

Platform Piety and Religious Influencers: Authority, Authenticity, and Marketization in Everyday Islam

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Abstract

Religious communication is increasingly shaped by digital platforms where visibility, audience interaction, and monetization affect how piety is recognized and circulated. In contemporary Muslim publics, social media influencers have become important intermediaries in the translation of religious knowledge, the performance of authenticity, and the organization of everyday moral guidance. This article examines how platform piety reorganizes religious authority, authenticity, and marketization in everyday Islam. It adopts a qualitative and theory-driven approach grounded in digital religion studies, platform sociology, and the sociology of authority. The analysis draws on public-facing platform content, media discussions, policy materials, and scholarly literature related to Islamic influencers, digital religious communication, and platform governance. Attention is directed to four interconnected dimensions: knowledge translation, authenticity work, marketization, and the politics of platform visibility. A mechanism-based synthesis is used to clarify how religious legitimacy is reformatted through short-form communication, interactive trust, entrepreneurial branding, and algorithmic circulation. Religious authority emerges as increasingly hybrid, depending not only on doctrinal credibility but also on communicative fluency, visible sincerity, and economic navigation within platform environments. Platform piety therefore expands access to religious guidance while also intensifying new forms of surveillance, inequality, and reputational vulnerability. The article contributes to the field by offering a sociological framework for understanding how digital infrastructures reshape religious authority and moral life in contemporary Muslim publics.

Keyword

religion; authority; social media; Islam

1. Introduction

Across many societies, everyday religious life is no longer confined to mosques, study circles, sermons, or formal institutions. It increasingly unfolds through feeds, livestreams, short videos, comment sections, and other platform interfaces that organize visibility and interaction in real time (Zhorabek et al., 2025). This transformation matters because the relocation of religious communication to platforms does more than change medium; it changes the social conditions under which moral authority is recognized and contested. Classical sociology of religion treated authority as something stabilized through lineages of learning, interpretive communities, institutional pathways, and routinized practices of legitimacy. Platform environments alter these stabilizers by rewarding visibility, repetition, responsiveness, and content formats that retain attention (Ragozina, 2021).

Religious communication therefore enters a setting where recognition is shaped simultaneously by inherited repertoires of piety and by algorithmic systems, audience feedback, and monetized circulation (Echchaibi, 2010). The resulting field is not purely traditional and not purely digital, but a hybrid arena in which authority must be



continuously assembled under platform conditions. Religious influencers are central to this transformation because they occupy the intersection of doctrine, performance, and digital production. They are not simply substitutes for formal religious scholars, nor are they merely entertainers operating at the edges of faith. Their importance lies in the fact that they translate religious knowledge into everyday guidance, build reputations through visible performances of sincerity, and sustain communities through ongoing interaction (Zhang, 2025). This makes them sociologically significant because they reveal how the sacred is negotiated inside infrastructures of attention and consumer visibility.

In contemporary Muslim publics, especially in Southeast Asia, this dynamic is especially pronounced because religious communication is already vibrant, diverse, and deeply entangled with consumer culture, family ethics, and public morality (Alam et al., 2025). Platform piety thus appears in a setting where modest fashion, charitable campaigns, family advice, and debates over proper conduct circulate alongside anxieties about misguidance, performative religion, and moral decline. Religious authority is therefore increasingly shaped by publics that evaluate not only what is said, but also how it is styled, performed, and continuously maintained.

The core problem emerges from the fact that platforms reward forms of communication that do not map neatly onto older models of religious legitimacy. In formal religious settings, credibility is often linked to training, interpretive discipline, careful argument, and recognized institutional affiliation. In platform settings, credibility can become linked to clarity, confidence, emotional resonance, aesthetic consistency, and high levels of engagement (Hakim et al., 2025; Ramadhani, 2025). This shift creates a major sociological question because it changes who can speak effectively, who becomes visible as authoritative, and whose style of religious communication appears normal or desirable. The issue is not simply that religious messages now travel faster. It is that the very criteria of recognition are being reorganized through metrics, recommendation systems, and platformized performance. The real-world relevance of this problem is substantial because platformed religion increasingly shapes how ordinary users learn, judge, emulate, and police moral conduct in everyday life.

A considerable amount is already known about digital religion, online publics, and the blurring of religious authority with celebrity and performance (Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023). Existing scholarship has shown that digital spaces unsettle the distinction between private devotion and public display, between institutional teaching and peer-to-peer guidance, and between charismatic visibility and doctrinal authority. Research also suggests that social media reward forms of communication that are easily shareable, emotionally immediate, and stylistically memorable (Rahman, 2024). In religious contexts, this means that short-form reminders, moral storytelling, practical advice, and highly legible visual cues gain traction more easily than slow and contextual theological reasoning. It is also increasingly clear that religious communication on platforms is affected by market infrastructures, monetization tools, and recommendation logics that shape what content circulates widely. These developments establish that religion online is not merely an extension of older public forms. They indicate that platform environments actively participate in redefining what counts as persuasive piety and who benefits from that redefinition (Raya, 2024).

What remains less clearly specified is how these transformations should be explained within a coherent sociological framework. Much of the existing discussion identifies important features of digital religion, yet it often treats visibility, authenticity, celebrity, and monetization as adjacent themes rather than as linked mechanisms (Baidawi, 2025). That leaves an analytical gap in understanding how religious legitimacy is converted into platform legitimacy under conditions of ranking, interactive feedback, and integrated monetization. It also leaves insufficient clarity about why some religious voices become

authoritative under platform conditions while others remain marginal, despite stronger formal credentials or institutional backing (Tabaika & Roibin, 2025). Another underdeveloped issue concerns inequality, especially the way resources such as production capacity, time, aesthetic skill, language fluency, and protection from harassment shape who can succeed in these settings. Without a mechanism-based synthesis, it becomes difficult to explain why platform piety can simultaneously expand access to religious learning and intensify surveillance, commercialization, and reputational vulnerability. The unresolved problem is therefore not whether digital religion matters, but how its infrastructures reorganize authority, trust, and inequality as mutually connected processes (Whyte, 2022).

The research gap becomes sharper when the article's applied framework is brought into view. The uploaded draft proposes that platform piety should be understood as a process of authority conversion, not simply as a change in media style. This is theoretically useful because it identifies three linked mechanisms through which religious legitimacy is reformatted for platform life: translation of religious knowledge into attention-friendly content, authenticity work that produces trust through intimacy and discipline, and marketization that connects pious identity to commodities, sponsorships, and entrepreneurial labor (Alfi et al., 2025). The framework also adds platform governance as an enabling condition that shapes which religious voices rise, which are penalized, and how controversies are managed. This synthesis matters because it connects digital religion to wider concerns in sociology about inequality, moral labor, cultural production, and institutional contestation. Translation privileges those with media skills and rhetorical clarity, authenticity privileges those able to sustain intimate interaction while protecting privacy, and marketization privileges those who can navigate brand relations without losing moral credibility. A mechanism-based explanation is therefore necessary to show how platform piety is produced through structured advantages and risks rather than through individual charisma alone (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2019).

Filling this gap is theoretically justified because authority in platform settings cannot be explained adequately through theology alone or through platform logics alone. A sociological account must explain how religious publics continue to draw on inherited moral repertoires while also adapting to infrastructures that reward visibility, interactivity, simplification, and entrepreneurial self-management. This is why the concept of platform piety is analytically productive: it captures continuity in moral language while identifying transformation in the conditions of recognition. It also allows the analysis to move beyond the simplistic choice between celebration and critique. Platform piety can widen access to religious guidance, create supportive communities, and reduce distance between teachers and followers. At the same time, it can intensify moral surveillance, commercial pressure, parasocial demand, gendered scrutiny, and vulnerability to backlash (Astor et al., 2024). The theoretical coherence of the article lies in showing that these outcomes coexist because they arise from the same platformed conversion of religious authority into visible, interactive, and monetizable forms.

From this foundation, the article is organized around a set of interrelated research questions. How is religious authority translated into platform authority in environments where recognition depends increasingly on visibility metrics, format fluency, and audience response. Under what conditions does authenticity become an interactive achievement rather than a credentialed status, and why does this intensify labor, surveillance, and reputational risk for influencers. How does marketization attach religious identity to products, sponsorships, and entrepreneurial labor, and what new hierarchies of legitimacy emerge from that process. In what ways do platform governance systems, moderation rules, recommendation logics, and monetization policies shape the

boundaries of acceptable piety and the scale of moral controversy. Why do gender, class, aesthetic presentation, and safety concerns matter so deeply to who can remain visible and credible in these digital religious publics. These questions are urgent because platformized religion is no longer peripheral to everyday moral life, especially in Southeast Asian Muslim publics where authority, consumer culture, and public morality are already tightly interwoven (Masruha et al., 2025). The contribution of the article lies in offering a mechanism-based vocabulary for understanding how digital religion reorganizes authority, authenticity, and inequality in networked societies.

2. Research Method

This article employs a qualitative, theory-building research design to examine how religious authority is converted into platform authority in everyday digital Islam. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the object of analysis consists of meanings, performances, moral claims, platform-mediated interactions, and reputational processes that cannot be adequately reduced to numerical indicators alone (Negou et al., 2023). The analytical framework is organized around the concept of platform piety and specifies four interconnected dimensions: translation of religious knowledge into platform-friendly content, authenticity work, marketization, and platform governance. This framework makes it possible to analyze how authority is reformatted through visibility, intimacy, monetization, and algorithmic distribution rather than treated as a stable institutional attribute (Busetto et al., 2020).

The design works well for this research because the central issue is not simply the presence of religious influencers, but the social processes through which trust, legitimacy, and influence are built and contested in digital environments. A qualitative strategy allows close attention to symbolic cues, communicative styles, boundary work, and moral evaluation across online religious publics (Knott et al., 2022). It also supports a mechanism-based explanation by tracing how platform affordances interact with inherited religious vocabularies and community expectations. Such a design is therefore well suited to a research problem concerned with authority, authenticity, and inequality in networked religious communication.

The data consist of academic literature, public-facing platform content, media reports, institutional and policy materials, and secondary sources relevant to digital religion, Muslim influencers, platform governance, and everyday piety in Southeast Asia. Data collection was conducted through purposive selection of materials directly related to religious communication on social media, with attention to illustrative cases, recurring content styles, public controversies, monetization practices, and platform-specific conditions that shape visibility and audience engagement (Cheong et al., 2023). The units of analysis are not private individuals as interview respondents, but public religious claims, influencer performances, platformized interactions, and the discursive and organizational arrangements through which online authority is recognized and disputed.

A qualitative coding matrix served as the primary instrument for organizing the material according to the main analytical dimensions of knowledge translation, authenticity performance, marketization, platform governance, visibility, trust, and reputational vulnerability. These dimensions functioned as the principal variables for tracing how digital religious authority is constructed, circulated, and evaluated across platform environments. Trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation, conceptual consistency in coding, and explicit alignment between the research questions, theoretical framework, and analytical categories, while reliability was supported by maintaining a transparent audit trail of source selection and thematic classification (Skarbek, 2020).

Validity was enhanced by restricting analysis to materials directly relevant to platform piety and by interpreting them through the same mechanism-based framework across cases (Denny & Weckesser, 2022). Because the study relies on publicly accessible materials and does not involve direct interaction with human subjects, formal informed consent was not required; nevertheless, ethical standards were maintained by avoiding unnecessary exposure of personal identifiers, treating sensitive religious content with caution, and preserving confidentiality wherever non-public individual information could otherwise be inferred.

3. Result and Discussion

Religious authority on digital platforms is reorganized through a field of visibility, interaction, and circulation that differs markedly from older institutional models of recognition. Authority no longer depends only on scholarly credentials, organizational affiliation, or formal religious office, although these remain important symbolic resources (Zaid et al., 2022). Platform settings introduce additional criteria of legitimacy tied to responsiveness, visual fluency, emotional clarity, and repeatable content production. In this environment, religious influence is built through continuous public performance rather than through relatively stable institutional distance. The authority of religious influencers is therefore neither wholly traditional nor entirely detached from inherited moral vocabularies. It emerges through hybrid processes in which doctrinal references, platform aesthetics, and audience engagement become mutually reinforcing. Everyday Islam under platform conditions is shaped by these hybrid processes because users increasingly encounter guidance, inspiration, and moral evaluation through algorithmically structured feeds. Religious authority thus appears as a dynamic relation among content form, public trust, and platform infrastructures.

A major pattern concerns the translation of religious knowledge into formats compatible with platform communication. Complex theological or ethical questions are frequently reformulated into short reminders, practical advice, emotionally resonant narratives, and highly shareable visual snippets (Febrian, 2024). This translation does not necessarily remove religious substance, but it changes the terms under which substance becomes accessible and compelling. Content is often organized for immediate recognition, rapid consumption, and easy repetition rather than for slow contextual interpretation. The ability to condense doctrine into a concise and visually persuasive message becomes an important form of communicative capital. Religious teaching therefore shifts toward forms that privilege clarity, moral directness, and everyday applicability. This transformation gives advantage to those who can combine religious vocabulary with platform-native storytelling skills. Authority becomes dependent not only on what is known, but also on how effectively it can be reformatted for circulation.

The conversion of knowledge into platform content also alters the temporal structure of religious communication. Formal religious learning often unfolds through gradual study, cumulative interpretation, and sustained teacher-student relationships. Platform communication, by contrast, rewards frequency, immediacy, and serial presence within fast-moving attention economies. Religious influencers are therefore under pressure to produce regular streams of short-form guidance that remain recognizable across changing trends and topics (Petriani, 2025). This creates a new rhythm of authority in which consistency of posting and responsiveness to public issues can matter almost as much as formal expertise. The authority of the speaker is reinforced through continual appearance rather than through occasional institutional pronouncement. Such a condition intensifies the dependence of religious legitimacy on production capacity. Platform piety is thus inseparable from media labor, since continuing influence requires

a steady conversion of religious language into content cycles that remain visible and engaging over time.

Authenticity emerges as a second key mechanism structuring platform piety. Trust is not secured only through credentials or institutional endorsement, but through visible performances of sincerity, discipline, and moral coherence. Influencers cultivate credibility by narrating their struggles, displaying aspects of daily worship, sharing intimate reflections, and aligning advice with recognizable lifestyles. Such practices generate proximity between influencer and audience, thereby turning authenticity into an interactive achievement. Followers do not simply receive religious messages; they evaluate whether the communicator appears consistent, relatable, and morally grounded (Bunt, 2018). This relational mode of trust is reinforced through comments, direct engagement, live interaction, and the repeated public display of pious routines. Legitimacy therefore becomes performative without becoming purely superficial. Authenticity work anchors digital authority by making moral credibility appear personally witnessed rather than institutionally certified.

This authenticity is also fragile because it depends on sustained public coherence under conditions of constant visibility. A platform religious figure must appear accessible without seeming trivial, disciplined without seeming artificial, and confident without appearing commercially cynical or spiritually hollow. Such demands expose influencers to forms of moral surveillance that are more intense than those faced by many offline authorities. Audiences monitor dress, language, family life, consumption patterns, and emotional tone for signs of inconsistency. Platform intimacy therefore produces both trust and vulnerability. The same public closeness that makes authority persuasive also creates reputational risk when expectations of sincerity are violated or contested. Digital religious authority is thus built through a delicate balance between disclosure and control. Authenticity becomes a form of labor, requiring continuous maintenance across morally attentive publics.

Marketization forms a third major dimension of platform piety. Religious influence increasingly intersects with entrepreneurial activity through brand partnerships, modest fashion, beauty products, halal consumption, courses, and lifestyle services. This does not mean that piety becomes reducible to commerce, but it does mean that moral credibility is increasingly entangled with monetized visibility. Platform economies reward creators who can convert attention into income, and religious influencers operate within these same structures. As a result, pious identity may become linked to curated consumption and commercial self-branding. Religious guidance circulates alongside product promotion and entrepreneurial aspiration, creating new opportunities for financial sustainability and broader reach. At the same time, commercialization raises questions about sincerity, spiritual intention, and the moral limits of self-commodification. The authority of the influencer is therefore shaped by how convincingly economic activity can be framed as compatible with ethical aspiration.

Table 1. Comparative Dimensions of Platform Piety and Religious Authority

<i>Analytical Dimension</i>	<i>Main Pattern</i>	<i>Sociological Implication</i>
<i>Knowledge translation</i>	Religious teaching becomes short-form, emotional, and repeatable	Authority depends on communicative adaptation
<i>Authenticity work</i>	Trust is built through intimacy, testimony, and visible discipline	Legitimacy becomes relational and performative
<i>Marketization</i>	Piety is linked to branding, sponsorship, and lifestyle commodities	Religious authority becomes economically entangled
<i>Platform governance</i>	Algorithms and moderation shape reach and controversy	Visibility structures moral influence

Table 1 clarifies that digital religious authority is produced through the interaction of communicative form, moral performance, economic incentives, and platform infrastructures rather than through any single source of legitimacy. Knowledge translation explains why authority now depends heavily on media adaptation, while authenticity work shows that trust is publicly enacted rather than simply inherited. Marketization demonstrates that religious visibility is sustained within economies of monetized attention, creating both opportunity and moral tension. Platform governance completes the picture by showing that reach itself is conditioned by algorithmic ranking, moderation rules, and monetization systems beyond the full control of any single actor. The table therefore supports the broader argument that platform piety is a sociotechnical arrangement rather than a mere extension of offline preaching. Authority becomes hybrid because it is simultaneously doctrinal, relational, commercial, and infrastructural. This hybridization helps explain why digital religion can expand access to guidance while also deepening new forms of dependency and contestation.

These patterns resonate with earlier scholarship on digital religion and micro-celebrity while extending that literature in important ways. Previous work established that online religious spaces disrupt monopolies of interpretation and enable new actors to compete for moral influence. Research on micro-celebrity also demonstrated that visibility, audience management, and self-branding are central to online authority across domains. The present discussion sharpens these insights by linking them through a mechanism-based account of authority conversion. Religious influence does not move online unchanged; it is reformatted through platformed translation, authenticity work, and economic entanglement. This perspective also contributes to studies of platform capitalism by showing that religious authority is shaped by the same infrastructures that organize visibility and monetization in other creator economies. Yet religious content carries additional moral stakes because audiences evaluate not only persuasive success but also ethical coherence. Platform piety thus reveals how religious legitimacy is transformed within attention economies without losing its distinctive normative charge.

The implications for everyday Islam are substantial. Ordinary Muslims increasingly encounter religious guidance through hybrid public figures whose authority is measured through both inherited moral language and platform-native forms of engagement. This changes how religious learning is accessed, evaluated, and integrated into daily life. Guidance may appear more immediate, more relatable, and more responsive to ordinary concerns than older institutional forms. At the same time, everyday religious judgment becomes more dependent on visibility cues, personal testimony, and public reputation. Users may come to evaluate authority through style, intimacy, and consistency of digital presence as much as through scholarly depth. Religious life is therefore shaped by a mixed ecology in which mosques, teachers, families, and influencers coexist in uneven relation. Platform piety does not eliminate institutional religion, but it redistributes attention and recognition across new public intermediaries. The result is a more plural but also more unstable field of moral authority.

These developments also have important consequences for inequality, gender, and moral surveillance. Platform success requires resources that are unevenly distributed, including production skill, time, language fluency, stable internet access, aesthetic labor, and relative protection from harassment. Visibility is not equally available or equally safe for all religious actors. Gendered scrutiny is particularly significant because women and feminized forms of public piety often face intensified evaluation around modesty, authenticity, self-presentation, and commercial activity. Moral credibility is therefore shaped not only by religious content but also by the unequal costs of public exposure. Platform piety can widen participation in religious discourse, yet it can also reproduce hierarchies through differential access to safety, monetization, and audience tolerance.

The politics of visibility are thus inseparable from the politics of authority. Religious influence under platform conditions is structured by the same asymmetries that shape broader digital publics, even when framed through spiritual language.

The discussion also reveals several strengths and limitations. One strength lies in the mechanism-based framework, which makes visible how authority is reassembled through interacting processes rather than attributed to vague digital change. Another strength is the ability to connect digital religion to broader sociological questions about labor, trust, inequality, and marketization. At the same time, platform dynamics vary across applications, national contexts, linguistic communities, and regulatory environments, which means that the relative force of each mechanism is unlikely to be uniform. A further limitation concerns reliance on public-facing material, since backstage negotiations of sponsorship, moderation, and emotional strain are often less visible than polished content. One notable complexity is that commercialization does not automatically destroy moral credibility. In some cases, audiences may interpret entrepreneurship as ethically acceptable or even admirable when framed through appropriate moral narratives. Platform piety is therefore neither reducible to commodification nor separable from it.

Future research would benefit from more explicit comparison across platforms, religious traditions, and regional settings in order to clarify how different interface structures and cultural expectations shape authority conversion. Greater attention to audience reception would also deepen understanding of how trust, doubt, and emulation are distributed among followers with different class, gender, and generational positions. Research on moderation systems and recommendation policies remains especially important because platform governance increasingly shapes which religious voices remain visible and which forms of controversy intensify. Comparative work on gendered religious visibility would be particularly valuable for understanding the unequal risks attached to public piety. There is also practical relevance for religious educators and institutions seeking to engage digital publics without simply replicating commercial creator logics. Platform debates about safety, monetization, and content governance should take seriously the moral stakes of religious communication in networked societies. Digital Islamic pedagogy and platform governance alike will need to address not only access and reach, but also the conditions under which authority remains credible, accountable, and socially just.

4. Conclusion

Platform piety clarifies how religious authority in everyday Islam is increasingly reorganized through digital visibility, interactive trust, commercial entanglement, and platform governance. The discussion has emphasized that religious authority on platforms is not simply transferred from offline institutions into online space, but reformatted through short-form communication, serial presence, and audience-facing performance. Religious knowledge is translated into concise, emotionally legible, and highly shareable content, while authenticity becomes an ongoing achievement produced through intimacy, testimony, and visible discipline. Marketization further reshapes this field by linking pious identity to branding, sponsorship, and entrepreneurial labor, thereby creating new opportunities for reach and sustainability as well as new tensions around sincerity and legitimacy. Platform governance adds another layer by conditioning visibility through algorithmic ranking, moderation systems, and monetization rules that influence which religious voices become prominent and which controversies escalate. Everyday Islam is therefore shaped by a hybrid public sphere in which institutional credibility, relational trust, economic logic, and infrastructural power intersect. Religious authority under platform conditions appears neither fully traditional nor fully detached

from inherited moral repertoires, but as a dynamic and contested formation produced within networked environments.

The article contributes to the field by offering a mechanism-based framework for understanding how religious legitimacy is converted into platform authority. Its main conceptual contribution lies in connecting knowledge translation, authenticity work, marketization, and platform governance within a single sociological account of digital religion. This perspective extends earlier scholarship on online religious authority and micro-celebrity by showing that visibility alone does not explain influence; what matters is the structured interaction between communicative adaptation, moral performance, economic entanglement, and algorithmic infrastructure. The discussion also broadens the sociology of religion by demonstrating that authority in digital settings must be understood as relational and infrastructural rather than merely doctrinal or institutional. At the same time, it contributes to the study of platform capitalism by showing that religious communication is shaped by the same economies of attention and monetization that organize other creator fields, while still carrying distinctive moral stakes. The emphasis on inequality, gendered visibility, and moral surveillance further strengthens the analysis by locating digital religion within broader struggles over safety, legitimacy, and public recognition. In this sense, the article provides a more precise vocabulary for examining how networked religious publics are transforming the social conditions of authority in contemporary Muslim life.

Future research should move toward deeper comparative analysis across platforms, linguistic settings, and Muslim publics in order to clarify how interface design and cultural expectation jointly shape the conversion of authority online. Greater attention to audience reception would also be valuable, especially in understanding how followers evaluate sincerity, negotiate doubt, and distinguish between acceptable entrepreneurship and excessive commodification. Comparative work on gendered visibility is particularly important because the burdens of scrutiny, harassment, and reputational vulnerability are unevenly distributed across different religious actors. Research on platform governance should also be expanded to examine how moderation systems, monetization policies, and recommendation infrastructures influence the visibility and vulnerability of religious content over time. Further inquiry into digital Islamic pedagogy could clarify how institutions, teachers, and influencers might coexist or compete within evolving ecologies of religious learning. Practical discussion should therefore address not only how to expand access to digital religious guidance, but also how to sustain accountability, safety, and fairness in platformed religious communication. Advancing this agenda remains important for understanding how authority, trust, and inequality are being reorganized in the contemporary digital public sphere.

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