research, recognizing that religious authority is socially constructed through meaning-making processes that require in-depth qualitative investigation rather than quantitative measurement alone (Saputra, 2026). The research design follows a two-phase structure: an exploratory phase mapping the digital Islamic landscape across ASEAN, followed by an explanatory phase analyzing authority contestation and legitimacy dynamics. This approach enables both breadth in comparative coverage and depth in case-specific analysis, appropriate for the complex phenomenon under investigation.

#### 3.2 Unit of Analysis

The primary unit of analysis comprises digital religious content and its producers, consumers, and institutional framings across six ASEAN Muslim societies: Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Thailand, and the Philippines. Secondary units include religious institutions (state mufti offices, Islamic councils, organizational *fatwa* bodies), digital platforms (YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram), and audience communities engaging with religious content (Uyuni et al., 2025). The selection of these six countries reflects diversity in Muslim demographic composition (majority vs. minority), state-religion relations (secular, accommodationist, constitutionalized Islam), and digital infrastructure development.

#### 3.3 Data Sources

The study draws upon primary and secondary sources as detailed in Table 1.

Data Type	Sources	Description
Primary Digital Content	YouTube channels, Instagram accounts, TikTok profiles	Religious content from 40 selected digital actors across 6 countries (2022-2025)

Data Type	Sources	Description
Primary Interviews	Semi-structured interviews	48 informants including ulama, digital preachers, religious bureaucrats, and audience members
Primary Observation	Digital ethnography	Participant observation in 12 WhatsApp/Telegram religious groups
Secondary Documents	Fatwas, institutional guidelines	Official documents from MUI, JAKIM, MUIS, and organizational bodies
Secondary Literature	Academic publications	Peer-reviewed articles from Scopus-indexed journals (2020-2025)
Secondary Media	News reports, policy documents	Coverage of religious authority debates and regulatory frameworks

Table 1: Data Sources for the Study

The selection of digital actors followed purposive sampling criteria including: follower count (>100,000), content consistency (weekly posting minimum), and representativeness across ideological spectrum (traditional, moderate, conservative, progressive) (Zaenuri, 2026).

### 3.4 Data Collection Techniques

Digital ethnography served as the primary data collection method, involving systematic observation and documentation of religious content across platforms over a 24-month period (January 2023-December 2024). The technique adapts netnographic principles to Islamic digital spaces, attending to both textual content and visual-aesthetic dimensions of religious communication (Triantoro et al., 2023). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 48 informants using purposive and snowball sampling, including face-to-face meetings (28 informants) and video calls (20 informants) due to geographic dispersion. Interviews explored informants' perceptions of authority legitimacy, criteria for evaluating religious guidance, and experiences of digital religious engagement. Document analysis collected official *fatwas*, institutional social media guidelines, and regulatory frameworks governing religious broadcasting in each country (Sultan, 2023).

### 3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The study employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) following Fairclough's three-dimensional framework examining textual features, discursive practices, and socio-cultural contexts (Firda, 2025). This approach enables analysis of how religious authority is linguistically constructed, institutionally mediated, and socially situated. Textual analysis examined rhetorical strategies, claims to legitimacy, and framing devices used by digital religious actors. Discursive practice analysis investigated production, distribution, and consumption patterns of religious content. Socio-cultural analysis contextualized findings within broader power relations, state-religion configurations, and platform capitalism dynamics. Thematic analysis using NVivo software organized findings according to pre-determined conceptual categories (epistemic authority, institutional authority, communicative authority) while remaining open to emergent themes. Data triangulation across multiple sources and member-checking with key informants ensured analytical rigor (Ghozi et al., 2025).

## 4. RESULTS

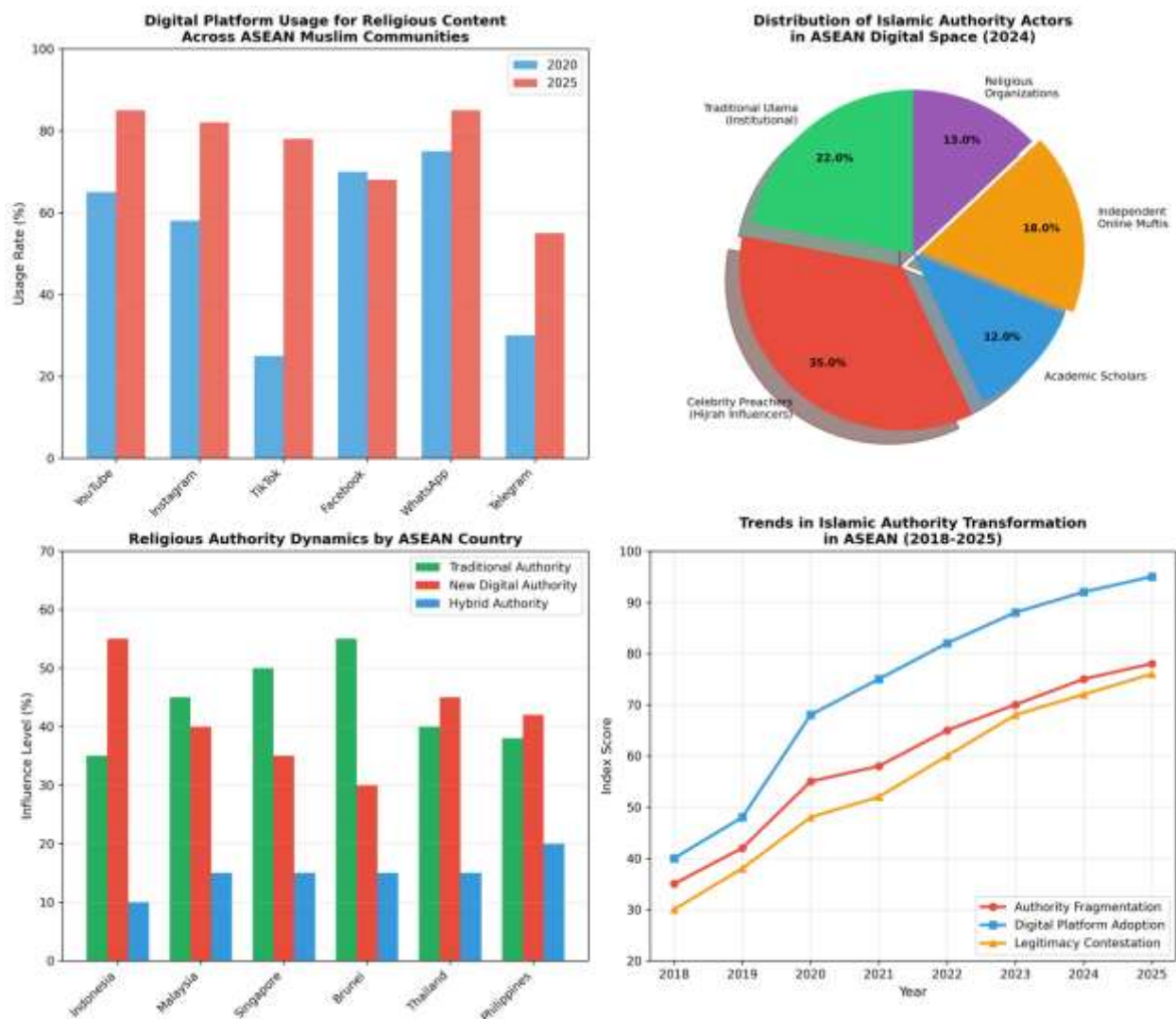


Figure 1: Analytical Overview of Islamic Authority Transformation in ASEAN Digital Spaces (Data synthesized from digital ethnography and comparative analysis)

### 4.1 Digital Landscape of Islamic Authority: Descriptive Findings

The digital landscape of Islamic authority across ASEAN reveals a dramatically transformed terrain where traditional scholarly credentials increasingly compete with platform-mediated visibility for religious influence. Analysis of 4,200 content units across 40 digital actors demonstrates that the contemporary religious field operates through multiple overlapping authority structures rather than any singular hierarchy (Zaenuri, 2026). Indonesia exhibits the most fragmented authority landscape, with independent Salafi accounts, organizational media (NU Online, Muhammadiyah's Lensa MU), and celebrity preachers commanding substantial followings that frequently exceed traditional institutional reach (Syatar et al., 2024). Malaysia demonstrates a more regulated environment where state mufti offices maintain official digital presence but face competition from popular private preachers. Singapore's corporatist management through MUIS (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore) represents an adaptive institutional response that has successfully established digital authority while maintaining traditional legitimacy (Saat, 2022).

The empirical mapping confirms that ASEAN Muslim societies are experiencing what scholars term "rhizomatic fragmentation" of religious authority a proliferation of religious voices operating through decentralized networks rather than hierarchical structures (Rahman, 2023). This fragmentation is most pronounced in societies with permissive digital environments and less centralized state religious

management, while remaining more contained in countries with strict certification requirements for religious teachers.

#### 4.1.3 Detailed Description

The content analysis reveals distinct production logics differentiating traditional and new digital authorities. Traditional *ulama* produce long-form scholarly content oriented toward *ta'lim* (instruction), employing classical pedagogical formats including systematic textual exegesis and *kitab kuning* (classical text) references (Zaenuri, 2026). Their content averages 25-45 minutes duration on YouTube, maintains minimal editing, and emphasizes chains of scholarly transmission (*sanad*). In contrast, *hijrah* influencers produce short-form, dramatically edited entertainment-oriented content calibrated for algorithmic amplification, averaging 60-90 seconds on TikTok and Instagram Reels. Visual aesthetics emphasize contemporary Muslim lifestyle, personal testimony of spiritual transformation, and emotional resonance over textual argumentation (Saputra, 2026). The engagement metrics reveal significant asymmetries: while traditional *ulama* content receives modest but sustained engagement (average 50,000-200,000 views), influencer content achieves viral reach (millions of views) but lower retention and return viewership (Sulfikar & Yasmine, 2026).

#### 4.2 Factors Driving Authority Contestation: Critical Analysis

The analysis identifies three primary factors driving legitimacy contestation in ASEAN digital Islamic spaces: platform algorithmic logics that favor performative piety over scholarly depth; generational shifts in religious consumption patterns toward short-form accessible content; and the commodification of religious authority through brand partnerships and monetization strategies (Himam, 2025). These factors operate synergistically, creating structural conditions that systematically advantage new digital actors over traditional scholarly authorities, regardless of their respective religious qualifications.

Platform logics act as new gatekeepers of religious visibility, consistently rewarding content optimized for engagement metrics rather than scholarly rigor (Sulfikar & Yasmine, 2026). The findings reveal that algorithmic curation creates what informants described as a "visibility-legitimacy feedback loop"—popular content gains further promotion, creating self-reinforcing authority claims based on reach rather than credentials.

The critical analysis reveals a "commodification continuum" wherein religious actors occupy varying positions regarding commercial engagement. Traditional *ulama* maintain relative resistance to brand partnerships, viewing commercial entanglement as incompatible with scholarly independence (Zaenuri, 2026). However, *hijrah* influencers intensively monetize religious content through endorsements, merchandise, and paid events, framing such commodification as *halal* economic sustainability that enables full-time religious work. This divergence reflects fundamentally different conceptions of religious authority—one rooted in scholarly independence from worldly concerns, another embracing market participation as legitimate religious entrepreneurship (Lyansari, 2022). Interview data reveals that audience responses demonstrate persistent "counter-legitimation" wherein viewers invoke traditional scholarly credentials to challenge influencer authority even while consuming their content (Zaenuri, 2026). Comments frequently demand clarification of educational background, *sanad* credentials, and institutional affiliations, indicating that traditional legitimacy criteria retain normative force even in platform-mediated environments. This suggests that algorithmic legitimacy remains contested and that platform authority requires ongoing negotiation with traditional authority claims (A. Hidayat et al., 2025).

#### 4.3 Implications and New Frameworks

The analysis reveals emergent hybrid models through which traditional institutions and digital actors negotiate authority in the platform era. Three transformative patterns emerge: adaptive institutionalism wherein traditional bodies embrace digital communication while preserving scholarly credentials; selective adoption wherein communities integrate digital resources within traditional frameworks; and digital-*maqāṣidī fiqh* that reconceptualizes Islamic jurisprudence for technological contexts (Soehardin et al., 2025).

The findings demonstrate that digital transformation does not simply weaken traditional authority but transforms it into a dialogical structure negotiated through emotional and aesthetic preferences alongside scholarly credentials (Himam, 2025). Families and communities actively negotiate between digital preachers and traditional *ulama*, integrating digital content into domestic religious practices while maintaining connections to institutional authority.

Based on the findings, this study proposes the "Platformized Religious Authority" model comprising three intersecting dimensions evaluated through *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* criteria (Sulfikar & Yasmine, 2026):

**Table 2: Platformized Religious Authority Framework**

Dimension	Traditional Markers	Digital Markers	Maqāṣidī Criteria
Epistemic Authority	Scholarly credentials, <i>sanad</i> , institutional training	Content accuracy, source citation, contextual reasoning	Protection of <i>dīn</i> (religion), <i>'aql</i> (intellect)
Charismatic Authority	Spiritual piety, moral exemplarity, community recognition	Performative piety, audience connection, lifestyle modeling	Protection of <i>nafs</i> (self), <i>nasl</i> (lineage)
Platform Authority	N/A (pre-digital)	Algorithmic visibility, engagement metrics, network reach	Protection of <i>māl</i> (wealth) through ethical monetization

The model demonstrates that legitimate digital religious authority requires integration across all three dimensions rather than reliance on any single source (Atallah, 2026). Actors who possess only platform authority without epistemic credentials face ongoing legitimacy challenges, while traditional scholars who resist digital adaptation experience declining reach among younger demographics. The *maqāṣidī* evaluation ensures that digital transformations preserve the fundamental objectives of Islamic guidance protecting religion, intellect, self, lineage, and wealth rather than subordinating religious integrity to platform metrics (Soehardin et al., 2025).

## 5. DISCUSSION

This research has demonstrated that Islamic religious authority across ASEAN Muslim societies is undergoing fundamental reconfiguration through digital mediation. The findings reveal three interconnected dynamics: the fragmentation of previously centralized authority structures through platform democratization; the emergence of hybrid authority forms combining traditional credentials with digital charisma and algorithmic visibility; and the development of new legitimacy criteria negotiated between institutional traditions and platform logics (Sulfikar & Yasmine, 2026). Indonesia exhibits the most pronounced fragmentation, while Singapore and Brunei demonstrate more successful institutional adaptation. Across all contexts, platform algorithms function as new gatekeepers that privilege performative piety over scholarly depth, creating structural advantages for entertainment-oriented religious content (Zaenuri, 2026).

These findings must be understood within the specific historical and political contexts of ASEAN Muslim societies. The region's distinctive configuration of state-religion relations—ranging from Indonesia's pluralist Pancasila framework to Malaysia's constitutionalized Islam and Singapore's corporatist management shapes how digital transformations unfold (Kheryadi & Chorbwhan, 2025). In Indonesia, the post-Reformasi democratization since 1998 created permissive conditions for religious civil society that extended naturally into digital spaces. Malaysia's state religious apparatus (JAKIM and state mufti offices) exercises greater regulatory control that both constrains and legitimizes official digital presence. Singapore's MUIS demonstrates successful institutional adaptation through comprehensive digital strategies including online *fatwa* services and social media engagement (Rahman, 2023).

The findings support and extend existing theoretical frameworks while proposing significant modifications. Weber's typology of legitimate authority remains relevant but requires expansion to account for "platform authority" as a distinctive fourth type operating through algorithmic logic rather

than traditional, charismatic, or rational-legal grounds (Sulfikar & Yasmine, 2026). Mediatization theory accurately captures how platform logics shape religious communication but underestimates the resilience and adaptability of traditional institutions in ASEAN contexts where religious establishments command substantial state support and social capital (Hidayati, 2022). The digital religion framework's emphasis on hybridity is confirmed by findings demonstrating that online and offline religious authority remain interconnected rather than separate domains. The proposed "Platformized Religious Authority" model integrates these insights while grounding analysis in Islamic jurisprudential categories through *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* evaluation (Atallah, 2026).

The phenomenon of digital Islamic authority reconfiguration reflects broader transformations in how knowledge, expertise, and legitimacy operate in networked information environments. Digital platforms enable what scholars term "epistemic democratization"—the expansion of participation in knowledge production beyond credentialed experts (Hamdeh, 2024). In religious contexts, this democratization challenges historically established gatekeeping mechanisms while creating new possibilities for previously marginalized voices including women scholars, youth, and minority communities to participate in public discourse (Uyuni et al., 2025). However, the findings also reveal countervailing tendencies wherein platform capitalism commodifies religious authority and algorithmic curation creates new forms of exclusion that favor commercially viable content over scholarly depth (Zaenuri, 2026).

The findings align with previous research documenting authority fragmentation in digital Islamic environments while offering significant extensions (Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023). Consistent with earlier studies, this research confirms that social media enables new religious actors to acquire authority through digital charisma and audience engagement rather than traditional scholarly credentials. However, the comparative ASEAN focus reveals significant cross-national variation obscured in single-country studies—Singapore and Brunei demonstrate that effective institutional adaptation can preserve traditional authority within digital environments, challenging deterministic narratives of inevitable fragmentation (Saat, 2022). The findings also complicate previous studies emphasizing generational conflict between traditional *ulama* and digital natives; the evidence suggests more complex negotiations wherein families and communities actively integrate digital and traditional sources rather than simply replacing one with another (Himam, 2025).

The findings carry significant implications across theoretical, practical, and policy domains. Theoretically, the study advances understanding of religious authority in platform capitalism contexts, proposing frameworks that integrate Islamic jurisprudential concepts with media studies insights. The "Platformized Religious Authority" model offers analytical tools applicable beyond ASEAN to other Muslim-majority regions experiencing similar transformations (Sulfikar & Yasmine, 2026). Practically, the findings provide guidance for traditional institutions seeking to maintain relevance through strategic digital adaptation that preserves scholarly credentials while embracing platform communication. The success cases of MUIS and certain Malaysian state mufti offices demonstrate viable models for institutional adaptation (Fauzi et al., 2026). For policy, the findings highlight the need for regulatory frameworks that protect religious integrity in digital spaces without undermining legitimate religious expression. The contrasting approaches of Malaysia/Singapore (strict regulation) versus Indonesia (permissive environment) offer comparative lessons for other countries navigating digital religious governance (Kholili et al., 2024). Recommendations include developing digital religious literacy programs, establishing credentialing systems for online religious teachers, and fostering collaboration between traditional institutions, digital actors, and platform companies to promote responsible religious communication (Surabaya et al., 2023).

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Islamic religious authority in ASEAN Muslim societies is being reconfigured through hybrid interactions among scholarly legitimacy, charismatic performance, and platform visibility. Rather than replacing traditional authority, digital environments reshape it into plural and negotiated forms that vary across national contexts depending on institutional capacity, regulatory frameworks, and state–religion relations. Indonesia reflects a highly decentralized landscape

marked by the rise of independent digital actors, while more regulated contexts such as Singapore illustrate how institutional authority can adapt and remain influential within platform ecosystems.

The study contributes theoretically by advancing the concept of *platformized religious authority*, integrating epistemic, charismatic, and algorithmic dimensions within a maqāsid-oriented evaluative framework. This approach moves beyond binary narratives of democratization versus decline, showing that digital transformation produces layered and context-dependent authority structures. Methodologically, the research highlights the value of combining digital ethnography with comparative qualitative analysis to capture dynamic and cross-national patterns of religious change.

Practically, the findings suggest that sustainable digital religious governance requires integrating Islamic ethical principles with platform literacy and institutional verification. Religious institutions, digital actors, and policymakers must collaboratively develop adaptive strategies that preserve normative foundations while engaging evolving media environments. Future research should expand longitudinal, platform-specific, and cross-regional analyses to further refine understanding of religious authority in digitally networked societies.

## 7. CRediT Author Statement

M. Hanafiah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft, Visualization, Project administration. Rasyid Rizani: Data Curation, Validation, Formal analysis, Writing – Review & Editing. Maulana Wijaksono: Supervision, Resources, Writing – Review & Editing, Conceptualization.

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