



Algorithmic Authority: Understanding the Construction of Digital Sanad in TikTok Dakwah

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ABSTRACT

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The rapid growth of social media has transformed the landscape of Islamic dakwah, enabling platform algorithms to play an increasingly significant role in shaping religious authority. This study aims to examine how algorithmic authority influences the construction of digital sanad within the TikTok dakwah ecosystem and to explore its theoretical implications for contemporary Islamic authority and knowledge transmission. The study employed a qualitative literature review by synthesizing scholarly articles, academic books, conference proceedings, and research reports related to algorithmic authority, digital religion, Islamic epistemology, and social media communication. The findings indicate that digital sanad emerges through the interaction of platform algorithms, religious content creators, and audience engagement, creating a hybrid model of religious legitimacy that complements rather than replaces the classical concept of sanad. This study contributes by integrating perspectives from Algorithmic Authority Theory, Digital Religion, Networked Religion, Platform Governance, and Islamic Epistemology into a unified conceptual framework. The findings provide valuable insights for strengthening digital religious literacy and promoting responsible Islamic communication in the digital era.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the production, dissemination, and reception of religious knowledge in contemporary society (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). Among these platforms, TikTok has emerged as one of the most influential digital ecosystems, particularly among younger generations, due to its algorithm-driven recommendation system, short-form audiovisual content, and highly interactive communication features (Qudsy et al., 2021). Unlike conventional religious learning, where authority is traditionally established through institutional affiliation, scholarly lineage (sanad), and prolonged educational engagement,

TikTok enables religious messages to circulate widely regardless of the educational background or scholarly credentials of content creators (Herbert, 2011). This transformation has significant implications for public understanding of religious authority because algorithmic visibility increasingly determines which religious voices receive greater public recognition (Hew, 2018). Recent studies on digital religion demonstrate that algorithmic recommendation systems significantly shape information consumption, audience engagement, and online credibility, thereby influencing how religious legitimacy is perceived in digital environments. Consequently, understanding the relationship between algorithmic systems and the construction of digital religious authority has become an important academic concern, particularly within Islamic communication and contemporary religious education (Ali et al., 2025).

The emergence of algorithmically mediated religious communication also introduces a complex challenge regarding the authenticity and legitimacy of Islamic knowledge (AlMazaedh et al., 2026). Classical Islamic scholarship has historically relied upon sanad as an epistemological mechanism for ensuring the reliability, continuity, and credibility of transmitted religious knowledge (Wahid & Abdulloh, 2026). The concept of sanad functions not merely as a chain of narration but also as a symbol of intellectual accountability connecting contemporary scholars with previous generations through verified educational relationships (Habsi et al., 2025). However, digital media have substantially altered this mechanism by allowing popularity, engagement metrics, and algorithmic amplification to become influential determinants of perceived authority (Saifillah et al., 2026). Consequently, audiences frequently evaluate religious content based on indicators such as follower counts, viral dissemination, comment interactions, and audiovisual presentation rather than scholarly qualifications or recognized educational genealogy (Abusharif, 2024). This condition creates a significant epistemological dilemma in which algorithmic popularity may compete with traditional scholarly legitimacy, raising important questions concerning how digital platforms reconstruct Islamic authority and influence public perceptions of religious authenticity.

Within the broader context of digital religion, TikTok has increasingly become a prominent arena for Islamic preaching (dakwah) and religious education (Fajar et al., 2025). Muslim preachers, Islamic educational institutions, independent content creators, and ordinary users actively produce short educational videos addressing Qur'anic interpretation, Islamic jurisprudence, moral values, contemporary social issues, and practical religious guidance (Lohlker & Wahid, 2026). The platform's recommendation algorithm encourages rapid dissemination of concise and emotionally engaging content, enabling certain religious narratives to achieve extraordinary visibility within relatively short periods (Rahmatullah & Baitussalam, 2025). Simultaneously, audience participation through comments, reposts, duets, and live-stream interactions contributes to the collaborative construction of religious meaning and credibility (Kholili et al., 2024). Rather than functioning solely as passive recipients of

information, users actively negotiate, validate, question, and reproduce religious authority through digital interactions. Consequently, authority within TikTok-based dakwah increasingly emerges from the interaction between technological infrastructure, content strategies, audience engagement, and algorithmic recommendation mechanisms (Baitussalam & Basofitrah, 2025). This phenomenon illustrates that contemporary Islamic authority is no longer exclusively institutional but increasingly networked, participatory, and digitally mediated.

Previous studies have extensively explored the relationship between social media and religious communication from various theoretical perspectives (Müller & Friemel, 2024). Research on digital religion has demonstrated that online platforms facilitate new forms of religious participation, virtual communities, and hybrid religious identities that transcend geographical and institutional boundaries (Andok, 2024). Other studies have examined the role of social media influencers in shaping religious discourse, highlighting how communication style, emotional engagement, and digital storytelling contribute to audience trust (Haq & Kwok, 2024). Meanwhile, investigations into algorithmic governance emphasize that recommendation systems actively prioritize specific types of content according to engagement-based computational logic rather than educational quality or scholarly legitimacy (Wijaya et al., 2025). Collectively, these studies contribute valuable insights into the transformation of religious communication by demonstrating that digital technologies increasingly mediate knowledge production and authority formation (High et al., 2023). Nevertheless, most existing research treats technological algorithms, religious communication, and Islamic authority as separate analytical domains, resulting in limited theoretical integration regarding the emergence of algorithmically mediated religious legitimacy (Ihsaniyati et al., 2023).

Furthermore, scholarly discussions concerning sanad have predominantly focused on classical Islamic epistemology, hadith sciences, traditional pesantren education, and scholarly transmission networks (Ahmad et al., 2025). These studies consistently emphasize the importance of educational continuity, teacher-student relationships, and institutional verification in preserving authentic Islamic knowledge (Amal, 2025). Conversely, research investigating TikTok dakwah generally concentrates on communication effectiveness, audience engagement, media literacy, or digital marketing strategies, with relatively limited attention devoted to the epistemological implications of algorithmic recommendation systems for reconstructing sanad. Existing literature rarely conceptualizes the interaction between computational infrastructures and Islamic epistemology through an integrated analytical framework capable of explaining how digital legitimacy is negotiated among content creators, audiences, and platform algorithms (Akhmadi, 2024). Consequently, an important research gap remains concerning the mechanisms through which algorithmic authority intersects with traditional Islamic concepts

of scholarly legitimacy, thereby generating new forms of what may be described as a "digital sanad" within contemporary religious communication ecosystems (Sani & Majeed, 2025).

This article addresses this theoretical gap by proposing a qualitative literature review that synthesizes interdisciplinary scholarship from digital religion, algorithm studies, Islamic communication, media sociology, and contemporary Islamic epistemology. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine TikTok as a communication medium or focus exclusively on the classical understanding of sanad, this review positions algorithmic authority as a central analytical lens for understanding how digital legitimacy is socially and technologically constructed. The novelty of this article lies in developing the concept of digital sanad, understood as an evolving network of religious legitimacy produced through continuous interactions among algorithmic recommendation systems, audience participation, content visibility, and symbolic representations of Islamic scholarship. By integrating these previously fragmented bodies of literature, the article offers a more comprehensive conceptual framework for explaining how technological infrastructures increasingly participate in redefining religious authority within contemporary Islamic digital environments.

Based on these considerations, this literature review seeks to answer the following research question: How does algorithmic authority contribute to the construction of digital sanad within TikTok-based dakwah ecosystems? Specifically, the study aims to synthesize existing scholarly evidence regarding the interaction between platform algorithms, Islamic religious authority, audience engagement, and epistemological legitimacy in digital environments. Through systematic analysis and critical comparison of previous studies, this article develops a conceptual understanding of the processes through which algorithmic recommendation systems influence the recognition, validation, and circulation of religious authority beyond conventional institutional structures. Theoretically, this review contributes to expanding the interdisciplinary discourse connecting digital religion, algorithmic governance, media studies, and Islamic epistemology. Practically, it provides valuable insights for Islamic educational institutions, religious scholars, policymakers, and digital content creators in promoting responsible, credible, and epistemologically grounded religious communication within rapidly evolving social media ecosystems.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative literature review design to develop a comprehensive conceptual understanding of the construction of digital sanad within TikTok-based *dakwah* through the perspective of algorithmic authority. Rather than testing causal relationships or collecting primary empirical data, qualitative literature review emphasizes the critical interpretation, comparison, and synthesis of existing scholarly knowledge to generate new theoretical insights. This approach is particularly appropriate because the concept of digital

sanad represents an emerging interdisciplinary phenomenon situated at the intersection of Islamic epistemology, digital religion, media studies, and algorithm studies. By integrating diverse academic perspectives, the study seeks to explain how algorithmic infrastructures increasingly influence the formation of religious legitimacy within contemporary digital communication ecosystems. The data sources consisted exclusively of secondary scholarly materials obtained from authoritative academic publications. These sources included peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in reputable international databases, academic books discussing digital religion, Islamic communication, media sociology, and algorithm studies, conference proceedings addressing technological transformations in religious communication, and institutional research reports published by universities, research organizations, and international agencies. Priority was given to publications that provided theoretical discussions or empirical findings related to social media algorithms, digital religious authority, Islamic educational communication, online communities, platform governance, and the epistemological transformation of Islamic knowledge. Collectively, these sources provided a multidimensional perspective for examining how algorithmic recommendation systems participate in reconstructing religious authority within TikTok *dakwah*.

To ensure the quality and relevance of the review, explicit inclusion criteria were established prior to the literature selection process. First, all selected publications had to demonstrate direct relevance to at least one of the following themes: algorithmic authority, digital religion, TikTok communication, Islamic *dakwah*, religious authority, social media governance, digital literacy, or Islamic epistemology. Second, greater emphasis was placed on publications released between **2020 and 2026**, reflecting the rapid evolution of TikTok as a dominant social media platform and the increasing scholarly attention devoted to algorithmically mediated religious communication. Nevertheless, several influential theoretical works published before this period were retained when they contributed foundational concepts regarding algorithmic governance, religious authority, digital sociology, or the theory of digital religion. Third, only high-quality academic sources—including peer-reviewed journals, scholarly books from recognized academic publishers, reputable conference proceedings, and institutional research reports—were included to maintain the credibility and academic rigor of the review.

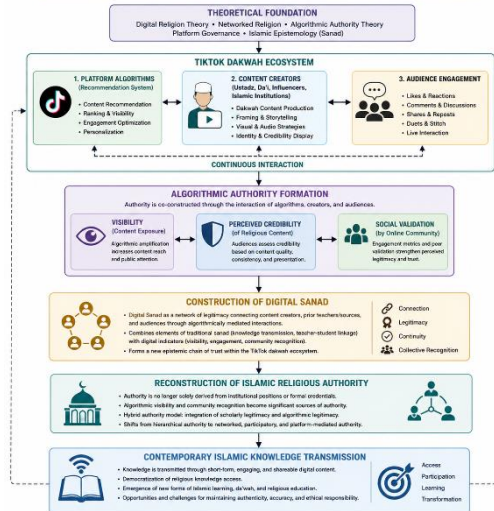
The literature collection process followed a structured and transparent procedure. Relevant publications were systematically identified through comprehensive searches of major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, Emerald Insight, JSTOR, and SAGE Journals. A combination of keywords such as *algorithmic authority*, *digital religion*, *TikTok dakwah*, *Islamic authority*, *digital sanad*, *religious influencers*, *platform governance*, *algorithmic recommendation*, and *Islamic communication* was employed to maximize the retrieval of relevant literature. Following the initial search, duplicate publications were removed, and titles, abstracts, and full texts were carefully screened to determine their alignment with the research objectives. Studies

lacking sufficient theoretical relevance or methodological rigor were excluded, while the remaining literature formed the analytical corpus of the review.

The collected literature was analyzed using an iterative qualitative synthesis process consisting of four interconnected stages. The first stage involved literature reduction, during which publications were critically examined to identify concepts directly related to algorithmic authority and the transformation of religious legitimacy. The second stage focused on **thematic categorization**, whereby the selected studies were organized into major analytical themes, including algorithmic governance, digital religious authority, Islamic epistemology, audience participation, platform visibility, and the emergence of digital *sanad*. The third stage comprised conceptual synthesis, integrating findings from multiple disciplines to identify convergent patterns, theoretical complementarities, and existing research gaps. Finally, theoretical interpretation was conducted by contextualizing the synthesized evidence within broader discussions of digital religion, media sociology, and Islamic knowledge transmission, thereby producing a comprehensive conceptual framework explaining the construction of digital *sanad* within TikTok-based *dakwah*.

The trustworthiness of this literature review was strengthened through several validation strategies. First, cross-checking of scholarly sources was conducted by comparing arguments across multiple academic databases, theoretical traditions, and empirical contexts to minimize interpretive bias. Second, comparative analysis was applied to examine similarities, differences, and inconsistencies among previous studies concerning algorithmic authority, religious legitimacy, and digital communication. This process enabled the identification of dominant scholarly perspectives while highlighting unresolved theoretical debates. Third, argumentative consistency was maintained by ensuring that every analytical conclusion emerged logically from the synthesized literature and remained aligned with the research objectives. Through these validation procedures, the study enhances the credibility, transparency, and theoretical reliability of its conceptual findings while providing a robust foundation for future empirical investigations concerning algorithmic authority and the evolving construction of digital *sanad* in contemporary Islamic digital environments.

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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The Transformation of Religious Authority through Algorithmic Authority in the TikTok Dakwah Ecosystem

The concept of **algorithmic authority** refers to the capacity of computational systems and recommendation algorithms to shape public perceptions regarding the credibility, visibility, and legitimacy of information. Unlike traditional authority, which derives from institutional recognition, formal expertise, or established scholarly credentials, algorithmic authority emerges from the ability of digital platforms to determine which content is prioritized and recommended to users. Within TikTok, recommendation algorithms continuously evaluate user behavior—including watch time, engagement, interaction patterns, content completion rates, and sharing activities—to personalize content distribution. Consequently, religious authority in digital environments increasingly depends not only on theological competence but also on algorithmic visibility. In the context of Islamic *dakwah*, this transformation signifies a shift from institutionally mediated religious legitimacy toward technologically mediated legitimacy, where algorithmic systems indirectly influence which religious voices become influential within online communities.

Previous studies consistently demonstrate that digital platforms have significantly transformed the landscape of religious communication. Research on digital religion argues that social media democratizes religious knowledge by allowing diverse actors—including formally trained scholars, independent preachers, influencers, and ordinary users—to participate in religious discourse without institutional gatekeeping. Investigations into TikTok *dakwah* further reveal that short-form videos encourage concise, emotionally engaging, and visually attractive religious messages that rapidly circulate through recommendation algorithms. Other scholars emphasize that audience

engagement, measured through likes, comments, reposts, and follower growth, increasingly functions as an indicator of credibility. These findings collectively suggest that algorithmic recommendation systems have become active participants in determining the visibility of religious narratives, thereby reshaping how authority is recognized and negotiated in contemporary Islamic digital environments.

The literature also indicates that algorithmic authority operates through reciprocal interactions between technological infrastructures and user participation. Platform algorithms prioritize content capable of generating sustained engagement, while audiences reinforce algorithmic decisions through continuous interaction with recommended videos. As a result, religious legitimacy becomes socially and computationally constructed rather than exclusively derived from traditional scholarly credentials. Studies examining religious influencers demonstrate that persuasive communication styles, emotional storytelling, audiovisual creativity, and digital authenticity frequently contribute to audience trust as much as formal religious education. Simultaneously, research on platform governance suggests that recommendation systems reward content aligned with algorithmic optimization strategies rather than theological depth, creating conditions in which highly engaging religious messages receive greater exposure than academically rigorous but less algorithmically attractive content. Consequently, digital religious authority increasingly reflects the interaction between computational selection mechanisms and collective audience validation.

Despite substantial scholarly contributions, existing literature remains theoretically fragmented. Research on algorithmic governance generally focuses on computational decision-making without adequately considering Islamic epistemological traditions, while studies on Islamic authority often emphasize classical concepts such as *sanad*, scholarly lineage, and institutional legitimacy without incorporating technological mediation. Likewise, investigations into TikTok *dakwah* predominantly examine communication effectiveness, digital literacy, or media influence rather than exploring how recommendation algorithms participate in reconstructing religious legitimacy. This fragmentation limits a comprehensive understanding of contemporary religious authority because it overlooks the interconnected roles of algorithms, content creators, audiences, and Islamic epistemological principles. Therefore, integrating algorithm studies with digital religion and Islamic knowledge traditions offers a more holistic explanation of how authority is produced, negotiated, and legitimized within algorithmically mediated religious ecosystems.

Across the reviewed literature, several recurring patterns emerge. First, nearly all studies acknowledge that algorithmic recommendation systems significantly influence the visibility of religious content and the popularity of digital preachers. Second, audience engagement consistently functions as a mechanism through which algorithmic visibility is translated into perceived credibility and social legitimacy. Third, technological infrastructures do not

independently determine authority; rather, authority develops through dynamic interactions among platform algorithms, creator strategies, audience participation, and existing religious discourses. Finally, scholars increasingly recognize that digital religious authority represents a hybrid phenomenon in which institutional legitimacy and algorithmic popularity coexist, compete, and occasionally reinforce one another. These recurring patterns collectively indicate that algorithmic authority should be understood not merely as a technological feature but as an emerging sociotechnical process influencing the production and circulation of religious knowledge.

The findings synthesized in this theme contribute directly to the broader objective of understanding the construction of **digital sanad** within TikTok *dakwah*. The transformation of religious authority through algorithmic mechanisms demonstrates that legitimacy in digital environments increasingly depends on the interaction between technological recommendation systems, participatory audiences, and symbolic representations of Islamic scholarship. Rather than replacing traditional religious authority, algorithmic authority reconfigures the pathways through which authority is recognized, validated, and disseminated across digital platforms. This conceptual understanding provides the theoretical foundation for explaining digital *sanad* as an evolving network of legitimacy that combines classical Islamic epistemology with contemporary algorithmic governance. Accordingly, algorithmic authority should be viewed as an essential analytical framework for interpreting the changing nature of religious authority in the digital age and for understanding how TikTok has become a significant arena for negotiating Islamic knowledge, credibility, and educational influence.

Table 1. Literature Synthesis on Algorithmic Authority and Religious Authority

Author & Year	Research Focus	Method	Main Findings	Contribution
Gillespie (2018)	Platform governance and algorithms	Conceptual	Algorithms shape information visibility	Introduced algorithmic governance
Campbell (2021)	Digital religion	Literature Review	Religious authority becomes networked	Foundation of digital religion theory
Cotter (2019)	Algorithm awareness	Qualitative	Users adapt behavior to platform algorithms	Explains creator-algorithm interaction
Bishop (2021)	TikTok recommendation system	Digital ethnography	FYP algorithm determines content exposure	Explains algorithmic visibility
Zulli & Zulli (2022)	TikTok culture	Qualitative	Engagement determines popularity	Audience participation strengthens authority
Abidin (2021)	Influencer culture	Qualitative	Authenticity influences credibility	Explains digital religious influencers
Bunt (2018)	Islam in digital environments	Literature Review	Islamic authority expands beyond institutions	Digital Islamic communication

Hoover (2021)	Media and religion	Conceptual	Media reconstructs religious practices	Religious authority becomes mediated
Klinger & Svensson (2018)	Platform logic	Conceptual	Algorithms shape public discourse	Platform logic framework
Lewis (2020)	Social media governance	Qualitative	Visibility influences legitimacy	Connects algorithms and public trust

Interpretation of the Literature Synthesis

The literature synthesis demonstrates a clear convergence across multiple disciplines regarding the transformative role of algorithmic systems in shaping religious authority. Studies originating from media studies and platform governance consistently argue that algorithms function as gatekeepers that regulate content visibility through engagement-based computational mechanisms. Simultaneously, research within digital religion emphasizes that online religious authority increasingly emerges from networked interactions rather than solely from institutional recognition. Together, these perspectives suggest that technological infrastructures and audience participation jointly contribute to the social construction of legitimacy within digital religious ecosystems.

Another significant pattern concerns the interdisciplinary complementarity among the reviewed studies. While digital religion scholars explain how online environments reshape religious practices, algorithm studies clarify the technological mechanisms responsible for amplifying particular religious narratives. Research on influencer culture further demonstrates that authenticity, communication style, and audience engagement strengthen perceived credibility, thereby reinforcing algorithmic visibility. The integration of these findings indicates that algorithmic authority is not an isolated technological phenomenon but a multidimensional sociotechnical process involving platform algorithms, religious communicators, participatory audiences, and evolving conceptions of Islamic authority. This synthesis provides the theoretical basis for conceptualizing the emergence of **digital sanad** as a contemporary form of religious legitimacy.

The Construction of Digital *Sanad* through the Interaction between Platform Algorithms, Content Creators, and Audience Engagement in TikTok Dakwah

The concept of digital *sanad* refers to a contemporary form of religious legitimacy that emerges through the interaction of digital technologies, religious communicators, and participatory online audiences. In classical Islamic epistemology, *sanad* represents an authenticated chain of knowledge transmission connecting students to recognized scholars through continuous educational relationships. This chain guarantees the authenticity, credibility, and accountability of religious knowledge. Within the TikTok *dakwah* ecosystem, however, the process of establishing legitimacy extends beyond formal scholarly genealogy. Platform algorithms determine the visibility of religious content, content creators strategically adapt their communication styles to algorithmic

preferences, and audiences collectively evaluate credibility through engagement practices such as liking, commenting, sharing, following, and participating in live discussions. Consequently, digital *sanad* should not be understood as a replacement for classical *sanad* but rather as a digitally mediated network of recognition in which technological infrastructures, communication practices, and collective validation jointly contribute to the construction of contemporary religious authority.

Previous studies on digital religion consistently demonstrate that social media platforms have transformed the mechanisms through which religious authority is recognized and disseminated. Research examining Islamic communication on TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram indicates that recommendation algorithms significantly influence which religious narratives become visible and widely consumed. Simultaneously, studies on religious influencers argue that content creators increasingly combine theological messages with persuasive storytelling, visual creativity, emotional expression, and platform-specific communication strategies to increase audience engagement. Investigations into participatory media further reveal that audiences actively contribute to the formation of credibility by validating religious messages through interaction, discussion, and recommendation. Collectively, these studies suggest that digital authority is no longer determined solely by institutional recognition but increasingly depends on the interaction between technological visibility and audience participation. Nevertheless, most previous studies discuss these elements independently rather than explaining how they collectively construct a coherent framework of digital *sanad*.

Other scholars have emphasized that algorithmic recommendation systems function as invisible mediators connecting religious content creators with potential audiences. Platform algorithms continuously analyze behavioral data, including watch duration, interaction frequency, completion rates, reposting activities, and user preferences, to personalize religious content recommendations. Consequently, creators frequently optimize video length, titles, hashtags, audiovisual presentation, and publication timing to maximize algorithmic exposure. Audience engagement subsequently reinforces algorithmic decisions by increasing the circulation of highly interactive content through additional recommendations. Studies grounded in platform governance therefore argue that authority within digital environments is co-produced through reciprocal interactions among algorithms, communicative strategies, and participatory audiences. However, these investigations rarely connect such computational dynamics with the Islamic concept of *sanad*, leaving limited theoretical understanding regarding how digital legitimacy evolves through technological mediation while remaining symbolically associated with traditional Islamic knowledge transmission.

A critical examination of the existing literature reveals an important conceptual limitation. Studies focusing on Islamic epistemology generally emphasize teacher-student transmission, scholarly lineage, and institutional

legitimacy while paying relatively little attention to computational infrastructures that increasingly mediate religious communication. Conversely, research concerning algorithmic governance often conceptualizes visibility and engagement as technological outcomes without considering the epistemological dimensions of Islamic authority. Similarly, investigations into digital influencers predominantly assess communication effectiveness, branding strategies, or audience behavior rather than examining legitimacy as an evolving sociotechnical phenomenon. This disciplinary fragmentation restricts scholarly understanding because contemporary religious authority cannot be fully explained solely through either classical Islamic scholarship or algorithmic mechanisms. Instead, digital *sanad* should be conceptualized as a hybrid epistemological process in which algorithmic recommendation, creator performance, audience participation, and symbolic religious credibility continuously interact to produce socially recognized religious legitimacy.

Across the reviewed literature, several consistent patterns can be identified. First, algorithmic recommendation systems serve as the initial mechanism determining which religious messages receive public visibility. Second, content creators actively adjust their communication strategies to align with platform logic while maintaining religious narratives capable of attracting audience attention. Third, audiences function as active evaluators rather than passive consumers, continuously reinforcing or challenging perceived religious credibility through digital interaction. Fourth, repeated engagement contributes to the accumulation of symbolic legitimacy, enabling certain creators to become influential religious references despite differing educational backgrounds. Finally, traditional scholarly credentials remain relevant, yet their influence increasingly intersects with algorithmic amplification and participatory validation. These recurring patterns indicate that digital *sanad* develops through multidirectional interactions among technological systems, communicative practices, and collective social recognition rather than through a single source of authority.

This thematic synthesis contributes directly to the overarching objective of explaining how digital *sanad* is constructed within TikTok *dakwah*. The reviewed literature demonstrates that religious legitimacy in contemporary digital environments is increasingly negotiated through the interconnected roles of recommendation algorithms, strategic religious communication, and participatory audience engagement. Accordingly, digital *sanad* represents an evolving conceptual bridge between classical Islamic epistemology and contemporary digital sociology, illustrating how technological infrastructures participate in reshaping pathways of religious knowledge transmission. This conceptualization enriches discussions on digital religion by demonstrating that algorithmic authority not only affects content visibility but also influences the broader processes through which Islamic authority, credibility, and educational legitimacy are socially constructed in platform-based communication environments.

Table 2. Literature Synthesis on the Construction of Digital *Sanad*

Author & Year	Research Focus	Method	Main Findings	Contribution
Campbell (2021)	Networked religion	Literature Review	Religious authority is increasingly networked and participatory	Explains the social transformation of religious authority
Bunt (2018)	Islam in digital media	Literature Review	Digital media expand Islamic knowledge beyond traditional institutions	Foundation for digital Islamic communication
Abidin (2021)	Influencer communication	Qualitative	Authenticity and communication style strengthen audience trust	Explains creator legitimacy
Bishop (2021)	TikTok recommendation algorithm	Digital Ethnography	Algorithms determine content visibility through user engagement	Explains algorithmic mediation
Cotter (2019)	Algorithm awareness	Qualitative Interviews	Creators adapt content to algorithmic preferences	Describes creator-algorithm interaction
Gillespie (2018)	Platform governance	Conceptual	Algorithms function as digital gatekeepers	Foundation of algorithmic authority
Hoover (2021)	Media and religion	Conceptual	Religious practices are reconstructed through media environments	Media as a source of religious legitimacy
Zulli & Zulli (2022)	TikTok participatory culture	Qualitative	Audience interaction amplifies digital credibility	Explains audience validation
Klinger & Svensson (2018)	Platform logic	Conceptual	Platform logic shapes public communication	Explains technological influence on discourse
Lewis (2020)	Social media legitimacy	Qualitative	Public engagement contributes to social legitimacy	Connects engagement with authority

Interpretation of the Literature Synthesis

The synthesized literature demonstrates a strong convergence regarding the multidimensional nature of digital religious authority. Studies originating from digital religion emphasize the transformation of religious legitimacy into a networked and participatory process, while platform governance research explains the computational mechanisms responsible for regulating content visibility. At the same time, investigations into influencer communication reveal that creators actively negotiate algorithmic preferences by adapting communication styles capable of maximizing audience engagement. Collectively, these findings indicate that religious authority within TikTok *dakwah* is no longer determined exclusively by institutional recognition but increasingly emerges through continuous interactions among technological infrastructures, communication practices, and collective audience participation.

Another important pattern concerns the complementary relationship among algorithms, creators, and audiences. Rather than functioning independently, these three elements reinforce one another in constructing digital

sanad. Recommendation algorithms provide visibility, creators produce religious narratives optimized for digital dissemination, and audiences validate legitimacy through repeated interaction and symbolic endorsement. This cyclical relationship creates a self-reinforcing process whereby greater engagement generates broader visibility, which subsequently increases perceived credibility and further strengthens public recognition. Consequently, digital *sanad* should be understood as a sociotechnical network of legitimacy in which computational systems and human actors collaboratively shape the transmission and recognition of Islamic knowledge in contemporary digital environments.

Theoretical Implications of the Emergence of Digital *Sanad* for Contemporary Islamic Authority and Knowledge Transmission

The emergence of **digital sanad** represents a significant theoretical development in understanding the transformation of Islamic authority and knowledge transmission in the digital era. Traditionally, *sanad* has functioned as a verified chain of scholarly transmission that guarantees the authenticity, continuity, and legitimacy of Islamic knowledge through direct educational relationships between teachers and students. Classical Islamic epistemology places considerable emphasis on intellectual genealogy, scholarly integrity, and institutional recognition as the primary foundations of religious authority. However, the rapid expansion of digital communication platforms has introduced new mechanisms through which religious knowledge is produced, disseminated, and validated. Within social media environments such as TikTok, religious legitimacy increasingly develops through the interaction of recommendation algorithms, creator performance, audience engagement, and networked communication. Consequently, the concept of digital *sanad* extends traditional understandings of knowledge transmission by acknowledging that technological infrastructures now participate alongside religious actors in shaping contemporary Islamic authority. This theoretical perspective does not replace classical *sanad* but reconceptualizes it within digitally mediated communication ecosystems.

Previous studies in digital religion consistently argue that technological developments have fundamentally altered religious practices, institutional structures, and public engagement with religious knowledge. Research on networked religion demonstrates that online environments encourage decentralized forms of authority in which multiple actors contribute to religious interpretation and dissemination. Similarly, studies examining Islamic communication highlight that digital platforms enable broader participation in religious education by reducing institutional barriers and expanding access to Islamic learning resources. Meanwhile, scholarship on algorithmic authority emphasizes that recommendation systems increasingly influence public exposure to religious content by prioritizing engagement-based visibility rather than formal scholarly credentials. Collectively, these studies suggest that contemporary Islamic authority has become increasingly distributed across

technological systems, communication networks, and participatory digital communities. Nevertheless, much of the existing literature continues to examine these transformations separately, without proposing an integrated theoretical explanation for how Islamic epistemology adapts to algorithmically mediated knowledge environments.

Additional research focusing on digital literacy, platform governance, and online religious influencers further demonstrates that authority within digital environments emerges through continuous interaction among multiple social and technological actors. Religious content creators strategically optimize communication styles to increase algorithmic visibility, while audiences actively negotiate credibility through comments, recommendations, discussion forums, and repeated engagement. Platform algorithms simultaneously reinforce these interactions by amplifying content that generates sustained user activity. Scholars investigating Islamic educational communication argue that this participatory environment transforms religious learning into a collaborative process extending beyond conventional institutional boundaries. However, despite recognizing the changing dynamics of religious communication, relatively few studies explicitly connect these developments with the classical Islamic concept of *sanad*. Consequently, existing scholarship provides valuable empirical insights but remains limited in explaining how digital interaction reconstructs the epistemological foundations of Islamic authority within platform-based communication ecosystems.

A critical analysis of the reviewed literature reveals that contemporary discussions concerning digital religion frequently prioritize technological innovation while underestimating the continuing relevance of Islamic epistemological principles. Conversely, studies grounded in traditional Islamic scholarship often preserve classical understandings of authority without sufficiently addressing the influence of algorithmic mediation and participatory digital culture. This disciplinary separation produces a theoretical gap in explaining how technological systems reshape—not replace—the processes through which religious legitimacy is established and recognized. The concept of digital *sanad* addresses this limitation by integrating classical notions of scholarly continuity with contemporary theories of algorithmic governance, digital communication, and networked participation. Rather than conceptualizing technology and tradition as opposing forces, digital *sanad* demonstrates that contemporary Islamic authority evolves through the reciprocal interaction between established epistemological values and emerging digital infrastructures. Such an integrated perspective offers a more comprehensive explanation of authority formation within contemporary Muslim digital communities.

Several recurring patterns emerge across the synthesized literature. First, scholars consistently recognize that digital technologies have decentralized religious communication by enabling wider participation in knowledge production and dissemination. Second, recommendation algorithms increasingly influence which religious narratives become publicly visible, thereby indirectly

shaping perceptions of legitimacy. Third, audience participation functions as a critical mechanism through which algorithmic visibility is transformed into social recognition and symbolic authority. Fourth, traditional scholarly credentials continue to influence perceptions of credibility but increasingly operate alongside algorithmic popularity and digital engagement. Finally, interdisciplinary studies suggest that future theories of Islamic authority must incorporate computational infrastructures, media ecology, and participatory communication alongside classical Islamic epistemology. These patterns collectively indicate that digital *sanad* should be understood as an adaptive epistemological framework capable of explaining the coexistence of traditional scholarship and algorithmically mediated religious legitimacy.

The theoretical implications identified in this review contribute directly to the broader objective of understanding religious authority within contemporary digital environments. By conceptualizing digital *sanad* as a hybrid model of knowledge transmission, this study demonstrates that Islamic authority is increasingly negotiated through interactions among religious scholarship, technological infrastructures, communication practices, and participatory audiences. This perspective expands existing theories of digital religion by integrating Islamic epistemology with algorithmic authority, thereby providing a novel conceptual framework for interpreting contemporary religious legitimacy. Furthermore, the concept of digital *sanad* contributes to future interdisciplinary research by offering an analytical foundation for investigating how digital technologies reshape educational authority, religious learning, and knowledge transmission across diverse Islamic digital ecosystems. Consequently, the emergence of digital *sanad* represents not merely a technological phenomenon but a broader epistemological transformation within contemporary Islamic thought.

Table 3. Literature Synthesis on the Theoretical Implications of Digital Sanad

Author & Year	Research Focus	Method	Main Findings	Contribution
Campbell (2021)	Networked Religion	Literature Review	Religious authority becomes decentralized and participatory	Explains transformation of religious authority
Bunt (2018)	Digital Islam	Literature Review	Digital platforms expand Islamic learning beyond institutions	Foundation of digital Islamic knowledge
Hoover (2021)	Media and Religion	Conceptual	Media reconstructs religious practices and authority	Explains mediation of religious legitimacy
Gillespie (2018)	Algorithmic Governance	Conceptual	Algorithms regulate information visibility	Foundation of algorithmic authority
Cotter (2019)	Algorithm Awareness	Qualitative	Users and creators adapt to algorithmic systems	Explains algorithm-human interaction
Bishop (2021)	TikTok Recommendation System	Digital Ethnography	Recommendation systems amplify engaging content	Explains technological visibility
Abidin (2021)	Influencer Culture	Qualitative	Authenticity strengthens digital credibility	Explains creator legitimacy

Zulli & Zulli (2022)	Participatory Culture	Qualitative	Audience reinforces authority	engagement digital	Explains collective validation
Klinger & Svensson (2018)	Platform Logic	Conceptual	Platform logic shapes public communication		Links technology and discourse
Lewis (2020)	Digital Legitimacy	Qualitative	Public contributes to legitimacy	interaction to social	Connects engagement with authority formation

Interpretation of the Literature Synthesis

The reviewed studies collectively demonstrate that contemporary Islamic authority can no longer be adequately explained through institutional or theological perspectives alone. Research on digital religion consistently shows that technological platforms have transformed religious communication into a networked and participatory process, while studies on algorithmic governance explain the computational mechanisms that determine public visibility. Complementary investigations into influencer communication and participatory culture further reveal that creators and audiences actively shape perceptions of religious credibility. Together, these perspectives indicate that authority within digital environments emerges through continuous interaction among technology, communication, and collective social recognition.

A second pattern evident across the literature concerns the growing convergence between classical Islamic epistemology and digital communication studies. Although earlier scholarship often treated these domains separately, recent studies increasingly acknowledge that technological infrastructures influence the contemporary transmission of Islamic knowledge. Nevertheless, the literature still lacks an integrative theoretical framework capable of explaining how traditional concepts such as *sanad* evolve within algorithmically mediated environments. The concept of digital *sanad* proposed in this review addresses this limitation by synthesizing insights from Islamic epistemology, digital religion, and algorithmic authority into a unified explanation of contemporary religious legitimacy.

Discussion

The findings of this literature review demonstrate that the transformation of Islamic authority in the digital era cannot be adequately explained through conventional theories of religious leadership that emphasize institutional legitimacy, scholarly lineage (*sanad*), and formal educational credentials alone (Wahid & Abdulloh, 2026). Instead, the emergence of algorithmic authority reveals that technological infrastructures have become active participants in shaping the visibility, circulation, and recognition of religious knowledge within digital environments. Recommendation systems employed by TikTok determine which religious messages are repeatedly presented to users, thereby influencing public perceptions of credibility before audiences have the opportunity to evaluate the theological substance of the content itself. The reviewed literature consistently indicates that authority is increasingly negotiated through the

interaction between computational selection, communicative performance, and audience participation. This finding supports the perspective of digital religion and networked religion, which argues that religious authority has become decentralized and socially negotiated through digital communication networks. However, this review extends these theories by demonstrating that algorithms should not be regarded merely as neutral technological tools but as sociotechnical mechanisms that indirectly shape the contemporary construction of Islamic legitimacy (Suheri, 2025). Consequently, the concept of digital *sanad* emerges as an analytical framework that integrates technological mediation with classical Islamic epistemology, offering a more comprehensive explanation of religious authority in contemporary Muslim digital communities.

A comparison of previous studies further reveals both convergence and divergence in explaining the transformation of religious authority. Research grounded in Islamic epistemology consistently emphasizes that scholarly legitimacy originates from verified educational transmission, intellectual continuity, and ethical accountability embodied in the classical concept of *sanad*. Conversely, studies within media sociology, platform governance, and digital communication argue that authority increasingly depends upon algorithmic visibility, creator performance, and participatory engagement within social media ecosystems. Although these theoretical traditions initially appear contradictory, the present review demonstrates that they are complementary rather than mutually exclusive (Qudsy et al., 2023). Traditional *sanad* continues to function as the normative foundation of authentic Islamic knowledge, while algorithmic systems increasingly determine the pathways through which that knowledge reaches contemporary audiences. The reviewed literature therefore suggests that religious authority now develops through the intersection of theological authenticity and computational mediation. Rather than replacing institutional scholarship, digital communication expands the mechanisms through which legitimacy is recognized, negotiated, and disseminated. This integrated interpretation contributes to reconciling the apparent tension between classical Islamic educational traditions and emerging forms of digitally mediated religious communication.

Despite broad agreement concerning the growing influence of digital platforms, the reviewed studies also exhibit important differences regarding the relative significance of algorithms, content creators, and audiences. Some scholars emphasize the dominant role of recommendation algorithms as computational gatekeepers responsible for determining public visibility (Husniyah et al., 2026). Others argue that communication strategies, emotional storytelling, authenticity, and audiovisual creativity employed by religious content creators constitute the principal determinants of digital influence. Meanwhile, another body of literature highlights participatory audiences as the central actors because social legitimacy ultimately depends upon collective recognition expressed through likes, comments, shares, and online discussions. Rather than privileging one perspective over another, this review indicates that

these three dimensions operate as an interconnected sociotechnical system. Algorithms regulate exposure, creators produce platform-appropriate religious narratives, and audiences validate credibility through continuous interaction. The emergence of digital *sanad* therefore results from reciprocal relationships among technological infrastructures, human agency, and collective social participation. This synthesis provides a more holistic explanation than previous studies that typically examined these dimensions independently, thereby addressing an important conceptual gap within contemporary scholarship on digital religion (Wahid, 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, the proposed concept of **digital sanad** contributes to the development of interdisciplinary knowledge by integrating Islamic epistemology with theories of algorithmic authority, digital religion, platform governance, and networked communication. Previous scholarship has generated valuable insights into each of these domains, yet relatively few studies have established a unified conceptual framework capable of explaining how technological systems participate in reconstructing Islamic authority without dismissing the normative significance of classical *sanad*. The present review therefore proposes that digital *sanad* should be understood as a hybrid epistemological model in which traditional scholarly legitimacy and algorithmically mediated public recognition coexist within contemporary digital ecosystems. This conceptualization broadens existing theories by acknowledging that religious authority is simultaneously theological, technological, communicative, and social. Furthermore, it provides a theoretical foundation for future empirical investigations examining how digital platforms influence religious education, Islamic knowledge transmission, media literacy, and the evolving relationship between religious institutions and online communities. Consequently, the concept of digital *sanad* represents a meaningful contribution to the growing interdisciplinary discourse concerning religion and technology in the twenty-first century.

The practical implications of this review are equally significant for Islamic education, religious institutions, and educational policymaking. Educational institutions, including Islamic schools, universities, and pesantren, should recognize that digital literacy has become inseparable from religious literacy because students increasingly encounter Islamic knowledge through algorithmically curated social media environments. Consequently, educational curricula should integrate critical digital literacy with classical Islamic epistemology, enabling learners to evaluate religious content not only according to its popularity but also according to its scholarly credibility, methodological rigor, and ethical foundations. Religious organizations and *dakwah* practitioners should likewise develop communication strategies that maintain theological authenticity while adapting to the communicative characteristics of digital platforms without compromising scholarly integrity. At the policy level, collaboration among educational institutions, digital platform providers, and religious authorities is needed to promote responsible algorithmic governance,

strengthen public awareness of credible religious information, and reduce the circulation of misleading or unverified religious content. Through these efforts, the concept of digital *sanad* can serve not merely as a theoretical construct but also as a practical framework for fostering responsible, credible, and epistemologically grounded Islamic education within increasingly algorithm-driven digital societies.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative literature review concludes that the emergence of algorithmic authority has fundamentally transformed the construction of Islamic religious authority within the TikTok *dakwah* ecosystem. The synthesized literature demonstrates that contemporary religious legitimacy is no longer determined solely by classical *sanad*, institutional affiliation, or formal scholarly credentials, but increasingly emerges through the interaction between platform algorithms, religious content creators, and participatory audience engagement. Recommendation algorithms regulate the visibility of religious content, creators strategically adapt their communication to platform dynamics, and audiences collectively validate credibility through continuous digital interaction, resulting in the formation of **digital sanad** as a new network of religious legitimacy. Rather than replacing the classical concept of *sanad*, digital *sanad* complements it by explaining how Islamic authority is negotiated within algorithmically mediated communication environments. Theoretically, this study contributes by integrating perspectives from Algorithmic Authority Theory, Digital Religion Theory, Networked Religion, Platform Governance, and Islamic Epistemology into a unified analytical framework, thereby providing a broader understanding of the transformation of Islamic authority and knowledge transmission in the digital era.

Practically, the findings emphasize the importance of strengthening digital literacy alongside Islamic religious literacy within educational institutions, pesantren, universities, and *dakwah* organizations so that online religious content is evaluated not only based on algorithmic popularity but also on scholarly credibility and epistemological authenticity. The concept of digital *sanad* offers a useful analytical framework for educators, religious leaders, policymakers, and digital content creators in developing responsible and credible religious communication in digital spaces. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its reliance on secondary literature and the absence of empirical evidence examining the experiences of content creators, religious scholars, and audiences within the TikTok *dakwah* ecosystem. Therefore, future research is encouraged to employ qualitative approaches, such as digital ethnography, netnography, in-depth interviews, comparative case studies, and discourse analysis, to further explore how digital *sanad* is negotiated across different social media platforms, cultural contexts, and Islamic communities.

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