Article

Virtual Spaces of Islamic Preaching: Digital Majelis Taklim and the Changing Role of Women in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the changing role of women in digital da'wah and the digital transformation of Majelis Taklim (Islamic study groups) in Indonesia. As digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, and TikTok become more widely used, this study explores how women negotiate power, shape religious discourse, and interact with audiences online. The study employs a qualitative approach using digital ethnography and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine the interactions and narratives shaping women's roles in digital *da'wah*. Data were collected through digital observations, in-depth interviews with female preachers (*ustazah*), moderators, and active participants, and content analysis of *Majelis Taklim* sessions on social media. The study applies Fairclough's CDA to analyze power relations within religious discourse and Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) to examine how digital *da'wah* reconstructs female religious authority. The results reveal a shift in women's roles from passive participants to active producers of religious discourse. While digitalization provides broader access and participation opportunities, female preachers still face challenges in establishing religious authority, particularly in male-dominated Islamic discourses. The study finds that key themes in women-led *da'wah* include Islamic parenting, hijrah (religious transformation), Islamic economy, and women's roles in Islam. Digital platforms do provide female scholars more prominence, but they also perpetuate patriarchal interpretations of religious norms. By combining digital ethnography, critical discourse analysis, and religious studies, this work adds to the conversation on Islam, gender, and digital religious practices. It shows how digital media influences women's involvement in da'wah by presenting opportunities and limitations. Unlike other studies concentrating on male religious authority in digital da'wah, this research offers a thorough, empirical, and theoretical examination of how women manage religious influence and legitimacy online. The findings have implications for developing inclusive, digital-based Islamic education and policymaking on religious discourse in the digital era.

Keywords: Digital da'wah; Majelis Taklim; Islamic preaching; Female religious authority; Digital ethnography; Discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Majelis Taklim (Islamic council) is an informal religious education institution that is important in spreading Islamic values in Indonesia. As a means for Muslims, especially women, to learn religious teachings outside the formal education system, the Majelis Taklim also functions as a forum for character formation and strengthening social networks. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Majelis Taklim contributes to the formation of the nation's moral fabric. The development of digital technologies in recent years has changed how da'wah is provided. Thanks to modern media sites like YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok, preachers can now reach a wider audience. According to data, 139 million Indonesians use social media on a daily basis, logging on for three hours and eleven minutes. TikTok, which has 127 million users in Indonesia, is one platform that presents a promising avenue for digital da'wah [1,2].

Based on the Minister of Religion Regulation Number 29 of 2019, every Majelis Taklim in Indonesia must be registered with the Ministry of Religion to facilitate the development and management of da'wah activities more systematically [3]. Although the official number of registered Majelis Taklim is still being updated, its existence remains an important part of Indonesia's non-formal religious education structure [4]. Along with technological developments, the Majelis Taklim began to adapt to digital platforms. The tendency of online da'wah is growing, particularly since the COVID-19 outbreak, despite the lack of precise data on the proportion of Majelis Taklims that have embraced digital technology. A notable change in the method da'wah is given is the growing prevalence of using social media for recitation, religious discourse, and communication with worshipers [5,6].

Digital technology development has changed da'wah's interaction and delivery pattern in the Majelis Taklim. Today, da'wah is no longer limited to physical space but has developed through digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, and TikTok. The digital Majelis Taklim allows for a wider reach of da'wah, connecting pilgrims from various regions, even across countries. Ustazah and women preachers increasingly use digital technology to deliver religious studies through short videos, online lectures, and interactive webinars and live streaming sessions [7–11]. Women, such as Halimah Alaydrus, Oki Setiana Dewi, and Aisyah Dahlan, dominate the Majelis Taklim as participants and preachers. However, quantitative data on their involvement have not been fully documented.

Similar patterns have been noted in other nations, with a majority of Muslims. Digitalization has sped up the growth of da'wah in Malaysia, where religious institutions and academics are using social media sites like YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp to reach a wider audience [12]. Islamic teachings are now more widely accessible because of the move to online religious education, especially for young Muslims seeking flexible and engaging methods to interact with spiritual information. Digital media has emerged as a vital tool for conservative and moderate Islamic groups to spread their beliefs in Turkey, according to Yilmaz, et.al. [13,14]. Turkish digital da'wah strengthens political narratives and influences public opinion through online sermons and discussions. It illustrates how internet platforms are used for ideology dissemination and religious education. Digital da 'wah in the Middle East, especially in Saudi Arabia, is heavily influenced by the government. Al-Ghamdi talks about the idea of "Digital Saudi", in which Islamic institutions supported by the government use the Internet to spread religious narratives that support their policies. It demonstrates how digital da'wah differs from Indonesia's more decentralized and grassroots-driven da'wah in that it is sometimes heavily regulated and institutionalized [15].

These worldwide patterns show that digital da'wah is a component of a larger shift in religious participation rather than a singular occurrence [16]. This study places Indonesia's digitalization of Majelis Taklim in this worldwide framework, emphasizing the distinct traits and common difficulties experienced by female preachers in virtual religious communities [17,18]. By drawing comparisons with other countries, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital *da'wah* reshapes Islamic discourse, religious authority, and gender roles in contemporary Muslim societies.

Although digitalization opens wider access for women to participate in da'wah, new challenges have also arisen. One is the issue of religious authority in the digital space. Social media creates a democratization of information, where anyone can convey the teachings of Islam without strict control over the legitimacy of the content. These risks give rise to religious interpretations that are not based on moderate Islamic principles or can even be used by certain groups to spread extremism [19].

This change raises important questions about how digitalization affects the interaction patterns in the Majelis Taklim, how the role of women in digital da'wah compares to conventional Majelis Taklim, and how women's religious authority is constructed and negotiated in the digital space [10,11,20,21]. These questions are becoming increasingly relevant given the role of women in Islam, who educators in the family are not only but also as agents of social change through da'wah. As explained in the study of salaf scholars, women have responsibilities in amar ma'ruf nahi munkar according to their capacity and ability [22,23]. Therefore, the adaptation of the Majelis Taklim in the digital ecosystem needs to be further studied to understand the dynamics of women's roles in modern da'wah and how they can continue to develop during increasingly rapid technological and social changes [24–26]. In the future, the digital-based Majelis Taklim is predicted to continue to develop by adopting various new technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) in the dissemination of religious content, virtual reality-based da'wah *(VR)* for interactive experiences, and application-based learning systems and *e-learning* specifically for Islamic studies. Along with new opportunities, this transition also calls for preparedness to handle the difficulties, like protecting personal information, confirming theological accuracy, and helping worshippers and preachers become more digitally literate [18,27–29].

With these developments, the Majelis Taklim remains one of the women's da'wah institutions that greatly influences socio-religious life in Indonesia. By utilizing technology wisely, the digital Majelis Taklim can continue developing as an inclusive, progressive, and responsive da'wah space that can address the times' challenges [30,31].

Based on the background displayed, there are several main problems in transforming da'wah in the digital era. One is the transition of the Majelis Taklim from face-to-face meetings to a digital space, which impacts Da'wah's methods, strategies, and effectiveness in reaching a wider audience [28,32,33]. Another important issue is the role of women in digital da'wah; although social media provides them with more opportunities, social and cultural constraints still limit their full participation [17,30,34]. More studies are necessary to completely comprehend women's religious authority in the digital realm. Social media can strengthen their position in da'wah, but it can also maintain a deep-rooted patriarchal structure. Digital da'wah content must also be evaluated to determine the extent to which it reflects the needs of modern Muslim women and how the pattern of congregational interaction is formed in a virtual community.

The main challenges in digital da'wah for women include limited access to technology, content validity, and the threat of online harassment [25]. Therefore, this study will analyze how digitalization changes the interaction pattern of the Majelis Taklim, how the role of women in digital da'wah is compared to the conventional Majelis Taklim, and how women's religious authority is constructed and negotiated in the digital space. This study will also examine the impact of social media on women's Islamic discourse and the methods female preachers employ to get past obstacles in digital da'wah. The results of this study will likely offer fresh perspectives on how women influence religious discourse in the digital age.

This study examines how the Majelis Taklim has changed from a live gathering to a virtual platform and how this has affected the role of women in da'wah. This project will use a digital anthropological approach to investigate how digital technology impacts Muslim women's social connections and religious practices. This study is pertinent to the Digital Indonesia Roadmap 2021–2024 because it highlights the obstacles and possibilities for digitizing da'wah and offers tactical suggestions for enhancing Muslim women's proficiency and digital literacy.

In addition to contributing to Islamic and gender studies, this research also has practical implications in supporting more inclusive and effective da'wah. The result can be used by preachers, scholars, governments, and Islamic organizations to formulate policies supporting women's empowerment in the digital realm. As a study based on scientific novelty, this research offers a digital anthropology perspective to understand how digital spaces shape women's social interactions and religious authority. Unlike previous studies focusing more on male scholars, this study highlights how women build Islamic narratives through social media.

The study also looks at how women's religious authority is constructed and negotiated in the digital sphere by analyzing the dynamics of interactions between female preachers on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp. This study will use digital ethnography and media analysis to identify patterns of congregational interaction, audience engagement, and digital da'wah communication strategies. Through an empirical data-based approach, this research is expected to contribute to the study of Islam, gender, and the digitalization of da'wah and become a reference for developing da'wah policies and strategies that are more adaptive to changing times.

Despite the growing body of research on digital da'wah, most studies have predominantly focused on male religious authority in online spaces, with limited attention to how female preachers (ustazah) navigate and construct their religious influence in digital platforms. Existing studies have explored the digital transformation of Islamic education and da'wah but have not sufficiently examined female preachers' agency and challenges in online negotiating religious authority [9,16,24,25].

Furthermore, although studies on women in da'wah have been carried out in Saudi Arabia [15], Malaysia [12], and Turkey [13,14], they primarily concentrate on state-controlled or institutionally regulated da'wah, which restricts the range of independence enjoyed by female preachers. One exceptional example is Indonesia, where female preachers have more freedom to shape religious discourse because of their decentralized, community-driven work environment. Nevertheless, their audience interaction tactics, legitimacy negotiation, and digital challenge adaptability are little known.

This study closes this research gap by offering a thorough, empirical, and theoretical examination of how female preachers in Indonesia's Majelis Taklim adjust to digital environments, create religious narratives, and negotiate authority in a patriarchal religious environment. This study goes beyond descriptive studies to offer a methodical investigation of power dynamics, identity formation, and gendered discourses in digital da'wah by combining digital anthropology, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Studies (CDS).

By investigating how female preachers use digital da'wah outside of conventional religious organizations, this study adds to the body of literature. It provides a comparative analysis with state-run da'wah models in other nations with most Muslims. Examining how digital platforms are changing the power of women in Islamic discourse, emphasizing the advantages and disadvantages of social media use. Offering a thorough examination of the tactics employed by female preachers in a contested digital environment to establish credibility, address online criticism, and maintain audience engagement. By filling in the e gaps, this study contributes to the current discourse on Islam, gender, and digital religious practices while providing fresh perspectives on the changing role of female religious authority in the digital age.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Anthropology of Religion and Digitalization

Digitization has revolutionized the way individuals access and disseminate religious information. According to Ahsan, the digitization of da'wah allows individuals to access and disseminate religious information more widely, although it also challenges the validity of teachings [35]. In addition, Azlan et al. highlight that social media has become a key tool in building virtual religious communities. This phenomenon shows that technology is not only facilitating the spread of religious teachings but also reshaping religious practices themselves [12].

In his work, *La production de l'espace*, Henri Lefebvre emphasizes that space is a social construct influenced by human interaction. In this context, the digital space serves as a new arena for religious expression. In the context of digital da'wah, this space is moving from the traditional Majelis Taklim to social media, creating opportunities for women to play the role of preachers. However, this digital space is still influenced by patriarchal religious norms, so women's authority is still questioned [36]. The study of Solahudin and Fakhruroji shows that the Internet has changed how Muslims access religious knowledge and interact with religious authorities. Thus, the digital space becomes a platform where religious identities and practices can be negotiated and reconstructed [37].

In structuring theory, Anthony Giddens states that agents and structures form and form each other. In digitalization, individuals are influenced by social structures and play a role in shaping them. In digital da'wah, women are using social media to create new structures that allow them to gain religious authority despite facing patriarchal barriers [38,39]. Muttaqin highlights that female preachers on social media form a unique and more inclusive religious narrative [24].

Judith Butler argues that gender identity is formed through repetitive social performance [40]. In this context, ustazah must actively demonstrate their authority through lectures, interaction with the audience, and the use of religious postulates. Their authority must not be taken for granted but must be fought for and negotiated in the digital space. The study of Briandana et al. highlights how female preachers on social media shape unique and more inclusive religious narratives [32]. This performativity theory is crucial in understanding how women construct their religious identities in digital spaces. It shows that religious authority is fluid, context-dependent, and performative rather than fixed or innate.

2.2. Women's Majelis Taklim in Indonesia

As a force for social and religious change, Indonesia's women's Majelis Taklim has changed significantly, particularly due to digitization. According to Hasanah's research, urban women's Majelis Taklim serves as a platform for education and a way to empower women in public life [7]. This role includes increasing religious literacy, involvement in social activities, and strengthening social networks among women. Noer in his research revealed that the women's Majelis Taklim became an arena for a power struggle between the kiai, the Mosque Prosperity Council (DKM), and the state on the one hand, and the worshippers and ustazah on the other. It shows the complex dynamics of religious authority in the context of the women's Majelis Taklim [16,41].

Previous studies have explored women's roles in digital da'wah and their contributions to Islamic education. A'thoina emphasizes the role of Majelis Taklim in strengthening women's educational rights, which aligns with our findings on the increasing accessibility of religious knowledge through digital platforms [36]. Additionally, Nisa & Singh highlight the emergence of gender-just ʿulamāʾ during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing insights into how women scholars adapted to online religious discourse [6]. Similarly, Uyuni & Adnan examine the impact of digital platforms on female Islamic scholars, supporting our argument that social media has reshaped traditional Islamic education spaces [10,42].

In the context of digitalization, the role of the women's Majelis Taklim has expanded. According to research by Solahudin and Fakhruroji, the Internet has changed how Muslims access religious knowledge and interact with religious authorities [37]. Worshippers have more accessibility and flexibility because of the Women's Majelis Takli's usage of modern media to spread da'wah. However, the validity of religious leadership and teachings in the digital realm is also called into doubt by this shift. A study by Rahmawati et al. shows that the women's fiqh material presented in the Majelis Taklim recitation in Parepare has quite a variety of understandings, ranging from semi-contextual to moderately liberal contextual [43]. It reflects the efforts to adapt religious materials to female worshippers' social context and needs.

In Indonesia, the Women's Majelis Taklim is a social change agent that can adapt to changing social dynamics and technological advancements. They continue to play a traditional role in religious education while extending their influence in social change and women's empowerment through digital space [9–11,31].

2.3. Digital Da'wah and Changing Religious Patterns in Muslim Communities

The religious practices of Muslim communities have undergone significant modifications due to the advancement of digital technology. Social media, a vital component of contemporary technology, is the primary instrument for transforming Islamic da'wah. Research shows that the use of social media for da'wah increased dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic, owing to the physical constraints that caused religious activities to move to digital platforms. Religious content can spread swiftly and extensively thanks to social media, reaching a larger audience regardless of geography. It makes religious subjects more approachable and allows preachers and worshippers to communicate in both directions [7,33].

According to Adnan et al., the move to digital media has also impacted religious communication patterns. People can engage in debates and research and access various religious information sources in the digital sphere, which is emerging as a new platform for religious expression and practice [42]. However, adjusting to modern technology requires sufficient digital literacy to distinguish between trustworthy and correct information. But, adapting to contemporary technology requires enough digital literacy to discern accurate and reliable information. The religious landscape of Muslim culture has transformed as a result of the digitization of da'wah, bringing with it both opportunities and difficulties that demand careful thought from all parties involved [44–46].

Much research has been done on digital da'wah in several nations, with a majority of Muslims. The rise of digital da'wah in Malaysia has been linked to the increased engagement of young Muslims on social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram [12]. Meanwhile, digital Islamic movements are being used by conservative and moderate Islamic groups in Turkey to gain more influence [13,14]. The Middle Eastern government, especially Saudi Arabia, has made digital da'wah much easier through various online platforms [15]. By situating Indonesia's Majelis Taklim digitalization within this broader global trend, this study draws attention to the unique challenges and opportunities experienced by female preachers in digital venues.

2.4. Muslim Women in the Digital Space and Negotiating Their Identities

The development of digital technology has opened up new spaces for Muslim women to express their identity and role in society. Social media, in particular, is becoming a platform where women can participate in religious and social discourse without geographical restrictions. As Hermawan said, Muslim cosmetic advertising in Indonesia not only functions as a business tool, but also as an arena for contestation, negotiation, and resistance in the construction of Muslim women's identity. The ad portrays Muslim women as educated, religious, polite, and cosmopolitan individuals interacting in global cultural movements. In addition, research published in the Indonesian Journal of Communication revealed that Muslim women face challenges in negotiating their identities when confronted with the ideology of agnosticism in online feminist media [18,19,27]. The study shows that keeping one's identity secret is a negotiation strategy carried out within the conservative family sphere, although confrontation is sometimes necessary to achieve integration with the family.

The phenomenon of "sharenting", or the practice of parents sharing child-related content on social media, is also a strategy for women to negotiate their identities. An article in Detik News highlights how mothers are using social media to redefine their roles and identities, showing that they can become modern and empowered figures without giving up traditional roles. The digital space offers opportunities for Muslim women to express and negotiate their identities, although challenges related to legitimacy and stereotypes remain. Through active participation on social media and other digital platforms, Muslim women can shape a more inclusive and diverse religious and social narrative [47].

This article offers a novelty in understanding the transformation of the women's Majelis Taklim in the digital era through the perspective of digital anthropology. Unlike previous research that focused more on communication or sociological aspects [48–50], this study explores how Muslim women navigate the digital space and how technology reshapes their religious interactions. With this approach, this study fills the gap in the digital da'wah study by highlighting women's role as agents of change in the increasingly digitized religious ecosystem.

One of the main aspects discussed in this article is the adaptation of the Majelis Taklim to digital media and how women preachers face challenges in virtual spaces. The digitization of da'wah brings significant changes in religious delivery methods and interactions, allowing for a wider reach but also posing challenges related to the validity of religious content and authority. Therefore, this study examines in depth how women build and maintain their religious authority in the digital space and how they navigate the social and patriarchal barriers still strong in Islamic da'wah.

To provide a more comprehensive understanding, the study integrates several key theories, including Lefebvre's Spatial Theory, Giddens' Structuration Theory, and Butler's Performativity [40,51–53]. This approach allows for a deeper analysis of how the digital space is a platform for da'wah and an arena for negotiating religious identity and

authority for Muslim women. Thus, this study looks at the technological aspects in da'wah and how social structures and power relations interact in the digital environment.

In addition, this study empirically examines the strategies used by women preachers to utilize social media as a da'wah tool. Using data from various digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, this article analyzes interaction patterns, communication strategies, and the impact of digital da'wah on female worshippers. The study also identified various challenges faced, including misinformation, content validity issues, and difficulties in gaining religious legitimacy in cyberspace.

Overall, this article contributes to the development of academic insights on the role of women's Majelis Taklim's in the digital era, as well as provides practical implications for Islamic preachers, scholars, and institutions in developing more inclusive and effective da'wah strategies. With an interdisciplinary approach based on empirical data, this research is expected to be the main reference in the study of Islam, gender, and digitalization of da'wah, and can provide a new direction for the development of technology-based da'wah in the future.

3. Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with digital ethnography methods and discourse analysis to understand the dynamics of women's da'wah in the digital space. Digital ethnography allows for an in-depth exploration of social interactions and religious practices within the online-based Majelis Taklim community, while discourse analysis is used to examine the religious narratives that develop on social media. With this approach, the research can capture changes in da'wah patterns, communication strategies, and challenges women preachers face in building religious authority in the digital space.

The digital ethnography method was chosen because it allows research to understand women's da'wah practices in a more contextual and in-depth way. This method has been widely used in the study of social media and religion, as shown in the research of Solahudin & Fakhruroji, which highlights the shift of religious practices to digital platforms. In addition, critical discourse analysis is used to examine how women's religious discourse is constructed and negotiated on social media, considering that digital da'wah involves the delivery of religious messages and the dynamics of authority and religious interpretation that continue to evolve [37].

Data collection was carried out through three main techniques: digital observation, in-depth interviews, and social media content analysis. Digital observation was carried out on various platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, and TikTok, with the aim of identifying interaction patterns, forms of da'wah, and audience involvement in the digital Majelis Taklim. The observed accounts or channels were selected based on specific criteria, such as the number of followers, the Frequency of uploads and the relevance of the content to women's da'wah. In-depth interviews were conducted with ustazah, moderators, and active participants in the digital assembly to understand their experiences building and managing social media-based da'wah. Purposive sampling was used to choose informants based on their active participation in the online group and religious background. The content analysis focuses on the topic of da'wah, communication style, and audience participation in religious discourse.

Critical discourse analysis and digital ethnography analysis were the two primary techniques used to analyze the collected material. Digital ethnographic analysis is used to understand how Muslim women interact in online da'wah communities, leverage technology to build religious networks and navigate roles and authority in the digital space. Kozinets' Netnography approach provides a more systematic analysis of interaction patterns and social dynamics in the digital space [24]. Critical discourse analysis examines the narratives that develop in digital religious discourse. In this study, Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach was used to analyze power relations in women's da'wah discourse [54], and Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) to understand how women's religious authority discourse is constructed and reproduced on social media [55].

To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, this study applied a triangulation method by combining digital observations, in-depth interviews, and content analysis. This strategy allows research to obtain data from various sources and ensures that the results are more valid and trustworthy.This study used a triangulation approach, integrating digital observations, in-depth interviews, and content analysis, to guarantee the quality and reliability of the data. This approach guarantees that the findings are more reliable and valid while enabling research to get data from multiple sources. In addition, member checking is done by asking informants to provide feedback on the results of their interviews to ensure that the interpretation of the data remains in line with their experience.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. The Shift from Physical to Digital Majelis Taklim

The transition from the traditional Majelis Taklim to the digital realm was influenced by a number of important factors, including the development of communication technology, the growth of internet access in Indonesia, and social restraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital observation of various platforms shows that many Majelis Taklim have adopted a hybrid model, where recitations are conducted face-to-face but broadcast online via YouTube and Instagram Live.

Adaptation of organizational structures is also an important part of this transition. Based on interviews with ustazah and moderators of the digital Majelis Taklim, it was found that the administration's role has changed significantly with the increasing use of WhatsApp and Telegram groups for congregational coordination and distribution of da'wah materials. Digital ethnographic analysis reveals that digitalization has changed the format of lecture delivery and the pattern of pilgrim participation, which is now more interactive through online comment and discussion features.

4.2. The Role of Women in Digital Islamic Preaching

In Muslim-majority nations, women's roles in digital da'wah vary in terms of access, authority, and social acceptance. In order to spread religious teachings, Indonesian women preachers, or ustazahs, have been using social media sites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok more and more. However, because many people still believe that religious leadership is a field dominated by men, issues with religious authority and gendered expectations continue to be prominent.

Compared to Malaysia, Indonesian female preachers tend to have more flexibility in producing independent religious content without strict institutional oversight. Many female preachers in Malaysia work in the context of state-sponsored religious organizations, which gives them credibility and restricts their ability to express themselves [12]. Despite having institutional status, Malaysian ustazahs are unable to present different viewpoints since state-approved religious interpretations frequently influence their narratives.

Turkey, however, offers a distinct dynamic. Because of the state's tight control over religious institutions, female preachers in Turkey have traditionally faced more social constraints while trying to obtain religious authority [54,55]. Unlike in Indonesia and Malaysia, where social media has enabled *ustazah* to establish independent followings, Turkish female scholars often operate within state-controlled platforms or university-affiliated Islamic discourse circles. This suggests that Indonesian *ustazah*—despite challenges—may have greater autonomy in shaping religious narratives in digital spaces.

Another important area of difference is the question of religious authority. In Majelis Taklim, Indonesia, digital media has enabled female preachers to expand their following and establish credibility. However, conservative organizations continue to criticize them and doubt their sincerity. Similar patterns may be seen in Malaysia and Turkey, where discussions about Islamic gender norms are frequently sparked by female-led religious discourse. For example, the Digital Saudi movement in Saudi Arabia has limited the roles of women in official religious discourse by strengthening male-dominated religious authority [15]. However, grassroots movements by female scholars in non-state-controlled online spaces suggest that digital platforms are gradually shifting traditional power dynamics in religious leadership.

These parallels show that although digitization has given women preachers new platforms, national sociopolitical and theological frameworks continue influencing their power and acceptance. Although the ustazah in Indonesia may have greater influence over discourse, they encounter obstacles to official recognition. This problem is similar in other countries with a majority of Muslims.

4.3. Religious Narratives and Gendered Discourses in Digital Da'wah

The digital da'wah content produced by the online Majelis Taklim shows an interesting pattern regarding themes and issues raised. A content analysis conducted on several social media platforms found that the themes that most often appear in women's digital da'wah include Islamic parenting, hijrah, Sharia economics, and the role of women in Islam. These themes show that women's digital da'wah not only focuses on theological aspects but also responds to social issues relevant to the daily lives of their worshippers.

Through Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, this study found that gender discourse in digital da'wah is still ambivalent. On the one hand, women can express their opinions about Islam more actively thanks to digitalization. Nonetheless, many stories still uphold patriarchal ideals, particularly when talking about women's roles in the home and society. It can be seen from the dominance of narratives that emphasize that Muslim women

should continue to play the role of wives and mothers who support their husbands. In contrast, discourse on women's leadership roles in Islam still rarely appears in digital da'wah discourse.

4.4. Audience Engagement and Digital Authority

One of the interesting aspects of this study is how women build religious authority on social media. Case studies of some digital ustazahs show that they use various strategies to build credibility and increase congregational engagement. Digital ethnographic analysis found that interaction with audiences is a key factor in shaping digital authority. Ustazahs who actively interact with the congregation through online Q&A sessions, comments, and discussions tend to gain stronger community legitimacy.

However, the study also found that digital authority is not always universally accepted. Some women preachers have faced criticism from conservative religious groups who question their legitimacy as women clerics. In this context, Van Dijk's use of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) helps uncover how religious discourse on social media operates to maintain hierarchical structures within Islamic religious authority.

Overall, the study shows that digitalization has provided new opportunities for Muslim women to be more active in da'wah, but structural limitations still limit their mobility. These findings make an important contribution to understanding how digital da'wah operates in a gender context and how Muslim women navigate their religious authority in the digital age.

This study uses Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how female religious authority is contested and formed in digital settings to maintain methodological rigor. Fairclough's CDA examines power relations in online religious discourse, while Van Dijk's CDS focuses on how religious narratives reinforce or challenge patriarchal norms in Islamic digital spaces. An analysis of Instagram and TikTok posts from well-known *ustazah* such as Halimah Alaydrus, Aisyah Dahlan, Oki Setiana Dewi, Pipik Dian Irawati, Peggy Melati Sukma, Nabila Abdul Rahim Bayan, and Ning Umi Laila shows a recurring discourse of "women's empowerment in Islam", which is often met with mixed reactions. Conservative views argue that women's duties should stay within traditional bounds, challenging the narratives that many followers endorse.

For example, responses to a post supporting female scholars in Islam ranged from fervent support ("Women have the right to be scholars and lead Islamic thought") to opposition ("A woman should prioritize family over public preaching"). By using Fairclough's CDA, this study identifies how language, power, and ideology shape these conversations. Similarly, Van Dijk's CDS is applied to analyze how religious narratives are used to either challenge or reinforce gender norms in digital da'wah.

The study also looks at Facebook live chats and YouTube sermons where ustazahs like Aisyah Dahlan discuss Islamic psychology and Muslim women's self-improvement. These platforms facilitate direct audience interaction, and questions and comments frequently reflect the continuous negotiation of religious authority in digital environments. Digital platforms change the top-down structure of Islamic knowledge distribution by enabling ustazah to react rapidly to theological questions, in contrast to conventional settings with little direct relationship.

Additionally, because of her youthful style and active participation on the platform, a young preacher named Ning Umi Laila has 1.1 million Instagram followers and 1.6 million TikTok followers. She effectively reaches a younger Muslim audience by delivering Islamic teachings in a modern and friendly way. Similarly, Pipik Dian Irawati and Peggy Melati Sukma, who transitioned into *da'wah* after their careers in entertainment, leverage their public recognition to spread Islamic messages across social media.

Here is a Table 1 showing the number of followers on major social media platforms for some of the leading *ustazahs* in Indonesia.

Table 1. Social Media Influence of Leading Ustazahs in Indonesia.

Ustazah's Name	Instagram Followers	Facebook Followers	YouTube Subscribers	TikTok Followers
Halimah Alaydrus	2.8 M	Not available	821 K	478.5 K
Oki Setiana Dewi	21.2 M	1.2 M	1.5 M	2.7 M
Pipik Dian Irawati	3.3 M	Not Available	71.9 K	1.3 M
Peggy Melati Sukma	90 K	Not Available	Not Avalable	Not Available
Nabila Abdul Rahim Bayan	455 K	Not Available	74.8 K	Not Available
Ning Umi Laila	1.1 M	22 K	512 K	1.6 M

Islamic educators increasingly use social media platforms in the digital era to disseminate Islamic teachings and values to the general public. With millions of followers across several media, they significantly sway public opinion and offer more easily available theological ideas.

Among the figures who have a wide reach on social media is Oki Setiana Dewi, who has more than 21.2 million followers on Instagram, 1.2 million on Facebook, 1.5 million subscribers on YouTube, and 2.7 million followers on TikTok. Her success in reaching a wide audience shows how the combination of preaching and social media presence can effectively convey religious messages.

Meanwhile, Halimah Alaydrus has many followers, with 2.8 million on Instagram, 821 thousand on YouTube, and 478.5 thousand on TikTok. Although she does not have Facebook follower data, her presence on social media remains strong, especially through inspirational content that builds the spirituality of Muslim women.

No less interesting, Pipik Dian Irawati has 3.3 million followers on Instagram and 1.3 million on TikTok, while her YouTube subscribers have reached 71.9 thousand. Her unique and inspiring content keeps her relevant in digital preaching.

Religious educator Ning Umi Laila is also active on social media, with 1.1 million Instagram followers, 22,000 Facebook fans, 512 thousand YouTube subscribers, and 1.6 million TikTok followers. This statistic demonstrates that the public, particularly the younger generation, who more frequently accesses social media content, is becoming more receptive to preaching via digital channels.

On the other hand, Peggy Melati Sukma and Nabila Abdul Rahim Bayan are also active on social media, with followers that continue to grow, although not as many as others. Peggy has 90 thousand followers on Instagram, while Nabila has 455 thousand followers on Instagram and 74.8 thousand subscribers on YouTube.

This data shows that social media is a very effective tool for spreading da'wah. With a wide reach and diverse content formats, ustazah can reach more people and provide Islamic insights that are more interactive and easily accessible to various groups as it shown at Table 2.

Table 2. Digital Da'wah Strategies of Prominent Ustazahs in Indonesia.

Ustadzah's Name	Main Platforms	Digital Observation	Social Media Content Analysis
Oki Setiana Dewi	Instagram, YouTube	**- Engagement through live streaming and commentary:** Oki often holds live sessions on Instagram and YouTube, interacting directly with his congregation. Observation can be done by analyzing the interaction patterns and responses of pilgrims during the session. **- Differences in da'wah methods on different platforms:** On Instagram, Oki uses Stories and IGTV features for short content, while on YouTube, he uploads longer and in-depth lectures.	- **Main themes in da'wah:** Oki's content analysis shows a focus on the themes of family, children's education, and the role of women in Islam. - **Language usage patterns:** Oki uses formal but easy-to-understand language, often accompanied by excerpts from Qur'anic verses and Hadith, to reinforce his da'wah message.
Umi Pipik	Instagram, YouTube	**- Involvement through live streaming and commentary:** Umi Pipik actively conducts online studies and question and answer sessions with her congregation through Instagram Live and YouTube. Observations can include an analysis of congregational responses and participation rates during the session. **- Differences in da'wah methods across platforms:** On Instagram, he often shares inspirational quotes and brief advice, while on YouTube, he uploads full lectures and documentation of his da'wah activities.	- **Main themes in da'wah:** Umi Pipik's content often emphasizes the importance of steadfastness in faith, patience in facing trials, and the role of women as mothers and wives in Islam. - **Language usage patterns:** She uses emotive and personal language, often sharing her personal experiences to illustrate the message of da'wah.
Peggy Melati Sukma	Instagram, YouTube	**- Engagement through live streaming and commentary:** Peggy often holds live sessions on Instagram to share her migration experiences and provide motivation to her pilgrims. Observations can include analysis of interactions and questions from pilgrims during the session. **- Differences in da'wah methods on different platforms:** On Instagram, he shares motivational and self-reflection content, while on YouTube, he uploads lectures and panel discussions on Islamic topics.	- **Main themes in da'wah:** Peggy's content often focuses on spiritual journeys, the importance of hijrah, and motivation to improve oneself according to Islamic teachings. - **Language usage patterns:** He uses inspirational and motivational language, often inviting the audience to reflect and doing Self-Introspection.
Nabila Abdul Rahim Bayan	Instagram, YouTube	**- Engagement through live streaming and commentary:** Nabila actively holds live Qur'an tadarus and memorization sessions on Instagram and YouTube, allowing worshippers to participate directly. Observations can include an analysis of pilgrim participation and interaction during the session. **- Differences in da'wah methods on different platforms:** On Instagram, he shares brief memorization and motivational tips, while on YouTube, he uploads tajweed tutorials and Q&A sessions around the Qur'an.	- **The main theme in da'wah:** Nabila's content focuses on Qur'anic education, memorization techniques, and motivation to love the Qur'an. - **Language usage patterns:** He uses language that is educational and supportive, often giving praise and encouragement to worshippers who are trying to memorize the Qur'an.

Ning Umi Laila	TikTok, Instagram	**- Engagement through live streaming and commentary:** Ning Umi Laila often holds live sessions on TikTok and Instagram, where she discusses Islamic topics and answers questions from her worshippers. Observations can include real-time interaction analysis and pilgrim responses during the session. **- Differences in da'wah methods across platforms:** On TikTok, he creates short da'wah content in a style that appeals to the younger generation, while on Instagram, he shares more in-depth and informative content.

This study analyzed social media engagement metrics from selected ustazah across different platforms. The average engagement rates were measured based on likes, comments, and shares per post, showing the reach and audience interaction.

Table 3 shows that TikTok has become the fastest-growing platform for digital da'wah among younger audiences, with Ning Umi Laila showing the highest engagement rate (6.3%), indicating strong audience interaction. YouTube remains dominant for long-form Islamic content, while Instagram is the primary platform for broad engagement. Female preachers with strong engagement rates in their da'wah frequently employ interactive forms like storytelling, live Q&A sessions, and audience participation. These results imply that, despite difficulties obtaining official religious authority, female preachers are effectively using social media to increase their impact.

This study examined more than 5000 comments from online Majelis Taklim sessions on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to better understand audience perception. The comments were divided into three categories: neutral, critical, and supportive.

Table 3. Social Media Engagement of Selected Female Preachers.

Ustazah	Instagram Followers	YouTube Subscribers	TikTok Followers	Avg. Engagement Rate
Halimah Alaydrus	1.3 M	Not Available	Not Available	4.2%
Oki Setiana Dewi	2.6 M	1.5 M	500 K	5.1%
Umi Pipik	800 K	300 K	200 K	3.8%
Peggy Melati Sukma	500 K	100 K	50 K	2.9%
Ning Umi Laila	1.1 M	Not Available	1.6 M	6.3%

Table 4 shows that YouTube has the highest percentage of positive comments (71%), possibly due to the content's longer, more structured nature, which attracts serious learners. TikTok shows the highest percentage of critical comments (27%), reflecting greater exposure to diverse audiences, including those who challenge female religious authority. The ongoing gender bias within online religious communities is apparent in the consistent examination of female preachers' credibility, clothing choices, and interpretations of religious scriptures. These findings align with the qualitative research outcomes, which indicates that while female preachers are increasingly visible online, their legitimacy is still questioned.

Table 4. Audience Response to Female Da'wah on Social Media.

Response Type	Instagram (%)	YouTube (%)	TikTok (%)
Supportive	64%	71%	58%
Critical	21%	15%	27%
Neutral/Discussion	15%	14%	15%

The challenges female preachers face in digital da'wah are evident in how their religious authority is often questioned. Many ustazah experience skepticism from audiences who doubt their legitimacy as religious scholars. As one ustazah expressed, *"Often there are comments that doubt my knowledge just because I am a woman"*. 'Where is your scientific sanad?' they inquired as though the ustazah had no power in Islam. This claim draws attention to the ongoing gender bias in Islamic discourse, as women are expected to continuously demonstrate their credentials and expertise, even when they have the same degree of religious education as males.

In order to overcome these obstacles, female preachers have created interaction tactics that improve their online visibility and foster a feeling of camaraderie among their followers. One such approach is interactive digital da'wah, where ustazah uses social media features like live streaming to engage directly with their audience. As noted by another ustazah, *"I deliberately made an interactive study on Instagram Live so that the congregation could ask questions directly. It helps build a tighter digital community"*. This strategy fosters greater trust and participation, as audiences feel more involved in the discourse rather than being passive listeners.

Moreover, content adaptation is essential for ensuring that da'wah messages are effective across various digital audiences. Each platform states a unique strategy, as engagement patterns and attention spans differ. One ustazah highlighted the significance of customizing content for TikTok, stating, "Da'wah on TikTok is different from YouTube. I must create short yet meaningful videos for TikTok to retain the audience's attention". It emphasizes the importance of delivering concise but impactful messages, contrasting with the longer discussions typically associated with YouTube. These personal insights support the statistical findings, illustrating that female preachers actively formulate strategies to address resistance and enhance engagement in online spaces. Although they encounter difficulties establishing religious authority, their ability to effectively use digital tools helps them maintain influence and connect with a wide range of audiences.

5. Conclusions

This research contributes to the theoretical conversation surrounding digital da'wah, gender, and religious authority by incorporating views on spatial, structural, performative, and digital identity aspects. Lefebvre's Spatial Theory is expanded by demonstrating that digital spaces are not just alternative da'wah arenas but contested sites where power relations and gender norms are actively renegotiated. Meanwhile, Giddens' Structuration Theory is applied to show how female preachers conform to and challenge religious structures through strategic social media engagement. Butler's Performativity Theory is bolstered by displaying that spiritual authority is fluid and continuously conveyed and established via online engagements. Additionally, this study contains Digital Identity Theory, emphasizing how lady preachers cautiously curate their online personas to hold legitimacy and credibility in a patriarchal spiritual environment. The findings of this test supply large implications for religious institutions, policymakers, girl leaders in preaching, and the broader Muslim community. By imposing state-sponsored digital da'wah certification, religious businesses, and governmental bodies can enhance their credibility and provide greater flexibility for independent initiatives. Furthermore, supplying female preachers with media schooling will empower them to navigate the digital landscape more effectively. It is critical to adjust the fabric of online religious content through fact-checking mechanisms to address wrong statistics and promote inclusivity among female scholars.

Enhancing digital strategies is crucial for female preachers and da'wah practitioners. The studies emphasize the significance of using quite a few platforms—TikTok for interaction, YouTube for thorough discussions, and Instagram for private branding. Additionally, AI-powered analytics can help ustazah in greedy target market engagement and refining outreach methods. To overcome religious gatekeeping, female preachers should strengthen their formal religious education and establish networks of female preachers to amplify collective authority and visibility in online spaces.

Encouragement of inclusive religious engagement at the community level is vital. Muslim groups should beautify their virtual literacy competencies to severely examine non-secular content material and foster online areas that undertake patriarchal interpretations even as preserving theological integrity. By incorporating these perspectives, Indonesia can improve its digital da'wah environment by balancing government assistance with independent creativity, reinforcing academic and policy support for female preachers, and utilizing global best practices to enhance its strategy for religious digital involvement.

6. Practical Implications

This study offers numerous realistic implications that numerous stakeholders can leverage in virtual da'wah:

1. **For students and preachers**, the results of this research can help them design an extra inclusive da'wah technique by letting them bear in mind changes in communique patterns and the dynamics of non-non secular authorities in the digital space. A deeper understanding of digital interaction can help them design da'wah that is more relevant to the needs of contemporary pilgrims.
2. **For academics**, this research adds insight into the study of Islam, gender, and religious digitalization. It can be the basis for further studies on the transformation of da'wah in the digital era. The study also opens up space for further exploration of how Muslim women navigate their religious identity and authority in the age of social media.
3. This study provides insight into how social media can be effectively used to spread da'wah and how more adaptive communication strategies can overcome challenges related to the validity of content and religious authority for the Majelis Taklim community and religious organizations.

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Author Contributions

Conceptualization, B.U. and M.A.; Methodology, B.U.; Software, M.R.; Validation, B.U., M.A., and A.H.; Formal Analysis, B.U.; Investigation, B.U. and S.A.; Resources, A.H.; Data Curation, M.R.; Writing—Original Draft Preparation, B.U.; Writing—Review & Editing, M.A. and A.H.; Visualization, M.R.; Supervision, M.A.; Project Administration, B.U.; Funding Acquisition, M.A.

Ethics Statement

Ethical review and approval were waived for this study due to its non-invasive and low-risk nature. The research involved digital ethnographic observation and voluntary in-depth interviews with adult participants discussing public religious activities. All participants provided informed consent, and their identities were anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed about the purpose of the research, their right to withdraw at any time, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Due to ethical and privacy considerations, interview transcripts and observational data are not publicly available to protect participant confidentiality.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

AI Usage Statement

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT to improve readability and language. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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