

The Existence Of Ulama In The Digital Era: A Framing Analysis Of Gus Miftah's Misspeaking Using Robert Entman's Model

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Abstract: The advent of the digital era has profoundly reshaped the practice of Islamic preaching, allowing religious scholars (Ulama) to engage with broader and more diverse audiences through social media and other digital platforms. Yet, alongside this expanded reach comes a set of complex challenges, chief among them the heightened risk of verbal missteps, which can easily spark controversy, foster misinterpretation, and ultimately compromise the credibility of the Ulama in the public eye. This study seeks to explore the evolving role of the Ulama in the digital age, with particular emphasis on the challenges posed by verbal missteps and their implications for public perception. Utilizing a qualitative research design and content analysis methodology, the study investigates the cases of Gus Miftah and Herri Pras, two influential religious figures who encountered significant public backlash following communication errors on social media platforms. This analysis draws on Robert N. Entman's framing model to examine how media outlets and audiences construct and interpret the public statements of Ulama and how these interpretive frames shape their broader public image. The findings indicate that even minor verbal missteps can rapidly escalate into significant controversies, ultimately threatening to erode the public's trust in religious authority. Given these dynamics, the Ulama must cultivate digital literacy and adopt more deliberate, context-sensitive communication strategies. This study contributes original insights to the discourse on the communicative challenges confronting Ulama in the digital era, underscoring the critical need for their preparedness to navigate the complexities of social media to sustain their relevance and credibility as authoritative voices in Islamic scholarship.

Keywords: Digital, Framing, Existence, Misspeaking, Ulama.

Introduction

Advancements in digital technology have fundamentally reshaped the way Islamic scholars (Ulama) engage in da'wah. Through platforms

such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and others, Ulama can now disseminate religious teachings to far broader audiences, transcending the traditional limitations of time and geographical boundaries. The digital landscape presents a valuable opportunity for expanding the reach of da'wah in contemporary society. Yet, the very accessibility that enables broader engagement also introduces new challenges. Among the most frequent is the occurrence of verbal slips. In these instances, imprecise language or offhand remarks may lead to misinterpretation, provoke controversy, and potentially erode public trust in the credibility of the Ulama.¹

In the digital era, every utterance is subject to instant documentation, rapid circulation, and open commentary by a global audience. When an ulama commits a verbal misstep, their words can swiftly gain viral traction, often triggering intense public discourse and scrutiny.² A notable example is the case of Gus Miftah. As reported by *Detik.com* on December 5, 2024,³ during a religious gathering (shalawatan) in Magelang, he made a remark that was perceived as offensive to a tea vendor. The video spread rapidly across social media and drew widespread negative reactions. Although Gus Miftah issued a public apology, and the affected vendor accepted it, the incident underscores the far-reaching consequences that a single verbal misstep can generate within digital spaces. A parallel case involving Herri Pras similarly ignited public backlash, as his remarks were perceived to perpetuate harmful stereotypes against specific groups, further illustrating the volatile nature of religious communication in the online sphere.⁴

In the contemporary digital landscape, an increasing number of Muslims turn to online platforms—ranging from social media and websites to podcasts and video content—as primary sources for

¹ Afifah Novi Pujianingrum, Sri Katiwi, and Amalia Khoirunisa, "Peran Ulama Dalam Pendidikan Islam Dan Implementasi Hukum Syariah Di Era Digital," *Hidayah: Cendekia Pendidikan Islam Dan Hukum Syariah* 1, no. 2 (2024): 13–16.

² Yedi Purwanto, Muhamad Taufik, and Asep Wawan Jatnika, "Peran Teknologi Informasi Dalam Perkembangan Dakwah Mahasiswa The Role Of Iinformasi Teknologi In The Preaching Development To University Student," *Institut Teknologi Bandung* 16, no. 1 (2017): 94–109.

³ Hilda Rinanda, "Ramai Gus Miftah Hina Bakul Es Teh, Gus Fahrur PBNU: Kepleset Lidah," *detikNews*, 2024, <https://www.detik.com/jogja/berita/d-7671877/ramai-gus-miftah-hina-bakul-es-teh-gus-fahrur-pbnu-kepleset-lidah>.

⁴ Wildan Nadhif, Berlianti Karunia Romadhoni, and Luluk Fikri Zuhriyah, "Pengaruh Status Sosial Dan Kekuasaan Dalam Komunikasi Antar Pribadi Antara Gus Miftah Dan Penjual Es Teh" 7 (2024): 114–24.

engaging with Islamic teachings. While this shift has undeniably expanded access to religious knowledge and broadened outreach, it also introduces significant risks, particularly when information imprecisely lacks adequate contextual depth. Instances of misspeaking, ambiguous language, or insufficient contextualization by Ulama can readily give rise to confusion, misinterpretations of religious teachings, and the unintentional spread of misinformation. Given their role as authoritative figures in spiritual discourse, Ulama carries a significant responsibility to convey their messages with clarity, precision, and a heightened sense of communicative responsibility. Accordingly, it becomes imperative to examine how Ulama can effectively navigate these emerging challenges, uphold the accuracy and integrity of their da'wah, and implement strategic communication approaches that safeguard their credibility and sustain the trust of the Muslim community in an increasingly digitalized public sphere.⁵

Previous studies—such as Fatkhurrohman's (2021) examination of Ulama's communication ethics on social media and the work of Ramdhani and Fadhilah (2022) on digital da'wah strategies targeting younger audiences—have explored a range of dimensions related to da'wah in the digital sphere. However, existing research has centered on message delivery techniques or audience reception, often overlooking the nuanced dynamics of Ulama's verbal missteps on social media and the subsequent implications for their credibility and public trust. Moreover, existing scholarship has yet to thoroughly examine how communicative missteps by Ulama can escalate into public controversies, nor has it sufficiently addressed the media's role in either undermining or rehabilitating their public image.

The distinctive contribution of this research lies in its exploration of how Ulama's verbal missteps are interpreted and framed by both the media and the public. To investigate this dynamic, the study adopts Robert N. Entman's framing theory, which delineates how media narratives are constructed through identifying problems, attributing causal responsibility, articulating moral judgments, and suggesting potential remedies. By applying this framework, the study reveals how media discourse can amplify or temper the societal impact of an ulama's communicative error.⁶

⁵ Firman Maulidna et al., "Etika Dakwah Di Media Digital : Tantangan Dan Solusi Di Antara Kelompok-Kelompok Masyarakat , Sehingga Mengganggu Persatuan Umat .," *Jurnal Manajemen Dan Pendidikan Agama Islam* 3, no. 2 (2025): 315–36.

⁶ Ayub Dwi Anggoro, Fingky Ayu Puspitasari, and Ahmad Puad Mat Som, "Robert

This study centers on Ulama's communication challenges in the digital age, particularly the repercussions of verbal missteps. Through the case studies of Gus Miftah and Herri Pras, the research aims to uncover how such incidents influence public perception and explore Ulama's strategies to sustain trust and relevance in the fast-paced, often volatile social media environment.

This study addresses a notable gap in the existing scholarship by investigating the phenomenon of verbal missteps by Ulama in the digital age—particularly within the context of social media—and their implications for religious credibility. By examining the cases of Gus Miftah and Herri Pras, the research employs Entman's framing theory to critically analyze how narratives surrounding such communicative lapses are constructed, circulated, and interpreted within the public sphere. This approach offers a more nuanced understanding of how digital media shapes public perceptions of Ulama while identifying practical strategies that religious figures can adopt to uphold their da'wah's credibility and ethical integrity in an evolving media environment. Specifically, this study investigates how Ulama can navigate and manage its communication practices on social media to sustain public trust and maintain its relevance in an increasingly digital religious landscape. It further proposes strategic interventions—centered on digital literacy and mindful communication techniques—that aim to reduce the likelihood of verbal missteps in the future.

This research offers a meaningful contribution to the scholarly discourse at the intersection of da'wah communication, digital media, and contemporary Islamic studies, enriching each field with insights into the evolving dynamics of religious expression in the digital age. More specifically, this study deepens the understanding of how communicative missteps by religious figures in digital arenas can influence their reputations and the perceived legitimacy and authority of religious leadership more broadly. Furthermore, it contributes to the relatively underdeveloped body of literature on applying framing theory within religious contexts, which remains particularly scarce in the Indonesian scholarly landscape.

Literature Review

Fathur Rohman's study, *"The Utilization of Social Media for the*

Entman's Framing Analysis: Female Representation in 2024 Presidential Candidates on Republika.Com and Sindonews.Com," *Komunikator* 15, no. 2 (2023): 211–24, <https://doi.org/10.18196/jkm.19247>.

Socialization of Religious Moderation" (2021),⁷ examines the use of social media as a means to socialize the values of religious moderation in Indonesia. Within a multicultural society, social media functions as a strategic public sphere that enables the dissemination of religious messages grounded in inclusivity, tolerance, and a conscious departure from extremist narratives. This study examines the role of social media as a vehicle for fostering religious literacy, highlighting its potential to meaningfully contribute to cultivating interreligious harmony within the Indonesian context.

This research adopts a qualitative methodology, utilizing a literature review approach to explore and articulate the conceptual foundations, potential benefits, and illustrative examples of how social media is leveraged to promote religious moderation. Drawing on various written sources—including books, scholarly articles, and related literature—this study finds that social media functions as a strategic and impactful medium for advancing the discourse of religious moderation. Through diverse digital platforms, messages rooted in moderate Islamic principles can be conveyed broadly and compellingly, especially to younger audiences deeply embedded in online culture rhythms. This effectiveness is largely attributed to the accessibility, expansive reach, and dynamic nature of social media, which enables the dissemination of religious messages through creative and interactive formats. Efforts to promote religious moderation via these platforms remain anchored in Qur'anic principles and core Islamic teachings, ensuring that values such as tolerance, equilibrium, and justice are communicated with authenticity and contextual sensitivity—aligned with the evolving demands of contemporary society.

While both works address the role of social media in contemporary Islamic preaching, they diverge in emphasis. The study on religious moderation foregrounds the optimistic potential of digital platforms as instruments for disseminating moderate Islamic values. In contrast, the analysis of Ulama and misspeaking underscores the communicative pitfalls inherent in the digital realm—highlighting how unguarded expressions, if mishandled, can compromise the credibility and public standing of religious authorities.

The novelty of this study lies in its critical examination of the contested presence of Ulama in the digital sphere, specifically through a

⁷ Fathur Rohman, "PEMANFAATAN MEDIA SOSIAL UNTUK SOSIALISASI MODERASI BERAGAMA Fathur Rohman Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dana Kebudayaan* 5, no. 1 (2023): 25–42.

framing analysis of Gus Miftah's misspeaking incident. Unlike prior research, which often emphasizes the constructive role of social media in advancing religious moderation, this study foregrounds the communicative vulnerabilities and reputational risks that religious figures encounter within digitally mediated publics.

Research Methods

This research adopts a qualitative framework, employing content analysis as its primary method to explore, in-depth, the roles undertaken by Ulama and the complex challenges they navigate in disseminating da'wah within the context of the digital age. This methodological approach enables a deeper investigation into the interpretive dimensions of Ulama's verbal missteps while shedding light on how such occurrences are mediated and received by both the press and the wider public. It resonates with the work of Ajis IAIN Curup (Totok Sugiarto, Muhammad Afifulloh, and M. Fahmi Hidayatullah), whose research underscores the value of critical, context-sensitive analysis in understanding religious communication within the evolving landscape of digital media.

This study primarily investigates the challenges that emerge from instances of misspeaking and how such moments influence public perceptions of religious authority. To support this inquiry, data is drawn from an extensive literature review encompassing a range of sources—including academic books, peer-reviewed journals, media coverage, and related scholarly works that engage with comparable themes.

The analytical process centers on a detailed interrogation of the selected content, aiming to uncover recurring patterns, trace the emergence of meaning, and critically assess the broader implications of the investigated phenomenon.⁸ To explore how media outlets frame the expressions and conduct of religious figures, this study adopts Robert N. Entman's framing analysis model. This framework is particularly apt, as it offers a structured approach to understanding how journalistic narratives are constructed and how these narratives contribute to shaping collective perceptions and social realities through mediated discourse.

⁸ Totok Sugiarto, Muhammad Afifulloh, and Muhammad Fahmi Hidayatullah, "The Character Value of Love for the Motherland in Madrasah Digital Books: Analysis of Islamic Religious Subject Cluster Books Class XI Madrasah Aliyah," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2024): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v9i1.7848>.

Entman's framing model identifies four principal dimensions for analyzing media discourse: the articulation of an issue as a problem, the attribution of causality to particular agents or conditions, the invocation of moral evaluations, and the proposal of specific remedies or policy responses. Each element collectively shapes how audiences interpret and respond to mediated representations of events or figures. Together, these four components form a critical lens through which one can examine the media's portrayal of Ulama and its role in shaping public conceptions of religious authority—particularly in an era defined by the rapid, unfiltered exchange of information across digital platforms.

Results and Discussions

Results

Application of Framing Theory in the Case of Ulama and Digital Media

In the contemporary digital era, the role of Ulama extends beyond traditional da'wah activities conducted in mosques or Islamic boarding schools. Their presence now encompasses the digital public sphere, facilitated by social media and various online platforms. This shift has positively contributed to the expansion of da'wah outreach, enabling broader engagement with diverse audiences. However, it also introduces new challenges—the heightened risk of miscommunication or the potential for their statements to be taken out of context and misunderstood. When such incidents arise, the rapid dissemination of information through social media can provoke substantial public reactions and, in some cases, directly impact the reputation of a religious figure. Robert Entman's framing theory (1993) offers a pertinent and insightful analytical framework to analyze how these responses are constructed and amplified.

According to Entman, framing refers to how the media or other influential actors shape public perception of an issue. He identifies four core components of framing. First is problem definition, which involves constructing an event or situation as a matter of public concern or significance. Second, diagnosing causal factors involves identifying who or what is perceived as responsible for the issue. Third, moral judgments entail applying societal values or normative standards to assess actions or events. Fourth, suggesting remedies refers to proposing solutions or recommending appropriate measures to address and resolve the

problem.⁹

The application of this theory is evident in the case involving Gus Miftah at the end of 2024. During a religious gathering in Magelang, he referred to an iced tea vendor using the term "goblok"—a derogatory Indonesian expression roughly translating to "stupid" or "foolish." Though the remark was made casually, its subsequent circulation on digital platforms illustrates how selective framing can influence public perception and generate controversy surrounding a religious figure.¹⁰ Although the original statement was intended as a joke delivered in an informal setting, the video clip that circulated on social media highlighted only the controversial segment, omitting the broader context in which it was made. Consequently, the framing constructed by both social media users and mainstream media recast the remark as an expression of arrogance and disrespect, thereby shaping public perception of the religious figure in a markedly negative light. Within the framework of framing analysis, the issue was constructed as a case of unethical conduct by an Islamic scholar. The perceived root cause was linked to an inappropriate communication style that failed to align with the expected religious decorum. Moral judgment was reflected in the intense public condemnation that followed the statement, framing it as a breach of ethical and religious norms. The dominant solution proposed by both media and public discourse was a call for Gus Miftah to issue a formal apology—pressure that ultimately culminated in his resignation from Special Staff to the President.

Another pertinent case is that of Herri Pras (Heri Prasetiawan), a content creator reported by *Mahardikanews.com*, who is known for consistently criticizing Ulama and pesantren through his YouTube channel. In one of his videos, Herri was perceived to have insulted KH. Azaim Ibrahimy of the Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Islamic Boarding School in Sukorejo, East Java. The incident triggered a significant backlash from alums and sympathizers of the pesantren, who regarded the remarks as a blatant act of disrespect toward a revered religious figure.

Across both news media coverage and online discourse, Herri was consistently framed as a figure who lacked respect for pesantren traditions and failed to embody the adab expected within Islamic

⁹ Perdana Putra Pangestu, "Efektivitas Dakwah Hadis Dalam Media Sosial: Analisis Atas Teori Framing Robert N. Entman," *Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 6, no. 1 (2021): 67, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jdk.v6i1.2958>.

¹⁰ Rinanda, "Ramai Gus Miftah Hina Bakul Es Teh, Gus Fahrur PBNU: Kepleset Lidah."

criticism, thereby positioning him as a transgressor of established religious and cultural norms. The issue was framed as an affront to a respected spiritual figure, with the root cause attributed to Herri's provocative communicative approach, which was perceived as deviating from the norms of Islamic decorum. The moral evaluation emerged through widespread public condemnation, reflecting a collective disapproval of the content. In response, commonly proposed solutions included reporting the incident to legal authorities, demanding public clarification, and calling for a boycott of Herri's digital content.

The analysis of these two cases underscores the extent to which the presence and authority of Islamic scholars in the digital era are profoundly shaped by the framing of their statements and actions by both the media and the public. If perceived as inappropriate, a single remark can rapidly circulate, be recontextualized, and provoke a widespread public response—often with direct consequences for the scholar's reputation and standing within the broader religious and social community. Entman's framing theory offers a robust analytical framework for understanding these dynamics, particularly in unpacking how narratives are constructed, identifying the key actors in reinforcing specific frames, and assessing the implications these frames carry for the individuals concerned. Therefore, in an era marked by the rapid and often unfiltered flow of information, scholars must cultivate digital awareness, effective public communication skills, and proactive crisis mitigation strategies to sustain their visibility and influence within contemporary society.

Theoretically, this study affirms the relevance of framing theory in elucidating how media narratives influence public perceptions of Ulama, particularly in moments of controversy or heightened public scrutiny. On a practical level, the findings offer valuable insights for Ulama and preachers, encouraging greater caution and strategic awareness in their public communication—especially within social media engagement. This study may also serve as a valuable reference for religious institutions in formulating guidelines for digital da'wah, helping to prevent potential misunderstandings that could lead to adverse consequences.

A primary limitation of this study is the lack of direct interviews with Ulama or members of the public. The analysis relied exclusively on secondary sources—namely, published readings and articles—which may not capture the full spectrum of perspectives or lived experiences relevant to the topic. Future research would benefit from incorporating

direct interviews with Ulama, da'wah audiences, and media representatives to obtain deeper, more nuanced insights into the dynamics at play. Additionally, employing quantitative, data-driven methodologies could provide measurable evidence regarding how much media representations influence public trust in Ulama.

Discussions

The Existence of Ulama in the Digital Era

From a linguistic standpoint, Ulama is the plural of 'alim, denoting "one who possesses knowledge," and originates from the Arabic root 'ilm, meaning knowledge. Within the Indonesian milieu, however, the term has acquired a more specific connotation, signifying religious authorities whose expertise is grounded primarily in Islamic legal and theological sciences, particularly those aligned with the principles of shari'ah. Although the conceptual boundary between a learned ulama and a widely followed religious persona appears straightforward, it has become indistinct in contemporary digital landscapes. Today, the gravitational pull of public appeal frequently eclipses the gravitas of traditional scholarship, complicating efforts to differentiate between authority rooted in deep religious knowledge and that derived from media visibility.

The Qur'an confers a high status on the Ulama, linking knowledge with spiritual elevation. Surah Al-Mujādilah (58:11) affirms that those endowed with faith and knowledge will be raised in rank. Likewise, Surah Fāṭir (35:28) identifies the Ulama as those who truly fear Allah, underscoring their deep awareness and moral responsibility."

A hadith reported by Abu Darda' conveys a profound assertion of the prophetic legacy: "The Ulama are the heirs of the prophets. The prophets did not leave behind dinars or dirhams, but rather they bequeathed knowledge, and whoever acquires it has indeed inherited a substantial portion." This narration underscores the elevated status of Ulama, not as successors to material wealth but as custodians of prophetic wisdom. In Islamic intellectual tradition, this inheritance signifies a moral and epistemic responsibility—entrusting the Ulama with preserving, interpreting, and disseminating divine knowledge across generations."

KH. Ahmad Siddiq articulates a foundational view of Ulama as inheritors of the Prophet's knowledge and practice—those whose authority is rooted in a profound engagement with the Qur'an and hadith. Within this framework, scholarly distinction is not conferred by

formal education alone but by a deep and sustained mastery of the revealed sciences, coupled with unwavering adherence to religious ethics. This delineation becomes especially critical in the digital age, where the democratization of platforms has enabled individuals without recognized scholarly credentials to speak authoritatively in the name of Islam, often blurring the boundaries between legitimate religious discourse and populist commentary.¹¹

The role of Ulama has increasingly transcended physical spaces such as mosques and traditional religious forums, extending into the expansive realm of social media and other digital platforms. In this new landscape, Ulama possesses unprecedented opportunities to disseminate Islamic teachings and, in some cases, exert political influence across broader and more diverse audiences. However, this expanded reach is accompanied by significant challenges, including the rapid circulation of misinformation, heightened opinion polarization, and the entanglement in political tensions often amplified within digital public spheres. Consequently, the presence of Ulama in the digital age demands more than mere technological adaptability; it necessitates a conscious commitment to preserving the integrity of religious teachings while maintaining a posture of political neutrality. Without such vigilance, there is a tangible risk that their moral and spiritual authority may be compromised, particularly if they become entangled in partisan dynamics that detract from their primary role as ethical guides and custodians of religious wisdom.¹²

Ulama's role has undergone a marked transformation in the digital era. No longer confined to traditional spaces such as mosques or pesantren, they have increasingly embraced digital platforms as vehicles for da'wah. Through mediums like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and podcasts, Ulama can now reach diverse and dispersed audiences, offering religious guidance in formats that are both accessible and attuned to contemporary modes of communication. This shift has broadened the reach of Islamic discourse and redefined how spiritual knowledge is mediated and consumed in the public sphere. Moreover, Ulama bears a critical responsibility in preserving the integrity of Islamic teachings—actively working to clarify doctrinal ambiguities and to

¹¹ Moh. Romzi, "Ulama Dalam Perspektif Nahdlatul Ulama," *RELIGIO: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama (UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya)* 2, no. 1 (2012): 42.

¹² Mohamad Subli et al., "The Absorptive Capacity of Fatwa Institutions in Indonesia on Contemporary Issues," *Al-Adalah: Jurnal Hukum Dan Politik Islam* 9, no. 1 (2024): 110–26, <https://doi.org/10.30863/ajmpi.v9i1.6047>.

counter the spread of misinformation. In adapting to the digital age, some have embraced the role of religious influencers, not merely disseminating knowledge but also modeling ethical conduct and fostering constructive social trends within their communities.¹³

This situation has precipitated a profound dilemma: the traditional authority of Ulama faces the risk of being eclipsed by media-savvy personalities whose popularity often outpaces their theological grounding. In a digital environment where virality frequently supersedes veracity, even well-intentioned scholars may find themselves embroiled in public backlash—sometimes not because of what they believe, but because their words are misinterpreted, decontextualized, or weaponized within polarized discourse. In today's media-saturated landscape, digital literacy is no longer optional for contemporary Ulama but indispensable. The ability to effectively convey religious teachings hinges on mastery of classical rhetoric and a nuanced understanding of media dynamics. To remain resonant and credible, Ulama must be capable of crafting contextually grounded messages while remaining vigilant against the distortions of misinformation and the risks of misrepresentation that proliferate across digital platforms.

Digital tools such as live streaming and online discussion forums offer ulama valuable opportunities to cultivate more direct and meaningful engagement with the public. However, these same platforms also demand heightened vigilance. In the highly reactive environment of the digital public sphere, a single misjudged phrase or poorly framed comment—especially when selectively edited or quoted out of context—can rapidly escalate into widespread controversy. Such incidents not only invite backlash but can also undermine the trust that Ulama has long worked to build.¹⁴

Ultimately, Ulama continues to serve as an essential guide for the Muslim community in the digital age. Yet, to sustain their relevance and preserve public trust, relying solely on theological depth is no longer sufficient. Their role now also demands the integration of strategic, ethically grounded communication that aligns with the complexities and sensitivities of the contemporary media environment. In an era

¹³ Athik Hidayatul Ummah, "Dakwah Digital Dan Generasi Milenial (Menelisik Strategi Dakwah Komunitas Arus Informasi Santri Nusantara)," *Tasâmuh* 18, no. 1 (2020): 54–78.

¹⁴ Yuyun Yumiarty, Bakti Komalasari, and Muhammad Kristiawan, "The Urgency of Learning the History of Islamic Culture: Digital Literation Based," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2021): 49, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v6i1.2328>.

dominated by digital media, scholarly authority can no longer rest solely on traditional religious qualifications such as sanad; it must also be reinforced by the ability to communicate with clarity, contextual awareness, and ethical sensitivity amid the relentless stream of online content. Despite these evolving demands, Ulama is central in guiding the Muslim community. To sustain the relevance and reach of their da'wah, however, they must commit to continuous learning and stay attuned to the shifting dynamics of the digital landscape.

Challenges Faced by Ulama in Maintaining Credibility in the Digital Era

In the digital era, Ulama faces many challenges in preserving public trust, particularly the heightened risk of misspeaking. Among the most pressing is the accelerated pace at which information circulates across social media platforms. A verbal misstep can be instantly captured, disseminated, and subjected to widespread commentary, often before any clarification can be offered or context reestablished. Consequently, even a minor lapse can escalate into a significant controversy that proves challenging to manage. Compounding this is the pressure ulama frequently face to respond immediately to audience inquiries, particularly in live or rapidly unfolding digital settings. The demand for prompt engagement often leaves little room for careful deliberation, heightening the likelihood of misstatements or oversights.¹⁵

Another significant challenge confronting Ulama is the risk of misinterpreting or misrepresenting their statements. In digital discourse's fragmented and fast-paced nature, a single comment can be extracted from its original context, selectively quoted, or deliberately altered—resulting in meanings that diverge sharply from the speaker's intent. This distortion compromises the message and can contribute to the wider circulation of misinformation. Such dynamics can contribute to societal confusion and even deepen divisions within the community. Compounding the issue, social media algorithms tend to amplify provocative or emotionally charged content over educational or corrective material. Consequently, a misspoken remark by an ulama is far more likely to gain visibility and traction than any subsequent clarification, allowing the initial misinformation to dominate public perception.¹⁶

¹⁵ Nurul Hidayat, "Tantangan Dakwah NU Di Era Digital Dan Disrupsi Teknologi," *J-KIs: Jurnal Komunikasi Islam* 5, no. 1 (2024): 45–54.

¹⁶ Meilisa Ani Nurhayati et al., "Islam Dan Tantangan Dalam Era Digital:

Ulama also contends with the inherent limitations of information control in the digital age. Once a statement gains viral traction, the possibility of retraction or correction becomes exceedingly difficult. Even when efforts are made to clarify or contextualize the original message, such responses often fail to reach the full breadth of the initial audience—and among those who encounter them, scepticism or disbelief may persist. Therefore, Ulama must exercise greater caution in its use of language, verify the accuracy of information before dissemination, and adopt well-considered communication strategies tailored to the digital medium. Such mindfulness safeguards their credibility and enables them to remain exemplary figures of guidance and integrity amidst the relentless influx of information that characterizes the digital age.

In addition, Ulama is increasingly confronted with the complex and constantly shifting dynamics of the digital landscape. To communicate effectively, they must develop a working knowledge of various social media platforms and gain insight into how audiences interpret and engage with their content. Without an understanding of algorithms, user behaviour, and the nuances of digital interaction, there is a heightened risk that their religious messages may fail to resonate—or worse, be misconstrued in ways that undermine their intended purpose.¹⁷

To effectively navigate these emerging challenges, Ulama must adopt a more deliberate and strategic approach to communication. Collaborating with media and technology professionals can offer valuable insights into optimizing message delivery across diverse digital platforms. Furthermore, sustained engagement with evolving technological trends is essential—to preserve their relevance in an increasingly digitized society and meaningfully connect with younger audiences whose lives are deeply intertwined with the digital sphere.¹⁸

Digital literacy has become a crucial competency in navigating the challenges of the modern information landscape. Ulama must be

Mengembangkan Koneksi Spiritual Dalam Dunia Maya," *Al-Aufa: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Kajian Keislaman* 5, no. 1 (2023): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.32665/alaufa.v5i1.1618>.

¹⁷ Eka Sartika et al., "Building Students' Islamic Characters through Information, Communication Dan Technology Literacy," *AJIS: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2018): 115, <https://doi.org/10.29240/ajis.v3i2.653>.

¹⁸ Ibnu Kasir and Syahrol Awali, "Peran Dakwah Digital Dalam Menyebarkan Pesan Islam Di Era Modern," *Jurnal An-Nasyr: Jurnal Dakwah Dalam Mata Tinta* 11, no. 1 (2024): 59–68.

equipped with a solid foundation in media literacy to critically assess the reliability of content, discern misinformation, and engage with emerging issues in a measured and thoughtful manner. By doing so, they uphold their role as trusted conveyors of religious knowledge and contribute to disseminating accurate, constructive information within society.¹⁹

The Implication of Misspeaking

Verbal missteps by Ulama in digital spaces can have profound consequences for public confidence and the advancement of Islamic preaching. In the current era of instantaneous communication, information spreads with remarkable speed. A single erroneous statement, once published online, can rapidly gain traction and become a focal point of public conversation—often detached from its original context and interpreted in ways that may distort its intent.

A key consequence of repeated verbal missteps is gradually erasing an ulama's credibility. As figures entrusted with conveying Islamic teachings, Ulama is often viewed as moral and intellectual exemplars. Their authority can be questioned when they falter—particularly through inaccurate or careless statements. Over time, this may prompt segments of the public to seek guidance from alternative voices, especially those they perceive as more reliable or better aligned with contemporary sensibilities.²⁰

In addition, verbal missteps can sow discord within the Muslim community itself, often igniting internal tensions and ideological rifts. Within the volatile ecosystem of social media, a scholar's words—once public—can be selectively edited, stripped of context, or deliberately distorted. These manipulations frequently fuel debate between adherents and critics, amplifying divisions rather than fostering constructive dialogue. Left unaddressed, such episodes risk deepening intra-community fractures and undermining the spirit of unity that da'wah endeavours to uphold.

From the standpoint of da'wah advancement, an ill-considered or poorly articulated remark can have repercussions that extend beyond

¹⁹ Fatin Izzati binti Mohd Taher and Farah Hanan binti Abu Bakar, "Pendidikan Digital Era Ri 4 . 0 Dalam Pendidikan Islam," *International Conference On Syariah & Law2021(ICONSYAL 2021)* 2021, no. APRIL (2021): 436–51.

²⁰ Muhamad Syahrizan and Rina Darajatun, "Strategi Dakwah Forum Komunikasi Da'I Muda Indonesia (Fkdmi) Dalam Meningkatkan Kredibilitas Da'I Di Provinsi Banten," *AdZikra : Jurnal Komunikasi & Penyiaran Islam* 14, no. 2 (2023): 118–34, <https://doi.org/10.32678/adzikra.v14i2.9979>.

personal credibility—it may also inadvertently cast Islam in a negative light. This is particularly true when the misstatement touches on delicate matters such as religious tolerance or Islamic jurisprudence. For individuals who lack a foundational understanding of the faith, such moments can reinforce misconceptions. Consequently, rather than fostering curiosity or engagement, they may withdraw, perceiving Islam as fundamentally at odds with the values they prioritize.

However, when managed appropriately, a misspoken statement can also serve as a constructive learning experience for Ulama. In this context, public criticism may function as valuable feedback—prompting increased mindfulness in speech and greater care in delivering da'wah messages. It can also assist Ulama in developing a more nuanced understanding of digital media, enabling them to convey their messages with greater clarity and reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation.

Therefore, in the digital era, Ulama must exercise greater caution in its public discourse and develop a comprehensive understanding of how social media platforms operate. Adopting appropriate communication strategies can minimize the risk of missteps that may damage their credibility or negatively affect the broader Muslim community. At the same time, such strategic awareness ensures that their da'wah efforts remain impactful, relevant, and well-received by a diverse and increasingly digital-savvy public.

Conclusion

Ulama occupies a distinguished position within the Islamic tradition as an inheritor of prophetic knowledge. In the context of the digital age, their responsibilities have broadened significantly—extending beyond traditional sermons delivered from the pulpit to include the dissemination of Islamic teachings across social media and various digital platforms. Their role is particularly vital in promoting authentic religious understanding and actively challenging the spread of misinformation in online spaces. However, the growing proliferation of misleading religious content necessitates that Ulama continuously adapts to technological developments to safeguard the relevance, appeal, and effectiveness of their preaching within an increasingly dynamic and digitally mediated society.

To maintain their position as respected figures, Ulama must cultivate expertise in digital communication strategies, gain a working knowledge of social media algorithms, and collaborate with media professionals to navigate the complexities of the digital landscape. In

addition, digital literacy is indispensable, enabling Ulama to evaluate information critically and communicate its messages with clarity, accuracy, and resonance across diverse audiences.

In the digital era, misstatements by Ulama can carry significant consequences for public trust and the perceived credibility of Islamic preaching. The rapid circulation of such missteps across online platforms can intensify misunderstandings, incite controversy, and, in more severe cases, contribute to fragmentation within the Muslim community. If not carefully managed, such missteps can tarnish the personal reputation of scholars and the public image of Islam itself. Accordingly, scholars need to exercise greater prudence in their public statements, develop a deeper understanding of the mechanics of digital platforms, and employ strategic communication techniques to ensure that their da'wah remains resonant and responsibly received by a diverse and digitally connected audience.

The application of Entman's framing theory reveals that scholars' visibility and perceived authority in the digital age are significantly shaped by how media narratives and public discourse construct and disseminate their statements or actions. The cases involving Gus Miftah and Herri Pras illustrate how content stripped of its original context can rapidly trigger adverse public perceptions and provoke extensive societal reactions. This phenomenon underscores the pivotal role of framing in shaping public opinion—by delineating issues, attributing causality, embedding moral judgments, and suggesting particular courses of action. Consequently, scholars must cultivate digital literacy, strengthen their public communication skills, and devise effective crisis management strategies to preserve their credibility and religious authority's integrity in increasingly digitized environments. A key limitation of this study, however, lies in the lack of firsthand accounts; no direct interviews were conducted with Ulama or members of the general public. As a result, the analysis draws exclusively from secondary sources—such as published articles and existing literature—which may not encompass the full range of lived experiences or viewpoints.

In future research, it would be advantageous to incorporate direct interviews with Ulama, da'wah audiences, and media practitioners to develop a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the subject. Additionally, quantitative methods could help quantify how media exposure influences public trust in Ulama, thereby complementing qualitative insights with measurable data.

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