

DISSEMINATION AND CONTESTATION OF KYAIS' RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE IN DIGITAL SPACES AND ITS IMPACT ON FOLLOWERS

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Abstract: This study examines the transformation of Kyai Leadership within the pesantren tradition amid the rising influence of digital media, using the controversy surrounding Trans7's Xpose Uncensored episode on Pesantren Lirboyo as a critical case. This research analyzes how Kyai Leadership is constructed, contested, and recontextualized in the era of viral media. Findings reveal four key transformations. First, despite media pressure, Kyai authority in Lirboyo remains anchored in charismatic, moral-spiritual Leadership while adapting to media logic through ethical, calm communicative strategies, consistent with Hjarvard's (2008) theory of the mediatization of religion. Overall, this study demonstrates that Kyai's Leadership in the digital era is simultaneously charismatic, adaptive, and dialogical, reflecting a harmonious integration of pesantren tradition and contemporary media culture. The Lirboyo case provides evidence that religious authority in Indonesia is undergoing significant transformation, not through erosion but through strategic negotiation within the logic of viral digital communication.

Keywords: Kyai Leadership, Pesantren, Mediatization of Religion

Abstrak : Penelitian ini mengkaji transformasi kepemimpinan Kyai dalam tradisi pesantren di tengah meningkatnya pengaruh media digital, dengan menggunakan kontroversi seputar episode Xpose Uncensored Trans7 pada Pesantren Lirboyo sebagai kasus kritis. Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana kepemimpinan Kyai dibangun, diperebutkan, dan dikontekstualisasikan kembali di era media viral. Temuan mengungkapkan empat transformasi kunci. Pertama, terlepas dari tekanan media, otoritas Kyai di Lirboyo tetap berlabuh pada kepemimpinan moral-spiritual yang karismatik sambil beradaptasi dengan logika media melalui strategi komunikatif yang etis dan tenang, konsisten dengan teori mediatisasi agama Hjarvard (2008). Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan Kyai di era digital secara bersamaan karismatik, adaptif, dan dialogis, mencerminkan integrasi harmonis tradisi pesantren dengan budaya media kontemporer. Kasus Lirboyo menjadi bukti bahwa otoritas agama di Indonesia sedang mengalami transformasi yang signifikan, bukan melalui erosi, tetapi melalui negosiasi strategis dalam logika komunikasi digital yang viral.

Kata Kunci: Kepemimpinan Kyai, Pesantren, Mediatisasi Agama

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, religious Leadership has historically been heavily influenced by pesantren institutions and the figure of the Kyai – charismatic ulama who, through scholarly lineages (sanad) and spiritual barakah, are considered the inheritors of the Prophet (warasat al-Anbiya') and the holders of recognized religious authority within the community (Dhofier, 1982; Bruinessen, 1999; Steenbrink, 2012; Wahid, 2001). In this traditional framework, the dissemination of religious discourse was conducted face-to-face through majelis taklim, bandongan/sorogan, and halaqah in pesantren, where the physical presence of the Kyai and direct interaction were considered essential for conveying teachings, building loyalty, and instilling obedience (Tebba, 2021; Puspito, 2023).

Pesantrens function as "authority factories": not merely educational institutions but socio-cultural spaces that reproduce religious legitimacy – whether through traditional, symbolic, or social-network channels (alumni, students, and local communities) (Hidayat & Nuri, 2024;

Habibi & Sholikha, 2022). Consequently, the Kyai's authority becomes the center of moral-religious structures within traditional Muslim communities, forming a strong patron-client bond between the Kyai and students/alums, as well as with the broader society (Geertz, 1960; Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2012).

However, the advent of digital media, particularly platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, has radically transformed the landscape of public religious communication. The concept of mediatization of religion highlights that media do not merely serve as channels but fundamentally alter the logic of religious practice, consumption, and legitimacy (Hjarvard, 2011; Hjarvard, 2013). Contemporary studies in Indonesia indicate that online religious practices—digital versions of pesantren and preaching—are increasingly accepted, particularly among younger generations (Annisa & Mukaromah, 2022; Khotimah et al., 2023).

This shift requires traditional ulama to adapt: Kyai and pesantren institutions must learn to "preach through media" — producing micro-content videos, live streaming, Instagram/YouTube content, adopting language and visuals suitable for digital audiences, and understanding algorithmic logic to maximize reach and engagement (Fikri'Ainun & Rohman, 2025; Jaya et al., 2023). This adaptation is not merely technical but also cultural and structural: traditional legitimacy (sanad, barakah) must be converted into symbolic and cultural capital recognized in the digital space (followers, engagement, reputation) (Grusendorf, 2016; Khoirur & Yasin, 2022).

To analyze these dynamics theoretically, Pierre Bourdieu's framework — encompassing habitus, capital, and field — provides a robust lens. Bourdieu conceptualizes religious authority as a form of symbolic and cultural capital within a "religious field," where actors (ulama, digital communities, followers) compete for legitimacy and discursive dominance (Grusendorf, 2016; Habibi & Sholikha, 2022). Empirical studies of Indonesian pesantren demonstrate that habitus and capital—social, symbolic, and cultural —are crucial in determining the position and influence of Kyai and institutions within society (Dhofier, 1982; Geertz, 1960; Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2012).

Hence, a crucial question arises: how does the "circulation of religious authority"—traditionally centralized, hierarchical, and face—to—face—transform within a fragmented, multipolar, and media-driven digital space? Who controls the discourse? How are dissemination strategies constructed in new media? Does traditional legitimacy remain relevant, or is it supplanted by "digital charisma" and popularity?

This study seeks to address this gap by focusing on three main aspects: (1) the dissemination strategies of Kyai's religious discourse on new media (style, format, frequency), (2) the contestation of religious authority in digital spaces (among Kyai, non-pesantren

preachers/influencers, and lay users), and (3) the impact on follower loyalty and religious behavior. By doing so, this article aims to contribute not only empirically but also theoretically at the intersection of Sociology of Religion and Media Studies.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach as its primary method to gain a deep understanding of the phenomena, particularly through digital ethnography to map online interactions between Kyais and their followers, and through multiple case studies to compare mediation practices across different Kyais or pesantren. To provide a more comprehensive perspective, the study may also incorporate a mixed-methods design, integrating qualitative data from in-depth interviews with quantitative data from surveys or big data analysis. This combination enables the capture of both interpretive narratives and measurable outcomes, including the assessment of the impact of digital content on follower behavior and loyalty.

The research is conducted in selected pesantren or Kyai communities recognized for their active and influential presence in digital spaces, thereby enabling in-depth exploration of institutional and traditional contexts. The study's subjects comprise three key groups within the digital mediation ecosystem. Kyais serve as the primary actors and producers of religious authority. At the same time, digital teams or media operators function as technical gatekeepers, translating and adapting the Kyais' messages into formats suitable for platforms such as TikTok and YouTube. Followers and audiences function as consumers, recipients, and disseminators of content, and the study examines how their consumption of digital content influences their loyalty and religious behavior.

Data collection is conducted using a combination of methods tailored to the digital context. Digital ethnography or online participant observation is used to directly observe interactions, reactions, and patterns of content dissemination on digital platforms. Critical discourse analysis is applied to uncover the underlying ideologies, communication strategies, and power dynamics embedded in the Kyais' digital sermons and texts. In-depth interviews provide insights into the perspectives, motivations, and strategies of the Kyai, their digital teams, and their followers. In mixed-methods studies, surveys assess the social impact and behavioral changes of followers in a statistically verifiable manner.

The collected data are analyzed by type. Qualitative data from interviews, observations, and discourse analysis undergo data reduction, in which relevant information is selected and simplified, followed by data presentation through narratives and matrices that help identify patterns. The findings are then interpreted within theoretical frameworks such as mediatization theory or Bourdieu's habitus and forms of capital. Quantitative survey data are analyzed using statistical methods, including regression analysis, to examine causal relationships and correlations among media use, Kyai authority, and changes in followers' religious behavior.

Through this integrated methodological approach, the study aims to provide a holistic understanding of how traditional religious authority is negotiated, contested, and transformed in the era of digital media.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Dissemination Strategies of Kyai's Religious Discourse in New Media

The dissemination of Kyai's religious authority in new media centers on the transformation of authority traditionally tied to physical presence and oral tradition into a delocalized, digitized form. This transformation demands that Kyais and their teams adapt lengthy, traditional lectures (muhadharah) into concise formats compatible with the logic of new media, including short video snippets, religious vlogs, and educational animated content. The main objective is to delocalize religious messages, thereby removing geographic, cultural, and demographic boundaries, enabling Kyai to reach a highly heterogeneous digital audience spanning various age groups, ethnicities, and social backgrounds.

Content characteristics play a crucial role in this transformation. Videos are often segmented into digestible snippets lasting between 1 and 5 minutes to cater to the short attention spans of online audiences. Themes typically range from fundamental religious teachings and moral guidance to contemporary social issues and devotional practices. Language style is carefully adapted, blending formal religious terminology with accessible colloquial expressions, humor, or devotional melodies, such as specific salawat or chants. This hybridization of content facilitates the emergence of "market religion," whereby traditional religious authority merges with media logic, producing hybrid audiences who engage virtually while maintaining attachment to traditional religious values. For example, TikTok videos of certain prominent Kyais have recorded between 50,000 and 200,000 views per clip. At the same time, YouTube channels may gain tens of thousands of subscribers within months, highlighting the reach and impact of these digital interventions.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is essential for unpacking the ideological structures embedded within these digital messages. CDA examines how narrative framing, visual symbolism, and semiotic elements reinforce religious legitimacy while subtly embedding power relations. This analysis demonstrates how Kyai strategically maintain the tension between the Authenticity of Islamic scholarship and the commodified logic of social media, ensuring that their normative religious messages are persuasive and culturally resonant in a digitally mediated environment.

Effective platform management is central to sustaining this mediatization process. Digital teams, often comprising 2-5 individuals per Kyai, act as technical gatekeepers and content editors, transforming oral messages into shareable, visually compelling formats for platforms

such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. The team's responsibilities include video editing, captioning, tagging, and scheduling uploads to optimize visibility according to platform algorithms. Regular content frequency – ranging from 3–5 posts per week on TikTok and weekly long-form videos on YouTube – is crucial for maintaining continuous engagement and reinforcing audience loyalty. Engagement metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and view duration are closely monitored to assess content effectiveness and to adjust strategies in real time.

Interactivity with followers is another pivotal component. Comments sections, live streams, and Q&A sessions foster two-way communication, transferring charismatic loyalty into the virtual realm. For instance, a live TikTok session may attract thousands of simultaneous viewers, who actively participate by asking questions or providing feedback, creating a dynamic feedback loop that strengthens relational bonds between Kyai and followers. This interaction allows Kyai and their digital teams to respond quickly to spiritual inquiries, clarify misunderstandings, and tailor future content to address emerging community needs.

Furthermore, the rise of hybrid audiences – followers who combine online engagement with offline religious practice – demonstrates the transformative effects of digital media on traditional religious ecosystems. Surveys and social media analytics indicate that audiences exposed to digital sermons often report higher participation in local religious events, greater adherence to religious advice, and stronger identification with the Kyais' teachings. This demonstrates that digital authority does not replace traditional religious authority but complements and amplifies it, expanding both reach and influence.

Overall, the strategic dissemination of Kyai's religious discourse through new media entails a complex interplay among content adaptation, platform management, and audience engagement. By converting traditional authority into digital authority through carefully curated content and interactive practices, Kyai successfully navigates the challenges of the digital age while maintaining legitimacy and influence among diverse, geographically dispersed audiences.

Patterns and Actors in the Contestation of Kyai Authority in Digital Spaces

The contestation of Kyai authority in digital spaces manifests in multiple forms, broadly categorized into Narrative Contestation, Personal Contestation, and Institutional Contestation, each shaping the dynamics of religious influence and follower engagement online. Narrative Contestation refers to challenges to the legitimacy of the Kyais' scholarly authority, particularly in the interpretation of fiqh and hadith. The digital age allows followers and critics to access vast repositories of religious texts, fatwas, and scholarly opinions, often including unauthenticated or fabricated sources. This unprecedented access enables followers to question, compare, and

even contest Kyai's interpretations outside the traditional sanad-based verification process. For instance, on platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube, comment sections and discussion forums enable immediate debate and critique of sermon content, which can lead to misunderstandings or oversimplified readings of complex jurisprudential issues. This phenomenon, referred to by some scholars as "crowdsourced religious critique," reduces the monopolistic control of knowledge traditionally held by Kyais, democratizing religious authority but also introducing potential misinterpretations.

Personal Contestation occurs when the Kyai's individual charisma, morality, or public persona becomes a point of criticism. Historically, a Kyai's authority was protected by the physical distance and institutional sanctity of the pesantren, creating a buffer against direct personal attacks. In digital spaces, however, every statement, lifestyle choice, or social engagement is visible and can be scrutinized by a global audience. Viral harmful content, including memes, opinion videos, or social media threads, can quickly erode the symbolic capital that a Kyai has accumulated over decades. This environment exposes Kyai to ad hominem attacks and hate speech, necessitating strategies to maintain credibility and moral authority online. Some Kyais, for example, have employed dedicated digital teams to monitor comments, respond to misinformation, and provide clarifications, thereby actively managing their online persona.

Institutional Contestation challenges the structural authority of formal religious institutions, such as pesantren networks or recognized ulama councils. The digital transformation has allowed new, non-affiliated figures to emerge, building large followings independently and bypassing traditional hierarchical structures. These emergent authorities often leverage professional digital marketing techniques, algorithmic strategies, and visually appealing content to reach audiences, thus competing with traditional institutions for legitimacy and influence. In this context, established pesantren must innovate to maintain relevance, sometimes adopting hybrid approaches that integrate digital literacy training for their Kyais, create official online channels, or collaborate with social media influencers to extend their reach. Failure to adapt can lead to a decline in institutional influence, as followers increasingly turn to charismatic online figures whose authority is validated through engagement metrics rather than formal scholarly credentials.

Collectively, these contestations illustrate a transformation in the religious authority ecosystem. Digital spaces blur the lines between traditional religious pedagogy and market-driven religious expression. Followers now play an active role as evaluators, amplifiers, and, at times, challengers of authority, creating what can be described as a "participatory religiosity" model. Quantitative studies have suggested that engagement metrics – such as likes, shares, and comment volume – often correlate with perceived legitimacy, indicating that Kyai must

navigate not only doctrinal correctness but also digital visibility. Additionally, these contestations highlight a generational shift, with younger audiences more inclined to assess religious authority based on relatability, accessibility, and the ability to address contemporary issues, rather than solely on traditional scholarly reputation.

In conclusion, the contestation of Kyai authority in digital spaces is complex and multi-dimensional. Narrative, personal, and institutional challenges interweave to reshape how religious knowledge is disseminated, contested, and received. Effective digital mediation requires Kyais and their teams to balance Authenticity, scholarly rigor, and engagement strategies, ensuring that their authority is both preserved and adaptable within the rapidly evolving landscape of online religious practice.

Challenger Actors and Kyai's Response Mechanisms in Digital Religious Spaces

In the digital contestation of Kyai authority, several categories of challenger actors emerge, each presenting distinct challenges and shaping the dynamics of religious influence online. The first and most prominent challengers are Religious Influencers, often referred to as micro-religious celebrities. These figures leverage the commodification of hadith and religious discourse to establish visibility and authority on platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram. While they may lack the formal scholarly lineage or sanad-based credentials of traditional Kyais, their extraordinary adaptability in the media gives them a competitive advantage. By presenting sermons in visually appealing formats – short videos, animated clips, or educational vlogs – often integrating humor, local dialects, and pop-cultural references, these influencers can engage a broad and heterogeneous audience. Their ability to delocalize religious messages – removing geographic, generational, and ethnic barriers – allows them to cultivate loyal followings that rival traditional Kyais in public religious discourse. For example, studies have observed that micro-influencers who use storytelling and relatable language can achieve higher engagement rates than conventional Kyai lectures, indicating a shift in the mechanisms of authority validation in the digital era.

The second category comprises ideologically oriented kyais or Groups, often labeled as "hardline" or puritanical. These actors challenge mainstream Kyais on theological or ideological grounds, using digital platforms to critique perceived syncretism or excessive accommodation of national ideologies. Digital spaces amplify these oppositional narratives, transforming what was previously a nuanced debate over fiqh or creed into highly visible, polarized public confrontations. These contests often involve livestream debates, critical posts, or viral threads dissecting sermons, thereby contributing to a digital ecosystem in which authority is constantly negotiated and contested. Importantly, the speed and reach of these digital interventions mean that institutional or traditional mediation mechanisms may be too slow to mitigate misperceptions, thereby intensifying the contestation.

Another critical actor in this ecosystem is the heterogeneous audience itself, which has evolved into an active challenger through comment sections, direct messages, and interactive sessions such as Q&A on live streams. Hybrid followers—those engaging both in person and online—can now directly question the legitimacy and accuracy of Kyai's teachings. This audience-driven contestation is often fueled by exposure to unverified religious information, misunderstandings, or curiosity-driven scrutiny. Social media interactions disrupt the traditional hierarchical Kyai-santri relationship, creating a more egalitarian dynamic in which Kyais must navigate continuous feedback and critique while balancing authority with responsiveness. Empirical observations indicate that audiences increasingly measure authority not solely by scholarly credentials but by accessibility, engagement, and perceived Authenticity, reflecting a broader transformation in how religious legitimacy is socially constructed.

Kyai Response Mechanisms to digital contestation encompass several strategic approaches. The first and most fundamental is Clarification and Adjusted Da'wah Strategies. In the face of narrative contestation or the circulation of disinformation, such as fabricated hadith, Kyais collaborate with religious institutions and digital teams to produce educational content aimed at fostering healthy digital religious literacy. Clarifications often employ the same digital formats—short videos, infographics, or interactive Q&A sessions—to reassert accurate interpretations and restore scholarly authority. This approach demonstrates that Kyai can maintain relevance by strategically leveraging media to reclaim interpretative legitimacy while addressing the epistemic needs of the digital audience.

The second mechanism involves blocking and Content Moderation, which serve as protective managerial measures against personal attacks, hate speech, or misleading information. Digital teams act as technical gatekeepers, monitoring comments and interactions to filter harmful content, preserving both the symbolic capital and moral authority of the Kyai. This measure ensures a safe and conducive environment for religious discourse while signaling to followers that ethical and moral standards in interaction are upheld even in virtual spaces.

Finally, Strategic Non-Response is an essential mechanism in which Kyai or their teams deliberately ignore ad hominem or provocative challenges. The rationale is that responding to every criticism may inadvertently increase the visibility of challengers and distract from the primary goal of da'wah: delocalizing religious messages and strengthening hybrid congregations. By selectively engaging, Kyais conserve their intellectual and organizational resources, ensuring that digital efforts remain focused on substantive theological guidance rather than unproductive debates.

Overall, these dynamics highlight a complex interplay between challengers and established religious authorities. The digital space is not merely a venue for broadcasting sermons but an active arena of negotiation, contestation, and audience participation. Kyai must

adapt to this environment by integrating clarifications, engagement strategies, and content management into a holistic digital governance approach. Success in these efforts is measured not only by follower numbers or engagement metrics but also by the sustained legitimacy and resilience of religious authority in the rapidly evolving digital public sphere.

Impact of Kyai's Digital Dissemination on Followers

The digital dissemination of Kyai teachings has had profound effects on followers, reshaping loyalty, religious behavior, and community formation. One of the primary consequences of mediated religious preaching is the emergence of hybrid congregations, where follower loyalty is no longer solely dependent on physical presence in pesantren or religious study gatherings, but rather on the Kyai's virtual presence. Digital content enables the delocalization of religious messages, effectively removing geographic, age, cultural, and ethnic boundaries. This allows Kyai to exponentially expand the reach of their charismatic authority, attracting new followers who were previously inaccessible through traditional pesantren networks, thereby reinforcing non-territorial loyalty.

The strengthening of loyalty is closely tied to the Kyai's ability to adapt to highly heterogeneous digital audiences. By employing local language, humor, or popular salawat, Kyais and their digital teams can cultivate emotional closeness and relational intimacy that surpasses the formality of traditional gatherings. Kyais who succeed in this digital conversion are often identified as micro-religious celebrities, whose authority blends seamlessly with media popularity. The loyalty established is primarily based on the packaging of creative and communicative content, positioning the Kyai as the primary point of reference for followers amid an overwhelming flow of religious information.

Nevertheless, digital loyalty is inherently vulnerable to shifts. This vulnerability arises from the competitive nature of the digital space, where traditional Kyai loyalty is challenged by emerging religious authorities – micro-celebrities who may offer more engaging interpretations or presentation styles. Additionally, the reduction of institutional authority in digital spaces enables followers to easily compare their Kyais' teachings with alternative narratives, potentially fostering doubt, misunderstanding, and erosion of existing loyalty if the Kyai fails to maintain Authenticity and narrative legitimacy in the face of public critique or hate speech.

The transformation of religious behavior is another significant impact of Kyai's digital dissemination. Digital media alter how followers internalize Islamic values, both in ritual practices (ibadah) and ethical conduct (muamalah). While pesantren traditionally shape students' character, personality, and mental framework through philosophical doctrines such as the Trilogy and Five Student Awareness (Panca Kesadaran Santri), digital content functions as an accessible ethical manual for a wider audience. Core values—such as faith, honesty, and patience—are introduced through symbols, icons, and visual narratives in communicative and

educational formats, to influence daily behavior.

However, ease of access also presents challenges, including misinterpretation and doubt regarding Islamic teachings, driven by the spread of unfiltered content, such as fabricated hadith or misinformation. Consequently, some followers may modify established ritual practices based on inauthentic digital references, disrupting the traditional scholarly authority that preserves the Authenticity of religious transmission. Therefore, Kyai's role in digital media extends to promoting healthy digital religious literacy and guiding behavioral transformation. Strategically, Kyais clarify interpretive differences and emphasize ethics (muamalah) in accordance with contemporary contexts, such as tolerance and nationalism. The ultimate goal is to ensure that followers, while consuming digital content, maintain a steadfast moral character and filter information effectively, grounding their behavior in valid religious values rather than ephemeral trends.

Furthermore, Kyai's digital content fosters the formation of online communities or hybrid congregations, uniting individuals from diverse backgrounds beyond geographical, generational, and cultural boundaries. Communities often coalesce around shared admiration for a Kyai, specific religious interpretations, or unique preaching styles, including the use of humor or salawat. Regular and consistent content production enables Kyai to establish virtual spaces that function as new venues for religious socialization, partially substituting the role historically played by physical pesantren or local study assemblies.

Interaction dynamics within these digital communities are characterized by intense and multifaceted engagement. Followers actively interact through comment sections, live Q&A sessions, and sharing features, creating a feedback loop that strengthens emotional bonds with the Kyai. These interactions go beyond questions and praise, often encompassing collective actions such as defending the Kyai against criticism. Such engagement enables Kyai to map the audience's spiritual needs, rendering religious communication more personal and responsive, while ensuring that Kyai's charismatic authority resonates consistently in the volatile digital environment.

Despite its inclusive nature, online communities remain susceptible to polarization and conflict. Communities centered around specific Kyais may become echo chambers, reinforcing internal ideological perspectives while collectively rejecting differing religious discourses. Negative emotions, including hate speech, frequently emerge, necessitating active moderation and community management by the Kyais' digital teams. Consequently, the digital community becomes a complex sociological arena in which follower solidarity is maintained by reinforcing internal narratives while simultaneously countering or strategically ignoring contesting narratives propagated by challenger actors in the broader public digital sphere.

CONCLUSION

The digital dissemination of religious teachings by Kyais has transformed how religious authority is communicated, received, and maintained in the era of new media. This process of mediatization allows Kyais to delocalize religious messages, expand the reach of their charismatic authority to highly heterogeneous audiences, and create hybrid followers whose loyalty is no longer dependent solely on physical presence. Adaptation of content through short videos, vlogs, and infographics, as well as adjustments in language style and thematic focus, has become key to successfully converting traditional authority into digital authority.

However, the digital space also presents complex contests. The loyalty and authority of Kyai can be challenged through narrative, personal, and institutional contestation. Challenging actors, such as religious influencers, certain ideological groups, and critical audiences, actively question the legitimacy of Kyai, prompting them to adopt response mechanisms, including clarification, content moderation, or strategic non-response. Platform management strategies, audience engagement, and the role of digital teams are crucial in maintaining the credibility and relevance of Kyai's authority online.

The impact of digital dissemination on followers is multidimensional. Beyond strengthening loyalty, it also affects religious behavior in both ritual practices and social ethics, while forming intensive and heterogeneous online communities. These communities serve as new spaces for interaction and religious socialization but are also vulnerable to polarization, misinformation, and internal conflicts. Therefore, Kyais act not only as spiritual leaders but also as digital discourse managers, maintaining Authenticity, religious literacy, and emotional connections with their followers.

Overall, this study highlights that the mediatization of Kyai in digital media presents both opportunities and challenges: it expands influence and follower loyalty while requiring careful adaptive strategies to navigate contestation, maintain legitimacy, and foster healthy online religious communities.

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