

Institutional Responses to Digital Religious Authority: Muslim Organizations' Digital Da'wah Strategies in Navigating Platform Culture in Indonesia

Wahyu Khoiruz Zaman^{1*}, Nur Ahmad², Nur Zakkiyah³

^{1,2,3}UIN Sunan Kudus, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: wahyukz@uinsuku.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how Nabhdlatul Ulama (NU) responds institutionally to the transformation of digital religious authority in Indonesia's platform-based media environment. While previous studies have largely emphasized the fragmentation of religious authority and the rise of individual digital preachers, this study shifts attention to how a major Islamic organization manages legitimacy, communication, and organizational adaptation in the digital era. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research is based on digital trace observation conducted from August 2025 to April 2026. The data corpus includes NU's official websites, Instagram accounts, YouTube channels, digital religious services, institutional announcements, governance platforms, and selected regional digital channels. The findings show that NU responds to platform culture through a multi-layered institutional digital da'wah strategy: strengthening official digital media, institutionalizing digital religious services, developing digital governance mechanisms, building content and leadership capacity, and expanding decentralized media networks. This study argues that digital religious authority does not only decentralize or erode traditional authority; it also encourages established Islamic organizations to reinstitutionalize authority through digital infrastructure, platform adaptation, and organizational strategy. The article contributes to digital religion studies by highlighting institutional reinstitutionalization as an overlooked dimension of digital authority. It also contributes to Islamic management studies by conceptualizing institutional digital da'wah as a strategic organizational response involving media management, service innovation, digital governance, human resource development, and network coordination.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital media has transformed the ways religious authority is produced, circulated, and recognized in contemporary Indonesia. Internet and social media are no longer peripheral channels for religious communication; they have become central infrastructures through which Muslims encounter religious knowledge, follow preachers, debate Islamic issues, and assess the credibility of religious actors. The Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association reported that Indonesia had 221.56 million internet users in

2024, equal to 79.5 percent of the national population (APJJI, 2024). More recent digital data also show that Indonesia had around 180 million social media user identities in October 2025, equivalent to 62.9 percent of the population (DataReportal, 2026). These figures indicate that the digital sphere has become a major arena for religious communication, public influence, and authority formation in Indonesian Islam.

This transformation is significant because digital platforms do not merely transmit religious messages; they organize visibility, interaction, and attention (Zaman & Saefudin, 2025). Platform studies have shown that digital platforms shape public communication through algorithmic recommendation, ranking systems, datafication, engagement metrics, and the commercial logic of visibility (Bucher, 2012; Cotter, 2019; V. Dijck, 2018). Within this environment, religious messages do not circulate only because they are theologically authoritative or institutionally legitimate, but also because they are formatted, amplified, and made visible according to platform logics. Short videos, emotionally resonant messages, personal branding, visual consistency, and audience engagement increasingly influence how religious authority is perceived by digital publics. In this sense, platform culture has changed the conditions under which Islamic organizations communicate, maintain legitimacy, and compete for public attention.

The study of digital religion has long emphasized that digital media reshape religious practice, community, identity, and authority (H. A. Campbell, 2013; H. A. Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). Campbell's concept of networked religion is particularly useful for understanding how religious authority becomes more fluid, interactive, and negotiated in online environments (H. A. Campbell, 2017; H. A. Campbell & Bellar, 2023a). Authority is no longer located only in formal institutions, scholarly credentials, or traditional hierarchies; it is also shaped by networks, visibility, participation, and the capacity of actors to communicate effectively across digital platforms. Cheong also notes that digital media do not simply eliminate religious authority, but reconfigure the ways authority is mediated, performed, and legitimated. Therefore, the key issue is not whether religious authority disappears in digital environments, but how it is reorganized through the interaction between institutional legitimacy and platform-based visibility (Cheong, 2017).

In Indonesian Islam, this issue is especially important because religious authority has historically been connected to ulama, pesantren, Islamic organizations, scholarly transmission, and institutional structures. However, the rise of social media has enabled new religious actors, including popular preachers, influencers, and informal digital communities,

to gain visibility outside conventional structures of religious authorization. Studies on Indonesian digital Islam have shown that social media has produced new forms of Islamic activism, fragmented religious authority, and intensified competition among religious actors (Akmaliah, 2020, 2022; Nisa, 2018; Slama, 2018). Recent studies also suggest that digitalization has shifted religious authority from traditional institutional hierarchies toward more popularity-based and platform-mediated forms of authority (Rachman & Saumantri, 2025). This means that established Islamic organizations now face a strategic challenge: they must maintain normative and institutional legitimacy while adapting to a media environment that rewards speed, personalization, emotional proximity, and continuous visibility.

This article focuses on Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) as a theoretically significant case of institutional adaptation to digital religious authority. NU was selected not merely because it is one of Indonesia's largest Muslim organizations, but because it represents a tradition-based religious authority rooted in ulama networks, pesantren, Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah identity, and layered organizational structures. At the same time, NU has developed a visible digital ecosystem through NU Online, TVNU, social media channels, the NU Online Super App, digital administrative platforms, and various capacity-building initiatives related to digital communication. This combination makes NU an important case for examining how a historically rooted Islamic organization responds to a platform environment that tends to decentralize authority and privilege more agile, personalized, and media-savvy religious actors. In other words, NU provides a useful case for analyzing how traditional religious legitimacy is translated into institutional digital strategy.

Previous studies have provided important insights into digital Islamic authority in Indonesia. Some studies emphasize the emergence of new online religious actors and the weakening of established authority in the digital public sphere (Ahyar, 2019; Akmaliah, 2020; Nisa, 2018). Others examine how NU faces challenges from new religious authorities and attempts to reclaim moderate Islamic discourse on digital platforms (Akmaliah, 2022). More recent works discuss digital da'wah, platform-based Islamic communication, and the growing role of artificial intelligence and digital services in Muslim organizational life (Ganiem, 2025; Khusairi, 2025; Nada-qisthina & Musyafak, 2025). However, much of the existing literature still tends to focus on individual preachers, digital religious contestation, or the general transformation of authority. Less attention has been given to how a Muslim organization manages digital da'wah institutionally as a strategic response to platform culture.

This gap is important for Islamic management studies. Digital da‘wah should not be understood only as the online dissemination of Islamic messages. For large religious organizations, it is also a matter of strategic communication, organizational adaptation, legitimacy management, human resource development, media governance, and digital infrastructure. From this perspective, the question is not only how religious messages are delivered online, but how an Islamic organization organizes its authority, resources, channels, and networks in response to the changing structure of religious communication. This article therefore treats digital religious authority as an organizational and managerial issue. It argues that the rise of platform-mediated authority pressures Muslim organizations to develop institutional digital da‘wah strategies that connect religious legitimacy with platform adaptation.

Based on this background, this article asks: How does Nahdlatul Ulama respond institutionally to the transformation of digital religious authority in Indonesia’s platform-based media environment? More specifically, this study examines how NU develops digital da‘wah strategies through official media channels, digital religious services, governance mechanisms, content capacity building, leadership development, and decentralized media networks. By focusing on NU, this article aims to contribute to two fields of discussion. First, it contributes to digital religion studies by showing that digital authority does not only produce fragmentation or individualization, but can also encourage institutional reinstitutionalization through digital infrastructure and organizational strategy. Second, it contributes to Islamic management studies by conceptualizing institutional digital da‘wah as a multi-layered organizational response to platform culture, involving legitimacy management, strategic communication, digital governance, and adaptive organizational capacity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of digital religious authority begins from the recognition that digital media have changed the conditions under which religious knowledge is produced, circulated, and legitimized. In the field of digital religion, digital technology is no longer understood merely as a neutral medium for transmitting religious messages, but as a sociotechnical environment that shapes religious practices, communities, identities, and authority structures (H. A. Campbell, 2013; H. A. Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). Campbell’s notion of networked religion is particularly useful because it explains how digital media encourage religious authority to

become more fluid, interactive, and distributed across networks rather than being located solely in formal institutions or traditional hierarchies (H. A. Campbell, 2024; H. A. Campbell & Bellar, 2023c). In this sense, religious authority in digital environments is not simply transferred from offline institutions to online platforms; it is renegotiated through new forms of visibility, participation, interaction, and audience recognition.

This transformation is also closely related to the changing nature of mediation. Cheong argues that digital media do not necessarily destroy religious authority, but reshape the ways authority is performed, mediated, and recognized in religious organizations and communities (Cheong, 2017). This means that the digitalization of religion should not be read only as the weakening of traditional authority, but also as a process of reconfiguration. Religious authority may still depend on knowledge, charisma, institutional position, and moral credibility, but these sources of legitimacy must now be communicated through platform-based environments where visibility, affect, interactivity, and consistency of presence matter. Thus, digital religious authority is not only a theological or doctrinal issue; it is also a communicative and organizational issue.

In the context of Islam, the transformation of religious authority becomes more complex because religious legitimacy has historically been connected to scholarly transmission, ulama networks, educational institutions, and established traditions of learning. However, digital media enable new actors to gain public recognition without necessarily passing through conventional mechanisms of religious authorization. Studies on digital Islam have shown that online platforms have expanded spaces for Islamic expression, activism, preaching, and identity formation (Bunt, 2018; Rahman, 2024). At the same time, these platforms have enabled the rise of new religious actors whose influence is shaped not only by scholarly authority but also by media skills, audience proximity, and algorithmic visibility. In Indonesia, this shift has been discussed by several scholars of digital Islam. Ahyar shows that Islamic activism in digital space has generated new forms of religious authority among technologically literate Muslim audiences (Ahyar, 2019). Nisa's study of Instagram da'wah among young Muslim women demonstrates that religious communication in digital space is increasingly shaped by visual culture, affective style, and creative forms of piety (Nisa, 2018). Akmaliah further argues that new media have challenged the authority of established moderate Islamic organizations by enabling new preachers and Islamic publics to gain influence outside traditional organizational structures (Akmaliah, 2020, 2022). More recent studies also confirm that digital platforms continue to reshape the structure of Islamic

authority in Indonesia by making visibility, engagement, and public responsiveness increasingly central to religious influence (Rachman & Saumantri, 2025; Raya, 2025). Recent studies on NU's digital da'wah also show that NU has increasingly responded to platform-based religious communication through social media, online media, and digital preaching strategies, although many of these discussions remain more descriptive than organizationally analytical (Arya et al., 2025).

These studies are important because they show that digital religious authority in Indonesia is not merely a matter of technological adoption. It concerns the changing structure of religious legitimacy. The public increasingly encounters Islamic knowledge through social media feeds, short videos, online lectures, livestreaming, and algorithmically recommended content. As a result, the authority of established Islamic organizations can no longer rely only on historical reputation, organizational size, or traditional legitimacy. These organizations must also develop the capacity to appear, communicate, and remain relevant in digital spaces where public attention is fragmented and constantly contested.

Platform Culture and the Pressure of Visibility

The transformation of religious authority in digital environments cannot be separated from platform culture. Platform culture refers to the broader sociotechnical logic through which digital platforms organize communication, visibility, interaction, and value creation (J. van Dijck et al., 2018). Platforms do not function simply as channels for message distribution. They shape what becomes visible, what is recommended, what gains attention, and what forms of communication are rewarded. Gillespie explains that platforms operate as intermediaries that structure public communication through moderation, recommendation, ranking, and infrastructural control (Gillespie, 2019). In this sense, platforms are not neutral arenas; they actively shape the conditions of public visibility.

Bucher's concept of algorithmic power is relevant for understanding this problem. She argues that social media visibility is partly governed by algorithmic systems that determine what appears, what is hidden, and what becomes more likely to circulate (Bucher, 2012). Cotter develops this argument through the idea of the "visibility game," showing that digital actors learn to adjust their behavior to platform logics in order to remain visible and influential (Cotter, 2019). For religious actors and organizations, this means that religious communication is not only evaluated based on doctrinal correctness or moral authority, but

also on its ability to adapt to platform formats, engagement metrics, audience behavior, and algorithmic rhythms.

Platform culture therefore creates specific pressures for Islamic organizations. First, it pressures organizations to produce content continuously because visibility is often sustained through regular presence. Second, it pressures organizations to simplify and reformat messages into platform-friendly forms such as short videos, visual quotes, reels, captions, and live streaming. Third, it encourages personalization and emotional proximity, which can benefit individual preachers more than formal institutions. Fourth, it makes religious authority increasingly measurable through indicators such as followers, subscribers, likes, comments, shares, and views. While these metrics do not fully represent theological or scholarly authority, they influence public perception of relevance and credibility in digital space.

This is where the challenge for established Islamic organizations becomes acute. Institutions such as Nahdlatul Ulama possess strong historical legitimacy, scholarly networks, pesantren-based authority, and organizational structure. However, platform culture does not automatically translate these forms of legitimacy into digital visibility. A message from a highly authoritative institution can remain marginal if it is not formatted according to the communicative logic of the platform. Conversely, an individual preacher with weaker institutional credentials can gain massive visibility if he or she masters platform grammar, audience engagement, and personal branding. This does not mean that traditional authority disappears, but it shows that institutional authority must now be mediated through platform-compatible communication strategies.

In management terms, platform culture creates an adaptive pressure. Organizations are expected to develop new capacities, redesign communication systems, strengthen digital governance, and manage legitimacy in changing environments. Studies on digital transformation show that organizations often respond to digital pressure not only because of market competition, but also because of institutional expectations, social legitimacy, and the demand to remain relevant within a changing communication environment (Bennich, 2023; Schiavi et al., 2024). This insight is important for Islamic management studies because religious organizations are not commercial firms, but they still face institutional pressures to digitalize, professionalize communication, and maintain public legitimacy in platform society.

Institutional Digital Da‘wah Strategy as Organizational Adaptation

Digital da‘wah is often understood as the use of digital media to spread Islamic messages. While this definition is useful, it is not sufficient for analyzing large Islamic organizations. For an institution such as NU, digital da‘wah is not merely the act of uploading religious content to websites or social media. It involves strategic communication, media management, digital infrastructure, human resource development, organizational coordination, and legitimacy management. Therefore, this article uses the concept of institutional digital da‘wah strategy to refer to organized, multi-layered, and institutionally managed efforts by a Muslim organization to maintain and expand religious authority in digital environments.

This conceptualization is supported by organizational adaptation theory and institutional theory. Organizational adaptation refers to how organizations respond to environmental change by adjusting structures, strategies, resources, and routines (David J. Teece, 1997; March, 1991). Institutional theory emphasizes that organizations respond not only to technical efficiency but also to social expectations, legitimacy pressures, and institutional norms (Powell, 1983; Suchman, 1995). When applied to Islamic organizations, these perspectives suggest that digital da‘wah strategy is not only about effective communication, but also about maintaining legitimacy in a changing environment. Religious organizations must adapt to platform culture while preserving doctrinal credibility, institutional identity, and organizational authority.

Strategic communication literature also helps clarify this issue. Strategic communication refers to the purposeful use of communication by organizations to fulfill their mission, build relationships, manage reputation, and respond to publics (Hallahan et al., 2007; Zerfass et al., 2018). In the context of Islamic organizations, digital da‘wah can be understood as a form of mission-driven strategic communication. It aims not only to inform but also to guide, persuade, protect institutional credibility, and sustain religious influence. This requires organizations to manage content formats, audience segmentation, platform selection, message consistency, and the relationship between official institutions and decentralized networks.

From this perspective, NU’s digital da‘wah strategy can be read as an institutional response to three related pressures. The first is authority pressure, namely the challenge created by the rise of new digital religious actors who gain influence outside traditional structures. The second is platform pressure, namely the need to adapt religious

communication to the logic of visibility, engagement, speed, and algorithmic circulation. The third is organizational pressure, namely the need to coordinate digital communication across official media, regional networks, affiliated actors, and internal human resources. These pressures show that digital da'wah is not merely a communication technique, but a management challenge.

Recent studies on NU indicate that the organization has begun to respond to these pressures through multiple digital initiatives. NU Online functions as an official source of Islamic information, news, opinions, and religious services. TVNU expands NU's audiovisual presence through YouTube and social media channels. The NU Online Super App represents an attempt to institutionalize religious services into a digital application format. Digital governance platforms, document verification systems, content creator training, and digital leadership programs show that NU's adaptation is not limited to public communication, but also involves internal capacity and organizational infrastructure. These developments suggest that NU's response to digital religious authority can be understood as an emerging form of institutional digital da'wah strategy.

However, the existing literature has not sufficiently theorized this response as a managerial and organizational process. Studies on digital Islamic authority often emphasize fragmentation, contestation, and the rise of individual preachers. Studies on NU's digital presence often describe platforms, content, or discourse struggles. What remains underdeveloped is an analytical explanation of how a Muslim organization translates traditional legitimacy into digital infrastructure, communication governance, content capacity, and networked outreach. This is the gap addressed by the present study.

Conceptual Model: From Digital Authority Pressure to Institutional Da'wah Strategy

This article develops a conceptual model that connects three analytical axes: digital religious authority, platform culture, and institutional digital da'wah strategy. These three concepts are not treated as separate themes, but as sequentially related dimensions of organizational adaptation.

First, digital religious authority refers to the changing structure of religious legitimacy in which authority becomes more networked, visible, participatory, and negotiated through digital media. This shift creates pressure for established Islamic organizations because they no longer monopolize religious interpretation or public attention. Second, platform culture refers to the media environment that shapes religious communication through visibility,

engagement, personalization, algorithmic distribution, and attention-based interaction. This platform environment intensifies the pressure because authority must now be communicated in formats that are compatible with digital publics. Third, institutional digital da'wah strategy refers to the organizational response through which a Muslim institution develops media channels, digital services, governance systems, human resources, leadership capacity, and distributed networks to maintain and reorganize its authority.

The conceptual relationship can be summarized as follows:

Shifting Digital Religious Authority → Platform Culture Pressure → Institutional Digital Da'wah Strategy → Reinstitutionalization of Religious Authority

This model means that the rise of digital religious authority does not only produce fragmentation or erosion of traditional authority. It can also push established Islamic organizations to reorganize their authority through institutional digital strategies. In the case of NU, this process can be observed through the strengthening of official digital media, the development of digital religious services, the creation of governance and verification systems, the training of digital content creators, the strengthening of digital leadership, and the expansion of regional media networks.

The concept of reinstitutionalization is important here. It indicates that institutional authority is not simply weakened by digital media; rather, it may be reassembled through new infrastructures, organizational routines, and communication strategies. NU's digital response therefore should not be read only as adaptation to technology, but as a managerial attempt to translate traditional religious legitimacy into platform-based organizational presence. Through this model, the article contributes to digital religion studies by shifting the discussion from authority fragmentation to institutional reorganization. It also contributes to Islamic management studies by showing that digital da'wah is a strategic organizational process involving legitimacy management, communication governance, digital infrastructure, and adaptive capacity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative case study approach with digital trace observation to examine how Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) responds institutionally to the transformation of digital religious authority in Indonesia's platform-based media environment. A qualitative approach was selected because the study does not aim to measure the statistical effect of NU's digital da'wah, but to understand the organizational meanings, strategies, and legitimacy practices

embedded in NU's digital communication ecosystem (John W. Creswell, 2018; Robert K. Yin, 2018). The case study design is appropriate because NU is treated as a theoretically significant case of a tradition-based Islamic organization that seeks to maintain and reorganize its authority within digital platforms.

The research was conducted through digital trace observation from August 2025 to April 2026. Digital trace observation refers to the systematic collection and interpretation of publicly available digital materials, including website content, social media posts, videos, digital service descriptions, institutional announcements, and public interaction indicators. This approach is relevant because NU's institutional response to digital religious authority is publicly expressed through its official media channels, digital platforms, applications, and organizational documents. The research did not examine private communication, closed groups, or non-public user data. All data used in this study were obtained from publicly accessible digital sources.

Research Object and Case Selection

The main object of this study is Nahdlatul Ulama as a religious organization, while the units of analysis are NU's institutional digital channels, digital da'wah content, organizational digital services, and publicly available documents related to NU's digital communication and institutional adaptation. NU was selected as the sole case for three reasons.

First, NU represents a historically rooted Islamic authority in Indonesia, with legitimacy based on ulama networks, pesantren, Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah tradition, and layered organizational structures. Second, NU faces the challenge of platform-based religious authority, where religious influence is increasingly shaped by visibility, engagement, personalization, and algorithmic circulation. Third, NU has developed a relatively broad digital ecosystem, including NU Online, TVNU, NU Online social media, the NU Online Super App, digital administrative platforms, and digital capacity-building initiatives. These features make NU a theoretically significant case for examining how an established Islamic organization translates traditional legitimacy into institutional digital da'wah strategy.

Data Sources and Corpus

The data corpus was constructed from NU's publicly accessible digital ecosystem. The observed sources included official websites, Instagram accounts, YouTube channels,

application-related materials, digital governance platforms, institutional news, and selected public interactions. The corpus was not intended to represent all NU digital activities statistically, but to provide information-rich materials that reveal NU's institutional response to digital religious authority and platform culture. The following table summarizes the main digital sources observed in this study.

Table 1. Digital Sources Observed in the Study

No.	Source Category	Platform / Channel	Digital Source Observed	Type of Data Collected
1	Official website	Website	NU Online / nu.or.id	News articles, religious service pages, opinion articles, institutional announcements
2	Official social media	Instagram	@nuonline_id	Reels, captions, visual da'wah posts, news snippets, engagement indicators
3	Official video channel	YouTube	TVNU Televisi Nahdlatul Ulama	Da'wah videos, institutional broadcasts, live events, short clips, subscriber data
4	Official social media	Instagram	@tvnu.id	Broadcast promotion, short da'wah videos, visual content, engagement indicators
5	Digital religious service	Mobile application / app description	NU Online Super App	Feature descriptions, religious service functions, application positioning
6	Digital governance platform	Website / digital system	Digdaya Kepengurusan	Organizational digital administration and management information
7	Document verification	Website / digital system	verifikasi-surat.nu.id	Document verification function and institutional legitimacy control
8	Regional NU digital network	YouTube / Instagram / Website	Selected NU regional channels, including PWNU Jawa Timur Official and NU Online Jatim	Regional digital da'wah content, institutional identity, distributed media network

9	Institutional programs	Official news and documents	NU-related official announcements on digital training, content creator development, and digital leadership	Program descriptions, organizational statements, training reports
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To improve transparency, the final corpus analyzed in this study consisted of selected digital materials from the sources above. The corpus included website articles, Instagram posts, YouTube videos, application descriptions, institutional documents, and observable public interactions. The data were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research focus.

Table 2. Data Corpus Used for Qualitative Analysis

No.	Data Type	Number of Items Analyzed	Selection Criteria
1	NU Online website articles and institutional news	10 items	Articles related to NU's digital da'wah, institutional communication, religious services, digital programs, and organizational identity.
2	Instagram posts/reels from @nuonline_id	30 items	Posts showing da'wah messages, institutional identity, religious guidance, visual adaptation, and audience engagement.
3	Instagram posts/reels from @tvnu.id	10 items	Posts related to short video da'wah, broadcast promotion, institutional events, and visual platform adaptation.
4	YouTube videos from TVNU	10 items	Videos showing da'wah content, organizational broadcasts, live events, religious lectures, and institutional communication.
5	Selected videos/posts from NU regional digital channels	15 items	Regional content showing decentralized institutional da'wah and network-based distribution.
6	Institutional documents and official announcements	10 items	Documents/news related to digital training, digital leadership, content creator development, Super App, digital governance, and verification systems.
7	Application and platform feature descriptions	3 items	NU Online Super App, Digdaya Kepengurusan, and document verification system.
8	Public interaction indicators	20 selected examples	Comments, likes, shares, views, and observable audience responses used only as contextual indicators.

The numbers above refer to the selected corpus used for qualitative thematic analysis, not to the total number of NU digital contents available online. Follower counts, subscriber numbers, and engagement indicators were treated as time-bound observational snapshots. Therefore, each numerical observation was recorded and used only to illustrate the scale and visibility of NU's digital presence, not as a fixed or permanent measurement.

Sampling Procedure

This study used purposive sampling. The selection of digital materials was guided by the research objective: to understand how NU manages institutional digital da'wah strategy in response to changing digital religious authority. The selected materials had to meet at least one of the following criteria.

First, the material had to explicitly represent NU's institutional identity, either through official platforms, organizational symbols, institutional language, or affiliation with NU's official digital ecosystem. Second, the material had to be related to da'wah, religious guidance, Islamic knowledge, organizational communication, or institutional legitimacy. Third, the material had to show adaptation to platform culture, such as the use of short videos, reels, visual quotes, captions, livestreaming, audience interaction, or cross-platform distribution. Fourth, the material had to indicate organizational strategy, such as the development of official media, digital applications, governance systems, content creator training, digital leadership, or regional media networks. Fifth, the material had to be publicly accessible and ethically usable for academic analysis.

This sampling strategy was chosen because the study aims to identify strategic patterns rather than to produce a statistically representative account of all NU digital activities. Therefore, the selected data were considered representative in an analytical sense: they were information-rich, institutionally relevant, and directly connected to the conceptual focus of the study.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three main techniques: digital observation, digital documentation, and public interaction tracking. First, digital observation was conducted by systematically examining NU's official and institutionally connected digital channels. The observation focused on platform type, content format, theme, visual style, communication style, use of institutional symbols, frequency of public presence, and indications of adaptation

to platform culture. Special attention was given to how NU translates traditional religious authority into platform-based communication formats.

Second, digital documentation was conducted by collecting and recording relevant website articles, institutional announcements, screenshots, platform descriptions, application information, and official news related to NU's digital da'wah ecosystem. These documents were used to support the interpretation of NU's institutional strategy, especially in relation to digital infrastructure, content production, leadership development, and governance.

Third, public interaction tracking was used to observe visible audience responses, such as likes, comments, shares, views, and recurring forms of audience engagement. These interaction indicators were not treated as quantitative evidence of effectiveness. Instead, they were used as contextual data to understand how NU's digital communication appears within the platform environment and how public engagement is displayed around selected content.

Observation Matrix

To ensure consistency during data collection, this study used an observation matrix. The matrix helped classify digital data according to the conceptual axes of the study: digital religious authority, platform culture, and institutional digital da'wah strategy.

Table 3. Observation Matrix

Analytical Dimension	Observation Indicators	Examples of Data Observed
Institutional identity	NU symbols, official logos, organizational language, references to PBNU, NU Online, TVNU, or NU networks	Website profile, account description, official announcements
Religious authority	Use of ulama, kiai, pesantren, sanad, fiqh, Aswaja, institutional fatwa-like guidance, religious service content	Religious articles, da'wah videos, Islamic guidance posts
Platform adaptation	Short videos, reels, captions, visual quotes, livestreaming, hashtags, thumbnails, audience-oriented formats	Instagram reels, YouTube clips, short captions, visual da'wah content
Digital infrastructure	Official websites, applications, digital administrative systems, verification platforms	NU Online, NU Online Super App, Digdaya Kepengurusan, verifikasi-surat.nu.id
Strategic communication	Message consistency, audience targeting, content packaging, cross-platform distribution, public issue response	News snippets, campaign-like content, event promotion

Human resource development	Training, content creator programs, digital leadership, media capacity building	Official news on digital training and leadership programs
Network expansion	Regional channels, local NU media, affiliated digital actors, decentralized media distribution	PWNU channels, NU Online regional accounts
Public engagement	Likes, comments, shares, views, subscriber/follower counts, visible audience responses	Engagement indicators and selected comments

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The analysis followed several stages. The first stage was familiarization. The researcher repeatedly read, watched, and reviewed the selected digital materials to understand the general patterns of NU's digital presence. Notes were made on recurring themes, content formats, institutional symbols, and indications of platform adaptation.

The second stage was initial coding. Each data item was coded according to descriptive categories, such as official media strengthening, visual da'wah format, institutional legitimacy, content creator training, digital religious services, leadership development, governance system, regional network, and audience engagement.

The third stage was focused coding. Similar codes were grouped into broader analytical categories. For example, codes related to NU Online, TVNU, Instagram, and YouTube were grouped under "strengthening official digital media." Codes related to the NU Online Super App, Digdaya Kepengurusan, and document verification were grouped under "digital infrastructure and governance." Codes related to training, content creators, and digital leadership were grouped under "capacity building."

The fourth stage was theme development. The focused codes were refined into major themes that reflect NU's institutional response to digital religious authority. The final themes included: strengthening official digital media, institutionalizing digital religious services, developing digital governance systems, building digital content capacity, strengthening digital leadership, and expanding decentralized media networks.

The fifth stage was interpretive synthesis. The themes were interpreted using the conceptual model developed in the literature review: shifting digital religious authority, platform culture pressure, institutional digital da'wah strategy, and reinstitutionalization of religious authority. This stage allowed the study to move beyond description and explain how

NU's digital activities function as organizational strategies for legitimacy management in a platform-based environment.

Table 4. Coding Structure

Initial Codes	Focused Codes	Final Themes
NU Online articles, official website, news updates, religious service pages	Official media consolidation	Strengthening official digital media
TVNU videos, YouTube broadcasts, Instagram clips, live events	Audiovisual da'wah and platform visibility	Strengthening official digital media
NU Online Super App, digital prayer services, Islamic learning features	Digital religious service provision	Institutionalizing digital religious services
Digdaya Kepengurusan, document verification, administrative platforms	Digital organizational governance	Developing digital governance systems
Content creator training, digital talent, media production	Human resource development	Building digital content capacity
Digital leadership training, digital mindset, security, skills	Leadership and managerial capacity	Strengthening digital leadership
PWNU channels, NU Online regional accounts, local media networks	Distributed institutional communication	Expanding decentralized media networks
Likes, comments, views, shares, public responses	Audience visibility and engagement	Navigating platform culture

Validity and Reliability

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, this study used source triangulation, data form triangulation, and analytical consistency checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from different NU digital channels, including websites, Instagram accounts, YouTube channels, applications, and institutional documents. Data form triangulation was conducted by comparing different types of data, such as articles, captions, videos, platform descriptions, program announcements, screenshots, and public interaction indicators.

Analytical consistency was maintained through the use of an observation matrix and coding table. The researcher repeatedly reviewed the data and compared the emerging themes with the research questions and conceptual framework. Numerical data such as follower counts, subscriber numbers, views, likes, and comments were recorded only as observational snapshots. Because these figures change over time, the study presents them with observation dates and treats them as contextual indicators rather than fixed measures.

Ethical Considerations

This study used only publicly available digital materials. It did not access private accounts, closed groups, direct messages, or personal information that was not publicly displayed. Public comments were used only as contextual indicators and were not analyzed to identify individual users. When screenshots or examples were used, the analysis focused on institutional content and public platform features rather than personal identities. This ethical approach was adopted to ensure that the study respects privacy, minimizes risk, and remains focused on NU's institutional digital da'wah strategy.

Through this methodological design, the study provides a transparent and systematic account of how NU's digital ecosystem was observed, selected, coded, and interpreted. The method allows the article to examine NU's response not merely as a collection of online activities, but as an institutional strategy for managing religious authority, communication, and legitimacy in a platform-based media environment.

RESULTS

The digital trace observation shows that NU's institutional response to digital religious authority can be understood through four interconnected findings. First, NU has developed an institutional digital infrastructure that functions as an official source of religious communication and organizational legitimacy. Second, NU's digital presence is distributed across multiple platforms rather than concentrated in a single official channel. Third, NU has begun to develop digital capacity through content creator training, digital leadership, and organizational communication programs. Fourth, NU's strategy indicates a process of reinstitutionalizing religious authority through digital media, digital services, governance systems, and decentralized organizational networks.

These findings suggest that NU's digital da'wah strategy is not limited to the production of online religious content. It represents a broader organizational response to platform culture, where religious legitimacy must be maintained through visibility, consistency, accessibility, credibility, and institutional coordination.

Institutional Digital Infrastructure: From Media Presence to Authority Management

The first finding shows that NU has built a relatively layered digital infrastructure. This infrastructure includes official news media, audiovisual channels, social media accounts, religious service applications, digital administrative systems, and document verification

platforms. These channels do not perform identical functions. Rather, each platform occupies a specific position within NU's broader digital da'wah ecosystem.

NU Online functions as the main official digital media channel. It provides Islamic articles, religious guidance, organizational news, opinion pieces, and public information related to NU's socio-religious activities. In this sense, NU Online serves not only as a news portal, but also as a digital reference point for religious knowledge and institutional communication. TVNU, on the other hand, expands NU's authority into audiovisual format through YouTube, livestreaming, institutional broadcasts, da'wah videos, and religious events. Instagram accounts such as @nuonline_id and @tvnu.id translate NU's institutional messages into shorter, more visual, and platform-friendly formats.

The NU Online Super App represents another layer of institutional adaptation. Unlike conventional social media content, the application shifts NU's digital da'wah from information dissemination to digital religious service provision. It offers worship-related and Islamic learning features that allow users to access religious guidance in a more practical and personalized way. Meanwhile, Digdaya Kepengurusan and verifikasi-surat.nu.id indicate that NU's digital transformation also includes internal governance and administrative legitimacy. The presence of these platforms shows that NU's digital response is not only directed outward to audiences, but also inward to strengthen organizational coordination and credibility.

Table 5. NU's Institutional Digital Infrastructure

No.	Digital Channel / Platform	Main Function	Evidence from Observation	Institutional Meaning
1	NU Online / nu.or.id	Official religious and organizational media	Articles, religious guidance, opinion, news, and organizational announcements were regularly published through the official website.	Strengthens NU's position as an official digital reference for Islamic knowledge and institutional communication.
2	NU Online Instagram / @nuonline_id	Social media distribution of NU Online content	The account distributes reels, visual quotes, religious captions, news snippets, and Islamic guidance in short and visual formats.	Translates institutional authority into platform-friendly communication.

3	TVNU YouTube	Audiovisual da'wah and institutional broadcasting	The channel contains religious lectures, organizational events, livestreaming, and video documentation of NU activities.	Expands NU's authority into audiovisual and livestreaming formats.
4	TVNU Instagram / @tvnu.id	Short visual and promotional content	The account promotes broadcasts, short da'wah clips, religious events, and video fragments.	Adapts NU's audiovisual da'wah to Instagram's visual and short-form culture.
5	NU Online Super App	Digital religious service	The application provides Islamic service features and worship-related information.	Institutionalizes da'wah into practical digital services.
6	Digdaya Kepengurusan	Digital organizational governance	The platform supports digital-based organizational management.	Shows that NU's digital adaptation includes internal governance, not only public communication.
7	verifikasi-surat.nu.id	Official document verification	The platform provides verification of NU-related official documents.	Protects administrative legitimacy and institutional trust in digital circulation.
8	Regional NU digital channels	Decentralized digital da'wah network	Regional channels such as PWNU and NU Online regional accounts distribute local religious and organizational content.	Expands NU's digital authority through a networked and decentralized model.

This finding is important because it shows that NU does not respond to digital religious authority merely by being present on social media. Instead, NU develops a digital architecture that connects public communication, religious services, institutional governance, and administrative credibility. This pattern indicates that digital da'wah has become part of authority management. NU's religious legitimacy is translated into a digital ecosystem that allows the organization to remain visible, accessible, and institutionally recognizable in a platform-based public sphere.

A small portion of supporting data from the author's broader dissertation observation also confirms this pattern. In the broader observation of NU's digital ecosystem, NU's institutional authority was repeatedly displayed through three markers: the use of

official organizational identity, the presence of ulama and pesantren-based symbols, and the integration of religious content with institutional media channels. This supports the argument that NU's digital da'wah does not simply rely on individual popularity, but seeks to maintain a recognizable institutional frame within digital communication.

Multi-Platform Presence and Managed Decentralization

The second finding shows that NU's digital da'wah strategy is multi-platform and decentralized. NU's digital presence is not limited to one central channel. It is distributed across official websites, Instagram accounts, YouTube channels, mobile applications, and regional media networks. This distribution reflects the logic of platform culture, where different platforms require different forms of communication.

Website-based content allows NU to provide longer explanations, institutional news, religious articles, and opinion pieces. Instagram enables shorter, visual, and more shareable communication. YouTube supports longer religious lectures, live broadcasts, institutional events, and audiovisual documentation. The NU Online Super App provides more service-oriented interaction. Regional channels allow NU's digital presence to be extended beyond central-level communication into local and territorial contexts.

Table 6. Snapshot of NU's Digital Presence

No.	Channel / Account	Platform	Observed Function	Observation Note
1	NU Online	Website	Main official media for religious articles, news, and institutional information	Observed as the central digital reference in NU's official media ecosystem.
2	@nuonline_id	Instagram	Short religious guidance, reels, news snippets, visual da'wah, and public engagement	Illustrates adaptation to visual, concise, and shareable content.
3	TVNU Televisi Nahdlatul Ulama	YouTube	Religious lectures, official events, livestreaming, and NU audiovisual broadcasts	Shows the audiovisual expansion of NU's institutional da'wah.
4	@tvnu.id	Instagram	Promotion of TVNU programs, short clips, and visual da'wah	Connects longer YouTube content with Instagram's short-form visibility.
5	PWNU Jawa Timur Official	YouTube	Regional organizational content, religious events, and da'wah videos	Indicates the strength of regional NU networks in digital da'wah.

6	NU Online Jatim	Website / Instagram	Regional religious news and institutional communication	Shows decentralization of NU's digital media ecosystem.
7	NU Online Super App	Mobile application	Worship services, Islamic learning, and religious guidance	Moves da'wah from media content to digital service.

This multi-platform presence demonstrates what can be called managed decentralization. NU does not rely solely on PBNU-level communication. Instead, the central digital ecosystem provides institutional identity, official narratives, and religious legitimacy, while regional and affiliated channels expand reach across local contexts. From a management perspective, this is significant because it shows that NU's digital authority is organized through both centralization and decentralization. Centralization appears in the use of official symbols, organizational identity, and authoritative media. Decentralization appears in the distribution of digital da'wah through regional channels, affiliated networks, and platform-specific formats.

This finding also supports the argument that platform culture does not only fragment religious authority. It also encourages large organizations to develop networked communication systems. In NU's case, the organizational response is not to eliminate decentralization, but to manage it through recognizable institutional identity and distributed media channels.

Content Capacity, Digital Leadership, and Human Resource Development

The third finding concerns NU's investment in digital human resources. The observation indicates that NU's response to digital religious authority is not limited to opening accounts or producing content. It also involves efforts to strengthen digital capacity through content creator training, media literacy, digital leadership, and organizational communication skills.

One example is the involvement of NU-related networks in content creator training, including programs associated with Pagar Nusa, NUPro Academy, NU Online, and TVNU. These programs indicate that NU recognizes the importance of digital talent in the platform era. Content production is no longer treated as a spontaneous individual activity, but as an organizational capacity that needs to be trained, coordinated, and improved.

Another example is digital leadership training involving NU administrators. Such initiatives show that digital transformation is understood not merely as media production, but also as a leadership and governance issue. Digital leadership requires the ability to understand platform culture, digital security, public communication, and organizational coordination. This is particularly important because Islamic organizations operate through layered structures, from central leadership to regional and local branches.

Table 7. NU's Strategic Response to Platform Culture

No.	Strategic Response	Empirical Evidence	Organizational Meaning
1	Strengthening official digital media	NU Online, TVNU, @nuonline_id, @tvnu.id	Maintains official institutional channels as trusted sources of religious and organizational information.
2	Institutionalizing digital religious services	NU Online Super App	Transforms da'wah from information delivery into accessible digital service.
3	Consolidating digital governance	Digdaya Kepengurusan and verifikasi-surat.nu.id	Extends digital transformation into organizational administration and legitimacy control.
4	Developing content human resources	Digital content creator training involving NU-related networks	Builds internal capacity to produce platform-compatible religious content.
5	Strengthening digital leadership	Digital leadership programs involving NU administrators	Prepares organizational leaders to manage digital transformation and platform-based communication.
6	Expanding regional digital networks	PWNU channels, NU Online regional accounts, and local NU media	Extends institutional narratives through decentralized and territorial networks.

This finding shows that NU understands digital da'wah as a managerial issue. Platform culture requires not only religious messages, but also content skills, media routines, visual literacy, audience understanding, and leadership capacity. Therefore, NU's digital response can be read as an attempt to build organizational capacity in the face of a communication environment that rewards speed, visibility, and continuous production.

A small portion of the author's broader dissertation data also supports this interpretation. In interviews with organizational actors, digital da'wah was often described not only as a matter of preaching online, but also as a matter of institutional readiness, media governance, and the need to prevent religious narratives from being dominated by actors outside mainstream Islamic organizations. This insight helps explain why NU's digital

initiatives include not only public-facing media channels, but also training, governance, and leadership components.

Reinstitutionalizing Authority through Digital Da'wah Strategy

The fourth finding is that NU's digital response represents a process of reinstitutionalizing religious authority. Previous studies often emphasize that digital media decentralize authority by allowing individual preachers, influencers, and informal communities to gain religious influence outside traditional structures. The findings of this study do not reject that argument. However, the NU case shows that decentralization is only one side of the process. The other side is reinstitutionalization, namely the effort of established organizations to reorganize their authority through digital infrastructure, media governance, service platforms, and networked communication.

Three layers NU's strategy can be interpreted through of reinstitutionalization. First, there is media reinstitutionalization. NU strengthens official channels such as NU Online and TVNU to maintain recognizable institutional references in digital space. These channels function as anchors of authority amid fragmented online religious communication. Second, there is service reinstitutionalization. Through the NU Online Super App and other digital religious services, NU expands its da'wah from public communication to everyday religious assistance. This allows institutional authority to be embedded in practical digital services. Third, there is governance reinstitutionalization. Through Digdaya Kepengurusan, document verification systems, content training, digital leadership, and regional networks, NU connects digital da'wah with organizational administration, legitimacy protection, and human resource development.

Table 8. Patterns of Authority Reinstitutionalization in NU's Digital Da'wah

No.	Pattern	Digital Form	Authority Function
1	Media reinstitutionalization	NU Online, TVNU, Instagram official accounts	Maintains institutional visibility and official religious reference.
2	Service reinstitutionalization	NU Online Super App and digital Islamic services	Brings institutional religious guidance into daily digital practice.
3	Governance reinstitutionalization	Digdaya Kepengurusan and document verification	Protects organizational legitimacy and administrative credibility.
4	Capacity reinstitutionalization	Content creator training and digital leadership	Builds internal capability to compete in platform culture.

5	Network reinstitutionalization	Regional NU channels and affiliated media networks	Expands authority through decentralized but institutionally connected channels.
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These patterns show that NU does not simply adapt to digital media at the level of communication technique. Rather, NU reorganizes its authority through institutional systems. This is the key finding of the study. Digital religious authority does not only weaken established organizations; it also pushes them to build new forms of institutional presence. In NU's case, this presence is formed through official media, digital services, governance mechanisms, human resource development, and decentralized networks.

Therefore, NU's digital da'wah strategy can be understood as a multi-layered organizational response to platform culture. It combines traditional religious legitimacy with platform-based communication, institutional identity with decentralized distribution, and organizational governance with public-facing digital services. This finding confirms that the management of digital da'wah is not merely a technical matter of media use, but a strategic process of legitimacy management in the platform era.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that NU's response to digital religious authority should not be understood merely as the expansion of da'wah into online media. Rather, it represents an institutional strategy through which a large Islamic organization seeks to reorganize its religious authority in a platform-based communication environment. NU's digital ecosystem, including NU Online, TVNU, official social media accounts, the NU Online Super App, digital governance platforms, document verification systems, content creator training, digital leadership initiatives, and regional media networks, indicates that digital da'wah has become a matter of organizational strategy, legitimacy management, and institutional adaptation.

This finding extends existing scholarship on digital religious authority. Previous studies have often emphasized how digital media weaken traditional authority by enabling new religious actors, influencers, and informal communities to gain public visibility outside established institutional structures (Ahyyar, 2019; Akmaliah, 2020, 2022; Nisa, 2018). These studies are important because they show that the digital public sphere has decentralized Islamic authority and created new forms of religious influence. However, the case of NU

suggests that decentralization is not the only process taking place. Established Islamic organizations do not simply lose authority in digital environments. They may also attempt to reorganize and reinstitutionalize authority through digital infrastructure, official media, platform-specific communication, organizational governance, and human resource development.

This study therefore contributes to digital religion studies by shifting the analytical focus from authority erosion to authority reinstitutionalization. Campbell's concept of networked religion explains that digital media make religious authority more fluid, interactive, and negotiated (H. Campbell, 2011; H. A. Campbell & Bellar, 2023b). Cheong also argues that digital media reshape the performance and mediation of religious authority rather than simply eliminating it (Cheong, 2017). The findings of this study support this argument but add an institutional dimension. In NU's case, authority is not only negotiated through individual visibility or audience interaction. It is also reorganized through official platforms, digital services, administrative systems, training programs, and decentralized organizational networks. Thus, digital authority is not only a matter of religious actors competing for attention; it is also a matter of how institutions build systems to remain credible, visible, and relevant.

The findings also confirm the importance of platform culture in shaping contemporary religious communication. Platform studies have shown that digital communication is increasingly structured by visibility, algorithms, engagement, datafication, and audience metrics (Bucher, 2012; Cotter, 2019; J. van Dijck et al., 2018). NU's digital strategy can be read as a response to these pressures. NU Online provides more stable and authoritative religious information, while Instagram and YouTube allow NU to adapt its message to shorter, visual, and more shareable formats. The NU Online Super App shows an attempt to move beyond content circulation toward digital religious service provision. Meanwhile, digital leadership and content creator training indicate that NU recognizes platform culture not merely as a technical media environment, but as an organizational challenge requiring skills, routines, leadership, and governance.

This finding is especially important because platform culture often favors religious actors who are personal, emotionally resonant, visually consistent, and algorithmically visible. Individual preachers may gain authority through charisma, communication style, and audience intimacy, even when their institutional credentials are weaker. By contrast, large religious organizations often face the challenge of translating layered religious knowledge,

formal authority, and institutional caution into formats that can circulate effectively on digital platforms. NU's strategy shows one possible institutional response to this tension: rather than abandoning its traditional sources of legitimacy, NU seeks to translate them into digital channels, applications, official media, and distributed networks.

From the perspective of Islamic management, this study argues that institutional digital da'wah is a multi-layered organizational strategy. It involves at least five managerial dimensions. First, media management, through the strengthening of official digital channels such as NU Online, TVNU, and official social media accounts. Second, service management, through the development of digital religious services such as the NU Online Super App. Third, governance management, through digital administrative systems and document verification platforms. Fourth, human resource management, through content creator training and digital capacity-building programs. Fifth, network management, through the involvement of regional channels and decentralized NU media ecosystems.

These dimensions show that digital da'wah is not merely communication activity. It is part of institutional adaptation. Organizational adaptation theory emphasizes that organizations respond to environmental change by adjusting resources, structures, routines, and strategies (David J. Teece, 1997; March, 1991). Institutional theory further explains that organizations respond to legitimacy pressures in their environment, not only to technical efficiency (Powell, 1983; Suchman, 1995). NU's digital response reflects both dynamics. On the one hand, NU adapts technically by using websites, social media, YouTube, applications, and digital systems. On the other hand, NU adapts institutionally by attempting to preserve legitimacy, credibility, and religious authority within a changing media environment.

This point strengthens the contribution of the article to Islamic management studies. Islamic organizations are often studied as religious, social, or cultural actors, but they also operate as complex organizations that must manage communication, legitimacy, human resources, technology, and institutional reputation. The rise of digital religious authority has made these managerial issues more urgent. If religious legitimacy is increasingly shaped by digital visibility and public engagement, then Islamic organizations must develop strategies to manage their digital presence without losing their doctrinal, ethical, and institutional identity. NU's case shows that institutional digital da'wah requires not only pious content, but also organizational design, platform literacy, media governance, and adaptive leadership.

The concept of reinstitutionalization helps explain this process. Reinstitutionalization refers to the way established religious authority is reorganized through new institutional

forms in digital environments. In NU's case, reinstitutionalization appears in five patterns. Media reinstitutionalization occurs through official digital channels that function as authoritative references. Service reinstitutionalization occurs through digital religious applications that embed NU's authority in everyday religious practice. Governance reinstitutionalization occurs through digital administrative and verification systems. Capacity reinstitutionalization occurs through digital training and leadership development. Network reinstitutionalization occurs through regional and decentralized NU media channels that expand institutional communication beyond the central organization.

This interpretation also challenges the assumption that digital platforms necessarily lead to the decline of religious institutions. The findings show a more complex process. Digital platforms do create fragmentation, competition, and decentralization. However, they also encourage established organizations to build new infrastructures of authority. NU's digital strategy shows that institutional authority can survive and even be reorganized when it is supported by digital media systems, governance mechanisms, trained human resources, and networked communication. Therefore, the question is no longer simply whether traditional religious authority is weakened by digital media, but how religious institutions reorganize authority under the pressure of platform culture.

Nevertheless, the findings also show that institutional digital da'wah remains full of tensions. NU must balance credibility and visibility, depth and speed, institutional caution and platform responsiveness, centralized identity and decentralized networks. Religious knowledge rooted in ulama, pesantren, and sanad is not always easily translated into the fast-moving, emotional, and visual logic of social media. At the same time, ignoring platform culture would risk making institutional voices less visible in digital public discourse. This tension is likely to continue shaping the future of Islamic organizational management in Indonesia.

Overall, this study argues that NU's response to digital religious authority represents an emerging model of institutional digital da'wah strategy. This model connects religious legitimacy with media infrastructure, platform adaptation, organizational governance, human resource development, and networked communication. By doing so, the study contributes to a more organizational understanding of digital religion and a more digital understanding of Islamic management.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Nahdlatul Ulama responds institutionally to the transformation of digital religious authority in Indonesia's platform-based media environment. The findings show that NU's response is not limited to the use of social media for da'wah. Rather, NU has developed a multi-layered institutional digital da'wah strategy through official media, audiovisual channels, social media distribution, digital religious services, organizational governance platforms, document verification systems, digital capacity building, leadership development, and regional media networks.

Empirically, the study identifies five patterns of NU's digital response. First, NU strengthens official digital media through channels such as NU Online, TVNU, and official social media accounts. Second, NU institutionalizes digital religious services through application-based platforms such as the NU Online Super App. Third, NU develops digital governance mechanisms through organizational management and document verification systems. Fourth, NU builds digital content capacity through training and human resource development. Fifth, NU expands its authority through decentralized regional and affiliated media networks. These findings show that NU's digital da'wah strategy combines institutional legitimacy with platform-oriented communication.

Theoretically, this study contributes to digital religion studies by arguing that digital media do not only decentralize or erode traditional religious authority. They may also encourage established religious organizations to reinstitutionalize authority through digital infrastructure, platform adaptation, and organizational strategy. The NU case shows that religious authority in digital environments is not simply transferred from institutions to individuals. Instead, it is reorganized through the interaction between traditional legitimacy, platform visibility, and institutional capacity.

This study also contributes to Islamic management studies by conceptualizing institutional digital da'wah as a form of organizational adaptation. Digital da'wah is not merely the online dissemination of Islamic messages. It involves strategic communication, media management, digital governance, service innovation, human resource development, leadership capacity, and network coordination. From this perspective, digital religious authority becomes a managerial issue because Islamic organizations must manage their legitimacy, reputation, communication channels, and organizational resources within platform-based public spaces.

Practically, the findings suggest that Islamic organizations need to approach digital da'wah as an integrated institutional strategy. They cannot rely only on historical reputation, formal authority, or sporadic social media activity. They need official media systems, credible digital services, trained content producers, adaptive leadership, internal governance, and coordinated networks. At the same time, they must preserve the ethical and scholarly foundations of religious authority while adapting to the communicative demands of digital platforms.

This study has several limitations. First, it relies on publicly available digital traces, including websites, social media accounts, videos, application descriptions, and institutional documents. It does not examine internal organizational decision-making processes in depth. Second, the study focuses only on NU as a single case, so the findings cannot be generalized to all Muslim organizations in Indonesia. Third, digital platform data such as follower counts, subscriber numbers, views, likes, and comments are time-bound and may change over time. Therefore, such figures should be understood as observational snapshots rather than fixed indicators.

Future research could compare NU with other Islamic organizations, especially Muhammadiyah or smaller Muslim organizations, to examine whether similar patterns of institutional digital da'wah strategy appear in different organizational traditions. Further studies may also combine digital trace observation with interviews, ethnography, or internal organizational document analysis to better understand how digital da'wah strategies are planned, managed, and evaluated within Islamic organizations. Comparative research on digital governance, religious applications, artificial intelligence, and platform-based da'wah management would also enrich the growing field of Islamic management in the digital era.

In conclusion, NU's case shows that the transformation of digital religious authority is not only a challenge for Islamic organizations, but also an opportunity for institutional renewal. Through digital media, services, governance, capacity building, and networked communication, NU seeks to maintain and reorganize its authority in a platform society. This process demonstrates that the future of Islamic management will increasingly depend on the ability of religious organizations to integrate legitimacy, technology, communication, and organizational adaptation.

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