JURNAL ILMIAH
ISLAM FUTURA
Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry

ISSN 1412-1190
E-ISSN 2407-7542

Vol. 26. No. 2, August 2026, 502-528

FROM MOSQUE TO METAVERSE: NEGOTIATING ISLAMIC AUTHORITY IN ROBLOX–BASED MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

In the era of digital da'wah, religious communication has shifted from conventional, one-way preaching to interactive and participatory virtual spaces. This study examines how religious authority is constructed and exercised within Roblox as a user-generated gaming platform. Using a qualitative multiple-case study design, the research examines two Roblox-based Muslim communities, *Majelis Roblox Indonesia* (MARIO) and *Ngaji* Roblox. Data were collected through participant observation conducted in July 2025 and semi-structured interviews with eight participants in August 2025, consisting of two key actors and six community participants. The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke, complemented by a cross-case comparison of the two communities. The findings show that religious authority in the two communities is constructed through two distinct pathways. In the MARIO case, authority is primarily established through the prior recognition of religious figures and credentials that are introduced into the Roblox environment, representing a process of re-authoring. In contrast, in the *Ngaji* Roblox case, Syauqi's credibility develops through participation, interaction, communicative performance, and community recognition within the virtual environment, representing a process of authoring. These findings demonstrate that digital religious authority is not dependent solely on pre-existing institutional legitimacy but can also be constructed through community recognition and digital participation. Thus, Roblox functions not merely as a medium for transmitting religious messages but also as a social space in which legitimacy, authority, and community relations are negotiated. This study contributes to digital religion scholarship by demonstrating that the transformation of religious authority in virtual spaces can involve both the relocation of established authority and the emergence of new forms of community-based recognition.

Keywords: Online Religion, Religious Authority, Gamified Da'wah.

Abstrak

Di era dakwah digital, komunikasi keagamaan telah bergeser dari dakwah konvensional satu arah menuju ruang virtual yang interaktif dan partisipatif. Studi ini mengkaji bagaimana otoritas keagamaan dibangun, diakui, dan dinegosiasikan dalam Roblox sebagai platform permainan berbasis pengguna. Dengan menggunakan desain

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Citation: Syahid, Akhmad, Alfan F. Rahman, Alifah N. Fadilah, Ibnu Azka, and Firman Muhammad Arif "From Mosque to Metaverse: Negotiating Islamic Authority in Roblox–Based Muslim Communities." *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 26, no. 2 (2026): 502–528

10.22373/jiif.v26i2.34445

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studi kasus kualitatif multipel, penelitian ini mengkaji dua komunitas Muslim berbasis Roblox, yaitu Majelis Roblox Indonesia (MARIO) dan Ngaji Roblox. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif pada Juli 2025 dan wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan delapan partisipan pada Agustus 2025, yang terdiri atas dua aktor kunci dan enam anggota komunitas. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik refleksif mengikuti Braun dan Clarke, yang dilengkapi dengan perbandingan lintas kasus. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa otoritas keagamaan dalam kedua komunitas terbentuk melalui dua jalur yang berbeda. Dalam kasus MARIO, otoritas terutama dibangun melalui pengakuan sebelumnya terhadap figur dan kredensial keagamaan yang kemudian diperkenalkan ke dalam lingkungan Roblox, yang merepresentasikan proses re-authoring. Sebaliknya, dalam kasus Ngaji Roblox, kredibilitas Syauqi berkembang melalui partisipasi, interaksi, kinerja komunikatif, dan pengakuan komunitas di lingkungan virtual, yang merepresentasikan proses authoring. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa otoritas keagamaan digital tidak hanya bergantung pada legitimasi institusional sebelumnya, tetapi juga dapat dikonstruksi melalui pengakuan komunitas dan partisipasi digital. Dengan demikian, Roblox tidak sekadar berfungsi sebagai media penyampaian pesan keagamaan, tetapi juga sebagai ruang sosial tempat legitimasi, otoritas, dan relasi komunitas dinegosiasikan. Studi ini berkontribusi pada kajian agama digital dengan menunjukkan bahwa transformasi otoritas keagamaan dalam ruang virtual dapat berlangsung melalui relokasi otoritas yang telah mapan sekaligus munculnya bentuk pengakuan baru yang berbasis komunitas.

Kata Kunci: *Agama Daring, Otoritas Keagamaan, Dakwah yang Digamifikasi*

مستخلص

في عصر الدعوة الرقمية، تحوّل التواصل الديني من الوعظ التقليدي أحادي الاتجاه إلى فضاءات افتراضية تفاعلية تشاركية. تتناول هذه الدراسة كيفية بناء السلطة الدينية وممارستها داخل منصة روبلوكس، وهي منصة ألعاب قائمة على المحتوى الذي ينشئه المستخدمون. باستخدام تصميم دراسة نوعية متعددة الحالات، تبحث هذه الدراسة في مجتمعين إسلاميين على منصة روبلوكس: مجلس روبلوكس إندونيسيا (MARIO) ومجتمع «Ngaji Roblox». جُمعت البيانات من خلال الملاحظة بالمشاركة التي أُجريت في يوليو 2025، ومقابلات شبه منظمة مع ثمانية مشاركين في أغسطس 2025، يتألفون من فاعلين رئيسيين وستة أعضاء من المجتمعين. حُلّلت البيانات باستخدام التحليل الموضوعي التأملي وفقًا لمنهج براون وكلارك، مع استكمال التحليل بمقارنة بين الحالتين. تُظهر النتائج أن السلطة الدينية في كلا المجتمعين تتشكل عبر مسارين متميزين. ففي حالة ماريو، تُبنى السلطة أساسًا من خلال الاعتراف المسبق بالشخصيات الدينية ومؤهلاتها، التي تُقدَّم لاحقًا داخل بيئة روبلوكس، ما يمثل عملية إعادة تشكيل السلطة الدينية (re-authoring). في المقابل، في حالة نغاجي روبلوكس، تتطور مصداقية شوقي من خلال المشاركة والتفاعل والأداء التواصلي والاعتراف المجتمعي في البيئة الافتراضية، ما يمثل عملية تشكيل السلطة الدينية (authoring). تشير هذه النتائج إلى أن السلطة الدينية الرقمية لا تعتمد فقط على الشرعية المؤسسية السابقة، بل يمكن بناؤها أيضًا من خلال الاعتراف المجتمعي والمشاركة الرقمية. وبالتالي، لا تعمل روبلوكس كوسيلة لنقل الرسائل الدينية فحسب، بل أيضًا كمساحة اجتماعية يجري فيها التفاوض حول الشرعية والسلطة والعلاقات المجتمعية.

تُسهم هذه الدراسة في بحوث الدين الرقمي من خلال إظهار أن تحوّل السلطة الدينية في الفضاءات الافتراضية يمكن أن يشمل نقل السلطة القائمة وظهور أشكال جديدة من الاعتراف القائم على المجتمع.

الكلمات الرئيسية: الدين عبر الإنترنت، السلطة الدينية، الدعوة المُدمجة في التلعيب

A. Introduction

The digital revolution of the past decade has significantly reshaped Islamic *da'wah* (religious preaching and outreach). While conventional methods relied on mosque pulpits, religious assemblies, and printed materials, contemporary *da'wah* increasingly takes place through social media, online videos, podcasts, mobile applications, and virtual environments. These media expand the geographical reach of Islamic propagation and enable more interactive forms of engagement through comments, live discussions, virtual gatherings, and user-generated religious content.[1] However, digitalization also creates challenges for the production and transmission of religious knowledge. Religious hoaxes, misattributed hadiths, unsupported claims, and decontextualized interpretations can circulate rapidly, while the compression of complex teachings into short and engaging content may simplify religious messages.[2] Networked communities can also intensify ideological contestation by allowing users to selectively engage with perspectives that reinforce existing positions.[3] More importantly, digital platforms have created opportunities for religious authority to emerge beyond conventional institutional structures. Religious actors may gain influence through visibility, communication skills, community participation, and audience recognition rather than solely through formal credentials.[4] This development raises an important question concerning how Islamic authority is constructed, recognized, and negotiated when religious interaction takes place in virtual environments such as Roblox.

Meanwhile, Amin and Sururi reveal a complex reception among young audiences of digital da'wah: although 72% of respondents accessed digital *da'wah* more than three times a

[1] Dede Sihabudin et al., "Transformasi Dakwah Islam Melalui Strategi Dan Implementasi Di Era Digital," *Jurnal Khabar: Komunikasi Dan Penyiaran Islam* 6, no. 2 (December 2024): 97–108, https://doi.org/10.37092/khabar.v6i2.908; Ahmad Tamrin Sikumbang et al., "Digital Da'wah Indonesia Ulema in the Discourse of Theology," *Pharos Journal of Theology*, no. 105(1) (December 2023), https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.1051; Muhammad Choirin et al., "Muballigh in the Digital Age Based on Insights from Indonesian Phenomena: Leveraging Digital Learning for the Promotion of Islamic Values," *Al-Balagh : Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 9, no. 2 (July 2024): 167–90, https://doi.org/10.22515/albalagh.v9i2.7751.

[2] Ibnu Azka, *Matinya Mimbar : Perjumpaan Agama dan Media dalam Diskursus Sosial* (Yogyakarta: Deepublish, 2026), 3.

[3] Campbell, Heidi A., and Louise Connelly. "Religion and Digital Media." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Materiality*, edited by Vasudha Narayanan. Wiley Blackwell, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118660072.ch25

[4] Moch. Khafidz Fuad Raya, "Digital Islam: New Space for Authority and Religious Commodification Among Islamic Preachers in Contemporary Indonesia," *Contemporary Islam* 19, no. 1 (April 2025): 161–94, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-024-00570-z; Sikumbang et al., "Digital Da'wah Indonesia Ulema in the Discourse of Theology."

week, only 52% reported significant behavioral changes, while 45% expressed confusion over the diversity of interpretations circulating on social media.[5] Such findings suggest that exposure to digital *da'wah* alone does not explain how religious messages acquire credibility. Instead, attention must also be given to the processes through which religious actors become trusted and recognized as authoritative. Existing scholarship on digital religious authority has largely examined social media, websites, and video-sharing platforms, where authority is mediated through visibility, algorithmic circulation, and audience engagement. Less is known about authority in immersive, game-based environments in which users interact through avatars, virtual gatherings, user-generated worlds, and platform-specific forms of participation.

This gap is particularly relevant to Roblox, a user-generated gaming platform that can also function as a space for social interaction, community formation, and religious activity. Recent scholarship on digital religion and gaming indicates that virtual environments can accommodate religious practices in which users actively participate rather than simply consume religious content. [6] However, studies of religion and gaming have generally emphasized the adaptation of religious practices, spiritual experiences, education, or *da'wah* strategies rather than the processes through which religious authority itself is constructed and negotiated.[7] Accordingly, this study focuses on two Roblox-based Muslim communities, Majelis Roblox Indonesia (MARIO; Indonesian Roblox Islamic Assembly) and *Ngaji* Roblox (Roblox Islamic Study Community), to examine how authority is produced and recognized within their specific social environments.

The concept of religious authority requires attention to both legitimacy and social recognition. Weber distinguishes power (*Macht*) from legitimate domination (*Herrschaft*), emphasizing that authority involves the probability that commands will be obeyed because they are recognized or accepted as legitimate.[8] This distinction is useful for examining digital environments, where influence can be exercised without formal institutional power or coercive

[5] Fathul Amin and Agus Ali Sururi, "Dakwah Digital: Mengukur Dampak dan Efektivitas Kampanye Dakwah Online terhadap Audiens Muda," *PROGRESIF : Jurnal Dakwah, Sosial, dan Komunikasi* 2, no. 1 (2025): 1–13, https://doi.org/10.63199/progresif.v2i1.31.

[6] Justin Thomas, Mohammad Amin Kuhail, and Fahad AlBeyahi, "The Metaverse, Religious Practice and Wellbeing: A Narrative Review," *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 27, no. 1 (2024), https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2023.0003

[7] Christopher Helland, "Online Religion as Lived Religion: Methodological Issues in the Study of Religious Participation on the Internet," *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 1, no. 1 (2005), https://doi.org/10.11588/rel.2005.1.380; Laksana, Muhibudin Wijaya, Dody S. Truna, and Roro Sri Rejeki Waluyajati. "Platformized Religiosity in Digital Games: A Critical Review of Roblox." *Jurnal Penelitian Agama* 27, no. 1 (2026): 1–18. https://doi.org/10.24090/jpa.v27i1.2026.pp1-18; Piotr Lendzion, "Mediatyzacja Kultu Religijnego Na Przykładzie Mszy w Roblox," *Łódzkie Studia Teologiczne* 33, no. 4 (December 2024): 37–49, https://doi.org/10.52097/lst.2024.4.37-49.

[8] Vedat Yilmaz and Cüneyt Telsaç, "Authority and Bureaucracy From Weber's Perspective," *Mehmet Akif Ersoy Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, no. 34 (November 2021): 42–52, https://doi.org/10.20875/makusobed.903546.

capacity. In Islamic contexts, religious authority has historically been associated with religious knowledge, interpretive competence, scholarly transmission, and recognition within communities of learning.[9] Authority is therefore not reducible to formal institutional position but is constituted through relationships among knowledge, interpretation, religious practice, and communal recognition. This understanding is compatible with Talal Asad's conception of Islam as a discursive tradition, in which inherited religious discourses and practices are continuously interpreted and reproduced under changing historical conditions.[10] Religious authority can consequently be understood as neither completely fixed nor detached from tradition, but as sustained through processes of interpretation, teaching, practice, and recognition.

Helland's digital religion framework further clarifies this process by distinguishing between *religion-online* and *online-religion*. The former concerns the use of digital media to disseminate religious information, whereas the latter emphasizes religious practices actively performed and experienced within digital environments.[11] This distinction is particularly relevant to Roblox because users can participate in religious gatherings, communicate with other participants, construct symbolic representations, and negotiate religious meanings through digitally mediated interaction. Roblox should therefore not be treated as inherently constituting "online religion"; rather, particular religious activities and interactions conducted through the platform can be analyzed as forms of online religious practice. Such an approach shifts attention from digital media as a passive channel of religious communication toward digital environments as social spaces in which religious practices and authority are actively performed and negotiated.

Previous studies demonstrate the relevance of this perspective. Istiqomah et al. identify a movement from authority associated with *sanad* (scholarly lineage) toward forms of algorithmically mediated authority shaped by engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and views.[12] Ibrahim similarly describes "Cyber Imams" who use digital infrastructures to disseminate *da'wah* and cultivate online religious influence.[13] In gaming and metaverse

[9] Zulkifli, "The Ulama in Indonesia : Between Religious Authority and Symbolic Power," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu- ilmu Keislaman* 37, no. 1 (2013): 185, https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v37i1.79

[10] Ovamir Anjum, "Islam as a Discursive Tradition: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 3 (December 2007): 656–72, https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201x-2007-041.

[11] Helland, Christopher. Online Religion as Lived Religion. Methodological Issues in the Study of Religious Participation on the Internet," *Heidelberg Journal of Religions* 1 (2005), https://doi.org/10.11588/rel.2005.1.380.

[12] Istiqomah, Dina, Muhammad Rusidi, and Opi Yensi. Tafsir Digital : Antara Adaptasi Dan Krisis Otoritas Keagamaan," *Lathaif* 4, no. 1 (2025). 41–56, https://doi.org/10.31958/lathaif.v4i1.15416.

[13] Ibrahim, Murtala. Islam in the Digital Infrastructure: The Rise of Islamic Cyber Practices in Northern Nigeria," *Religion, State and Society* 52, no. 2–3 (May 2024) : 114–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2024.2353956.

contexts, Laksana et al. examine platformized religiosity in Roblox, while Lendzion discusses the mediation of religious worship through Roblox. [14] Other studies explore games as channels for *da'wah* and religious education, including the use of gamification to increase engagement.

Research on the metaverse has also examined religious experience, social interaction, wellbeing, and community formation.[15] This development calls for a broader understanding of digital religious practices beyond the conventional dissemination model of online preaching. Collectively, these studies establish that digital and game-based environments can accommodate meaningful religious practices. Yet they leave a more specific question insufficiently addressed: how do religious actors become recognized as authoritative within game-based Muslim communities, and how do participation, interaction, content production, and community recognition shape that authority?

To examine these processes, this study focuses on two Roblox-based Muslim communities, Majelis Roblox Indonesia (MARIO) and *Ngaji* Roblox. Rather than assuming that Roblox produces an entirely new form of religious authority, the study investigates how existing understandings of authority are reproduced, negotiated, and reconfigured within a game-based virtual environment. The study asks three questions: How is Islamic religious authority constructed and negotiated within Roblox-based Muslim communities? What forms of participation, social interaction, content production, and community recognition contribute to the construction and legitimation of religious authority in these communities? Furthermore, how do community members understand and respond to religious authority emerging through their interactions in Roblox? These questions allow the analysis to examine whether digital religious authority primarily reproduces established hierarchies, develops through new forms of social recognition, or emerges through an interaction between the two.

The analysis integrates three complementary theoretical perspectives. First, Weber's theory of authority provides a foundation for examining legitimacy and the relationship between established forms of authority and recognition based on personal qualities and social acceptance.[16] In a digital context, this perspective makes it possible to examine how authority may be performed and recognized through communicative interaction rather than formal

[14] Laksana, Muhibudin Wijaya, Dody S. Truna, and Roro Sri Rejeki Waluyajati. "Platformized Religiosity in Digital Games: A Critical Review of Roblox." *Jurnal Penelitian Agama* 27, no. 1 (2026): 1–18. https://doi.org/10.24090/jpa.v27i1.2026.pp1-18

[15] Justin Thomas, Mohammad Amin Kuhail, and Fahad AlBeyahi, "The Metaverse, Religious Practice and Wellbeing: A Narrative Review," *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 27, no. 1 (2024), https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2023.0003

[16] Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, ed. Talcott Parsons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947).

institutional position alone. Second, Helland's digital religion framework situates religious authority within the conditions of digitally mediated religious practice and distinguishes the dissemination of religious information from religion enacted through participation and interaction. [17] Third, Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, and capital provide a framework for understanding Roblox as a social field in which actors mobilize and convert different resources into recognition. [18] Within digital contexts, technical proficiency, creative production, and social relationships may function as platform-specific resources that shape participation and social positioning.[19] The concept of digital habitus further helps explain how repeated engagement with the norms and affordances of immersive digital environments shapes participants' dispositions and practices. [20]

Roblox can consequently be understood as a distinctive digital social field in which religious actors and community members interact through platform-specific practices. Within this field, different forms of capital—including religious knowledge, communicative ability, creative production, technical competence, and social relationships—may contribute to the acquisition of recognition. Repeated participation can also produce dispositions that correspond to the logic of immersive and gamified digital environments, thereby shaping how participants communicate, interact, and respond to religious authority.[21] Integrating Weber, Helland, and Bourdieu therefore provides an analytical lens that connects the question of legitimacy with the digital conditions and social mechanisms through which authority is produced.

The primary objective of this study is to identify how Islamic religious authority is constructed and recognized in MARIO and *Ngaji* Roblox and to examine the mechanisms through which religious actors gain recognition through religious knowledge, communication, participation, creative production, technical competence, and social relationships. The study also explores how community members interpret and respond to such authority. Rather than

[17] Helland, "Online Religion as Lived Religion. Methodological Issues in the Study of Religious Participation on the Internet."
[18] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241–58
[19] Marco Adria, "How to Worship in the Metaverse: Religious Experience and the Affordances of a New Medium," *Religions* 15, no. 4 (April 2024): 487, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15040487; Justin Thomas, Mohammad Amin Kuhail, and Fahad AlBeyahi, "The Metaverse, Religious Practice and Wellbeing: A Narrative Review," *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 27, no. 1 (January 2024): 57–63, https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2023.0003; Yogesh K. Dwivedi et al., "Metaverse Beyond the Hype: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Emerging Challenges, Opportunities, and Agenda for Research, Practice and Policy," *International Journal of Information Management* 66 (October 2022): 102542, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2022.102542.
[20] Gabe Ignatow and Laura Robinson, "Pierre Bourdieu: Theorizing the Digital," *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 7 (July 2017): 950–66, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1301519.
[21] Syifa Fauziah, Kamila El Sabilla, Amr Yazid Pikoli, and Supra Wimbarti, "Scroll, Tap, Repeat: Habitus Digital sebagai Petualangan Identitas dalam Dunia Virtual," *Buletin Psikologi* 33, no. 1 (2025): 82–95, https://doi.org/10.22146/buletinpsikologi.97608.

proposing a wholly new theory of religious authority, this research brings established perspectives on authority, digital religion, and capital into dialogue within an empirical context that remains comparatively underexplored. Its contribution lies in extending scholarship on Islamic digital religion beyond conventional social media toward an interactive, game-based virtual environment and in demonstrating how established forms of religious legitimacy may interact with community-based recognition within the same digital field. In this way, the study offers a more nuanced account of how Islamic religious authority is negotiated when religious knowledge, digital participation, platform affordances, and community recognition intersect.

Methodologically, the study provides an in-depth qualitative examination of two Roblox-based Muslim communities. By combining participant observation with interviews with community organizers and participants, the research examines both the practices through which authority is performed and the ways in which that authority is interpreted and recognized by community members.

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study to examine how Islamic religious authority is constructed, recognized, and negotiated within two Roblox-based Muslim communities: Majelis Roblox Indonesia (MARIO) and *Ngaji* Roblox. This design was selected because the study focuses on two specific communities and seeks to understand religious practices and authority through participants' experiences and interactions rather than to measure their frequency or prevalence.

The research was conducted in July and August 2025. Participant observation was carried out throughout July 2025, focusing on religious gatherings, gamified religious activities, communication, and interactions among participants within the Roblox environments used by the two communities. Roblox was treated as a digital platform rather than a single server, with participants accessing activities through their individual accounts and usernames. Interviews and further data collection were conducted in August 2025.

The study involved eight interview participants, consisting of two key actors, Rozan from MARIO and Syauqi Mubarok from *Ngaji* Roblox, and six community participants comprising four Roblox players and two female senior high school students from Sorong, Southwest Papua. Rozan and Syauqi were interviewed individually for approximately one hour through Zoom. Both are their real names and had given permission for their names to be used in the publication. Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in or experience with the religious activities examined.

Data were collected through participant observation and semi-structured interviews, complemented by records of relevant community interactions and activities. The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke, involving data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, review, refinement, and interpretation.[22] The analysis was conducted iteratively and followed by a cross-case comparison of MARIO and *Ngaji* Roblox. The analysis focused on religious knowledge, communication, participation, community recognition, and other resources through which religious authority was negotiated within the two communities.

The study was limited by its eight interview participants, one-month observation period, and focus on only two Roblox-based Muslim communities. The findings therefore provide a contextualized account of religious authority within the cases examined rather than a generalization of Islamic religious practices across Roblox or other virtual platforms.

B. Discussion

1. Case Studies: MARIO & *Ngaji* Roblox

The development of Islamic da'wah in digital environments has extended beyond conventional social media into interactive platforms such as Roblox. Within such environments, religious activities may be conducted through virtual gatherings, avatar-mediated interaction, gamified activities, and community participation. Rather than treating Roblox itself as a religious space, this study examines how religious practices and authority are organized within two specific Roblox-based Muslim communities: Majelis Roblox Indonesia (MARIO) and *Ngaji* Roblox. The two cases reveal different organizational arrangements through which religious authority is constructed and recognized.

MARIO represents a relatively institutionalized model of Roblox-based religious community. The community has a formal management structure through a *Dewan Kemakmuran Majelis* (DKM; community management board), consisting of positions such as chairperson, secretary, and treasurer. It also organizes regular religious programs, including *Kajian Muslimah* (women's Islamic study sessions), *Kajian Tematik* (thematic Islamic study sessions), and *murojaah* (Qur'an memorization review). Based on participant observation and an interview with Rozan, these activities are organized according to a regular schedule,

[22] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis," *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 11, no. 4 (2019): 589–597, https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806.

generally at 8:00 PM. The regularity of the programs provides an organizational framework that makes religious participation more predictable and routinized.

The institutional organization of MARIO is also reflected in the way religious speakers are selected. Rather than relying on a single preacher, the community involves several speakers whose educational background and da'wah experience are considered by the DKM. Rozan explained:

> "We do not invite just anyone to deliver a religious study session. We usually consider their educational background and experience in da'wah because we want to ensure that the material presented is religiously sound and accountable"[23]

This account indicates that religious authority within MARIO is partly mediated by organizational procedures. Educational background and da'wah experience function as criteria through which potential speakers are assessed before they are presented to the community. Authority is therefore not produced solely through individual visibility or popularity but is also institutionally filtered and organized. This finding is consistent with the broader understanding of religious authority as involving not only personal influence but also processes of recognition and legitimation within a particular community.

Participants' accounts further suggest that the recognition of religious speakers is also connected to the quality of religious communication. One Roblox participant explained:

> "I usually attend the religious study sessions because the *ustadz* (Islamic religious teacher) explains the material in a way that is easy to understand. Even though the sessions take place through Roblox, I still listen as long as the material is clear and the discussion is relevant."[24]

This account demonstrates that the virtual setting does not necessarily eliminate participants' expectations concerning religious knowledge and credible communication. The participant's recognition of the speaker is associated with the comprehensibility and perceived quality of the material rather than simply with the fact that the activity takes place in Roblox. Thus, the digital environment becomes a new setting for the negotiation of religious authority rather than an automatic replacement for existing criteria of religious credibility.

MARIO's connection with Masjid Arrohmah in Klaten provides another institutional dimension. As explained by Rozan:

[23] Rozan, interview by the authors via Zoom, August 2025
[24] Participant/Player 1, interview by the authors, August 2025

> "MARIO is indeed affiliated with Masjid Arrohmah. Therefore, the activities we conduct on Roblox do not operate independently but are connected to the mosque's activities."[25]

This connection links the virtual community with an established physical religious institution. The affiliation does not necessarily determine participants' acceptance of every speaker, but it provides an institutional reference through which MARIO organizes and presents its religious activities. The case therefore suggests that digital religious authority can be supported by existing institutional relationships rather than emerging entirely independently from conventional religious structures.

The community's technological infrastructure further demonstrates how institutional organization operates in the virtual environment. MARIO has a developer team responsible for creating virtual environments for religious activities, including *Masjid Ngajiblox* (Ngajiblox Mosque). Rather than interpreting this technological capacity as religious authority in itself, it can be understood as an organizational resource that enables the community to create a recognizable environment for religious participation. The distinction is important: technical competence supports the organization and visibility of religious activities, while religious legitimacy remains connected to knowledge, communication, organizational recognition, and participants' responses to religious actors.

Participant engagement also appears to develop through social interaction. One participant stated:

> "At first, I joined because I was curious about Roblox, but after participating several times, I became interested in attending the religious study sessions. The friends there also made me feel comfortable participating." [26]

This account suggests that religious participation may begin with an interest in the platform itself and subsequently develop through repeated interaction and community relationships. Religious engagement is therefore not necessarily initiated through a conventional religious motivation alone. Social familiarity and a sense of belonging can become part of the process through which participants remain engaged with religious activities.

In contrast, *Ngaji* Roblox developed through a more personal and relational organizational arrangement. The community was initiated by Syauqi through his friendship networks rather than through a pre-existing religious institution. Over time, he formed an eight-member core team consisting of early participants who subsequently assisted in maintaining

[25] Rozan, interview by the authors via Zoom, August 2025
[26] Participant/Player 2, interview by the authors, August 2025

order and supporting community activities. This arrangement differs from MARIO's formal organizational hierarchy because the structure of *Ngaji* Roblox emerged gradually through participation and interpersonal relationships.

The distinctive character of *Ngaji* Roblox is also evident in its use of gamification. Syauqi explained:

> "I did not immediately invite them to join the religious study sessions. We usually played first and completed the challenges together, and once we reached our destination, we would continue with the religious study session."[27]

This account shows that gaming functions as an entry point into religious interaction rather than merely as entertainment accompanying a religious session. Participants first engage in a shared activity and subsequently enter a religious learning context. The sequence creates an interactional bridge between gaming and religious learning, demonstrating how religious engagement can be embedded within participatory practices in a virtual environment.

The flexible scheduling of *Ngaji* Roblox further reflects its relational organization. Unlike MARIO's regular schedule, the timing of *Ngaji* Roblox sessions depends largely on Syauqi's availability, although sessions often take place on Sunday evenings. One participant explained:

> "If the timing is convenient for me, I join. Since the schedule is not always the same, I can adjust it according to my other activities"[28]

Rather than interpreting flexible scheduling simply as an organizational limitation, this finding suggests that flexibility can facilitate participation among users whose daily activities vary. At the same time, the absence of a fixed schedule places greater importance on the continued involvement of the central actor and the willingness of participants to remain connected to the community.

The concentration of religious teaching in Syauqi also distinguishes *Ngaji* Roblox from MARIO. While MARIO involves several speakers selected through organizational procedures, religious teaching in *Ngaji* Roblox is centered on Syauqi, while the eight-member team primarily provides operational support and participates in activities. One participant described this pattern as follows:

> "In Ngaji Roblox, we usually wait for Syauqi to deliver the religious study session. Since he was the one who initially invited us and organized the activities, we have become accustomed to attending his sessions."[29]

[27] Syauqi Mubarok, interview by the authors via Zoom, August 2025
[28] Student 2, interview by the authors, August 2025
[29] Participant/Player 3, interview by the authors, August 2025



Figure 1. Promotional Poster for a *Ngaji* Roblox Session by Syauqi Mubarok
Source: https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSb9WocJ4/

The statement indicates that Syauqi's position is reinforced through continuity and repeated interaction. His authority within the community is therefore not simply a consequence of holding a formal organizational position, but is developed through sustained participation, familiarity, and recognition by community members.[30] This represents a more relational form of religious authority than the institutionalized model observed in MARIO.

The absence of formal institutional affiliation makes this distinction particularly significant. Although Syauqi has experience as an activist in a campus da'wah organization, *Ngaji* Roblox is not formally affiliated with another religious institution. A participant explained:

> "I do not really consider which organization he comes from. What matters to me is that he presents the material well and that I can understand what he is saying."[31]

This account suggests that formal organizational affiliation is not necessarily a prerequisite for recognition within the community. Instead, communicative competence, comprehensibility, continuity, and interaction may become relevant criteria through which participants evaluate a religious actor. Thus, *Ngaji* Roblox demonstrates that religious authority in a digital community can develop through a pathway based more strongly on interpersonal relationships and community recognition than on formal institutional affiliation.

[30] Saputra, Eko, Dony Arung Triantoro, and Ardiansyah. "Urban Muslim Youth, Pengajian Communities and Social Media: Fragmentation of Religious Authorities in Indonesia." *Al-Qalam* 27, no. 2 (2021): 335–346. https://doi.org/10.31969/alq.v27i2.1004

[31] Participant/Player 4, interview by the authors, August 2025

The experiences of younger participants further illustrate the importance of participatory interaction. One of the female high-school participants explained:

> "In my opinion, it is more engaging because the religious study sessions are different from conventional ones. We can play and interact first, and then there is a religious session. So, it does not feel like we are simply listening to a sermon"[32]

This account indicates that the religious experience is perceived as an integrated activity involving gaming, interaction, and religious learning. The participant does not describe the experience merely as receiving religious information but as participating in an activity that combines social and religious dimensions. This finding supports the interpretation that virtual religious practices can be shaped by the participatory affordances of the platform.

Taken together, the comparison between MARIO and *Ngaji* Roblox demonstrates that Islamic religious authority in Roblox-based communities does not follow a single organizational pathway. MARIO shows how authority can be supported by institutional structure, speaker selection, regular programming, technological infrastructure, and affiliation with a physical mosque. *Ngaji* Roblox, in contrast, illustrates how authority may develop through interpersonal networks, repeated participation, gamified interaction, continuity of engagement, and recognition of a central religious actor.[33]

The difference should not be interpreted as a replacement of institutional authority by digital authority. Rather, the two cases demonstrate different ways in which conventional and emerging sources of legitimacy are negotiated within a virtual environment. In MARIO, institutional affiliation and organizational procedures provide an important basis for religious recognition, while in *Ngaji* Roblox, recognition appears to be more strongly connected to relational interaction and community participation. The findings therefore suggest that Roblox-based religious authority is produced through the interaction of religious knowledge, organizational structure, communicative performance, technological participation, and community recognition, rather than through platform visibility alone.

2. The Accumulation and Conversion of Capital in Digital Religious Fields

Building on Ignatow and Robinson,[34] religious practices in digital spaces can be understood as a process of accumulating and converting various forms of capital that are transformed by digital media infrastructure. In this context, capital operates not only as a social

[32] Student 1, interview by the authors, August 2025
[33] Shaheen Amid Whyte, "Islamic Religious Authority in Cyberspace: A Qualitative Study of Muslim Religious Actors in Australia," *Religions* 13, no. 1 (2022): 69, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13010069
[34] Ignatow and Robinson, "Pierre Bourdieu: Theorizing the Digital."

resource but also as an entity that undergoes mediation, distribution, and redefinition within the virtual environment. The case studies of Majelis Roblox Indonesia (MARIO) and *Ngaji* Roblox reveal two distinct models for constructing religious authority in the digital world: a curated institutional model and a fused personal model.

MARIO constructs its *da'wah* authority on Roblox by leveraging support from established institutions and networks. Its organized management structure, regular *da'wah* schedule, and affiliation with Masjid Arrohmah Klaten function not merely as organizational features but as resources through which its religious activities are presented as structured and accountable. The institutional connection provides MARIO with an established reference point for organizing religious activities and selecting speakers, thereby contributing to the recognition of its religious role within the community. However, such institutional resources do not automatically determine how participants recognize individual religious actors; their significance depends on how these resources are interpreted and experienced within the Roblox community. These institutional resources should be distinguished from institutionalized cultural capital, which refers more specifically to formally recognized educational qualifications and credentials.[35]

However, upon entering a digital platform like Roblox, a new challenge emerges. Avatars do not necessarily make religious identity or institutional affiliation apparent. Consequently, MARIO's institutional authority may not be immediately visible to other players. The symbolic value associated with MARIO's institutional backing cannot simply be assumed to operate in the same way within Roblox. In Bourdieu's framework, the value of capital is relational and depends on the field in which it is deployed. Following Ignatow and Robinson's discussion of Bourdieu in digital contexts, resources that carry symbolic value in one social setting may require mediation before they become recognizable within another.[36] In Roblox, institutional affiliation therefore needs to be communicated through forms of interaction that are meaningful to participants. Religious knowledge, communicative competence, and sustained engagement with the community become important mechanisms through which institutional resources can be translated into recognition within the digital field.

This pattern is reflected in the accounts of both the community organizer and participants. Rozan explained that MARIO considers the educational background and *da'wah*

[35] Muhammad Iqbal and Ayesha Khan, "The Role of Cultural Capital in Educational Attainment," *Pakistan Journal of Linguistics* 3, no. 4 (2021).
[36] Ignatow and Robinson, "Pierre Bourdieu: Theorizing the Digital."

experience of invited speakers, indicating that institutional procedures are involved in determining who is presented in its religious activities.[37] At the participant level, Player 1 emphasized that the clarity of the material and the way the *ustadz* communicates influence their willingness to listen, even when the religious study takes place through Roblox.[38] These accounts indicate that MARIO's religious authority is supported by an institutional framework but is also mediated through participants' encounters with individual speakers. Thus, the data suggest a relationship between institutional organization and interactional recognition rather than demonstrating that institutional authority is transferred directly into the digital environment.

In contrast, Ngaji Roblox's religious teaching centers primarily on Syauqi's religious knowledge, communicative style, and interactive activities, including the "mountain climb." Drawing on Ignatow and Robinson,[39] these resources can be interpreted as contributing to recognition through digitally mediated participation. This recognition develops within a community supported by an eight-member core team. The pattern is therefore more personally and relationally organized than MARIO's, rather than wholly individual or detached from prior social resources. The concentration of religious teaching in Syauqi makes his continued participation important to Ngaji Roblox, while the eight-member core team provides operational support. This arrangement raises questions about continuity, but the study does not establish that Ngaji Roblox is inherently less sustainable than MARIO.

Conceptually, this comparison illustrates two distinct directions of digital capital conversion. MARIO mobilizes institutional resources within the digital environment, where their symbolic value requires mediation through interaction and communication. *Ngaji* Roblox, meanwhile, places greater emphasis on interpersonal interaction and participatory religious practices in developing recognition within the virtual community.[40] In this comparison, MARIO combines institutional resources with digital participation, while Ngaji Roblox places greater emphasis on interaction and recognition within the virtual community. The distinction concerns how resources are mobilized, not whether they originate exclusively online or offline.

[37] Rozan, interview by the authors via Zoom, August 2025
[38] Participant/Player 1, interview by the authors, August 2025
[39] Ignatow and Robinson, "Pierre Bourdieu: Theorizing the Digital."
[40] Hannan, Abd, and Ach Fatayillah Mursyidi. "Social Media and the Fragmentation of Religious Authority among Muslims in Contemporary Indonesia." *Digital Muslim Review* 1, no. 2 (2023). https://doi.org/10.32678/dmr.v1i2.10

3. The Anatomy of Digital Authority in the Roblox Field

The shift in the field of da'wah introduces additional mechanisms through which religious authority is recognized. Islamic religious authority remains connected to inherited traditions of learning and interpretation.[41] Within Roblox, these resources are also mediated through digital communication and participatory interaction. Institutional procedures remain prominent in MARIO, while interpersonal relationships and sustained participation are more prominent in Ngaji Roblox.

The research findings support this observation. During participant observation in July 2025, religious activities within MARIO and *Ngaji* Roblox involved participants joining virtual gatherings, interacting through their avatars, and engaging in activities before or alongside religious discussions. This pattern is also reflected in the interview data. Syauqi explained that participants were not immediately invited to a religious study session; instead, they usually played and completed challenges together before continuing with the religious session.[42] Similarly, Student 1 described the experience as more engaging because participants could play and interact before receiving religious material.[43] These findings indicate that religious engagement within the two communities was not limited to the one-way transmission of religious messages but was embedded in interaction and participation within the Roblox environment.

Furthermore, the participant observation conducted in July 2025 showed that engagement in the observed Roblox-based religious activities was not limited to voice or text communication. Participants also interacted through their avatars, including movement and other avatar-based forms of interaction available within the Roblox environment. These observations indicate that participation in the two communities involved multiple modes of digitally mediated interaction rather than verbal communication alone. Such multimodal participation is relevant to understanding how religious interaction is experienced in a virtual environment, where participants communicate and engage with one another through both verbal exchanges and avatar-mediated actions.

Observations reveal that participants have developed their own emergent ethical codes. For instance, avatars refrain from crossing in front of the virtual pulpit during a sermon, and the use of certain emotes, such as "piggybacking," is deemed inappropriate and promptly

[41] Anjum, "Islam as a Discursive Tradition: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors."
[42] Syauqi Mubarok, interview by the authors via Zoom, August 2025
[43] Student 1, interview by the authors, August 2025

corrected by other congregants. This suggests that participants contribute to maintaining community norms through peer correction, alongside the organizational arrangements described in the two cases.

Furthermore, the virtual space facilitates open exchanges in religious learning. Avatar-mediated interaction may make congregants feel freer to ask questions, including challenging ones that test the preacher's understanding. In this context, the preacher's response becomes paramount. When they directly reference authoritative texts, such as the classical hadith collection *Riyad as-Salihin*, it substantiates their claims, builds trust, and constructs an authority based on demonstrable reliability. This process occurs directly and openly, meaning the preacher's authority is formed in real-time through their tangible responses to the congregation's needs and intellectual curiosity.

The reinforcement of this authority does not conclude within Roblox but is amplified across multiple platforms. Syauqi (Ngaji Roblox) continues unfinished discussions through his WhatsApp channel, while MARIO introduces the credentials of its upcoming preachers via TikTok. These activities extend religious communication and the presentation of credibility across digital platforms. Syauqi was also reported to have been invited to preach at a physical mosque, although the study does not establish that this invitation resulted from recognition gained within Roblox. Therefore, digital authority is constructed not only through in-game performance but also through a networked presence and distributed credibility across various platforms.

4. The Emergence of Performative Authority and Divergent Legitimation Pathways

The two cases reveal a performative dimension of religious authority, in which recognition is shaped by communicative competence and sustained interaction. This dimension operates alongside, rather than necessarily replacing, formal positions and institutional resources, which remain particularly prominent in MARIO. This is exemplified by Syauqi of *Ngaji* Roblox, who attained the status of an *ustadz* not through personal proclamation, but because the congregation acknowledged his competence after witnessing his ability to explain religious teachings in a manner that is honest, relevant, and contextual to their digital culture. This legitimacy is reinforced by tangible performance, such as his capacity to directly reference classical sources to answer critical questions from congregants. Drawing on Ignatow and Robinson,[44] this form of authority is underpinned by digital capital, which encompasses the

[44] Ignatow and Robinson, "Pierre Bourdieu: Theorizing the Digital."

technical ability to operate the platform, the creativity to design interactive experiences, and the social capacity to build community relations. These aspects are evident in Syauqi's mode of interaction with his congregation and the foundation of his digital legitimacy.

The difference in approach is stark when compared to the MARIO model. MARIO seeks to establish legitimacy before the study session begins by introducing its preachers and their religious credentials through social media such as TikTok. This indicates a credential-mediated pathway to authority, in which recognition from an established religious or institutional context is recontextualized within the Roblox environment. In contrast, Syauqi builds trust through direct participation and interaction within Roblox, where his credibility develops through engagement with the community rather than through credentials presented in advance. The reported invitation to preach at a physical mosque also points to Syauqi's connections beyond Roblox, without establishing the source of that recognition.

These cases therefore illustrate two distinct pathways to legitimacy: one based on the prior recognition of religious credentials and another based on community recognition generated through participation. This distinction is significant because it shows that digital religious authority is not necessarily derived from a single source. While institutional credentials can provide an initial basis for authority, sustained interaction within a digital community can also generate recognition among participants.

The authority emerging from Syauqi's participation can be understood through two classical lenses. First, it can be interpreted as symbolic capital in Bourdieu's sense, because his recognition as a credible preacher is produced through social recognition of his competence, authenticity, and communicative performance within the Roblox community (Bourdieu).[45] Second, it contains a charismatic dimension in Weber's sense, insofar as personal appeal and the perceived authenticity of the preacher become important sources of legitimacy rather than formal institutional position alone (Weber).[46] The significance of this finding is that Roblox functions not merely as a channel for transmitting pre-existing religious authority but also as a participatory space in which religious legitimacy can be negotiated and produced. Authority in the cases examined is therefore shaped through the interaction between cultural resources, digital participation, and community recognition.

[45] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 248.
[46] Max Weber, *Economy and Society : An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 241–254.

5. Virtual Ethics and Digital Piety: Adab in the World of Avatars

Amid the expansion of digital da'wah spaces, new forms of piety are emerging that are not only personal but also social and technological. Within the Roblox ecosystem, religious practice occurs not only through sermons and study sessions but also through symbolic interactions between avatars, reflecting values of *adab* (religiously informed etiquette and proper conduct). This phenomenon illustrates how participants contribute to the formation and enforcement of religiously informed norms within communities that have different organizational arrangements. The concept of digital piety becomes relevant for understanding how virtue in virtual spaces is not merely about da'wah content but also about how one behaves, interacts, and upholds ethics in the world of avatars.[47]

This study identifies practices of "digital adab" that are collectively enacted by da'wah communities on Roblox. Congregants demonstrate ethical interaction, such as offering greetings via chat or voice, sitting orderly with their avatars, and avoiding symbolic actions deemed disrespectful, like stepping over or standing on the preacher's avatar. Peer correction indicates that participants contribute to the maintenance of digital adab. These practices coexist with MARIO's management structure and Ngaji Roblox's core team and central preacher. They therefore suggest participatory moral regulation rather than an absence of leadership or organizational coordination.

One participant's account suggests that messages encountered in a virtual gathering may also influence self-reported conduct on other digital platforms. One adolescent participant revealed that she was not an active seeker of religious content but stumbled upon a Roblox study session in her TikTok feed. From there, she began regularly attending the virtual gatherings. What resonated most deeply was a lesson linking religious teachings to the prohibition of cyberbullying. She acknowledged that this message made her more conscious of guarding her speech and behavior not only in Roblox but also on other social media platforms.

This account can be interpreted through the concept of religious digital habitus, while remaining insufficient to establish the durability or wider prevalence of the dispositions described. Drawing on the theorization of digital habitus by Ignatow and Robinson,[48] habitus in a digital context is understood as the outcome of the interaction between social structures

[47] Mualimin, Shakhzod Tokhirov, and Nada Ramadhana, "From New Media to New Piety: The Construction of Muhammadiyah Digital Piety Ideas," *Digital Muslim Review* 1, no. 2 (November 2023): 68–82, https://doi.org/10.32678/dmr.v1i2.9.

[48] Ignatow and Robinson, "Pierre Bourdieu: Theorizing the Digital."

and technology, where algorithms, user interfaces, and platform cultures collectively shape how individuals think, communicate, and assess authority.

These findings suggest that participatory religious activities may provide a context for reflecting on ethical conduct. One participant reported becoming more attentive to her online speech and behavior after attending a session addressing cyberbullying. This account indicates a perceived influence beyond the immediate virtual gathering, but the study does not establish its duration, its prevalence among other participants, or a causal relationship between participation and behavioral change. Moreover, such digital da'wah communities align with Castells' concept of the network society. Viewed through this perspective, cross-platform relationships and peer participation are relevant to the organization of religious activity. In the cases examined, however, networked interaction coexists with organizational coordination and central religious actors. The maintenance of virtual religious etiquette therefore involves both participant engagement and leadership.[49]

6. Spirituality and Sustainability in the Platform Era

The spiritual motivation driving da'wah activities on Roblox remains classic and personal. As expressed by Syauqi, "The most important thing is that the knowledge is conveyed." This statement affirms that intention and sincerity remain the core of da'wah, even as its medium has shifted to the virtual world. However, this commitment to traditional values must now negotiate with a new logic imposed by digital platforms.

The sustainability of digital da'wah no longer depends solely on individual consistency but also on how the content becomes visible and accessible to a mass audience. Platforms like TikTok and YouTube operate on algorithms that determine which content appears on a user's feed. In this environment, a *da'i* (Islamic preacher) is not only required to deliver sincere and meaningful material but must also strategize to make their content capture attention—for instance, by creating promotional trailers for study sessions or producing short, engaging video clips to reach a broader audience.

This phenomenon relates directly to what is termed the attention economy—a condition in which user attention becomes the most critical resource. This concept, articulated by Herbert Simon, posits that amidst an abundance of information, human attention becomes the scarcest

[49] Ari-Veikko Anttiroiko, "Networks in Context : The Concept of Network in Manuel Castells' Theory of the Network Society," *Theoretical and Practical Research in the Economic Fields* 6, no. 1(11) (2015): 65–80, https://doi.org/10.14505/tpref.v6.1(11).04

commodity.[50] In the context of digital da'wah, this attention must be "competed for" to ensure the religious message can even reach its intended audience.

Consequently, a situation of "authority ambivalence" emerges, referring to the tension between the preacher's established religious authority and the need to perform and negotiate that authority within the digital environment. On the one hand, the preacher's authority may retain a sacred and religiously grounded dimension; however, in Weber's concept of charismatic authority, legitimacy is not derived from the preacher's sincere intention itself, but from followers' recognition of the extraordinary qualities attributed to the religious figure[51]. On the other hand, the preacher must also present themselves strategically and appealingly to gain recognition within the digital ecosystem. This aligns with Helland[52] and Campbell[53] et al., who emphasize that religious authority and participation in digital environments are shaped not only by religious claims but also by how religious actors construct, communicate, and negotiate their presence within online spaces.

This negotiation between religious commitment and self-presentation highlights the interaction of existing religious resources and digital practices. Syauqi's reported invitation to preach at a physical mosque points to connections beyond Roblox, but the study does not establish that virtual recognition was converted into offline institutional legitimacy. Thus, spirituality in the platform era is a practice of continuously balancing sacred values with technological demands, with intention motivating da'wah and authority negotiated through community recognition and relevant digital strategies. This hybrid authority is neither purely traditional nor purely algorithmic, but a new synthesis born from the negotiation between enduring religious norms and the imperatives of the digital attention economy.

7. Synthesis of Findings: Re-Authoring and Authoring of Authority in the Digital Field

The investigation into the dynamics of da'wah on Roblox ultimately leads to a fundamental conclusion: we are witnessing processes of "re-authoring" and "authoring" of religious authority. Religious authority is no longer solely inherited or bestowed based on fixed, pre-existing structures. Instead, it is being collectively rewritten through the new logic, relationships, and language of the digital field. These processes are evident in two key patterns:

[50] Jelle Bruineberg, "Rethinking the Cognitive Foundations of the Attention Economy," *Philosophical Psychology*, May 2025, 1–23, https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2025.2502428.
[51] Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, ed. Talcott Parsons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947).
[52] Helland, "Online Religion as Lived Religion. Methodological Issues in the Study of Religious Participation on the Internet."
[53] Campbell et al., "Gaming Religionworlds: Why Religious Studies Should Pay Attention to Religion in Gaming."

First, legitimacy is negotiated through established religious resources and community recognition, with institutional mediation more prominent in MARIO and relational recognition more prominent in *Ngaji* Roblox. In *Ngaji* Roblox, the title "*ustadz*" is not necessarily the starting point but a form of recognition granted by the community after directly witnessing a figure's competence, epistemic honesty, and consistency. The result is a form of digital charismatic authority, interpreted through perceived approachability, creativity, and the ability to address the anxieties of the younger generation in their own language.

Second, this authority is multimodal and portable. It is not confined to a single platform. Instead, it circulates and is reinforced across various spaces—from study sessions in Roblox, to follow-up discussions on WhatsApp, and the building of credibility narratives on TikTok. Such cross-platform circulation should not, however, be equated with demonstrated conversion of virtual recognition into offline institutional legitimacy.

Therefore, in the cases examined here, Roblox is not merely a passive container for existing religious content. Rather, it functions as a productive field in which the sources, forms, and logic of religious authority are actively negotiated and reconstructed. This process of “re-authoring” in the case of MARIO and “authoring” in the case of Syauqi is not a repudiation of tradition but a creative adaptation that demonstrates how religious authority can respond to and inhabit an evolving socio-cultural and digital environment.

8. Discussion and Implications: Beyond Re-Authored Authority

The findings on the transformation of authority in this study do not merely describe an empirical phenomenon; they also invite a re-examination of classical theories. Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital acquire new meaning in digital spaces, where technical and creative abilities become crucial forms of capital for gaining recognition. Meanwhile, the participant’s account discussed above suggests an adaptation of religious habitus to the workings of the virtual world. On the other hand, Weber’s concept of charismatic authority offers a lens for understanding recognition mediated through engaging and relevant digital performances. In other words, digital spaces are not just sites for applying old theories but reveal how these theories can evolve and remain relevant within a new, participatory context.

Nevertheless, many aspects remain unexplored and present avenues for future research. First is the role of algorithms in determining the visibility of preachers on platforms like TikTok and YouTube. Second, this study has not addressed the issue of the commodification of da'wah. Further research is needed to investigate how the economic logic of platforms influences the intention behind da'wah and the forms of authority that emerge when it begins to intersect with

financial incentives. Third, the dynamics of generation and gender are also crucial to explore. How do older generations perceive this digital authority? Do virtual spaces reinforce or potentially transform perspectives on religious leadership that have historically been gender-biased?

C. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that religious authority within Roblox is neither simply transferred from established religious institutions nor produced independently of existing religious traditions. Within the cases examined, the construction of digital religious authority follows two distinctive pathways. In the MARIO case, authority is largely established through the prior recognition of religious figures and credentials that are introduced into the Roblox environment, representing a process of *re-authoring*. In contrast, the *Ngaji* Roblox case demonstrates a process of *authoring*, in which Syauqi's credibility develops through participation, interaction, communicative performance, and recognition within the virtual community.

These findings suggest that digital religious authority is shaped through the interaction between pre-existing religious resources and community-based recognition. Institutional credentials can provide an initial basis of legitimacy, but they do not constitute the only source of authority in digital environments. Conversely, authority that emerges through participation and community recognition may become meaningful even in the absence of conventional institutional mediation. In this respect, Roblox functions not merely as a technological channel for transmitting religious messages but, within the cases examined, as a participatory field in which religious authority, legitimacy, and community belonging are negotiated.

The study therefore contributes to discussions of digital religion by showing how the relationship between tradition and technological innovation can involve both the relocation of established authority and the emergence of new forms of community-based recognition. Rather than treating digital platforms as inherently disruptive to religious authority, the findings indicate that digital environments can become spaces where existing religious authority is recontextualized and new forms of legitimacy are negotiated. The significance of Roblox in these cases lies not simply in its capacity to host religious activities, but in its role as a social environment where religious actors and communities participate in the ongoing reconstruction of authority. Given the study's focus on two Roblox-based Muslim communities and eight participants, these findings should be understood as a contextualized account of digital religious

authority rather than as a generalization of religious practices across Roblox or other virtual platforms.

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