

## RECONFIGURING RELIGION IN THE DIGITAL ERA: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE MEDIATIZATION OF RELIGION IN INDONESIA

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### Abstract

This article examines how religion is reconfigured in the era of digital platforms and proposes a conceptual framework for the mediatization of religion in Indonesia. While existing scholarship on digital religion has provided rich empirical insights, much of it remains fragmented and often limited to specific platforms or practices. This study addresses that limitation by reconstructing the multidimensional framework of Rodrigues and Harding and integrating it with mediatization theory, the phenomenology of religion, and digital religion scholarship. The study employs a conceptual and analytical approach based on a focused literature review and theoretical synthesis. The analysis produces a framework organized around five interrelated components: media logic, algorithmic curation, networked community, authority shift, and ethical governance. Building on this framework, the article advances three conceptual propositions concerning algorithmic shifts in authority, the transformation of sacred experience under digital mediation, and the expansion of epistemic participation alongside its associated risks. To demonstrate the analytical capacity of the framework, the article draws on literature-based illustrations of the digital *hijrah* movement and online *pengajian* in Indonesia. These cases show how digital infrastructures reshape authority, ritual practice, and community formation while also generating tensions related to fragmentation, polarization, and misinformation.

**Keywords:** *Digital religion, Mediatization of religion, Algorithmic curation, Networked authority*

### Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana agama mengalami rekonfigurasi di era platform digital dan mengajukan sebuah kerangka konseptual untuk memahami mediatization of religion di Indonesia. Meskipun kajian tentang agama digital telah menghasilkan temuan empiris yang kaya, sebagian besar masih bersifat terfragmentasi dan sering terbatas pada platform atau praktik tertentu. Penelitian ini mengatasi keterbatasan tersebut dengan merekonstruksi kerangka multidimensional Rodrigues dan Harding serta mengintegrasikannya dengan teori mediatization, fenomenologi agama, dan kajian agama digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan konseptual-analitis berbasis kajian literatur terfokus dan sintesis teoretis. Hasil analisis menghasilkan kerangka yang terdiri atas lima komponen utama yang saling terkait, yaitu media logic, algorithmic curation, networked community, authority shift, dan ethical governance. Berdasarkan kerangka ini, artikel ini mengajukan tiga proposisi konseptual terkait pergeseran otoritas berbasis algoritma, transformasi pengalaman sakral dalam kondisi mediasi digital, serta perluasan partisipasi epistemik beserta risikonya. Untuk menunjukkan kapasitas analitis kerangka

tersebut, artikel ini menggunakan ilustrasi berbasis literatur mengenai fenomena hijrah digital dan pengajian daring di Indonesia. Kedua kasus ini memperlihatkan bagaimana infrastruktur digital membentuk ulang otoritas, praktik ritual, dan pembentukan komunitas, sekaligus memunculkan ketegangan seperti fragmentasi, polarisasi, dan penyebaran misinformasi.

**Kata Kunci:** *Agama digital, Mediatisasi agama, Kurasi algoritmik, Otoritas berjejaring*

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## **A. Introduction**

Over the past two decades, developments in communication technology have changed how religion is present, practiced, and understood. Religious life no longer unfolds primarily in physical places of worship or through institutional authority alone. It also takes shape in digital spaces that are networked, interactive, and transnational. Social media, streaming platforms, and religious apps allow religious experience to appear as content, identity performance, and communal interaction, all of which are deeply shaped by platform design. In this environment, religion is not simply transferred to the internet. It is reconfigured through mechanisms of mediation such as audiovisual formats, popularity metrics, and algorithmic curation, all of which influence the visibility of religious messages, patterns of connection, and forms of participation.

Scholarship on digital religion has shown that online religion is not a straightforward migration of faith into web-based spaces, but a reconfiguration of belief and practice through technology (Campbell 2012). In a related vein, mediatization theory treats media as an institution with its own logic, one that can reshape other social institutions, including religion (Hjarvard 2008). Digital religiosity, then, should be understood as more than the circulation of religious information. It also involves changes in authority, community formation, and religious experience as these are reproduced through digital media.

In Indonesia, research on religion in digital spaces has expanded significantly. Studies have shown how young Muslims, especially women, use Instagram to construct Islamic identities through visual culture and hijrah narratives (Baulch and Pramiyanti 2018; Nisa 2018). Other work has examined how social media has helped produce popular religious authorities and new forms of digital piety (Hew 2018; Slama 2018). Research has also drawn attention to the relationship between algorithmic logic and the formation of information enclaves and identity polarization, including religious identity (Lim 2017). Meanwhile, studies on televangelism, popular Islam, and fashionable Sufism have demonstrated that media has become a major force in the transformation of contemporary religiosity in Indonesia (Heryanto 2014; Howell 2008).

Although this literature is rich in empirical detail, much of it remains centered on description or on practices tied to specific platforms and media environments. As a result,

the conceptual tools used in these studies often remain fragmented and are not yet consolidated enough to examine religious change simultaneously across belief, religious experience, symbols, rituals, and communal life. This is precisely where the multidimensional framework developed by Rodrigues and Harding (2008) becomes valuable. They understand religion as a multidimensional phenomenon that includes belief, religious experience, symbols, rituals, and communal life, while also stressing the importance of studying religion in ways that are both rigorous and reflexive (Rodrigues and Harding 2008). Although their framework predates the rise of social media platforms, it still offers a useful conceptual map for identifying what changes when religion is mediated through digital technology.

At the same time, efforts to adapt classical frameworks in the study of religion to the mediatization of digital religion, especially in Indonesia, remain limited. At least three gaps stand out. First, there has been little work examining how the multidimensional features of religion, such as belief, experience, symbols, rituals, and community, operate under conditions shaped by platform logic and algorithmic curation. Second, there is still no coherent synthesis that brings together mediatization theory (Hjarvard), the phenomenology of religion (Eliade 1959; Otto 1923), and digital religion scholarship (Campbell 2005, 2012) within a single operational analytical model. Third, scholarship has yet to formulate a framework explicitly designed to analyze shifts in authority, transformations in ritual practice, and questions of ethical governance within Indonesia's digital religious ecosystem.

Studies of the mediatization of religion and digital religion have already explained important changes in religious practice and authority in digital settings. Three limitations, however, remain especially visible. First, these studies often work at a macro or institutional level and therefore do not fully capture religion as an integrated multidimensional phenomenon involving experience, ritual, symbols, community, and authority. Second, mediatization theory has rarely been connected systematically to the phenomenology of religion, particularly the work of Otto and Eliade, which means that transformations in sacred experience often remain at the level of description. Third, algorithmic curation, including recommendation systems, ranking, and personalization, is usually treated as a technical background condition rather than as a mechanism that shapes visibility, attention, affect, and religious authority. These gaps become more significant in Indonesia, where religious preaching and authority have increasingly moved into platform ecosystems such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp, producing celebrity preachers and influencers while intensifying contestation between moderation and conservatism under conditions strongly shaped by engagement logic and algorithmic distribution. The unresolved question, therefore, is how algorithmic curation works within digital mediatization to transform the dimensions of religion and the experience of the sacred within Indonesia's contemporary religious landscape.

In response to this gap, this study reconstructs the Rodrigues and Harding framework in order to formulate a conceptual framework for the mediatization of religion

in the digital era, with algorithmic curation positioned as a central analytical component. The article addresses three questions: first, how can the multidimensional conception of religion proposed by Rodrigues and Harding be reconstructed for the context of digital mediatization; second, how can this framework be integrated with mediatization theory, the phenomenology of religion, and digital religion scholarship to produce a coherent analytical model; and third, what are the implications of such a model for the development of religious studies in Indonesia? The article's theoretical contribution lies in its integrative model, which treats algorithmic curation as a mediating mechanism that operates across the dimensions of religion by regulating the visibility of symbols, modulating ritual practice, shaping community, and shifting authority. In doing so, it extends mediatization studies beyond media logic toward platform and algorithmic logic, while offering a more operational analytical tool for the study of digital religion in Indonesia.

This study makes three contributions. First, it critically reconstructs the Rodrigues and Harding concept of religion as a multidimensional phenomenon so that it can better address religiosity in the age of digital platforms. Second, it formulates a conceptual framework for the mediatization of religion in the digital era by integrating Rodrigues and Harding with mediatization theory, the phenomenology of religion, and digital religion scholarship through five core components: media logic, algorithmic curation, networked communities, shifts in authority, and ethical governance. Third, it operationalizes this framework by mapping the theoretical synthesis onto prior studies of digital hijrah and online pengajian, thereby showing how the framework helps explain shifts in authority and transformations in ritual practice in the Indonesian context.

## **B. Methods**

This study is a conceptual and analytical inquiry based on a focused critical literature review and theoretical synthesis, and it does not involve the collection or analysis of primary data. The materials examined consist of secondary sources, primarily academic books and journal articles, identified through Google Scholar, Scopus, and Garuda/Sinta, with additional backward searching from key references. The literature search used both English and Indonesian keywords, including *digital religion*, *mediatization of religion*, *networked religion*, *algorithmic curation*, *platform governance*, *authority shift*, *Islam online*, *hijrah*, and *online pengajian*. The review focused mainly on publications from 2008 to 2025, while also incorporating selected classical works where necessary to provide the phenomenological foundation of the study.

The sources were selected purposively according to four criteria: they addressed the relationship between religion and media, engaged issues of authority, ritual, community, religious experience, algorithms, or ethical governance, demonstrated sufficient academic relevance, and were either directly connected to Indonesia or conceptually important for interpreting the Indonesian case. Popular non-academic materials, duplicate sources, and works that did not contribute meaningfully to the

analytical focus of the article were excluded. The final body of literature was organized around four main clusters: the multidimensional study of religion associated with Rodrigues and Harding, mediatization theory, the phenomenology of religion, and scholarship on digital religion and platform or algorithmic dynamics.

The analysis proceeded through conceptual mapping and thematic comparison across these clusters in order to identify points of convergence, difference, and tension, which were then synthesized into the framework proposed in this article. This process produced five analytical components: media logic, algorithmic curation, networked communities, shifts in authority, and ethical governance, along with the conceptual propositions derived from them. To illustrate how the framework works, the article draws on two literature-based analytical illustrations rather than field-based case studies: digital hijrah as an example of shifting authority and the formation of networked communities, and online *pengajian* as an example of the transformation of ritual practice and sacred experience in synchronous and asynchronous settings. The scope of the study is limited to Islam in Indonesia and to religious practices shaped through social media, streaming platforms, and video-conferencing services.

## **C. Results and Discussion**

### **1. Conceptual Foundations and Theoretical Problematization**

#### **a. The Multidimensionality of Religion in the Rodrigues and Harding Framework: Contributions and Limits**

Rodrigues and Harding (2008) approach religion as a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be adequately explained from a single standpoint. Drawing together the phenomenology of religion, especially Otto and Eliade, with the sociology of religion associated with Durkheim (1915) and Weber (1930), they understand religion as an interconnected configuration of belief, ritual, community, sacred experience, and practices of meaning-making articulated through symbols and language.

This framework remains important for at least three reasons. First, it resists disciplinary reductionism by refusing to collapse religion into doctrine alone, social function alone, or psychological experience alone. Second, it provides a reflective and critical basis for understanding religion as a practice that is always entangled with social and historical context, identity, and relations of power (Harding 1991; Rodrigues 2006). Third, Rodrigues and Harding make clear that religious experience is always mediated rather than experienced in a pure form detached from symbolic systems and social structures.

Yet the Rodrigues and Harding framework was not designed for the contemporary ecology of digital platforms, and for that reason it is less capable of explaining three central dynamics of digital religion. First, algorithmic curation shapes the visibility, ordering, and amplification of religious discourse through logics of ranking, recommendation, and personalization driven by engagement rather than by theological or institutional legitimacy. Second, authority becomes deterritorialized, as legitimacy can be

built through platform metrics and follower networks rather than through traditional structures of religious authority. Third, asynchronous temporality shifts ritual practice and participation into on-demand formats, changing patterns of togetherness, repetition, and the intensity of religious experience.

These limitations form the point of departure for this study. The central question is how the multidimensionality proposed by Rodrigues and Harding can be reconstructed so that it can account for the transformation of religion under digitally mediated conditions structured by algorithmic curation, particularly in Indonesia. To address this question, the present article places their framework in dialogue with mediatization theory, the phenomenology of religion, and digital religion scholarship in order to develop a more operational analytical framework.

#### **b. The Mediatization of Religion: From Hjarvard to the Problem of the Algorithmic**

Stig Hjarvard's concept of the mediatization of religion offers an important starting point for understanding media as more than a channel for transmitting religious messages. Media becomes a constitutive environment that reshapes religious practice, authority, and experience. Hjarvard argues that media has become a new social and cultural environment in which religion is produced, circulated, and interpreted. Religion, in this view, is no longer simply communicated through media but is increasingly shaped by media logic itself. He identifies three principal relations between religion and media: *religious media*, which refers to representations of religion as media content; *mediated religion*, which refers to the use of media as an instrument for religious communication and dissemination; and *media as religion*, in which media functions directly as a mediator of religious experience (Hjarvard 2008).

At the same time, Hjarvard's formulation emerged primarily from the context of secular Western Europe and was focused largely on traditional mass media such as television and radio. Two limits become apparent when this framework is applied to digital media and to Indonesia. The first concerns the absence of algorithmic curation as a distinct structural mechanism. Digital platform algorithms are not simply an extension of media logic in the conventional sense. They are part of platformization, a broader reorganization of the production, circulation, and consumption of content through datafication, commodification, and algorithmic selection (Poell et al. 2019). These automated systems sort, amplify, and suppress content according to engagement metrics (Bucher 2018; Gillespie 2018), rather than according to theological quality or traditional religious authority. In the religious sphere, this means that viral religious content is not always the most authoritative. It is often the content most compatible with algorithmic criteria: brief, emotionally charged, and capable of generating controversy (Cheong 2017). Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok operationalize this logic through recommendation systems and automated moderation that determine what becomes visible and invisible in the digital religious ecosystem (Gillespie 2020; Gorwa

et al. 2020). The result is a new hierarchy of visibility that may diverge sharply from, or even contradict, established hierarchies of religious authority.

The second limit lies in the secularization assumption embedded in Hjarvard's theory. His account assumes that mediatization unfolds against a background of secularization in which media takes over functions previously performed by religious institutions. The Indonesian case points in a different direction. Mediatization in Indonesia has developed within a society marked by the desecularization and Islamization of public space (Heryanto 2014; Howell 2008). Studies of digital hijrah movements (Nisa 2018) and celebrity preachers show that mediatization in Indonesia often strengthens the visibility and vitality of religious expression rather than diminishing it (Hew 2018). Hjarvard's theory therefore requires contextual reworking if it is to explain how mediatization operates in a religiously vibrant society.

To address these limitations, this study integrates mediatization theory with the concepts of algorithmic authority (Bucher 2018; Kellogg et al. 2020) and platform governance (Gorwa 2019). This synthesis allows for a more precise account of how algorithmic curation shapes the ecosystem of digital religious authority. Algorithms are not neutral filters. They are structural forces that shape the conditions under which religious content is produced, circulated, and consumed. Religious figures who master the grammar of platforms through short-form delivery, strong visual presentation, and emotionally resonant narrative gain visibility more easily regardless of the depth of their scholarship. This produces a form of authority that is no longer dependent on traditional institutional legitimacy (Cotter 2019).

### **c. Digital Religion: From Campbell to the Problem of Networked Authority**

Heidi Campbell's framework of the religious-social shaping of technology emphasizes that religious communities are not passive recipients of technology. They are active agents that negotiate, adapt, and modify technological forms in light of their own values and traditions. Campbell's concept of *networked religion* highlights continuity between offline and online religious practice. Values, norms, and rituals remain central, but their modes of enactment are adjusted to the logic of digital media. Shared prayer through Zoom, online sermons on YouTube, and virtual confession hosted on church websites are examples of the adaptation of religion to digital settings. These cases show that digital technology is not a neutral medium but a social environment in which religious values, practices, and symbols are continuously negotiated (Campbell 2005, 2012).

Stewart Hoover (2006) complements this perspective by treating media as a symbolic arena in which religion encounters public discourse. For Hoover, media functions as a dialogical space in which religious values can be expressed, negotiated, and critically examined. Media thus becomes a site where religion is not simply communicated but continually reconstructed in public life (Hoover 2006). The emergence of virtual religious communities marks a major shift in the social structure of religiosity. Digital communities allow bonds of faith to form without physical proximity, producing what Campbell (2005) describes as a *networked ecclesia*.

Campbell's major contribution lies in her rejection of technological determinism. Technology does not automatically transform religion. Religion and technology shape one another through complex processes of negotiation. Even so, Campbell's framework is less effective in explaining the mechanisms through which authority shifts in digital settings. Empirical studies in Indonesia suggest that digital religious authority involves more than symmetrical negotiation. It involves a deeper structural reconfiguration. Martin Slama (2018) shows that young preachers with large social media followings can surpass older and more institutionally established ulama in reach and influence. Nisa (2018) similarly shows that digital hijrah communities construct authority through personal testimony and peer validation rather than through institutional credentials from pesantren or Islamic universities.

This phenomenon cannot be fully explained through Campbell's emphasis on continuity because what we see here is also structural discontinuity. A new form of authority, which may be called *networked authority*, operates according to a logic different from that of traditional institutional authority. This authority is built through followers, engagement metrics, and the ability to produce content that fits platform grammar, rather than through conventional pathways such as formal religious education, endorsement by senior ulama, or affiliation with established organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama or Muhammadiyah. Any adequate conceptual framework must therefore account for both continuity and discontinuity in the transformation of religious authority in the digital era.

#### **d. Conceptual Dialogue: Compatibility, Contradiction, and Synthesis**

A coherent conceptual framework requires a clear account of how the theories used in this study relate to one another. Without such clarification, theoretical integration risks becoming eclectic rather than genuinely synthetic. The value of synthesis lies in producing an internally coherent framework with greater explanatory force than the individual theories can provide on their own.

At the level of compatibility, the Rodrigues and Harding framework of multidimensional religion aligns with Hjarvard's mediatization theory in its rejection of reductionism. Both insist that religion cannot be understood through a single dimension, whether theological or sociological. In a similar way, Eliade's concept of *homo religiosus*, which suggests that religious human beings continually seek the sacred in everyday life, is compatible with Campbell's concept of networked religion, which treats digital spirituality as an extension rather than a distortion of religiosity. Both perspectives recognize that religion is not confined to formal places of worship but permeates multiple domains of life, including digital environments.

There are, however, tensions that must be reconciled. Otto and Eliade, working within the phenomenology of religion, stress direct encounter with the sacred through the *numinous* and *hierophany*, whereas mediatization theory emphasizes that experience is always shaped by media structures. This tension can be addressed by distinguishing technological mediation, which is historically new, from symbolic and ritual mediation,

which has always been part of religious life. The sacred has always been mediated through symbols, language, and ritual. Digital technology introduces an additional layer of mediation rather than replacing earlier forms. Numinous experience in digital settings therefore remains possible. One may experience a sense of sacred presence during virtual collective prayer or while listening to a sermon online, but that experience is now also mediated by technological infrastructures with their own operating logics.

A further tension appears between critical approaches that understand digital platforms as instruments of colonization and commodification (Couldry and Mejias 2019; Fuchs 2014) and Campbell's more negotiated account of technology. The reconciliation proposed here is that digital technology is indeed a space of negotiation, but it is not an equal one. The political economy of platforms shapes the conditions under which negotiation takes place. Religious communities may negotiate how they use technology, but they do so within structures already organized by commercial interests, algorithmic design that privileges engagement, and the broader logic of the attention economy.

This conceptual dialogue makes clear the need for a framework that integrates four elements: the multidimensionality of religion as articulated by Rodrigues and Harding, the structural mechanisms of algorithmic mediatization that exceed conventional media logic, the agency of communities in negotiating technological forms as emphasized by Campbell, and the critical dimension of inequality and power developed in critical digital theory. None of these elements can be reduced to another, yet none can adequately explain religion in the digital era when treated in isolation.

## **2. The Conceptual Framework for the Mediatization of Religion in the Digital Era: Definition, Propositions, and Model**

### **a. Defining the Study of the Mediatization of Religion in the Digital Era**

Building on the critical reconstruction of the Rodrigues and Harding framework and its dialogue with mediatization theory and digital religion scholarship, this study proposes the following formal definition: the study of the mediatization of religion in the digital era is an interdisciplinary analytical framework that examines religion as a system of meaning produced, circulated, negotiated, and transformed through digital media infrastructures, with particular attention to the dialectical interaction among five core components: media logic, algorithmic curation, networked community, authority shift, and ethical governance. This definition has three operational implications that distinguish it from earlier frameworks. First, religion is understood as a process rather than a static substance, shifting the analytical focus from what religion is to how religion is produced and reproduced under digital conditions. Second, digital media infrastructures are treated as structural variables rather than neutral tools, since algorithms, platform architectures, and business models shape the conditions under which digital religious practices become possible and visible. Third, the five core components provide units of analysis that can be operationalized in future empirical research, allowing the framework to be tested and further developed through concrete case studies.

### **b. Conceptual Propositions for Future Research**

The framework advances three conceptual propositions that can be tested empirically. These propositions are not merely descriptive summaries of contemporary religious life. They are causal claims about mechanisms that can be verified, refined, or challenged through further research. The first proposition concerns algorithmic shifts in authority. Algorithmic curation on digital platforms contributes to a shift in religious authority away from formal institutions such as *ulama*, *pesantren*, and religious assemblies and toward forms of networked authority grounded in engagement metrics, algorithmic visibility, and peer-to-peer validation. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok prioritize content according to views, likes, shares, and comments rather than according to theological credentials or institutional legitimacy. Religious figures who command platform grammar through brevity, visual fluency, and emotionally resonant narratives therefore gain visibility more easily regardless of scholarly depth.

The second proposition concerns the transformation of digital hierophany. Sacred experience in digital settings undergoes a structural shift from forms grounded in shared physical presence and synchronous participation toward liminal experiences mediated by technological infrastructures, in which sacred time and sacred space can be accessed asynchronously, personally, and repeatedly. The concept of *hierophany* in Eliade refers to the manifestation of the sacred within the profane. Under digital conditions, that manifestation does not disappear, but the conditions of its mediation change. Ritual participation becomes less dependent on physical co-presence, collective immediacy may be sustained through virtual formats, and sacred encounters can be revisited through recordings, archives, and repeated access.

The third proposition concerns epistemic democratization and its risks. Digital mediation expands access to the production and circulation of religious knowledge, thereby distributing interpretive authority more broadly across networked participants. At the same time, it creates risks in the form of fragmented authority, epistemic polarization, and the rapid circulation of religious misinformation. The same infrastructure that lowers barriers to entry for religious interpretation also weakens traditional mechanisms of validation and gatekeeping. Individuals without formal credentials can produce commentary, gather audiences, and shape discourse, which may enrich the religious public sphere but may also intensify doctrinal confusion, echo chambers, and unstable forms of verification.

### **c. Positioning the Framework**

This framework differs from earlier approaches in several important respects. First, unlike classical mediatization theory, it does not stop at media logic in the conventional sense of mass-media formats. In this framework, media logic also includes platform architecture, interface design, and recommendation systems that shape the visibility and circulation of religious content. Second, whereas Campbell's concept of digital religion and networked religion emphasizes the negotiation of technology by religious communities and the continuity between offline and online practice, the present

framework explicitly adds authority shift and ethical governance as distinct analytical dimensions. It therefore does more than explain how religious communities adapt to technology. It also maps how legitimacy, hierarchies of authority, and mechanisms of normative regulation are reconfigured by platform logic, engagement metrics, and visibility incentives. Third, the framework expands the multidimensionality of religion as formulated by Rodrigues and Harding by treating digital infrastructure as part of the constitutive mediation of religiosity itself. If belief, ritual, symbols, community, and religious experience have always been mediated through language and social structure, then in the digital era they are also mediated through media logic, algorithmic curation, networked community, authority shift, and ethical governance. The integration of these five components into a single coherent model constitutes the article’s primary theoretical contribution to the study of religion in the digital age.

**d. The Five-Component Model and Intercomponent Relations**

The framework is operationalized through a five-component model whose elements are systematically interrelated. As the original manuscript states, Table 1 is presented as an operational map for future research. It offers a guide to units of analysis, minimum indicators, potential data sources, and analytical techniques that can be used to test the five-component model and the three propositions empirically. Because this article is conceptual in nature, the table is not presented as the result of primary measurement. It functions instead as a design for operationalization in later case-based research.

Table 1.

Conceptual Operational Framework for Future Empirical Research on the Five-Component Model of the Mediatization of Religion in the Digital Era

Component	Operational definition (unit of analysis)	Core indicators (minimum)	Illustrative application ( <i>digital hijrah</i> / online <i>pengajian</i> )	Potential data sources	Analytical techniques	Related proposition
Media logic	Platform-specific formats and communicative grammar that shape the production, packaging, and consumption of religious content. Unit of analysis: content form and performative style.	Format and duration; live or recorded mode; visual aesthetics; emotional, motivational, polemical, or instructional style.	<i>Digital hijrah</i> : testimonial narratives, aesthetic visual branding, motivational quotations. Online <i>pengajian</i> : adaptive duration, audiovisual quality, live-chat interaction, segmented sermon delivery.	Posts, livestreams, metadata, thumbnails, titles, hashtags, captions, screenshots, archived videos.	Content analysis, multimodal analysis, rhetorical analysis, thematic coding.	P2
Algorithmic curation	Mechanisms of selection, ranking, recommendation, and distribution that determine the visibility of religious content. Unit of analysis: search results, feeds, recommendations, and circulation pathways.	Search-result ranking; recommendation patterns; repetition of similar content; visibility shifts based on engagement signals.	<i>Digital hijrah</i> : rising exposure after repeated interaction with hijrah-related content. Online <i>pengajian</i> : recurring recommendation of similar themes, speakers, or channels.	Search pages, recommendation on pages, controlled user accounts, screen recordings, browsing traces, platform observation data.	Algorithm audit, ranking analysis, cross-account comparison, longitudinal comparison.	P1, P3
Networked community	Digitally connected religious formations that	Forms of interaction;	<i>Digital hijrah</i> : peer circles, hashtag-	Comment threads,	Network analysis,	P3

	are not dependent on geographic proximity but are sustained through symbolic identification, interaction, and flexible participation. Unit of analysis: affiliation patterns and interactional ties.	participation intensity; recurring symbols, hashtags, slogans, or shared vocabulary; continuity of engagement.	based belonging, Telegram or WhatsApp support groups. Online <i>pengajian</i> : recurring digital congregations organized around channels, livestreams, or study groups.	messaging groups, follower networks, community pages, digital interaction traces.	digital ethnography, discourse analysis, interaction mapping.	
Authority shift	Reconfiguration of religious legitimacy from hierarchical institutional authority toward more networked and participatory forms. Unit of analysis: claims to credibility, recognition, and influence.	Basis of authority such as credentials, charisma, metrics, or peer validation; relative visibility; audience trust; contestation among authority sources.	<i>Digital hijrah</i> : influencer-preachers gaining credibility through testimony and engagement. Online <i>pengajian</i> : preachers building loyal audiences beyond formal institutions.	Sermons, profiles, engagement metrics, audience comments, interviews, institutional statements, community endorsements	Comparative discourse analysis, credibility mapping, audience analysis, platform metric analysis.	P1
Ethical governance	Normative and regulatory arrangements shaping digital religious practice, including platform rules, moderation, and standards of responsible religious communication. Unit of analysis: norms, moderation practices, and responses to harm.	Communication ethics; moderation practices; responses to misinformation, hate speech, radicalizing content, and harmful preaching.	<i>Digital hijrah</i> : disputes over acceptable preaching styles and truth claims. Online <i>pengajian</i> : moderation of chat spaces, channel rules, and communal responses to harmful content.	Community guidelines, moderation logs where available, platform policies, public debates, user reports, institutional guidance.	Policy analysis, normative analysis, critical discourse analysis, case comparison.	P3

*Source: adapted from the article's theoretical synthesis and designed as an operational guide for future empirical studies rather than as the product of primary data analysis in the present article.*

The first component is media logic, which refers to the grammar and formats that shape how religious content is produced and consumed. In digital settings, this includes a preference for visual content, compressed narrative, shareable formats, and aesthetics aligned with platform conventions. The second is algorithmic curation, understood as the automated mechanism through which platforms select, rank, and distribute content according to specific metrics. It functions as a structural force that determines what becomes visible and what remains marginal within the digital religious ecosystem. The third is networked community, which refers to religious formations constituted through digital connection rather than geographic proximity. These communities are often characterized by broad but weak ties, symbolic identification, and flexible forms of participation. The fourth is authority shift, meaning the reconfiguration of religious authority from hierarchical institutional models toward networked and participatory ones. This shift does not eliminate institutional authority, but it multiplies competing sources of legitimacy. The fifth is ethical governance, which refers to the norms, values, and regulatory mechanisms that shape digital religious practice, including responsible religious communication, content moderation, and platform accountability in relation to risks such as radicalization, hate speech, and misinformation.

The relationships among these components can be summarized clearly. Media logic shapes algorithmic curation because platform formats and communicative grammar influence the criteria through which algorithms sort and amplify content. Algorithmic curation, in turn, affects authority shift by determining who becomes visible and audible within the digital religious ecosystem. Media logic also influences authority directly, since religious figures who can communicate effectively within platform conventions often gain an advantage in attracting audiences. Shifts in authority then shape networked communities, as followers organize themselves around newly visible figures and develop new patterns of affiliation and solidarity. Ethical governance cuts across all four components because every stage of digital mediation raises normative questions about legitimacy, responsibility, harm, and regulation. The five-component model should therefore be understood as a relational framework rather than as a set of isolated variables. It is designed to guide future empirical inquiry, not to present field-based findings within the present conceptual study.

### **3. Ontological, Epistemological, Methodological, and Axiological Dimensions within a Coherent Framework**

The framework for the study of the mediatization of religion in the digital era is organized through four mutually reinforcing dimensions: ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological. Together, these dimensions form a coherent analytical structure. Ontological assumptions about how digital religion operates shape the epistemological focus of the study, especially with regard to the production and validation of knowledge. That epistemological orientation, in turn, informs methodological choices, while the entire framework is guided by an axiological commitment to the purposes and values of research.

At the ontological level, religion is treated as a system of meaning that is always mediated by language, symbols, rituals, social structures, and, in the present context, digital infrastructures. This claim is grounded in social constructionism, particularly Berger and Luckmann's (1966) argument that social reality is produced through ongoing processes of meaning-making. The implication is that religion cannot be understood apart from the media through which it is experienced and communicated. Changes in media infrastructure, from print to broadcasting to digital platforms, reshape how religion is lived, circulated, and interpreted. Sacred experience does not disappear under conditions of mediation. It acquires additional layers of mediation that alter how religious meaning is produced and encountered. In Indonesia, this dynamic can be seen in the reconfiguration of religious expression through fashionable Sufism (Howell 2008), popular Islam (Heryanto 2014), and the rise of digital preachers who produce and circulate religious meaning in platform-specific formats.

At the epistemological level, the digital era is marked by the diffusion of religious knowledge beyond institutional centers such as *pesantren*, *madrasah*, Islamic universities, and religious councils toward a more diverse network of actors, including

digital preachers, influencers, online communities, and individual users. As a result, the validation of religious knowledge becomes more open while also more contested. This condition generates a form of epistemic democratization that may widen access to religious learning but also increases the risk of fragmentation and misinformation. The expansion of access, selection, and evaluation through digital media has been discussed by Hutchings (2017) and Campbell (2005), particularly in relation to the wide availability of sermons, teachings, and religious commentary across multiple platforms. What counts as credible knowledge is therefore no longer determined solely through institutional authority, but increasingly through circulation, recognition, and interaction in digital environments.

Methodologically, the complexity of digital religion calls for an interdisciplinary approach that brings together theology, the phenomenology of religious experience, socio-technical analysis of algorithms and platform architectures, and digital discourse analysis. Relevant methods include digital ethnography (Pink et al. 2016), which can capture religious practice and interaction in online settings, social network analysis to map authority structures and flows of information, and algorithmic or platform analysis to explain the mechanisms that shape visibility, recommendation, and content distribution. Methodological triangulation is essential. Qualitative approaches are needed to understand meaning, experience, and religious narration, while quantitative and computational approaches help map reach, engagement, recommendation patterns, and networked relations. Researcher reflexivity is equally important because researchers themselves are also platform users and are therefore exposed to algorithmic curation that may influence data selection, observation, and interpretation.

At the axiological level, the study of digital religion should do more than describe emerging phenomena. It should also contribute to religious digital literacy, religious moderation, and digital ethics. This orientation reflects a commitment to research that is analytically rigorous while remaining attentive to its social consequences. Principles of moderation are important here because they can support dialogue and help restrain extremism (Esposito 2011). The digital transformation of religion should therefore be examined with an ethical concern for how platforms, authorities, and communities shape values in public life. Ideally, digital religious transformation should strengthen humanity, social justice, and peace rather than deepen polarization, exclusion, or spiritual emptiness.

#### **4. Applying the Framework: Digital Religious Phenomena in Indonesia**

This section does not present primary empirical findings. Instead, it offers analytical illustrations that demonstrate how the proposed framework can be applied to two widely discussed forms of digital religious practice in Indonesia: the digital hijrah movement and online *pengajian* (religious study gatherings). These cases show how the five components—media logic, algorithmic curation, networked community, authority shift, and ethical governance—operate in concrete settings and how they relate to the three conceptual propositions.

**a. Phenomenon 1: Authority Shifts in the Digital Hijrah Movement**

The hijrah movement, which has grown rapidly since the mid-2010s, is characterized by narratives of “returning to Islam” that circulate through social media (Nisa 2018). It provides a rich case for examining how the five components of the framework interact in practice.

In terms of media logic, hijrah narratives are shaped by the communicative grammar of digital platforms. Personal testimony functions as a dominant genre. Stories of transformation—from a past framed as morally lacking to a more pious present—are conveyed through emotionally engaging and relatable narratives. Visual aesthetics also play a central role. Fashionable expressions of modest dress, stylized Islamic quotes, and curated lifestyle imagery are used to signal both identity and aspiration. Content is designed to be easily shared, often appearing as short videos, motivational captions, or visually appealing infographics. These features shape how hijrah is communicated and how audiences engage with it.

Algorithmic curation amplifies these patterns. Platform algorithms tend to prioritize content that generates high engagement. Preachers and influencers who adopt popular communication styles—clear messaging, emotional tone, and strong visual presentation—are more likely to gain visibility. This creates a feedback loop: increased visibility leads to more followers, which generates more engagement and further boosts visibility. Content that is emotionally charged or controversial may circulate more widely, which can influence the kinds of religious messages that become prominent in the digital ecosystem.

Networked communities emerge through hashtags such as #hijrah and #muslimahberhijrah, as well as through group-based interactions on platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp. These communities are not tied to physical proximity. Instead, they are formed through shared narratives, symbolic identification, and ongoing interaction. Participants often experience a sense of belonging and mutual support even without face-to-face contact. Community ties are sustained through repeated engagement, shared experiences, and the circulation of similar forms of content.

Authority shift is especially visible in this case. New religious figures gain legitimacy through visibility, audience interaction, and the ability to communicate effectively within platform environments. Their authority does not primarily derive from institutional credentials or long-standing scholarly training, but from their capacity to connect with audiences and sustain attention over time. This produces a form of networked authority that operates alongside, and sometimes in tension with, traditional religious institutions.

Ethical governance appears in debates over what constitutes an authentic or responsible form of hijrah. Discussions around the commercialization of piety, the boundaries of proper religious guidance, and the role of established institutions such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah reflect ongoing negotiation over norms and legitimacy. These debates show that digital religious space is not value-neutral. It is a site

of contestation where standards of authority, authenticity, and responsibility are continuously redefined.

This case illustrates Proposition 1 (algorithmic authority shift) and Proposition 3 (epistemic democratization and its risks). Authority becomes increasingly tied to visibility and engagement, while the production of religious meaning becomes more participatory and widely distributed, though also more fragmented.

**b. Phenomenon 2: The Transformation of Ritual Practice in Online Pengajian**

The expansion of online *pengajian* through platforms such as Zoom, YouTube Live, and WhatsApp groups—accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic and continuing thereafter—provides a second case for analyzing how religious practice is transformed in digital environments (Baker et al. 2020; Dein et al. 2020).

Media logic shapes how ritual is adapted to digital formats. Sessions tend to be shorter to accommodate attention patterns in online settings. Interaction takes place through chat functions and comment sections rather than through direct, synchronous dialogue. Recordings are often made available, allowing participants to revisit the session at any time. This shifts the temporal structure of ritual from a singular event to a repeatable and on-demand experience. Visual presentation also matters. Lighting, sound quality, and background settings influence perceptions of credibility and authority.

Algorithmic curation plays a role in structuring exposure. Platforms such as YouTube recommend religious content based on prior viewing behavior, creating personalized pathways through religious material. Users who watch particular types of *pengajian* are more likely to encounter similar content, which can deepen engagement with certain perspectives while limiting exposure to others. Search rankings further shape which religious content is encountered first and which remains less visible.

Networked communities form through repeated participation in live sessions, interactions in chat spaces, and ongoing engagement in digital groups. Participants often report a sense of shared presence even without physical co-location. These communities are flexible and geographically dispersed, allowing individuals from different regions to participate in the same religious activities.

Authority shifts are also evident. Religious figures who are adept at using digital tools and managing online interaction gain wider reach. Some emerge as “digital specialists” whose influence is built primarily through online platforms rather than traditional teaching settings. Technical competence, production quality, and communication style become part of what defines religious authority in this context.

Ethical governance emerges through debates over the legitimacy of online ritual, the ethics of digital donations, and the responsibility to ensure the accuracy of religious teaching. Questions about whether online participation fulfills religious obligations, how financial contributions are managed, and how misinformation is addressed highlight the normative dimensions of digital religious practice.

This case illustrates Proposition 2 (the transformation of digital hierophany). Sacred experience is reconfigured through technological mediation. Ritual can be

accessed asynchronously, participation can occur without physical presence, and experiences can be repeated and shared. Participants often describe these experiences as spiritually meaningful, even though their structure differs from face-to-face gatherings.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This study argues that religiosity in the era of digital platforms is best understood as a process of reconfiguration rather than simple relocation into online spaces. The production, circulation, and interpretation of religion are shaped by media logic and, more decisively, by algorithmic curation, which structures visibility, patterns of connection, and competition over authority within digital environments. To address the limitations of platform-specific and fragmented approaches in existing scholarship, this article reconstructs the multidimensional framework of Rodrigues and Harding and integrates it with mediatization theory, the phenomenology of religion, and digital religion studies.

The result is a conceptual framework for the mediatization of religion in the digital era that is organized around five interrelated components: media logic, algorithmic curation, networked communities, authority shift, and ethical governance. The framework is further articulated through three propositions that can be examined in future empirical research: the shift of religious authority toward algorithmically mediated visibility, the transformation of sacred experience under conditions of digital mediation, and the expansion of epistemic participation alongside its associated risks.

The analytical illustrations of digital hijrah and online *pengajian* demonstrate that the framework is capable of capturing both the transformation of authority and the reconfiguration of ritual and sacred experience in the context of Indonesian Islam. At the same time, these cases highlight the tensions generated by epistemic democratization, including fragmentation, polarization, and the circulation of misinformation. These findings reinforce the need for approaches to digital religion that attend not only to practice and representation but also to the structural role of platforms and algorithms.

Because this article is conceptual and does not rely on primary empirical data, its contribution lies in offering an analytical model and a set of testable propositions. Further research is needed to examine these propositions through empirical approaches such as digital ethnography, network analysis, platform analysis, and studies of algorithmic curation across different communities, issues, and platforms. Future work should also remain attentive to the ethical dimensions of digital religion, particularly in relation to religious digital literacy, moderation, and the broader goal of supporting more inclusive and responsible digital religious environments.

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