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DIGITAL ERA AND ONLINE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

In the midst of an abundance of digital information, a crucial question arises: who now holds the authority in conveying religious teachings? The digital age has significantly changed religious practice and the authority of religious leaders. Open access to religious content via the internet has given rise to online religious communities that actively educate the public about Islam. This phenomenon marks a shift in authority from traditional scholars to digital figures such as social media influencers or ustaz. This study aims to analyze the impact of digitalization on religious authority and online community dynamics, and identify the opportunities and challenges that arise. Using a qualitative approach through desk research and digital ethnography (netnography), the research examines various religious content on social media, video platforms, and online forums.Results show that digitization expands access to Islamic knowledge, increases digital religious literacy, and creates spaces for dialogue between generations and across regions. However, major challenges arise: the spread of unverified information, religious hoaxes, and the potential for radicalization. Digital religious figures are often more popular than scientifically legitimate, raising concerns about the authenticity of teachings.This study recommends proactive strategies, such as regulation of digital religious content, strengthening digital religious literacy, and collaboration between academics, scholars and technologists. Formal religious institutions also need to strengthen their digital presence to *balance the flow of information.*

INTRODUCTION

The digital era has brought significant changes in all aspects of human life, including in religious expression and practice. According to Statista, more than 5.35 billion people worldwide

are active internet users, representing 66.2% of the global population. The rapid development of digital technology has changed the way people access, understand, and practice religion. According to Fisher, religion is not just a collection of rigid rituals and rules, but something that is alive and evolving, shaped by community, identity, and everyday experiences, Fisher, 2011: 15-20. Now, social media and digital platforms are new places for people to express their spiritual values and interact with religious content that is in line with modern life.

Technology has enabled religious believers to access religious resources more easily than ever, through digital Qur'an and Bible apps, on-demand sermons, and religious podcasts, Rifaldi, 2021:45. Online worship practices, such as live-streamed congregational prayers or virtual church services, provide alternatives for individuals with physical or geographical limitations, prayers (jum'at, idul adha, idul fitri) that are broadcast live on television media, Salim, 2019:16. While these developments offer greater flexibility and accessibility, they also raise critical questions: how are digital technologies reshaping the nature of religious communities? What impact do these changes have on spiritual experience and religious authority?

Religious communities, previously based on physical interactions, are now increasingly operating in digital spaces. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok have become the primary means for discussions ranging from theological discussions, spiritual storytelling, and seeking guidance, Wadi & Dozan, 2021: 112. While these platforms encourage inclusivity and cross-border interactions, they also present challenges regarding the credibility and authenticity of religious information. Many users engage with teachings from unverified sources or religious influencers who lack formal theological training, potentially leading to misinformation and polarization, Setiansah & Sutikna, 2021:12.

In addition, it is important to understand that the concept of religious community in the digital age no longer relies solely on physical gatherings. Instead, it has evolved into interest-based religious communities that are connected through online platforms. For example, there is the “Muslimah Hijrah” community on Instagram and the “Youth Catholic Network” group on Facebook, which allow individuals with similar religious interests and values to interact across regions and even countries. According to Digital Religion Studies research, Campbell, 2021:20, the emergence of such micro-communities contributes to the formation of a more participatory, dialogic and flexible model of religiosity, compared to the traditional institution-based model. Therefore, it is important to explore how these online communities not only facilitate discussions about religion, but also play a role in the formation of the religious identity of the digital generation.

This study aims to explore the transformation of online religious communities in Indonesia and critically analyze how digitalization affects patterns of religious interaction, authority, as well as individual spiritual practices in the modern era. Furthermore, it seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital media shapes contemporary religiosity and religious leadership structures.

Although a number of studies have examined the rise of digital media in religious communication, the majority of existing literature tends to emphasize the technical aspects of online worship or the general sociological implications of digital religion. There is a lack of comprehensive research that critically examines the changing landscape of religious authority in online Islamic communities, especially in Indonesia, a country with one of the largest Muslim populations in the world and a rapid growth rate of internet users. This study therefore aims to

fill this gap by providing a contextual analysis of how digital technologies are reshaping religious leadership, communal interactions and spiritual practices. The research offers a nuanced understanding of the opportunities and challenges presented by the digitalization of religion, particularly in navigating the tensions between traditional authority and digital popularity.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach derived from literature sources relevant to the identified topic including books, journal articles, research articles, and phenomenological methods used to explore how people experience and feel religiosity in digital life, especially in online religious communities in Indonesia. The main focus of this study is to understand the subjective meaning of religious interactions, identity formation, and social dynamics that emerge in virtual spaces. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with administrators and members of digital religious communities selected purposively, representing diversity in age, religious background, and social orientation. In addition, digital observation or netnography was conducted on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Telegram to capture communication patterns, forms of engagement, and the character of communities formed online. The analysis also includes digital da'wah content, such as video lectures and social media posts, in order to understand the construction and reception of religious messages.

The data analysis process combines a critical discourse analysis approach to identify religious narratives, symbolic authority, and social representations, and a netnography approach to understand community structures, interaction patterns, and the process of digital identity formation. The researcher also reflects on his/her position and involvement in the digital space as part of the interpretation process. This study recognizes limitations, especially related to access to online private discussions and the dynamic nature of digital content. Therefore, this study recommends the development of exploration of more diverse online communities, the use of more in-depth digital analysis tools, and the preparation of ethical guidelines in digital media-based religiosity studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Typology of Online Religious Communities

In the context of religiosity in the digital era, we identified several typologies of online religious communities that play an important role in the spread of religious teachings and practices, including:

1. Digital Da'wah Community

This community includes various platforms used to spread da'wah through digital media. The most striking examples can be seen on YouTube, Islamic podcasts, and in the past the platform was radio, where preachers, scholars, religious leaders, intellectuals have the opportunity to reach a wider audience without geographical limitations. Through video and audio media, they deliver lectures, studies, and religious discussions that can be accessed anytime and anywhere. This phenomenon not only expands the reach of da'wah, but also allows for more dynamic interactions between the preacher and the audience, which provides an opportunity for listeners to comment, ask questions, and communicate directly, Agustinova, 2013; Hidayat, 2023; Vincenti et al., 2014: 2236.

In this context, da'wah through YouTube Podcast was chosen because today's young generation always carries gadgets (cellphones) and has the YouTube application. The podcast format was chosen because it is more two-way and interactive. They can also call speakers with various skills. Da'wah documents are also very diverse, especially when discussing everyday problems. Therefore, utilizing podcasts as an effective digital da'wah strategy by identifying audience characteristics, creating interesting da'wah messages, using the right methods, and choosing media according to the target is highly recommended. Podcasts can also be collaborated with other media such as YouTube to strengthen the visual and audio side, so that da'wah becomes more interactive and easily accessible at any time, Hsia et al., 2015; MPOC et al., 2020; Permana & Mahameruaji, 2019: 2236.

The presence of a digital preaching community has encouraged the birth of a more participatory and dialogical communication model. In this context, preachers no longer act as one-way conveyors of religious messages, but rather function as dialogue facilitators who are responsive to audience questions and doubts in real time. For example, the YouTube channel "Ngaji Bareng Gus Baha" and Ustadz Abdul Somad's Instagram live broadcast allow the congregation to ask questions through the comments column or Q&A feature, which are then answered directly in the session. This kind of interaction not only increases the sense of belonging, but also strengthens the congregation's emotional attachment to the digital preaching community, Gunawan & Muhid, 2022: 277.

Research shows that the implementation of interactive technology such as live question and answer sessions, polls, and quizzes enriches the audience's experience and provides opportunities for active participation in the preaching process. By providing space for interaction, preachers create a dynamic and responsive environment, thereby increasing the appeal and impact of preaching messages on digital platforms, Gunawan & Muhid, 2022: 277.

2. Religious Discussion Forums

Religious discussion forums on platforms such as Facebook, Telegram, and WhatsApp serve as a place for individuals to share thoughts, ask questions, and discuss various religious issues. Religious forums such as the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB), MUI, Terrorism Prevention Coordination Forum (FKPT), Zakat, Infak, and Sedekah Institutions (LAZIS), Islamic and interfaith community organizations create a more inclusive environment, allowing individuals from various backgrounds to engage in more open religious dialogue. In addition, these online discussions contribute to enriching religious understanding through various perspectives from academics, religious practitioners, and the general public. However, the main challenge is the potential for the spread of inaccurate information, religious misinformation, and ideological polarization that can trigger segregation of opinion in online communities, Carles, Hiptraspa, Warsah, & Effendi, 2024: 102.

Therefore, it is necessary to develop digital literacy and strengthen religious authority in the context of online discussions so that the information disseminated remains credible and does not cause distortion of people's religious understanding. In addition, the participation of religious scholars and academics in digital forums is a crucial aspect to maintain the credibility of information and prevent the potential misuse of religious discussion spaces for certain interests, including radicalization and the spread of extreme ideologies, Rahman & Alfarizi, 2023:112.

In addition to having educational potential, online religious discussion forums also offer different interaction patterns compared to face-to-face discussions. In online religious communities, communication generally combines equal interaction patterns between participants, known as peer-to-peer engagement, and asynchronous communication, which is communication that does not take place simultaneously. This gives participants the freedom to respond at any time without having to be present at the same time. Although this flexibility facilitates participation, challenges remain in keeping the discussion focused and constructive.

A study conducted by Mannayong et al, revealed that in digital forums based on WhatsApp and Facebook, discussions are often dominated by members who are more technologically active or who have better mastery of discourse. Conversely, participants who are less confident tend to act as passive readers. Therefore, the role of the moderator or group admin is very crucial in maintaining the balance of participation and ensuring that discussions remain inclusive and productive. This dynamic is also reflected in the broader context of digital transformation, where digital platforms foster more active and inclusive public engagement, empowering citizens to voice opinions and collaborate in decision-making processes, Mannayong et al., 2024, 60.

Furthermore, online religious discussions also play a role in the formation of digital religious identities. Referring to the concept of imagined religious communities adapted by Campbell, participation in online forums creates a sense of togetherness that does not always depend on physical meetings. This is realized through regular involvement in discussions, sharing spiritual experiences, and solidarity of values formed in digital spaces, Campbell, 2021: 164. In this context, a digital religious community is not just a collection of individuals who are technologically connected, but also a community that is imagined together based on religious values and practices that are collectively internalized.

In Indonesia, this phenomenon is clearly visible in communities such as “Ngaji Online Nusantara” on Telegram, and the Facebook group “Diskusi Fiqih Kontemporer”. These communities have succeeded in uniting members from various regions and backgrounds. Active participation in this environment not only deepens religious understanding, but also builds a collective identity as moderate, open, and adaptable digital Muslims, nug & Lestari, 2021: 205. Thus, online religious discussion forums have strategic potential to form healthy, ethical virtual communities and strengthen inclusive religious values in this digital era.

3. Digital Socio-Religious Movements

Digital socio-religious movements include initiatives that utilize digital platforms to carry out religious-based social activities. One relevant example is religious-based fundraising (crowdfunding) and online Islamic philanthropy movements. Through these platforms, individuals and groups can raise funds for social projects aimed at providing humanitarian aid, education, and health. These movements not only reflect solidarity among community members but also utilize technology to increase social participation and contribution. However, it is very important to ensure transparency and accountability in the management of funds to maintain public trust, sariAjeng: 211-242.

In addition to fundraising, a number of organizations in Indonesia also carry out digital-based socio-religious initiatives. Here are some of them:

- Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB)

FKUB utilizes social media and digital platforms to encourage interfaith dialogue, as well as promote tolerance and social harmony. Through activities such as webinars, online discussions, and educational content, FKUB seeks to build interfaith understanding and prevent potential conflicts related to SARA (Ethnicity, Religion, Race, and Inter-Group).

- Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI)

Through various digital channels, such as websites and social media, MUI provides online fatwa services, religious education, and socialization regarding zakat and online waqf. In addition, MUI also launched social campaigns, including the National Cash Waqf Movement (GNWU), and plays a role in verifying and facilitating Islamic philanthropic institutions to comply with sharia principles.

- Terrorism Prevention Coordination Forum (FKPT) and the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT)

FKPT actively uses digital platforms in digital literacy and counter-radicalization programs. This includes peaceful narrative campaigns, efforts to prevent violent extremism, and online training for teachers, youth, and religious figures. Activities such as Ngobrol Pintar (Ngopi) Cegah Radikalisme are often carried out in the form of webinars and podcasts.

- Zakat, Infak, and Sedekah Institutions (LAZIS)

Organizations such as Baznas and Dompet Dhuafa utilize digital technology—including applications, e-wallets, and websites—to distribute zakat, infak, and sedekah. Programs such as online zakat fitrah, digital dawn alms, and productive waqf are increasingly in demand by urban communities.

- Islamic and Interfaith Community Organizations

Organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah are also active in conducting digital da'wah, online religious education, and raising funds for disasters and health through applications and social media. Overall, this movement reflects the use of digital technology to strengthen the value of solidarity, expand the reach of da'wah, and accelerate the distribution of social assistance, while still prioritizing the principles of religion, transparency, and accountability.

DISCUSSION

Online Religious Ritual Community

This community focuses on carrying out rituals and worship online, either through live broadcasts or video conferencing platforms such as Zoom and YouTube Live. This phenomenon is growing, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, where mobility restrictions have forced people to participate in congregational prayers, worship, religious studies, and even tadarus Al-Quran virtually. Initiatives such as "Ngaji Online Ramadan" and "Doa Rosary Virtual" prove that the spiritual dimension can still be maintained even though they cannot physically gather at a place of worship. In addition, this practice has also given birth to a hybrid worship model, a combination of online and offline, which is expected to continue to develop post-pandemic, given the flexibility and reach it offers, Rahman & Alfarizy, 2023:296.

Impact of the Digital Era on Religious Communities.

Digital transformation has drastically changed the way religious individuals live. The development of digital technology has paved the way for the dissemination of religious teachings more widely and comprehensively, creating new opportunities in learning methods and conveying

religious messages. However, this convenience also brings serious challenges that need to be considered, especially regarding the reliability of information and the shift in the structure of religious authority that has been the foundation for spiritual communities. The following is an explanation of the positive and negative impacts of the digital era on religious communities.

Positive Impacts:

1. Increased Access to Religious Materials and Scholars

   Digital media such as YouTube, podcasts, and social media have eliminated the limitations of time and location in disseminating religious knowledge. Now, people can listen to lectures, interpretation studies, and religious discussions from various religious figures without having to be present in person. This creates more open learning opportunities, where diverse religious voices and views can be accessed by anyone, anytime, and anywhere. This situation not only enriches spiritual insight but also provides more opportunities to learn for individuals who previously had difficulty accessing religious knowledge centers, Campbell and Tsuria, 2021:35.

2. More Open and Interactive Digital Preaching

   The digitalization process allows for a more active and participatory approach to preaching. Preachers do not only convey messages in a one-way manner, but also provide opportunities for dialogue through online Q&A sessions and live broadcasts that can reach audiences worldwide. This method allows for the dissemination of religious teachings that are more personal and relevant to current societal conditions, while making preaching an inclusive activity that can reach various groups from different cultural and geographical backgrounds, Hjarvard, 2011:67.

3. Increasing Religious Understanding Through Digital Media

   Digitalization encourages people to be more familiar and active in accessing various religious sources online, ranging from holy books, interpretations, to fatwas from various authorized institutions. This situation opens up opportunities for broader and contextual interpretations, where individuals can develop a more critical and in-depth understanding, without being confined to one particular view or authority. The existence of this religious digital literacy helps people to be more independent in exploring spiritual values that are in accordance with their life circumstances, Lim, 2017:67.

4. Strengthening Interfaith Dialogue and Harmony among People

   The digital era also provides space for more open and broad interfaith dialogue. Through webinars, online discussion groups, and interfaith collaboration, digital space becomes an effective means of building communication and understanding among adherents of different religions. Forums such as the “Interfaith Dialogue” on the Clubhouse platform and the “Interfaith Webinar Series” on Zoom have succeeded in building empathy and reducing prejudice, which are very important for maintaining harmony and moderation in religion in an increasingly interconnected and diverse world.

Negative Impacts:

1. Spread of Hoaxes and Misinformation about Religion

   One of the main difficulties in this digital age is the proliferation of unreliable and misguided religious information. Much religious material is spread on social platforms without a vetting process, so it is often misinterpreted or used to support certain narratives that are not in accordance with the actual teachings. This situation causes a deviant

understanding of religion and can trigger conflict or misunderstanding in the community of believers, Echchaibi, 2011: 128

1. Polarization and Digital Extremism

   Algorithms on social media tend to reinforce existing opinions by displaying similar content, creating a noisy space that deepens social and religious divisions. This situation causes increasingly sharp polarization between groups and increases the risk of digital extremism. People who are trapped in this noisy space become less tolerant of differences, which ultimately damages social harmony and harmony between religious communities, Sageman, 2008: 42.

2. Loss of Authority of Ulama and Religious Leaders

   In the digital era, anyone can create and disseminate religious information without any filtering from clear authorities. This shifts the position of ulama and religious figures as the main source and reference in spiritual guidance for the community. Thus, society faces confusion in determining which sources of teachings are legitimate, which can result in fragmentation and uncertainty in daily religious practices, Hosen, 2020, 347.

3. Commodification and Reduction of Religious Substance

   Digitalization causes religion to be treated as an item packaged in a visually appealing form that is easily digested by the digital market. Religious content is often simplified into short videos with popular introductory music or motivational quotes, thus ignoring the depth and context of the original teachings. This phenomenon risks turning religion into a consumptive and temporary commodity, which ultimately weakens the quality of people's understanding and spiritual experience.

Dynamics of Religious Authority and the Future of Religious Leadership

The development of online religious communities in Indonesia has not only changed the pattern of social interaction among religious people, but also plays an important role in redefining the landscape of religious authority. There has been a significant shift from the authority of traditional ulama to digital figures, such as religious influencers, celebrity ustadz, and YouTube preachers, who are increasingly dominating. In this context, the model of authority is no longer entirely dependent on institutional legitimacy or scientific sanad, but rather on popularity, communication skills, and intensity of interaction with congregations in cyberspace, Hasyim, 2020:125. The implications of this change indicate that future patterns of religious leadership will be greatly influenced by the ability of religious figures to utilize digital technology as a means of preaching and providing education.

In the Indonesian context, this trend can already be seen from the increasing number of young preachers who are active on social media with a wide reach of followers. Research conducted by Rahman and Alfarizi shows that the success of digital preaching is greatly influenced by creativity in conveying messages, the use of language that is relevant to the context, and the presentation of visually appealing content, Rahman & Alfarizi 2023:295. Therefore, religious institutions in Indonesia need to start considering designing a curriculum for the formation of ulama cadres that includes digital literacy and online communication skills. This is important so that the regeneration of religious leadership remains relevant and able to adapt in the ever-evolving digital era.

However, this dynamic also presents serious challenges regarding the legitimacy of religious

authorities operating in cyberspace. As expressed by Hosen, the increasing number of online fatwas and online lectures that have not gone through a verification process or are not based on strong scientific knowledge has the potential to cause confusion and distortion of understanding among the people, Hosen, 2020:347. Therefore, it is very important to build synergy between scholars, academics, and technology practitioners in designing a validation mechanism for digital religious content, so that it can guarantee the credibility and authenticity of teachings delivered online.

On the other hand, strengthening digital literacy based on religion is an urgent need for society. Nugroho, said that it is important for society to be equipped with the ability to sort religious information critically and understand ethical principles in interactions in the digital world, Nugroho, 2021:12. By strengthening this competence, the people will not only act as passive consumers of religious information, but can also actively contribute to maintaining a healthy, moderate, and civilized digital ecosystem. If this is realized, the online religious community in Indonesia will be able to develop into a platform that is not only inclusive and informative, but also strengthens authentic and sustainable religious values.

Challenges and Opportunities for Religious Communities in the Digital Era.

The development of information and communication technology in the digital era has had a significant impact on various aspects of life, including in the field of religion. On the one hand, technological advances create many opportunities to distribute religious teachings and strengthen religious communities. However, on the other hand, the ease of obtaining information and interacting digitally also poses complex challenges that require caution from every religious follower. Therefore, a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the digital era is very important so that every person can use technology in a positive way while avoiding possible negative effects.

- Decentralization of Religious Authority.

  One of the biggest challenges that has emerged as a result of digitalization in religion is the phenomenon of the loss of centralized authority in religion. Conventionally, the authority to issue fatwas, direct religious teachings, and interpret sacred texts usually lies with official religious institutions and clerics recognized by the community. However, in this digital era, these boundaries are increasingly unclear. With easy access to the internet and various online platforms, anyone can disseminate religious information without requiring a verification process or recognition from the authorities.

  This condition causes confusion among religious people. Many have difficulty distinguishing which information is accurate and which cannot be accounted for. Aziz emphasized that the spread of unverified information can damage understanding of religion and even trigger social conflict, Aziz, 2023:64. This phenomenon is a serious issue because false or erroneous teachings can lead to division and moral decay within religious communities.

- Risk of Radicalization and Spread of Extremism.

  The next challenge that is also very important is the risk of radicalization and the spread of extremism through digital media. Social media platforms and various online spaces are places that are prone to being misused by radical groups to distribute their ideologies. Fadillah et al., that social media has the potential to accelerate the spread of misinformation and extreme content, which if not handled carefully, can lead to intolerance and conflict between groups, Fadillah et al., 2024:295. Therefore, digital literacy is very important as a tool to

develop a critical attitude in receiving and assessing circulating religious information. This digital literacy must include the ability to recognize reliable sources of information, understand the context of religious teachings correctly, and reject content that is hateful or extremist. In this way, religious people can protect themselves from negative influences while contributing to creating a healthy and moderate digital environment.

- Opportunities for Da'wah and Strengthening Religious Communities.

  Despite the many challenges that must be faced, the digital era also provides great opportunities for religious communities to expand the distribution of da'wah and strengthen their religious values. Digital technology allows people to use various platforms such as mobile applications, social media, and websites to send religious messages in innovative and interactive ways.

  Rahman & Alfarizy emphasize that this technology can be an effective tool to strengthen Islamic teachings, not only through wider access to information but also by building strong and mutually supportive online communities. The interactions that occur on this digital platform provide opportunities for religious people to share experiences, discuss, and create solidarity networks that transcend geographical boundaries, Rahman & Alfarizy, 2024:295.

- Technology-Based Religious Education.

  Another very significant opportunity is strengthening religious education by utilizing technology. With the presence of e-learning platforms and online courses, the process of learning religion becomes more flexible, easily accessible, and can be adjusted to individual needs. Arif et al. stated that innovation in Islamic education in the digital age is very important to improve the quality and accessibility of religious education, Arif et al., 2024:75.

  This shows that not only individuals in religious education centers have the opportunity to learn, but also people who live in rural areas or have limited mobility. Religious education that utilizes technology also allows for more interactive and interesting learning methods, such as video lectures, online quizzes, and interactive discussions, so that the learning experience becomes more meaningful.

- Digital Ethics and Data Protection Issues.

  In addition, a very important challenge is the issue of digital ethics, especially related to privacy and data security in a religious context. The use of zakat applications, fundraising, and online community forums involves the collection of participants' personal data. This data has the potential to be misused if there is no adequate protection system. In addition, advances in visual manipulation technology such as deepfake add a new layer to the risk of spreading false information that can damage the reputation and integrity of religious figures or religious institutions.

  Collective awareness of the importance of protecting privacy in the digital world and the implementation of data protection standards is urgent for religious communities to do. This not only maintains public trust but also prevents misuse of technology that has the potential to cause social tension.

- Collaboration between Ulama and Technology Academics.

Finally, in order to face the challenges and take advantage of opportunities in this digital era, close cooperation is needed between ulama and academics or technology practitioners. Huda emphasized the importance of synergy between various parties to create digital solutions that are not only efficient but also in line with religious values and moral ethics, Huda 2021:283.

This collaboration enables the creation of a more integrated and responsive strategy for mainstreaming religious moderation to technological developments. Thus, technology applied in a religious context is not just a tool, but also part of an effort to maintain social balance and build a peaceful and tolerant religious community.

Practical Implications and Researcher Reflections

The findings of this study have three important implications. First, there is an urgent need for active involvement from religious scholars and academics in producing digital content that is not only credible but also interesting. Second, there needs to be a digital ethics policy that encourages collaboration between platforms such as YouTube and TikTok with religious authorities to screen problematic religious content. Third, the formal religious education curriculum needs to be aligned with the current digital context, so that the younger generation can not only understand religious teachings, but also learn how to access and disseminate them in a responsible manner. In addition, it is important to develop a digital da'wah training program for young scholars and da'is. Holding workshops on creating da'wah content, online public speaking training, and increasing social media literacy are crucial steps.

This aims to ensure that da'is are able to utilize technology optimally and responsibly. In addition, collaboration between religious figures, academics, and technology experts needs to be facilitated in order to design an interactive da'wah platform that is in accordance with the principles of moderation and religious ethics. During this research, researchers faced various challenges, especially when interacting with discussion rooms that contained hate speech or manipulation of religious texts. Therefore, critical reflection is needed so that the research process is not only objective but also ethical. Other limitations faced include limited access to private groups and the rapid circulation of content in cyberspace, which requires adjustments in the methodological approach going forward.

In addition, another important implication is the need for government and policymakers to be involved, including the Ministry of Religion and the Ministry of Communication and Information, in formulating regulations that support a healthy digital religious ecosystem. These regulations should include not only content moderation and protection of the congregation's personal data, but also the provision of training infrastructure and facilitation of collaboration between digital platforms and religious authorities. With the support of clear and accommodating regulations, the potential for inclusive and moderate digital da'wah can be developed in a more focused and sustainable manner.

In addition, the community of people as users of digital media also needs to be empowered to become active and responsible actors in the online religious ecosystem.

Community-based digital literacy programs, hoax detection training, and education on ethics of interacting on social media based on religion can strengthen the capacity of people to participate in maintaining a peaceful and constructive digital space. Thus, efforts to strengthen digital preaching are not only top-down from clerics or the government, but also bottom-up through the active role of the community.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the digitalization of religion has brought about significant changes in religious practices, authority structures, and the dissemination of religious knowledge. Religious communities in cyberspace now serve as important platforms for Islamic preaching and education, providing unprecedented access to various religious discourses. However, this change also raises complex challenges, such as the spread of misinformation, the decline of traditional religious authority, and the risk of radicalization caused by uncontrolled digital content. The transition from traditional clerics to digital religious influencers raises serious concerns about the authenticity and credibility of religious teachings in the online realm. Therefore, maintaining a balance between traditional authority and digital participation is very important so that authentic teachings are maintained. The use of technology should consider the depth of spirituality, not only focusing on speed or popularity. In addition, future research agendas need to be directed to explore the impact of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), and metaverse, on various aspects of religion, both in the context of preaching, religious education, and social relations in religious environments.

The dynamic changes in religious authority in the digital world also require serious attention to improve digital religious literacy in society. People must be equipped with the skills to sort, verify, and understand religious information circulating in cyberspace wisely and critically. The goal is that people are not easily influenced by non-credible content and can actively participate in creating a healthy, moderate, and civilized digital space. Religious education, both formal and non-formal, needs to adjust its curriculum to digital realities so that the younger generation has dual competencies: in-depth knowledge of religion and digital literacy. On the other hand, formal religious institutions and clerics are expected to play an active role in strengthening their digital presence in an adaptive and relevant manner. Strategic steps, such as digital da'wah training programs, cross-field collaboration with communication and technology experts, and the development of interactive da'wah platforms, need to be taken. In this way, religious authority based on science can be maintained and conveyed effectively in a competitive and dynamic digital era.

This study emphasizes the importance of a proactive strategy to leverage the benefits of digital religious engagement while reducing its risks. This research encourages the development of a regulatory framework to oversee digital religious content as well as the promotion of digital religious literacy to empower individuals to critically evaluate religious information available in cyberspace. Collaboration between scholars and technology experts is crucial to ensure that digital da'wah remains authentic, accurate, and in line with moderate Islamic values. Strengthening the digital presence of formal religious institutions is also important to balance unverified sources of information and provide credible guidance.

By placing these findings in the broader context of digital religion, this study contributes to the study of the relationship between faith, media, and technology, especially in the context of Indonesian Muslims. Future research can expand this study through cross-cultural comparisons, longitudinal studies, or mixed-method approaches to further understand the socio-political implications of religious life in the digital era.

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