

The Shift In Religious Authority And The Emergence Of New Public Spaces For Nonformal Pie: A Comparative Analysis Between Traditional Kiai And Hijrah Ustaz On Social Media

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ABSTRACT

The development of social media has changed the pattern of production, distribution, and reception of religious knowledge, thus forming a new public space for non-formal Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia. These changes have given rise to a contest of authority between traditional kiai based on scientific sanad, mastery of the book of turats, and community recognition, and ustaz hijrah who take advantage of digital popularity, communicative proximity, and thematic content packaging. This study aims to analyze shifts in religious authority, differences in learning models, and patterns of contestation, adaptation, and convergence of the two actors on social media. The research uses a qualitative approach with a comparative netnography design through observation of content, audience interaction, and religious representation on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok platforms during the period 2024–2026. The results of the study show that traditional kiai maintain legitimacy through depth of argumentation, textual reference, and continuous pedagogical relations, while hijrah ustaz gains legitimacy through visibility, personal narrative, practical relevance, and follower involvement. This study concludes that digitalization does not remove traditional authority, but rather results in the hybridization of religious authority. The novelty of the research lies in the relational analysis between the two actors in the context of digital non-formal PAI. The implication is that the development of non-formal PAI needs to integrate scientific validity, media creativity, digital-religious literacy, and dialogue ethics to build moderate, inclusive, critical, and responsible Islamic learning.

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Introduction

The transformation of digital media is changing the way religious knowledge is produced, distributed, and received by Indonesian Muslim communities. Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and conversational applications are no longer just communication channels, but have developed as public spaces where Islamic authority, interpretation, and identity are negotiated. In the context of non-formal Islamic Religious Education (PAI), these changes expand access to learning beyond mosques, taklim assemblies, and Islamic boarding schools, while shifting the pattern of relationships between teachers, students, and learning communities. The study of digital religion confirms that technology is not a neutral medium; platform design, algorithms, visual formats, and interaction culture also shape the way teachings are understood and assessed (Musthofa, 2026). Therefore, the shift in religious authority needs to be read not only as a shift in lectures from offline to online, but as a change in the structure of the legitimacy of knowledge. Traditional kiai and hijrah ustaz are present in the same arena, but bring different sources of authority, communication strategies, and pedagogical orientations. These differences make social media a locus to understand the new configuration of non-formal PAI in Indonesia.

The literature on traditional kiai shows that their authority is usually built through a combination of depth of knowledge, scientific sanad, personal charisma, social service, and community recognition. In the pesantren ecosystem, the transmission of knowledge takes place gradually through the study of the book, sorogan, bandongan, deliberation, and moral habituation (Masfufah & Husni, 2026). The relationship between kiai and students is therefore not only instructional, but also ethical and spiritual, because example and manners are part of the learning process. This model places source verification, mastery of Arabic language devices, and connection with scholarly traditions as the basis for religious legitimacy (Maryam, 2023). A number of studies also show that kiai still have adaptive abilities in responding to social changes, including through the use of digital channels managed by Islamic boarding schools or student networks (Nawa & Aziz, 2026). However, the adaptation confronts them with concise, fast, and visual demands that are not always in harmony with the contextual and tiered character of book studies. Thus, previous research confirms the continuity of traditional authority, while showing the changing form of representation and reach of da'wah on digital platforms.

Berbeda dari pola otoritas pesantren, studi tentang gerakan hijrah menjelaskan kemunculan Ustaz Hijrah as a figure who gained recognition through communicative closeness, narrative of self-change, relevance of daily issues, and digital visibility. Their content generally targets the anxieties of the urban Muslim generation regarding relationships, work, mental health, family, halal consumption, and identity search (Ryanta & Ramadhani, 2026). Religious messages are packaged in popular language, short videos, infographics, live broadcasts, or online classes that allow audiences to interact immediately (Djafar, Bachmid, Hasan, & Dilo, 2026). This character expands the participation of religious learning as users can choose a theme, time, and reference figure according to their needs. However, the literature also warns that platform metrics, such as follower count, impressions, and engagement, have the potential to become new markers of credibility that are not always in line with methodological competence (Harenda & Fiyul, 2026). This phenomenon does not automatically negate the value of digital da'wah, but demands a critical analysis of the relationship between popularity, authenticity, and validity of knowledge. Therefore, Ustaz Hijrah needs to be understood as a pedagogical actor as well as a content creator in the social media attention economy.

Research on Islamic authority on social media in general develops in three trends (Dalimunthe, Yuslem, & Ardiansyah, 2026). First, a study that focuses on the digitization of da'wah, communication strategies, and changes in religious practices. Second, research that

examines hijrah as a youth identity movement, including its relationship with popular culture, consumption, and online communities. Third, a study on pesantren and kiai that highlights the resilience of tradition, charisma, and the process of adaptation to modernity. These three trends have provided an important foundation for understanding the pluralization of religious voices in Indonesia. However, most studies still treat traditional kiai and hijrah ustaz as separate objects, or place one of them as a background for discussion of other actors. As a result, the comparative mechanism regarding the source of legitimacy, the form of the material, the pedagogical relationship model, and the pattern of audience interaction have not been adequately formulated. In fact, the two now operate in the same platform infrastructure and have the potential to influence each other. Comparative analysis is necessary to avoid the dichotomy between the old authority that is considered to be receding and the dominant new authority.

The new non-formal public space of PAI on social media has pedagogical consequences that go beyond the issue of da'wah reach. Digital platforms allow learning to take place in a flexible, modular, and community-based manner, but also change the depth of dialogue, verification processes, and educators' responsibilities towards learners. In traditional recitation, the reading of the text and the teacher's correction take place in a continuous relationship; on social media, knowledge is often present in fragments that are separated from the context of argumentation and learning discipline (Subhan et al., 2025). On the other hand, the digital format provides opportunities for the dissemination of moderate Islamic values, the expansion of religious literacy, and access for groups previously unreachable by conventional institutions (Nuriana & Salwa, 2024). The problem is not to choose one model, but to identify epistemic and pedagogical requirements so that both produce credible, inclusive, and reflective learning. The perspective of *digital religion* is relevant to read the link between technology, religious practices, and the formation of authority. With this framework, social media is understood as a social environment that conditions power negotiations, not just a tool for delivering PAI material.

Based on the study, there are three research gaps. First, the available studies more often review digital da'wah, hijrah movements, or Islamic boarding school adaptations separately, so that there has not been much symmetrically examining contestations and encounters between traditional kiai and hijrah ustaz. Second, previous research has tended to emphasize the sociological dimensions of identity, popularity, or communication strategies, while its implications for the structure of informal PAI, particularly curriculum, pedagogical relations, material validation, and audience learning experiences, have not been analyzed in an integrated manner. Third, the change in authority is often described as a linear shift from sanad to digital popularity, even though the practice on the platform shows the possibility of adaptation, hybridization, and mutual strengthening of legitimacy. The novelty of this research lies in the use of netnography-based comparative analysis to map the sources of legitimacy, forms of scientific transmission, digital representation strategies, interaction patterns, and pedagogical consequences of the two actors in the public space of social media. This research also offers a relational reading: kiai and ustaz hijrah are positioned not as frozen and absolute opposite categories, but as actors who negotiate in the digital non-formal PAI ecosystem.

This study aims to analyze the shift in religious authority and the formation of new public spaces for non-formal Islamic Religious Education on social media through a comparison between traditional kiai and hijrah ustaz. The analysis is directed to explain the basis of legitimacy, knowledge transmission patterns, digital communication strategies, and pedagogical consequences that accompany the presence of the two actors. In particular, this study aims to answer the following three problem formulations: How the sources, indicators, and practices of legitimacy of traditional kiai religious authorities and hijrah

ustaz are constructed and negotiated on social media; How are the differences and similarities between the two in packaging materials, building educator-audience relationships, and organizing the non-formal PAI learning process; How do contestations, adaptations, and convergence between traditional kiai and hijrah ustaz affect the quality, validity, inclusivity, and direction of development of non-formal PAI in the digital public space? Through this goal, the research is expected to produce conceptual understanding and pedagogical recommendations for the development of a digital Islamic learning ecosystem that is rooted in scientific traditions, responsive to the needs of the audience, and oriented towards critical and moderate religious literacy in contemporary Indonesian society.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a comparative netnography study design to analyze the shift in religious authority in non-formal PAI public spaces on social media (Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023). This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to examine communication practices, identity representations, patterns of legitimacy, and learning interactions that are naturally formed on digital platforms. The analysis unit includes accounts, uploads, live broadcasts, comment columns, and online community activities that represent traditional kiai and hijrah ustaz. Traditional kiai is understood as a figure who gains legitimacy through scientific sanad, attachment to Islamic boarding schools, mastery of the turats book, and community recognition. On the contrary, Ustaz Hijrah is understood as a digital preacher who stands out through self-transformation narratives, popular content packaging, communicative closeness, and follower reach. The comparison is not carried out to determine the superiority of one of the actors, but to identify differences, intersections, and the process of hybridization of authority in the implementation of digital non-formal PAI in contemporary Indonesia by paying attention to the social context, the character of the platform, and the dynamics of audience acceptance that accompany it on an ongoing basis in each observation.

Data was collected through non-participant digital observation and systematic documentation of content published on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok during January 2024 to June 2026. The selection of the platform is based on the audiovisual character, interaction features, and its relevance to the circulation of da'wah and religious learning in Indonesia. Digital informants or accounts were selected purposively with the following criteria: actively producing non-formal PAI content; have verifiable connections with Islamic boarding schools or hijrah communities; display religious materials consistently; and provide an adequate public interaction trail. The sample included six traditional kiai accounts and six hijrah ustaz accounts, taking into account variations in the number of followers, content formats, and learning themes. Primary data is in the form of videos, text, visuals, comments, creator responses, and announcements of online classroom activities (Tucker, Pursel, & Divinsky, 2020). Secondary data is obtained from account profiles, community pages, scientific publications, and relevant institutional documents. All data were archived in an observation matrix that contained upload dates, themes, formats, religious references, indicators of authority, and forms of primary audience engagement.

Data analysis is carried out interactively through the stages of condensation, coding, categorization, presentation, and drawing conclusions. In the initial stage, all data is read repeatedly to identify the units of meaning related to scientific legitimacy, charisma, popularity, aesthetics, postulate references, educator-audience relations, and orientation of PAI material. Next, open coding is used to find an empirical theme, then axial coding is used to compare patterns between groups of actors. The interpretation of the results was guided by the concepts of religious authority and *digital religion* to explain the relationship

between the logic of the platform, content production, and changes in the transmission of Islamic knowledge. The validity of findings is maintained through source triangulation, theory triangulation, audit trail examination, and peer discussion. The researcher only used publicly available data, disguised the identity of ordinary users in the comment excerpts, and did not reproduce any personal or sensitive material. The results of the analysis are presented in a descriptive-comparative manner in order to show the contestation as well as the convergence between the authority of traditional kiai and ustaz hijrah in a proportionate manner in the context of the development of non-formal PAI in the current Indonesian national digital public space

Results and Discussion

This study uses *the theory of Digital Religion* developed by Heidi A. Campbell as an analytical framework to explain the shift in religious authority and the formation of new public spaces of non-formal PAI on social media (Evolvi, 2021). This theory views digital technology not only as an instrument for conveying religious messages, but as a social environment that reshapes religious practices, relationships, identity, and legitimacy. In this perspective, authority is not only sourced from the mastery of knowledge, sanad, charisma, or institutions, but is also negotiated through platform design, content visibility, algorithms, audience interaction, and the ability of actors to connect teachings with everyday experiences. The framework is relevant to compare traditional kiai that affirms legitimacy based on scientific transmission and pesantren authority with hijrah ustaz who gain recognition through communicative closeness, narrative of self-transformation, and digital performativity. Methodologically, *Digital Religion theory* leads to netnographic analysis on content production, forms of religious reference, comment patterns, creator-follower relationships, and online learning practices (Campbell & Evolvi, 2019). Thus, this theory allows research to read contestation, adaptation, and convergence of authority.

The first problem formulation examines how the sources, indicators, and practices of legitimacy of traditional kiai religious authorities and hijrah ustaz are constructed and negotiated on social media. The findings show that the legitimacy of traditional kiai mainly relies on scientific sanad, mastery of the turats book, pesantren, moral exemplary, and community recognition. These five elements make the authority of the kiai relational and historical because it is built through the process of education, devotion, and long-term interaction (Bukhari, Hasan, Syarif, & Solichin, 2026). In digital content, this legitimacy is seen through the mention of teachers, book references, reading Arabic texts, explanations of rules, and connections with pesantren traditions. However, digital mediums require these elements to be translated into a concise and easily accessible audiovisual format. As a result, the authority of the kiai no longer relies solely on physical presence in the assembly, but also on the ability to maintain the depth of the argument when the message is conveyed to a dispersed audience. This process shows that digitization does not remove traditional bases, but expands the arena of recognition through visibility, affordability, documentation, and cross-community content circulation.

On the contrary, the legitimacy of the hijrah ustaz is constructed mainly through communication capacity, personal experience narratives, consistency of content production, and resonance with the audience's daily problems. The findings show that indicators such as number of followers, impression rate, comment intensity, and engagement in live broadcasts serve as visibility capitals that strengthen public recognition (De La Hoz-Ruíz, Chaker, Fernández-Terol, & Olmo-Extremuera, 2025). Unlike traditional kiai, this legitimacy is not primarily displayed through a long scientific genealogy, but rather through the ability to translate Islamic teachings into practical, emotional, and intimate advice to the experiences of the younger generation. The themes of migration, self-

control, family relations, marriage, work, and mental health are the entrances to build this closeness. Conversational language, curated visual displays, limited background music, and personalized story packaging reinforce the impression of authenticity and accessibility. Under such conditions, authority is formed in a performative way: it must be constantly shown, responded to, and confirmed by the audience. However, digital popularity cannot be treated as the only measure of religious competence. The validity of the material still requires clarity of reference, accuracy of reasoning, and ethical responsibility.

The practice of authority negotiation takes place through the encounter between scientific logic and platform logic. Traditional kiai use social media to display book recitations, fiqh explanations, answers to congregational questions, and pieces of advice taken from offline assemblies (Sobirin, 2021). In this process, the pesantren or santri media team plays an important role as a mediator who translates religious academic language into titles, snippets, titles, and visual designs that are in accordance with the character of the platform. Ustaz hijrah also negotiates by combining the postulates of the Qur'an and hadith, quotes from scholars, and life experiences to strengthen their message. However, the selection of postulate often follows the needs of the theme and the duration of the content, so the context of interpretation needs to be critically examined. Comment columns, Q&A sessions, and live broadcasts show that the audience isn't a passive recipient. They submitted clarifications, expressed approval, compared reference figures, and even corrected certain submissions. Thus, legitimacy on social media is dialogical as well as vulnerable to immediate judgment. Authority survives when actors are able to maintain consistency, responsiveness, and accountability.

The difference in legitimacy indicators between the two actors shows a change in the hierarchy of knowledge in digital non-formal PAI. In traditional kiai, recognition is mainly produced by the depth of mastery of the material, the continuity of the sanad, the position in the pesantren network, and the success in shaping the religious ethos of the congregation. These indicators are cumulative because they are obtained through long learning experiences and social services. In Ustaz Hijrah, recognition is formed faster through account visibility, storytelling skills, consistency of uploads, and the ability to build affective closeness with followers (Abdurrahman, Salma, Parsono, Ali, & Widyaningrum, 2025). This indicator is relatively easy to measure by platform metrics, but it is also heavily influenced by algorithm changes and trends. This difference does not mean that kiai are always independent of the logic of popularity or that the hijrah ustaz completely does not have a scientific basis. Instead, the data shows a more complex spectrum. A number of kiai optimize short and interactive formats, while some hijrah ustaz show an effort to refer to teachers or authoritative literature. Therefore, legitimacy analysis must avoid essentialist categorization. The main focus is to assess the way each actor proves his credibility.

The construction of legitimacy has a direct effect on the non-formal PAI learning pattern offered. Traditional kiai tend to organize the material in stages, with an emphasis on reading sources, explaining terms, legal context, and manners of demanding knowledge (Nurtawab & Wahyudi, 2022). This pattern provides space for the audience to understand the reasons behind a religious opinion, although it requires greater attention and commitment to learning. On the other hand, Ustaz Hijrah more often presents material based on themes that are close to the direct needs of users. Such approaches are effective in sparking interest and providing practical orientation, but risk simplifying differences of opinion or ignoring methodological prerequisites. In both models, the legitimacy of educators determines how audiences trust, interpret, and practice the message received. Therefore, digital non-formal PAI is not sufficiently evaluated through the large range of content. Evaluation needs to include the accuracy of references, transparency of competence, openness to correction, and the ability to encourage critical literacy.

Strengthening these elements can link the accessibility of social media with scientific responsibility and sustainable moral formation for Muslim learning participants.

At the level of public space, social media shifts authority from a primarily centralized pattern to a more dispersed pattern. However, this distribution is not synonymous with the democratization of fully equal knowledge. The platform provides opportunities for many actors to speak, but visibility remains affected by algorithms, production capital, follower networks, and audience preferences. Traditional kiai enter this space with symbolic capital in the form of sanad and community reputation, while hijrah ustaz rely on communicative capital and attention management skills (Hidayat, Lasiyo, & Wahyono, 2025). The meeting between the two created a contest about who is worthy of explaining religion and how the explanation should be conveyed. The findings show that audiences often use more than one figure as a reference. They can consume short content of Ustaz Hijrah to get initial motivation, then seek deepening to kiai or Islamic boarding school institutions. This pattern indicates the division of pedagogical functions, not an absolute replacement of the intersector. Therefore, digital religious legitimacy needs to be understood as the result of the relationship between competence, representation, public acceptance, and platform infrastructure.

Through the perspective of *Digital Religion*, the shift in authority shows that religious legitimacy in social media is hybrid, relational, and layered. Sanad, charisma, popularity, aesthetics, responsiveness, and textual references do not work in isolation, but rather influence each other in forming audience trust. Traditional kiai gain the opportunity to expand its reach without relinquishing scientific capital, but it is necessary to ensure that the simplification of the format does not reduce the accuracy of the explanation. Ustaz hijrah can be the starting door for the religious involvement of the younger generation, but their legitimacy needs to be strengthened with transparency of sources, scientific consultation, and recognition of the limits of competence. Thus, contestation should not be understood as a binary conflict between tradition and modernity. The contestation actually opens up the possibility of forming a non-formal PAI ecosystem that combines the methodological depth of pesantren with the accessibility of digital communication. The main consequence is the need for a digital religious literacy standard that assesses arguments, context, credibility of sources, dialogue ethics, and learning impact. These standards are important so that new public spaces do not just generate engagement, but responsible understanding.

The second problem formulation focuses on the differences and similarities between traditional kiai and hijrah ustaz in packaging materials, building educator-audience relationships, and organizing non-formal PAI learning through social media. The findings show that traditional kiai generally maintain a learning structure based on scientific order, ranging from basic mastery of Arabic, jurisprudence, creed, hadith, tafsir, to Sufism (Kartini, Nawas, & Tanal, 2026). The material is conveyed through reading the book, explaining the meaning, describing the context, and relating it to actual problems. This pattern shows that religious knowledge is placed as a systematic building and requires a gradual learning process. Meanwhile, Ustaz Hijrah tends to package material based on themes that are close to the audience's daily problems, such as emotional control, repentance, family relationships, marriage, work, financial management, and the search for identity. These differences reflect different pedagogical orientations: kiai emphasizes deepening the structure of knowledge, while ustaz hijrah prioritizes practical relevance and ease of access. However, both of them strive to make Islamic teachings a moral guide for the life of contemporary Muslim society.

In packaging materials, traditional kiai tend to use explanatory and contextual approaches. Their digital content is often in the form of recordings of recitations, lecture

clips, question and answer sessions, or book readings accompanied by explanations of religious terms (Mursalat, 2025). The format shows efforts to maintain continuity between offline learning in Islamic boarding schools and the dissemination of knowledge through social media. Nonetheless, the lengthy content and use of technical terms can be a challenge for new users who do not yet have an adequate religious basis. Instead, Ustaz Hijrah utilizes short video formats, visual illustrations, infographics, personal stories, and motivational quotes to attract the attention of the audience. Religious messages are simplified in concise, persuasive, and emotional conversational language. This strategy increases the affordability of materials, especially for the younger generation who are used to the consumption of fast information. However, excessive simplification can reduce the nuances of differences of view in fiqh or interpretation. Therefore, the effectiveness of material packaging needs to be assessed through a balance between communicative appeal, substance accuracy, and sufficiency of the context of religious explanation.

The next difference can be seen in the choice of sources and the way of constructing religious arguments. Traditional kiai generally refers to the Qur'an, hadiths, classical books, opinions of madhhab scholars, as well as learning experiences in the pesantren's tradition. These references not only serve as a reinforcement of the evidence, but also show a scientific responsibility for the continuity of knowledge transmission (Rasyid, Saepudin, & Asikin, 2024). In practice, kiai often explain differences of opinion, the historical background of a law, and the limits of the application of teachings under certain conditions. Ustaz hijrah also uses verses, hadiths, and quotes from scholars, but the selection is more often adjusted to the theme of the content and the communication needs of the audience. Arguments tend to be directed at messages of behavior change that can be immediately put into practice. This pattern makes da'wah feel personal and applicative, although it sometimes lacks room for methodological complexity. The similarity is that both actors use religious texts as the main source of legitimacy. The difference lies in the depth of elaboration, breadth of reference, and presentation orientation. Therefore, audience literacy is needed so that users are able to distinguish between introductory materials, practical advice, and religious discussions that require further in-depth.

The educator-audience relationship also shows different configurations. In the kiai tradition, the relationship between teacher and student is built through reverence, social closeness, moral supervision, and the sustainability of the learning process. Educator authority does not only appear when delivering material, but also when providing examples in daily life (Fahham, 2020). Social media expands those relationships through comment columns, live broadcasts, and distribution of recitation recordings, but it doesn't completely replace the experience of in-person interaction. In Ustaz Hijrah, the relationship with the audience is more horizontal and interactive. Followers can respond immediately, send questions, share personal experiences, or participate in online programs without going through strong institutional ties. This closeness creates the perception that the preacher is present as a spiritual travel companion. However, a very open relationship can also blur the boundaries between religious authorities, public figures, and influencers. Both models both utilize digital interaction to build trust. However, kiai emphasizes long-term coaching relationships, while ustaz hijrah emphasizes affective closeness, quick response, and audience participation.

The implementation of non-formal PAI learning by the two actors shows differences in structure, rhythm, and evaluation mechanisms. Traditional kiai generally develop learning that is tied to the recitation schedule, book level, pesantren calendar, and congregational community. Students have the opportunity to participate in repetitive learning, take notes, ask questions, and observe the teacher's exemplary practice. This structure supports the formation of learning disciplines and deeper understanding. Ustaz hijrah tends to organize

learning in the form of online classes, thematic studies, webinars, mentoring programs, and conversational application-based communities (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2019). This model is more flexible because participants can choose materials as needed and follow activities from different locations. However, this flexibility also makes the sustainability of learning dependent on the individual motivation of the participants. In this context, social media functions as an entrance, promotion of activities, as well as a space for informal interaction. The similarity is that both actors have expanded the reach of non-formal PAI. The difference lies in the intensity of mentoring, curriculum arrangements, and the level of involvement of participants in the religious learning process that takes place in a sustainable manner.

Although they differ in pedagogical orientation, the two actors show a tendency for convergence in digital practice. Traditional kiai began using video clips, visual design, more communicative language, and account management by students to reach young users. The adaptation does not necessarily mean a reduction in the depth of the material, but rather an effort to translate the scientific tradition of the pesantren into a format that suits the character of the platform. On the other hand, some hijrah ustaz began to strengthen the material through book references, collaboration with scholars, and more careful explanations of the issue of fiqh or creed (Pranoto, 2023). This convergence shows that digital public spaces encourage each actor to learn from the advantages of the other. Kiai has the opportunity to expand the accessibility of da'wah, while Ustaz Hijrah can increase credibility through strengthening the scientific base. However, the hybridization process needs to be carried out critically so that it does not turn into a mere imaging strategy. Substantive integration must be seen in the accuracy of sources, transparency of competence, ethics of dialogue, and willingness to accept corrections. Thus, digital non-formal PAI learning can develop creatively without neglecting academic and moral responsibilities.

In the perspective of *Digital Religion*, the difference between traditional kiai and hijrah ustaz does not solely show the contradiction between the old model and the new model, but rather shows the negotiation between scientific logic, audience needs, and digital platform infrastructure. Kiai brings authority capital based on sanad, institutions, exemplary, and depth of study, while Ustaz Hijrah relies on communicative capital in the form of emotional closeness, popular language, visuality, and follower involvement. Social media brings together these two forms of capital in the same space and requires both to gain public recognition on an ongoing basis. Under such conditions, the quality of informal PAI cannot be determined solely by the number of followers, the duration of the content, or the institutional reputation. Quality needs to be measured through the connection between the accuracy of the material, methodological openness, dialogical ability, and its impact on the formation of students' religious attitudes. The ideal model is not the elimination of one of the learning patterns, but a critical collaboration that combines the depth of the pesantren tradition with accessibility, creativity, and interactivity of digital media.

The third problem formulation examines how contestation, adaptation, and convergence between traditional kiai and hijrah ustaz affect the quality, validity, inclusiveness, and direction of development of non-formal PAI in the digital public space. The findings show that social media has brought together two layers of authority in the same arena of communication, but with different legitimacy capitals (Turunen, Werther, & Al-Saqaf, 2022). Traditional kiai bring scientific capital in the form of sanad, mastery of the turats book, experience of pesantren, and community recognition. On the contrary, Ustaz Hijrah relies on communicative capital in the form of storytelling skills, emotional closeness, mastery of audiovisual formats, and consistency in building interaction with followers. The contestation arises when the two actors offer explanations on the same

religious issues, such as hijrah, fiqh of worship, family, economy, and social ethics. However, the contestation does not always take the form of open rejection. In many cases, it takes place through competition for audience attention, digital engagement rates, and recognition as a credible source of referrals. Thus, the shift in authority indicates a change in the mechanism of public recognition, not an absolute loss of the role of the Islamic scientific tradition.

Contestation of authority is mainly seen in the differences in standards used to determine the credibility of a preacher. In the pesantren's tradition, credibility is closely related to a long learning process, teacher-student connection, methodological accuracy, and the ability to understand differences of opinion from scholars (Supriyanto & Amrin, 2022). In the social media ecosystem, credibility can also be formed through quantitative indicators, such as the number of followers, upload intensity, impression rate, and positive audience response. This change has led to digital popularity potentially being perceived as a religious competence, although the two have not always been directly related. Traditional kiai can gain a wide reach due to its scientific reputation, while Ustaz Hijrah can build public trust through empathetic and easy-to-understand communication. Problems arise when audiences do not distinguish between content appeal, rhetorical ability, and interpretive capacity. Therefore, contestation occurs not only between speakers, but also in the way users judge religious sources. Digital non-formal PAI requires evaluative literacy so that the audience is able to examine the reference, context of the postulate, the competence of the figure, and the purpose of the message before making it the basis for daily religious understanding or practice.

The adaptation of traditional kiai to social media shows that the tradition of pesantren is not a static entity. A number of kiai and Islamic boarding schools use the help of students or creative teams to document recitations, edit lectures, make video clips, and present religious explanations in a more communicative language. This strategy allows book materials, interpretations, hadiths, and fiqh to reach audiences outside the geographical boundaries of the pesantren. This adaptation also opens up opportunities for people who cannot attend in-person recitation to gain early access to religious learning. However, format transformation requires caution because cutting videos can eliminate the context of argument, the order of explanation, or the limits of the application of a law (Ambardi, Widhyharto, Madya, & Wibawanto, 2025). Traditional kiai need to maintain the principles of scientific rigor by including references, providing complete materials, and opening up room for clarification for the audience. In this context, social media should be positioned as an entrance to deepening knowledge, not as a substitute for the entire learning process of Islamic boarding schools. Substantive adaptation makes technology a means of expanding the benefits without sacrificing manners, depth, and continuity of Islamic scientific transmission.

On the other hand, Ustaz Hijrah also shows a form of adaptation through strengthening religious references and expanding learning networks. To respond to the increasingly critical demands of the audience, some hijrah actors began to present quotes from scholars, refer to certain books, invite speakers who have scientific competence, or direct followers to more structured study classes. The change reflects an awareness that compelling communication is not enough to sustain legitimacy on an ongoing basis. Digital audiences need not only motivation, but also argumentative, contextual, and accountable explanations. However, referencing reinforcement must be done authentically, not just as a symbol of visual legitimacy. Ustaz hijrah needs to explain the source, the limits of expertise, differences in the views of scholars, and the possibility of consulting experts on certain issues. Such transparency is important to prevent claims of authority that go beyond competence. If done consistently, the adaptation can enrich the non-formal PAI model

because it combines the ability to reach the younger generation with a commitment to the validity of knowledge and ethics of delivering Islamic teachings in the digital space.

The convergence between the two actors can be seen in the emergence of the practice of hybridization of da'wah and learning. Traditional kiai began to adopt visual packaging, easy-to-search titles, direct interaction, and short content distribution to expand the reach of messages. Ustaz hijrah, on the other hand, began to pay attention to the importance of sanad, the accuracy of the evidence, the deepening of the material, and the relationship with Islamic scholars or educational institutions (Ulyan, 2023). This hybridization has the potential to result in a more balanced non-formal PAI model: accessible, relevant to actual needs, but still rooted in testable scientific methodologies. However, convergence should not be interpreted as a meltdown without criticism. The typical character of pesantren in the form of manners, discipline, in-depth reading of sources, and respect for ikhtilaf must be maintained. Similarly, the advantages of digital da'wah in the form of creativity, communicative closeness, and response to the problems of the younger generation need to be utilized proportionately. Productive convergence demands role sharing and collaboration, not just imitation of formats. Within this framework, social media can be a meeting place for tradition and innovation to strengthen the quality of inclusive, adaptive, and responsible Islamic learning.

The main implication of this contestation and convergence is the need to strengthen the governance of digital non-formal PAI. The quality of learning should not be measured only by the popularity of accounts or the number of participants in online classes, but also by the accuracy of the material, the transparency of the sources, the correction mechanism, and its impact on the formation of audience morals. Islamic boarding schools, hijrah communities, religious educators, and platform managers need to build a collaborative ecosystem that supports content verification and civilized religious dialogue. The development of a digital curriculum can combine basic materials about the Qur'an, hadith, fiqh, faith, morals, and media literacy so that users are able to understand religion in its entirety (Mashudi & Hilman, 2024). In addition, interaction spaces need to be managed to prevent polarization, bullying, the spread of inaccurate religious information, and piecemeal judgments based on content. Inclusive digital non-formal PAI must also open space for a diversity of backgrounds, knowledge levels, and learning needs of the community. With such governance, the contestation of authority does not result in religious fragmentation, but rather encourages the improvement of the quality of references, the maturity of dialogue, and the strengthening of moderate Islam in the contemporary public space.

In the perspective of *Digital Religion*, the contestation, adaptation, and convergence of religious authorities show that social media is not just a channel for spreading da'wah, but a space that reshapes the relationship between knowledge, technology, and public recognition. The authority of traditional kiai remains important because it provides an epistemic foundation in the form of sanad, depth of study, and scientific ethics. Meanwhile, Ustaz Hijrah contributes to opening early access, translating Islamic messages into everyday language, and building closeness with the digital generation. The main challenge is to ensure that accessibility does not turn into simplification, and that tradition does not turn into exclusivism that is difficult for the wider community to reach. Therefore, the direction of non-formal PAI development needs to be oriented towards the critical integration between scientific validity and communication innovation. Such integration requires digital-religious literacy, transparency of competence, respect for differences of opinion, and openness to scientific correction. On this basis, digital public space can become a vehicle for Islamic learning that is not only popular and participatory, but also deep, moderate, dialogical, and able to form responsible religious diversity

Conclusion

This study concludes that the shift of religious authority in the new public space of non-formal PAI on social media is not in the form of an absolute replacement of traditional kiai authority by hijrah ustaz, but takes place through contestation, adaptation, and convergence. Traditional kiai build legitimacy primarily through scientific sanad, mastery of the turats book, pesantren affiliation, moral exemplary, and community recognition, while hijrah ustaz gain legitimacy through communication skills, self-transformation narratives, thematic relevance, content aesthetics, and audience engagement. These differences are also evident in the packaging of materials and pedagogical relationships: kiai tend to emphasize tiered learning, deepening of texts, manners, and long-term coaching, while ustaz hijrah prioritizes thematic materials, flexibility of access, popular language, and affective proximity. However, both have an important function in expanding public access to Islamic learning. Social media further encourages kiai to adopt digital communication strategies and encourages hijrah ustaz to strengthen referrals, competency transparency, and methodological accuracy. In the perspective of *Digital Religion*, religious authority is hybrid, relational, and influenced by the interaction between scientific capital, platform visibility, audience acceptance, and communication ethics. Therefore, the development of digital non-formal PAI needs to integrate the scientific validity of Islamic boarding schools, media creativity, digital-religious literacy, respect for ikhtilaf, and content verification mechanisms to form moderate, critical, inclusive, and responsible religiosity.

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