

Algorithmic Religious Authority: Digital Preachers and the Transformation of Islamic Legitimacy in Indonesia

Khairunnisa

Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia

Received: 11/10/2025	Revised: 29/11/2025	Accepted: 30/12/2025
Abstract	The rapid expansion of digital media has transformed the configuration of religious authority in Indonesia by enabling digital preachers to gain legitimacy beyond traditional religious institutions. This study examines how Hanan Attaki and Felix Siau construct religious legitimacy through YouTube-based digital communication and how cultural, social, digital, and symbolic capital interact in shaping algorithmic religious authority. Using a qualitative document analysis, the study analyzes thirteen YouTube videos published between 2022 and 2025, including sermons, podcasts, interviews, and public discussions, through Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and symbolic power, complemented by the concept of digital capital. The findings reveal two distinct communication models. Hanan Attaki constructs religious authority through emotionally resonant narratives emphasizing spiritual healing, <i>tawakkul</i> , and self-improvement, whereas Felix Siau develops legitimacy through intellectual discussion, historical interpretation, and ideological engagement with contemporary social and political issues. The study further finds that audience interaction, cross-platform circulation, and algorithmic visibility facilitate the conversion of cultural and digital capital into symbolic religious authority. These findings suggest that digital media have not replaced traditional religious authority but have reconfigured the contemporary religious field by creating multiple pathways through which religious legitimacy is negotiated and recognized.	
Keywords	Digital Preachers, Religious Authority, Social Media.	
Corresponding Author Khairunnisa Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia; khairunnisathana@gmail.com		

1. INTRODUCTION

Religious authority has long occupied a central position in Muslim societies, serving as the principal source for interpreting Islamic teachings, issuing religious guidance, and shaping both religious and social life. In Indonesia, such authority has traditionally been vested in *ulama* whose legitimacy derives from mastery of the Qur'an and Hadith, formal education in *pesantren*, scholarly transmission (*sanad*), and recognition from established Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. As noted by Kaptein (2004) and Zulkifli (2013), these forms of scholarly and institutional recognition have historically positioned *ulama* as authoritative interpreters of Islam, while Harnadi et al. (2021) further emphasize that their influence extends beyond religious instruction into broader social and cultural life. Consequently, religious authority has traditionally been understood as



symbolic recognition grounded in religious expertise, institutional affiliation, and communal trust rather than public popularity alone.

This conventional pattern has been substantially transformed by the rapid expansion of digital media. Rather than relying exclusively on mosques, *pesantren*, or established religious institutions, Muslims increasingly access religious knowledge through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and X. Bunt (2003; 2009; 2018) argues that digital technologies have expanded opportunities for Islamic knowledge to circulate beyond conventional institutional boundaries, while Isetti et al. (2021) observe that online environments have become important arenas in which religious authority is continuously negotiated through interaction between religious actors and audiences. Helland further distinguishes between *religion online* and *online religion*, suggesting that digital media function not only as channels for disseminating religious information but also as spaces that enable varying degrees of religious participation (Helland, 2005). Consequently, digital platforms no longer function merely as communication channels but also as social spaces where religious legitimacy is increasingly produced, contested, and publicly recognized.

Indonesia provides a particularly significant context for examining this transformation because of its rapidly expanding digital ecosystem. According to the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), internet penetration reached 79.50% of the population in 2024 and increased to approximately 80.66% in 2025, representing more than 229 million internet users. This rapid growth has fundamentally reshaped patterns of religious learning, allowing Islamic sermons, Qur'anic studies, and religious discussions to be accessed through algorithmically curated digital platforms at any time (APJII, 2025). As a result, visibility, audience engagement, and platform recommendation systems increasingly influence the circulation of religious discourse, creating new opportunities for religious actors to establish legitimacy outside conventional institutional structures.

One important consequence of this transformation is the emergence of digital preachers whose influence depends not only on religious knowledge but also on their ability to communicate effectively within platform-based environments. Among the most influential figures in Indonesia are Hanan Attaki and Felix Siau, both of whom have attracted millions of viewers across multiple social media platforms. Latifah and Romario (2019) demonstrate that their digital popularity is closely related to persuasive communication strategies, while Muthohirin (2021) highlights their significant contribution to the contemporary *hijrah* movement among Indonesian Muslim youth. Despite sharing the same digital ecosystem, however, both preachers employ markedly different approaches. Hanan Attaki predominantly develops emotionally engaging narratives centred on spiritual healing, repentance, and self-improvement, whereas Felix Siau constructs religious discourse through historical interpretation, ideological argumentation, and discussions concerning Muslim identity, geopolitics, and contemporary Islamic civilization (Azca, 2020; Mandaville, 2001). These contrasting communication models suggest that religious legitimacy within digital environments is shaped not only by theological competence but also by communicative style, audience engagement, and platform visibility.

Previous studies have also associated Felix Siau with Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), a transnational Islamist movement that promoted the establishment of a global caliphate. Rather than relying solely on organizational activities, HTI increasingly utilized social media to disseminate narratives of Islamic identity, civilization, and Islamic lifestyles through persuasive and visually engaging forms of *da'wah* directed particularly at young Muslims (Hew, 2018; Syarafuddin HZ & Zain, 2017). This background provides an important context for understanding why discussions of Islamic civilization, Muslim identity, and political consciousness consistently appear in Felix Siau's digital

communication. Nevertheless, this study does not examine HTI as an organization or political movement; instead, it focuses on how these communication strategies contribute to the construction of religious legitimacy on YouTube.

Recent scholarship has documented the growing influence of digital media on the transformation of Islamic authority. Bunt (2003; 2009; 2018) argues that digital technologies have fundamentally reshaped the production and circulation of religious knowledge by enabling Islamic discourse to move beyond conventional institutional settings. Similar observations are offered by Campbell (2013) and Hoover (2016), who contend that authority in digital environments is increasingly negotiated through interaction, participation, and networked communication rather than institutional hierarchy alone. Within the Indonesian context, previous studies have likewise shown that social media has become a major arena for da'wah, particularly among younger Muslims, while simultaneously expanding opportunities for new religious actors to gain public influence (Harnadi et al., 2021; Muthohirin, 2021). These studies demonstrate that digital platforms have transformed the channels through which religious authority is communicated, yet they provide limited explanation of how such authority is socially constructed through different communication strategies.

Existing studies on Hanan Attaki and Felix Siauww also remain fragmented. Research on Hanan Attaki predominantly highlights his role in the *hijrah* movement, youth da'wah, persuasive communication, and the use of social media to promote Islamic values (Latifah & Romario, 2019; Muthohirin, 2021). Meanwhile, studies on Felix Siauww largely focus on political Islam, ideological discourse, transnational Islamic movements, and the dissemination of caliphate narratives in Indonesia (Azca, 2020; Hasan, 2012). Although these studies successfully explain the distinctive characteristics of each preacher, they generally examine them separately and pay greater attention to ideological orientation or communication effectiveness than to the sociological processes through which religious legitimacy is produced in digital environments.

Another limitation concerns the theoretical perspective adopted in previous scholarship. Many studies explain digital preaching primarily through communication theory, media studies, or digital religion, thereby emphasizing message delivery, audience reception, or platform characteristics. While these perspectives provide important insights, they offer less attention to the ways different forms of capital interact in shaping religious authority. Bourdieu's concepts of field, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding why certain religious actors acquire greater legitimacy than others within the same digital environment (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu, 1991). Recent discussions on digital capital further suggest that online visibility, audience engagement, and algorithmic exposure have become significant resources that can be converted into symbolic recognition within contemporary digital society (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2018). Although digital capital was not originally conceptualized by Bourdieu, contemporary scholars have extended his framework to explain resources generated through digital technologies (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2018). This study therefore adopts digital capital as a complementary concept to explain how online visibility and audience engagement facilitate the conversion of cultural capital into symbolic religious authority. Nevertheless, this perspective has rarely been applied to a comparative analysis of Indonesian digital preachers.

Accordingly, this study addresses two gaps in the existing literature. First, it compares two influential Indonesian digital preachers who employ contrasting communication models to construct religious legitimacy on YouTube. Second, it integrates Bourdieu's sociology with the concept of digital capital to explain how cultural, social, digital, and symbolic capital interact within Indonesia's

contemporary digital religious field. Rather than treating online popularity as a simple indicator of influence, this study examines how religious authority is continuously negotiated through communication practices, audience engagement, and algorithmically mediated visibility.

Based on these objectives, this study addresses two research questions: (1) How do Hanan Attaki and Felix Siauww construct religious legitimacy through YouTube-based digital religious communication? (2) How do cultural, social, digital, and symbolic capital interact in shaping algorithmic religious authority within Indonesia's contemporary digital religious field? By answering these questions, the study seeks to contribute to the growing literature on digital religion by providing a sociological explanation of how Islamic authority is reconfigured in the digital era, where traditional religious institutions, digital platforms, and transnational Islamic discourses continuously negotiate religious legitimacy.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using document analysis to examine the transformation of religious authority in Indonesia's digital era through Pierre Bourdieu's sociological framework. Document analysis was chosen because the study focuses on interpreting how religious legitimacy is constructed and negotiated through YouTube-based digital religious communication rather than measuring audience perceptions quantitatively. Accordingly, YouTube sermons, podcasts, interviews, and public discussions are treated as digital documents representing contemporary forms of Islamic communication and religious authority (Bowen, 2009).

The primary data consist of selected YouTube videos featuring Hanan Attaki and Felix Siauww published between 2022 and 2025. The corpus includes sermons, public lectures, interviews, podcasts, and collaborative discussions that represent the dominant communication patterns of both preachers while demonstrating substantial audience engagement through views, likes, comments, and cross-channel circulation. The number of videos analyzed differs between the two preachers because the corpus was selected based on thematic representativeness and variation in communication formats rather than numerical equivalence.

Hanan Attaki and Felix Siauww were purposively selected because they represent two influential yet contrasting models of contemporary digital Islamic preaching in Indonesia. Secondary data include Pierre Bourdieu's principal works on field, capital, and symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1991, 1993), together with scholarly publications on digital religion, Islamic authority, and social media (Bunt, 2003, 2009, 2018; Mandaville, 2001; Zulkifli, 2013; Harnadi et al., 2021; Isetti et al., 2021). Reports published by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII, 2025) were also used to contextualize the rapid growth of digital media use in Indonesia.

Purposive sampling was employed to select documents that fulfilled four criteria: (1) containing explicit Islamic preaching or religious discussions; (2) representing the dominant preaching characteristics of each preacher; (3) demonstrating substantial audience engagement; and (4) reflecting diverse communicative settings, including sermons, interviews, podcasts, and collaborative discussions. Data were analyzed following the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the coding process, each video was examined according to its dominant themes, communication strategies, religious references, audience engagement, and indicators of religious legitimacy before being compared across both preachers. Representative viewer comments were purposively selected to illustrate recurring audience responses regarding credibility, emotional engagement, intellectual

appreciation, and perceptions of religious legitimacy. These comments served as supporting qualitative evidence rather than the primary unit of analysis.

The analysis was guided by Bourdieu's concepts of field, cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital, and symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1986; 1991). In addition, this study adopts the concept of digital capital to capture online visibility, audience engagement, and algorithmically mediated exposure within digital platforms (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2018). Because access to YouTube's proprietary recommendation system was not available, algorithmically mediated visibility was not measured directly. Instead, it was inferred through observable platform indicators, including sustained view counts, likes, comments, cross-channel circulation, and audience interaction across the selected videos. These indicators were treated as proxies for algorithmically mediated visibility rather than direct measurements of platform algorithms. These analytical categories were used to explain how different forms of capital interact and are converted into symbolic religious authority within Indonesia's contemporary digital religious field.

Analytical Category	Operational Definition	Indicators	Evidence from Digital Documents
Cultural Capital	Religious knowledge and competence demonstrated by digital preachers through Islamic teachings and religious references.	Qur'anic verses, Hadith, stories of the Prophet, Islamic scholarship, moral teachings, religious concepts, use of Arabic terms.	Narratives delivered in sermons, podcasts, interviews, and religious discussions.
Social Capital	Social relationships and networks that strengthen religious influence in digital environments.	Collaboration with other public figures, institutional affiliation, participation in podcasts, digital communities, inter-channel interaction.	Collaborative videos, interviews, guest appearances, references to communities or organizations.
Digital Capital	Digital resources that increase online visibility and audience engagement within platform ecosystems.	Number of views, likes, subscribers, comments, cross-channel circulation, reposts, recommendation visibility, audience interaction.	YouTube engagement metrics and patterns of content dissemination.
Symbolic Capital	Public recognition, legitimacy, prestige, and authority attributed to religious actors by audiences.	Audience trust, recognition as a religious authority, credibility, persuasive influence, acceptance of religious interpretations.	Religious narratives, audience responses, public positioning, and communicative authority demonstrated in digital content.

Analytical Category	Operational Definition	Indicators	Evidence from Digital Documents
Algorithmic Religious Authority	The process through which platform algorithms amplify digital visibility and facilitate the conversion of accumulated capital into recognized religious authority.	Algorithmic visibility, recommendation patterns, sustained engagement, repeated circulation, platform amplification.	Comparative interpretation of audience engagement and cross-platform dissemination across the selected digital documents.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Traditional Religious Authority and the Persistence of Culture Capital

Religious authority has long constituted a fundamental element in the development of Indonesian Islam. Since the arrival of Islam in the archipelago, *ulama* have functioned not only as transmitters of religious knowledge but also as educators, legal authorities, and moral leaders whose guidance shapes religious and social life (Siregar, 2020). Historical studies further show that the legitimacy of Indonesian *ulama* was established through institutional learning, communal trust, and scholarly transmission rather than through public popularity or media exposure (Azra, 2004; Zulkifli, 2013). Consequently, religious authority was traditionally understood as a form of collective scholarly recognition that developed gradually within Islamic educational institutions and local Muslim communities. The institutional foundation of this authority is closely associated with the *pesantren* tradition, which has historically served as the primary center for the transmission of Islamic knowledge in Indonesia. Through long-term interaction between *kiai* and *santri*, students acquire mastery of classical Islamic sciences while simultaneously internalizing scholarly ethics and religious discipline (Dhofier, 2011). This educational process is strengthened by the concept of *sanad*, whereby religious knowledge is transmitted through recognized chains of teachers and students, ensuring the continuity and authenticity of Islamic scholarship (Bruinessen, 2015; Azra, 2004). As a result, religious legitimacy is primarily rooted in scholarly competence that has been collectively acknowledged over time.

Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and symbolic capital provide a useful perspective for understanding how this traditional system of authority operates. Cultural capital is accumulated through mastery of religious knowledge, educational experience, linguistic competence, and participation in recognized scholarly traditions (Bourdieu, 1986). When these competencies receive sustained recognition from religious institutions and Muslim communities, they are gradually transformed into symbolic capital in the form of credibility, prestige, and religious legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1991). Accordingly, traditional religious authority is produced through a long process of institutional validation rather than individual popularity or media performance. This pattern of legitimacy is reinforced through major Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and the Indonesian Ulema Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia/MUI). These institutions provide organizational frameworks through which scholars disseminate religious teachings, supervise Islamic education, formulate religious guidance, and respond to contemporary social issues (Fealy & White, 2008; Kaptein, 2004). Their institutional roles demonstrate that religious authority has historically been embedded within collective scholarly networks rather than relying solely on personal

charisma. In this context, institutional recognition remains an important source of religious legitimacy within Indonesian Islam.

The rapid expansion of digital media has not eliminated traditional religious authority but has changed the ways in which it reaches wider audiences. Many established scholars have gradually adopted platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram to disseminate religious knowledge while preserving the scholarly traditions that originally shaped their legitimacy (Mustofa, 2023; Bunt, 2018). Figures such as Gus Baha and Buya Yahya illustrate this pattern. Although both attract millions of online viewers, their authority continues to derive primarily from pesantren education, mastery of classical Islamic scholarship, and long-standing institutional recognition rather than from digital popularity itself (Ghofur, 2018; Risdiana et al., 2020). In this respect, digital media function mainly as channels that expand the circulation of pre-existing religious authority instead of creating new legitimacy from the outset. Nevertheless, the emergence of social media has introduced a different logic into Indonesia's religious field. Unlike pesantren and Islamic institutions that emphasize scholarly transmission and gradual learning, digital platforms prioritize visibility, engagement, recommendation systems, and audience interaction (Bunt, 2018). Religious content that attracts high watch time, comments, and repeated sharing is more likely to be promoted by platform algorithms, allowing certain preachers to reach audiences far beyond their immediate followers. Consequently, religious visibility is increasingly influenced not only by scholarly credentials but also by the communicative dynamics embedded within digital platforms.

These developments have significantly transformed how younger Muslims encounter religious knowledge. Whereas previous generations commonly relied on pesantren, mosques, or local religious organizations as their primary sources of Islamic learning, contemporary audiences frequently access religious content through YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and podcasts before engaging with formal religious institutions (Campbell, 2013; Bunt, 2018). Digital platforms therefore mediate the initial encounter between audiences and religious messages by continuously recommending content based on viewing histories and interaction patterns. This shift indicates that religious authority is increasingly experienced through digitally mediated communication without necessarily diminishing the continuing relevance of traditional institutions. From Bourdieu's perspective, these developments reflect a reconfiguration rather than a replacement of Indonesia's religious field. Traditional ulama continue to derive legitimacy from cultural and symbolic capital accumulated through religious scholarship and institutional recognition, while digital preachers increasingly compete through visibility, audience engagement, and algorithmic circulation that generate new forms of digital capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Ragnedda & Muschert, 2018). The coexistence of these different mechanisms demonstrates that contemporary religious legitimacy is becoming more plural, with traditional institutions and digital actors occupying complementary yet competitive positions within the same religious field. Against this broader transformation, the following section examines how Hanan Attaki and Felix Siauww construct religious legitimacy through YouTube-based communication and how their authority reflects the interaction between religious knowledge, communication strategies, audience participation, and digital platform dynamics.

3.2. Constructing Digital Religious Authority: Hanan Attaki and Felix Siauww

3.2.1 The Construction of Digital Religious Authority: Hanan Attaki

The analysis of eight YouTube videos published between 2022 and 2025 demonstrates that Hanan Attaki has developed a distinctive model of digital religious communication that differs from

conventional *pesantren*-based preaching. Rather than emphasizing jurisprudential debates, theological polemics, or detailed textual interpretation, his sermons consistently address the emotional and psychological experiences of contemporary Muslim audiences, including anxiety, burnout, uncertainty, heartbreak, and self-improvement. Such communication reflects the broader transformation of religious authority in digital environments, where accessibility, emotional relevance, and sustained audience engagement increasingly shape public perceptions of religious legitimacy (Campbell, 2013; Bunt, 2018). Instead of positioning himself primarily as a legal or doctrinal authority, Hanan Attaki constructs religious authority by translating Islamic teachings into practical guidance that resonates with everyday life.

To examine this communication model, the study analyzed eight YouTube videos uploaded between September 2022 and January 2025 using the coding framework presented in the Methods section. Each video was coded according to four analytical dimensions: (1) dominant religious themes, (2) communication strategies, (3) audience orientation, and (4) indicators of digital engagement, including views, likes, and audience interaction. Collectively, the selected videos accumulated approximately 7.49 million views, indicating sustained public exposure and algorithmic visibility on YouTube. Rather than selecting only viral lectures, the corpus was intentionally designed to identify recurring communication patterns that consistently characterize Hanan Attaki's digital da'wah.

Table 2. Selected YouTube Videos of Hanan Attaki

Video Title	Main Theme	Views	Communication Style
Kalau Lagi Mentok, Harus Gimana?	Tawakkul	1,769,611	Emotional & Persuasive
"Obat" untuk Menjawab Setiap Masalah	Qur'anic Healing	1,759,041	Reflective
Ketika Kita Merasa Lelah dengan Hidup	Spiritual Healing	1,361,194	Motivational
Cara Ngobatin Hati yang Lelah dan Terluka	Emotional Recovery	949,693	Storytelling
Saat Nabi Membela Orang yang Jatuh Cinta	Prophetic Empathy	573,488	Narrative
Suka Nunda Mau Sampai Kapan	Self-Improvement	440,217	Persuasive
Belajar Menerima Takdir Allah	Hikmah and Acceptance	319,000	Reflective
Cara Biar Dapat Support dari Langit	Reliance upon Allah	319,976	Motivational

Source: Processed by the author from YouTube (2022–2025).

The coding results reveal three recurring thematic patterns that characterize Hanan Attaki's digital preaching. The first and most dominant theme is spiritual healing, which appears in half of the analyzed videos, including *Ketika Kita Merasa Lelah dengan Hidup*, *Cara Ngobatin Hati yang Lelah dan Terluka*, and *"Obat" untuk Menjawab Setiap Masalah*. Across these lectures, Islam is consistently presented not merely as a system of religious obligations but also as a source of emotional recovery and psychological resilience. Rather than opening his sermons with discussions of jurisprudence or theological controversies, Hanan Attaki typically begins by acknowledging the emotional struggles experienced by audiences before introducing Qur'anic verses, Hadith, and prophetic narratives as practical spiritual guidance. Consequently, religious teachings become directly connected to

contemporary experiences of burnout, disappointment, loneliness, and uncertainty, reflecting the broader tendency of digital da'wah to prioritize emotional accessibility and personal relevance (Muthohirin, 2015; Bunt, 2018). This finding indicates that emotional resonance constitutes one of the principal foundations through which Hanan Attaki establishes religious legitimacy in digital spaces.

The second recurring pattern concerns tawakkul and positive religious coping, particularly in *Kalau Lagi Mentok, Harus Gimana?, Belajar Menerima Takdir Allah*, and *Cara Biar Dapat Support dari Langit*. Rather than portraying hardship as divine punishment, these lectures consistently interpret adversity as an opportunity to strengthen reliance upon Allah, cultivate patience, and maintain optimism. Qur'anic narratives concerning Prophet Yusuf, Prophet Musa, Prophet Ibrahim, and Surah An-Naml are not presented merely as historical references but are reconstructed as interpretive frameworks through which audiences understand their own personal struggles. Complementing this theme, videos such as *Suka Nunda Mau Sampai Kapan* and *Saat Nabi Membela Orang yang Jatuh Cinta* extend religious guidance into everyday behavioural issues by encouraging gradual self-improvement, emotional maturity, and ethical conduct instead of fear-based obedience. Collectively, these themes reposition Islam as a practical framework for personal transformation that remains closely connected to the lived realities of contemporary Muslim youth (Campbell, 2013; Harnadi et al., 2021).

Beyond the thematic patterns identified above, the analysis also reveals a distinctive communication strategy that contributes to Hanan Attaki's digital religious authority. Across all eight videos, he consistently employs conversational language, storytelling, relatable analogies, and rhetorical questions that reduce the social distance between preacher and audience. Rather than positioning himself as a distant religious authority, Hanan Attaki frequently adopts the role of a companion who empathizes with the emotional struggles of contemporary Muslim youth before introducing Qur'anic verses, Hadith, and prophetic narratives as practical guidance. Historical accounts concerning Prophet Yusuf, Prophet Musa, Prophet Ibrahim, and Prophet Muhammad are reconstructed within contemporary contexts, enabling audiences to connect classical Islamic teachings with everyday experiences such as academic pressure, career uncertainty, emotional exhaustion, and interpersonal relationships. argues that digital religious communication increasingly relies upon accessibility and emotional proximity to establish religious influence, a pattern that is consistently reflected throughout Hanan Attaki's digital preaching (Campbell 2013). Consequently, his communication strategy strengthens the perception that Islamic teachings are both emotionally relevant and practically applicable within everyday life.

The effectiveness of this communication strategy is further reflected in audience responses. Analysis of viewer comments reveals recurring patterns of emotional identification, religious coping, and personal transformation, suggesting that audiences actively appropriate Hanan Attaki's sermons to interpret their own life experiences. For example, one viewer of *Kalau Lagi Mentok, Harus Gimana?* wrote, "I watched this in 2025 when my life was completely falling apart. I was struggling physically, financially, and mentally. Please pray that I recover and find a job." Another commented, "I am currently at the lowest point in my life, but this lecture encouraged me to stay optimistic and strengthen my relationship with Allah." Similar responses also appear in *Cara Ngobatin Hati yang Lelah dan Terluka*, where one viewer described the lecture as "Exactly what I needed not sad music, but words that brought peace to my heart." Likewise, a viewer of '*Obat*' untuk Menjawab Setiap Masalah reflected, "Every time I read and understand the Qur'an, I realize that Allah always provides the answer to every problem." Rather than merely expressing admiration for the preacher, these comments indicate that audiences integrate the religious messages into their emotional and spiritual coping practices. Such interactions demonstrate that digital religious authority

is continuously reinforced through audience participation and shared religious experiences rather than through one-way transmission of religious knowledge alone.

The findings further indicate that Hanan Attaki's religious authority extends beyond his official YouTube channel through patterns of networked digital circulation. Several lectures analyzed in this study accumulated substantial additional audiences after being redistributed by independent Islamic channels such as *Mood Dakwah*, allowing the same religious messages to reach users beyond his immediate subscriber base. This repeated circulation not only increases algorithmic visibility but also strengthens audience familiarity through continuous exposure and recommendation. As a result, Hanan Attaki's authority is sustained through an interaction between emotionally resonant communication, audience engagement, and platform ecology, illustrating that digital religious legitimacy is increasingly reproduced through interconnected networks of users, content redistribution, and algorithmic recommendation rather than through institutional religious structures alone.

3.2.2. Religious Legitimacy through Intellectual and Ideological Communication: The Case of Felix Siauw

Unlike Hanan Attaki, whose digital preaching is largely oriented toward emotional reassurance and spiritual healing, Felix Siauw develops religious authority by placing Islam within broader intellectual and ideological discussions. Across the analyzed videos, religious teachings are consistently connected with contemporary issues such as geopolitics, civilizational decline, public policy, historical consciousness, and global Muslim affairs. Mandaville argues that contemporary Islamic authority increasingly intersects with political and transnational discourses, while Bunt demonstrates that digital platforms have enabled religious actors to reinterpret Islam through more diverse communicative forms (Mandaville, 2001; Bunt, 2018). Rather than limiting Islamic discourse to ritual observance or individual morality, Felix presents Islam as an intellectual tradition capable of explaining complex social and political realities. This communication model enables him to engage audiences who seek analytical explanations and historical perspectives alongside religious guidance. His religious legitimacy is therefore constructed through intellectual engagement as much as through religious instruction.

The analysis examined five YouTube videos published between 2024 and 2025, consisting of one lecture uploaded on Felix Siauw's official channel and four podcast appearances hosted by Raymond Chin, Ferry Irwandi, and Refly Harun. Together, these videos generated more than 3.6 million views, indicating that Felix's religious narratives circulate well beyond conventional Islamic audiences. Instead of relying on monologic sermons, most discussions take place within long-form podcast conversations where arguments are developed gradually through dialogue, questions, disagreement, and historical explanation. According to Campbell, interactive digital media provide religious actors with opportunities to negotiate authority through dialogue rather than one-way preaching, allowing audiences to observe how religious arguments are constructed (Campbell, 2013). This format provides greater flexibility to explore controversial issues while allowing audiences to observe the reasoning process behind Felix's religious interpretations.

Table 3. Selected YouTube Videos of Felix Siauw

Video Title	Main Theme	Views	Communication Style
Kenapa Orang Bodoh Diikuti? Fenomena Mama Ghuftron	Religious Authority & Critical Thinking	636,964	Argumentative & Educational
Saat Para Penjahat Ngomongin Damai	Palestine & Global Geopolitics	346,584	Ideological & Political
Semua Isi Kepala dan Transformasi Ustadz Felix Siauww	Islamic Civilization & Intellectual Transformation	1,200,000	Dialogical & Intellectual
Fenomena Islam dan Muslim "Munafik"	Muslim Identity & Moral Integrity	677,275	Reflective & Discursive
Makin Terang Tanda Kebangkitan Islam?	Islamic Revival & Global Change	667,078	Ideological & Futuristic

The coding results presented in Table 3 demonstrate that Felix Siauww consistently employs digital communication to discuss Islam beyond ritual observance. The selected videos are dominated by themes of Islamic civilization, Muslim identity, geopolitics, and critical thinking, positioning Islam as a comprehensive framework for interpreting contemporary social and political realities. Across lectures and interactive podcasts, Felix adapts these themes to different digital settings while maintaining a consistent intellectual orientation. Rather than producing isolated religious lectures, Felix consistently constructs interconnected narratives around two broad issues. The first concerns the relationship between Islam, civilization, and global politics. Discussions on Palestine, colonialism, Bayt al-Hikmah, international power relations, and the future of Muslim societies repeatedly position Islam as a comprehensive project rather than merely a collection of religious rituals. This emphasis on Islamic civilization is also consistent with previous studies that associate Felix Siauww's digital *da'wah* with Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), a transnational Islamist movement whose online communication promoted narratives of Islamic civilization, Muslim unity, and the caliphate through persuasive digital media (Hew, 2018). Rather than suggesting organizational continuity, this finding indicates that similar civilizational narratives continue to appear as recurring themes within Felix Siauww's contemporary YouTube communication. Mandaville notes that contemporary Islamic discourse increasingly connects religious teachings with questions of history, politics, and global Muslim identity (Mandaville, 2007). The second concerns intellectual responsibility within contemporary Muslim society. Videos such as *Kenapa Orang Bodoh Diikuti?* and *Fenomena Islam dan Muslim "Munafik"* argue that Muslims should cultivate historical awareness, critical thinking, and moral consistency instead of following religious opinions uncritically. Qur'anic narratives, particularly the story of Prophet Ibrahim, are interpreted as examples of intellectual inquiry, encouraging audiences to question assumptions before accepting religious claims. Together, these themes portray Islamic knowledge as a dynamic framework for analysing contemporary society instead of a closed system concerned solely with legal or doctrinal matters.

A notable characteristic of Felix Siauww's digital communication is the central role of dialogue in constructing religious legitimacy. Unlike conventional sermons that primarily transmit religious instruction, the podcast format requires continuous interaction with hosts who frequently challenge his arguments from political, historical, or philosophical perspectives. Hoover argues that authority within digital religion is increasingly negotiated through communicative interaction instead of institutional

status alone (Hoover, 2016). Rather than weakening his authority, these exchanges strengthen his credibility because audiences witness the process through which arguments are defended, clarified, and supported with religious as well as historical evidence. The authority that emerges is therefore grounded not only in religious knowledge but also in the ability to participate in public intellectual debate. This dialogical style distinguishes Felix from many digital preachers whose authority depends primarily on one-directional preaching.

Audience responses further reinforce this pattern. Instead of emphasizing emotional comfort, viewers repeatedly describe Felix's lectures as intellectually stimulating and capable of broadening their understanding of Islam. One viewer of the podcast *Fenomena Islam dan Muslim "Munafik"* commented, "This discussion helped those of us who had become confused about Islam reconnect with its real teachings." Another wrote, "They educate us and improve the way we think. The knowledge is freely available; our task is to learn from it." Similar reactions appear in *Kenapa Orang Bodoh Diikuti?*, where viewers remarked, "This is exactly the discussion I have been waiting for," and "Thank you for reminding us that Muslims must think critically instead of believing everything they hear." Rather than simply praising Felix's personality, these comments consistently acknowledge his ability to explain Islamic teachings through logic, evidence, and historical analysis. Such responses indicate that audiences recognize intellectual competence itself as an important source of religious legitimacy in contemporary digital environments.

Felix's participation in podcasts hosted by Raymond Chin, Ferry Irwandi, and Refly Harun also expands the circulation of his religious narratives beyond conventional Muslim communities. These collaborative spaces expose Islamic discussions to audiences whose primary interests include economics, politics, technology, history, and public affairs. Viewer comments demonstrate that many users intentionally follow podcasts featuring Felix regardless of the host. One audience member stated, "Whenever Felix Siauw appears as a guest, I immediately watch the episode because the discussion is always insightful." Another commented, "Very few religious speakers can explain economics, geopolitics, technology, history, and Islam in one coherent discussion." Campbell's concept of networked religion suggests that collaboration across multiple digital platforms enables religious authority to expand through interconnected online communities rather than remaining confined to institutional settings (Campbell, 2013). Such responses suggest that collaboration functions not merely as a strategy for increasing visibility but also as a mechanism through which symbolic recognition is continuously reproduced across diverse digital communities. Religious authority is therefore strengthened through repeated participation in broader public conversations rather than remaining confined to specifically religious platforms.

This communication pattern illustrates a different trajectory of capital conversion from that observed in Hanan Attaki's case. Felix's authority originates from cultural capital in the form of Islamic scholarship, historical literacy, and interdisciplinary knowledge before being amplified through digital platforms that reward sustained discussion and audience engagement (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu, 1991). Ragnedda and Muschert further argue that digital capital enables existing forms of knowledge and expertise to gain wider recognition through online visibility and audience interaction (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2018). Continuous circulation across podcasts, algorithmically mediated visibility, and audience interaction gradually transforms this cultural capital into digital capital and subsequently into symbolic capital manifested in public recognition, intellectual credibility, and trust. Unlike Hanan Attaki, whose symbolic authority largely emerges through emotional resonance, Felix Siauw's legitimacy is primarily reinforced through collective recognition of analytical competence and intellectual reasoning. These findings demonstrate that religious authority in Indonesia's contemporary

digital field is constructed through multiple communicative pathways, each reflecting different configurations of cultural, digital, and symbolic capital.

3.3. Capital Conversion and the Reconfiguration of Religious Authority

Religious authority in Indonesia's contemporary digital environment can no longer be understood solely through institutional legitimacy or formal religious scholarship. The expansion of digital platforms has transformed the religious field into a more open and competitive arena in which various religious actors continuously negotiate legitimacy through different resources and communication practices. Cheong describes this relationship through a logic of continuity and complementarity, in which religious leaders use social media to reconstruct and relegitimize authority rather than simply replace established religious structures (Cheong, 2014). In this context, authority is no longer determined exclusively by one's educational background or institutional affiliation but increasingly depends on the ability to convert existing religious resources into forms of capital that are recognized within digital environments. Pierre Bourdieu's theory provides a useful analytical framework for explaining this transformation because it conceptualizes authority as the outcome of continuous struggles among actors seeking recognition within a particular social field (Bourdieu, 1993; Bourdieu, 1986). From a Bourdieusian perspective, the digital religious field operates according to rules that differ substantially from those governing conventional religious institutions. Whereas traditional Islamic scholarship rewards prolonged learning, textual mastery, and scholarly recognition, digital platforms privilege visibility, audience engagement, interaction, and algorithmic circulation. Consequently, religious actors are required to accumulate not only cultural capital in the form of religious knowledge but also the communicative competence necessary to translate that knowledge into formats that correspond with platform logics and audience expectations (Bunt, 2009; Bucher, 2018). Authority, therefore, emerges from the successful interaction between scholarly competence and digital performance rather than from either dimension alone.

This transformation illustrates what Bourdieu describes as the conversion of capital. Rather than functioning independently, different forms of capital interact and reinforce one another within a social field (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital constitutes the initial resource from which religious authority develops, yet it acquires broader social influence only when it can be converted into other forms of capital. Within digital environments, this conversion process becomes increasingly important because religious knowledge alone does not automatically generate public recognition. Instead, cultural capital must first be translated into communication practices capable of attracting audience attention, encouraging interaction, and sustaining long-term visibility across digital platforms. The cases of Hanan Attaki and Felix Siauw demonstrate that this process of capital conversion follows different trajectories while producing similar outcomes. Both figures possess sufficient cultural capital to participate in the contemporary religious field, yet each transforms this resource through distinct communicative strategies. Hanan Attaki predominantly frames Islamic teachings through themes closely related to emotional well-being, spiritual recovery, self-improvement, and everyday religious experiences. Felix Siauw, by contrast, communicates Islamic knowledge through historical analysis, political commentary, ideological discussion, and civilizational narratives. Although their communication styles differ considerably, both illustrate that cultural capital becomes socially influential only after it has been reconstructed in forms compatible with the expectations of digital audiences (Bourdieu, 1984; Hasan, 2012; Azca, 2012).

These contrasting strategies indicate that communication itself functions as an important mechanism of capital conversion. In this regard, Helland's distinction between *religion online* and *online religion* clarifies how digital preaching combines the dissemination of established religious teachings with participatory interaction facilitated by digital platforms (Helland, 2005). Religious authority is not reproduced simply because audiences acknowledge scholarly expertise but because religious knowledge is presented in ways that correspond with the communicative norms of contemporary digital culture. Hanan Attaki establishes proximity through empathy, conversational language, storytelling, and practical religious guidance, allowing audiences to interpret Islam as a source of emotional support. Felix Siau, on the other hand, constructs authority through logical argumentation, historical reasoning, and ideological consistency, positioning himself as an intellectual interpreter of contemporary Muslim issues (Bourdieu, 1991; Bucher, 2018). In both cases, communication does not replace religious knowledge; rather, it mediates the transformation of cultural capital into wider public recognition.

The conversion of cultural capital subsequently generates digital capital through sustained visibility and audience engagement. Within YouTube's algorithmic environment, repeated interaction including viewing duration, comments, likes, subscriptions, and content sharing increases the probability that religious content will continue to circulate among broader audiences. Digital capital, therefore, should not be understood merely as numerical indicators of popularity but as accumulated visibility produced through continuous interaction between creators, audiences, and platform infrastructures (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2018; Ruiu, 2020; Bucher, 2018). The greater the circulation of religious content, the greater the opportunity for cultural capital to reach audiences beyond traditional religious communities, thereby expanding the preacher's influence within the digital religious field.

However, digital visibility alone cannot fully explain the emergence of religious authority. From Bourdieu's perspective, digital capital possesses sociological significance only when it becomes socially recognized as legitimate. High numbers of followers or millions of video views do not automatically produce authority unless audiences interpret these indicators as evidence of credibility, trustworthiness, and religious competence (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu, 1986). Consequently, digital capital functions as an intermediary resource that facilitates broader public recognition but requires continuous validation through audience interaction and collective acceptance before it can contribute to the formation of symbolic capital.

4. CONCLUSION

The rise of digital media has transformed the construction of religious authority in Indonesia by creating new mechanisms of legitimacy beyond traditional scholarly transmission and institutional recognition. While traditional ulama continue to maintain strong cultural and symbolic authority through pesantren education, sanad, and religious institutions such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, digital preachers such as Hanan Attaki and Felix Siau have gained legitimacy through social media visibility, audience engagement, and algorithmic circulation. This condition demonstrates that religious authority in contemporary Indonesian Muslim society is increasingly plural, fragmented, and shaped by the interaction between traditional scholarship and digital media culture. Through Pierre Bourdieu's framework, this study finds that the transformation of religious authority in the digital era reflects a reconfiguration of the religious field rather than the disappearance of traditional ulama authority. Digital capital such as followers, engagement, and online visibility can be converted into symbolic and social capital, enabling digital preachers to occupy influential positions

within contemporary da'wah arenas. At the same time, algorithmic systems significantly influence the distribution of religious legitimacy by prioritizing accessible, emotional, and highly interactive content. Consequently, authority in the digital era is produced through the interaction of cultural, symbolic, and digital capital within increasingly interconnected local and global religious spaces.

REFERENCES

- Azca, Muhammad Najib. "Felix Siauwa and the Rise of Digital Da'wa in Indonesia." *Studia Islamika* 27, no. 2 (2020): 1–30.
- Azca, Muhammad Najib. "Young Muslim Militancy in Indonesia: Moderate Networks, Radical Trajectories." *Indonesia and the Malay World* 40, no. 116 (2012): 59–77.
- Bayat, Asef. *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993.
- Bruinessen, Martin van. *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, dan Tarekat*. Bandung: Mizan, 2015.
- Bucher, Taina. *If... Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Bunt, Gary R. *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018.
- Bunt, Gary R. *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Bunt, Gary R. *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments*. London: Pluto Press, 2003.
- Cheong, P. H. "Tweet the Message? Religious Authority and Social Media Innovation." *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture*, no. 3(3) (2014), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-90000059>
- Gerbaudo, Paolo. *The Digital Party: Political Organisation and Online Democracy*. London: Pluto Press, 2019.
- Helland, C. "Online religion as lived religion: Methodological issues in the study of religious participation on the Internet. Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet" *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, no. 1 (2005) 1–16. <https://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/index.php/religions/article/view/381>
- Harnadi, Dodik, et al. "Pesantren and the Preservation of Traditional Religious Authority in the Digital Age." *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan dan Politik* 34, no. 3 (2021): 272–280. <https://doi.org/10.20473/mkp.V34I32021.272-280>.
- Hasan, Noorhaidi. "Piety, Populism and Youth: The Rise of the Da'wa Mecca in Indonesia." *Indonesia and the Malay World* 40, no. 116 (2012): 59–77.
- Hidayat, Nur. "Pesantren dan Media Baru: Adaptasi Ulama Tradisional di Era Digital." *Al-Balagh* 7, no. 1 (2022): 1–20.
- Isetti, Giulia, et al., eds. *Religion in the Age of Digitalization: From New Media to Spiritual Machines*. New York and London: Routledge, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367809225>.
- Kaptein, Nico J. G. "The Voice of the 'Ulama': Fatwas and Religious Authority in Indonesia." *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 125, no. 1 (2004): 7–27. <https://doi.org/10.4000/assr.1038>.

- Latifah, Nor, dan Romario Romario. "Trendsetter Muballigh di Medsos: Analisis Framing Instagram Felix Siauw dan Hanan Attaki." *Jurnal Studi Agama dan Masyarakat* 15, no. 1 (2019): 36–48. <https://doi.org/10.23971/jsam.v15i1.1150>.
- Mandaville, Peter. *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Mas'ud, Abdurrahman. *From Pondok to Cyber Pesantren: The Transformation of Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia*. Leiden: Brill, 2021.
- Mustofa, Mahmud Yunus, et al. "Hybrid Pesantren in Indonesia: Analyzing the Transformation of Islamic Religious Education in the Digital Age." *Al-Tadzkiyyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* (2023). <https://ejournal.radenintan.ac.id/index.php/tadzkiyyah/article/view/16928>.
- Muthohirin, Nafik. "Da'wa in Social Media: The Views of Ustad Hanan Attaki and Felix Siauw to The Hijrah Phenomenon." *Afkaruna: Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies* 17, no. 2 (2021): 249–270. <https://doi.org/10.18196/afkaruna.v17i2.12671>.
- Nasrullah, Rulli. *Media Sosial: Perspektif Komunikasi, Budaya, dan Sosioteknologi*. Jakarta: Kencana, 2017.
- Risdiana, Aris, et al. "Transformasi Dakwah Berbasis Kitab Kuning ke Platform Digital." *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 18, no. 1 (2020): 1–28.
- Siregar, Idris. *Islam Nusantara*. Yogyakarta: Trussmedia Grafika, 2020.
- Syahputra, Iswandi. "Religious Authority and Cyber Mufti: The Fatwa on Social Media in Indonesia." *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 7, no. 1 (2017): 111–134.
- Zulkifli. "The Ulama in Indonesia: Between Religious Authority and Symbolic Power." *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 37, no. 1 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v37i1.79>.