

## Between Lineage Scholarship and Charisma: The Phenomenon of Habib and Gus in Islamic Education

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the configuration of religious authority of Habib and Gus in contemporary Islamic education within the digital sphere, examining how nasab, pesantren scholarship, and charisma are constructed, reproduced, and contested on social media. The research employs a qualitative approach with an interpretative case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with Habib, Gus, santri, Islamic Religious Education teachers, and digital congregants; participatory observation of online da'wah activities and documentation study of social media content and digital da'wah archives. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, grounded in the theoretical framework of authority proposed by Max Weber and the theory of symbolic capital developed by Pierre Bourdieu. The findings indicate that the authority of Habib on social media is primarily constructed through nasab as symbolic capital, which gains legitimacy through collective recognition and digital representation. In contrast, the authority of Gus is more dominantly grounded in scholarship and pesantren based sanad, representing the continuity of Islamic intellectual tradition. Furthermore, the study identifies the emergence of digital charisma, formed through communicative performativity, emotional interaction, and technological mediation, thereby reinforcing audience loyalty within virtual communities. Social media functions as a new religious arena that both expands and intensifies symbolic contestation between genealogical legitimacy and scholarly legitimacy.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in Indonesian Muslim society functions not merely as a process of transmitting Islamic teachings and knowledge, but also as a social arena in which religious authority is constructed, symbolic legitimacy is negotiated, and religious elites are reproduced. In

contemporary Islamic developments, religious figures play a significant role as agents of moral and spiritual education, while simultaneously serving as symbols of the collective identity of the ummah. One of the most prominent phenomena in the current landscape of Islamic education is the increasingly visible representation of religious figures known as Habib and Gus.

The phenomenon of the Habib is generally associated with lineage-based legitimacy (*nasab*), namely genealogical claims of descent from the Prophet Muhammad. This lineage constitutes a powerful form of symbolic capital, as it establishes a type of traditional authority that is socially and culturally recognized in Indonesia. Critical literature studies conducted by Alkatiri and Karim Hayaze (2022) demonstrate that the identity of the *habaib* is constructed through historical narratives and sustained symbolic reproduction that continue to influence Islamic education and public religious spaces in Indonesia. Accordingly, *nasab* is not merely a marker of ancestry; rather, it functions as a foundation of religious legitimacy that significantly shapes social acceptance within the domain of Islamic education.

Furthermore, the authority of the *habaib* has undergone new dynamics in the digital era. Wahid (2025) explains that social media has become a space of authority contestation, in which genealogical legitimacy (*nasab*) and relationships with followers (*jamaah*) are subjected to transparency and renegotiation. This development indicates that lineage based authority is no longer taken for granted; rather, it is continuously debated and reconstructed within modern society, including in contemporary Islamic educational practices (Wahid, 2025). Meanwhile, the term Gus within the *pesantren* tradition particularly in the cultural sphere of Nahdlatul Ulama is more commonly understood as a symbol of authority grounded in scholarship and the inheritance of *kiai* leadership Amaliyah (2025).

Emphasizes that the “Gus” phenomenon constitutes part of a process of routinizing charisma, namely the transmission of charismatic authority from *kiai* to the next generation within *pesantren* institutions. This process simultaneously shapes institutional transformation as *pesantren* respond to the challenges of globalization. Accordingly, the legitimacy of a Gus is not solely dependent upon *pesantren* social status, but also upon scholarly capital and communal recognition (Amaliyah, 2025). Beyond lineage and scholarship, both Habib and Gus figures derive authority from the dimension of charisma defined as personal influence capable of generating social loyalty within Islamic educational communities.

Charismatic leadership among *kiai* in *pesantren* demonstrably shapes educational culture, character formation, and students’ value orientation. Kurniawan (2022) underscores that *kiai* leadership in Islamic educational institutions encompasses spiritual and charismatic dimensions that exert a substantial influence on the effectiveness of value-based education. Accordingly, the phenomena of Habib and Gus may be understood as configurations of religious authority constructed through the combination of three principal dimensions: *nasab* (genealogical descent), *keilmuan* (scholarly transmission within the *pesantren* *sanad* tradition), and *kharisma* (socially recognized charismatic influence).

These three elements constitute symbolic capital operating within the arena of contemporary Islamic education in Indonesia. Nevertheless, studies in Islamic education have tended to examine *pesantren* or religious elites in general terms, without specifically integrating how Habib and Gus function as two distinct yet interacting representations of authority. In fact, the dynamics between genealogically based authority and scholarship-based authority carry significant implications for the orientation of Islamic education, the formation of communal character, and the strengthening of religious moderation in Indonesia. Therefore, this research is crucial in addressing the existing academic gap concerning how *nasab*, scholarship, and charisma collectively shape the legitimacy of Habib and Gus within Islamic education.

The article focuses on the central question of how the configuration of authority surrounding Habib and Gus is constructed through genealogical capital, scholarly capital, and charismatic recognition, and what implications this configuration holds for the practices and orientations of Islamic education in contemporary Indonesian society. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the scholarship on Islamic religious authority in Indonesia, while also offering practical insights for the development of Islamic education that is more critical, substantive, and value-oriented rather than centered merely on individual figures.

## 2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with an interpretative case study design to gain an in depth understanding of the phenomena of Habib and Gus as configurations of religious authority in Islamic education, constructed through the dimensions of nasab (genealogy), scholarship, and charisma. The focus lies on the construction of social and symbolic meaning, as well as power relations, which cannot be reduced to statistical measurement but must instead be interpreted through the perspectives of actors within the context of contemporary Islamic education. This field research is descriptive-analytical in nature and explores how Habib and Gus figures are perceived, legitimized, and how their authority is reproduced within digital public spaces encompassing platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and online forums as emerging media of modern Islamic education.

The research subjects consist of Habib or digital majelis dakwah leaders, Gus or pesantren figures active on social media, santri, Islamic Religious Education teachers, and congregational audiences as digital religious publics. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance and involvement in the phenomenon under study (Alkatiri & Karim Hayaze, 2022). Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation of online preaching activities and digital interactions, and documentation studies of sermon content, social media posts, archived preaching channels, and institutional documents to analyze the symbolic reproduction of authority. Data analysis utilized the interactive model of Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, encompassing stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

Thematic analysis was conducted with reference to the theory of authority proposed by Max Weber and the concept of symbolic capital developed by Pierre Bourdieu, in order to examine the processes of legitimacy, contestation, and reproduction of religious elites within the social media based Islamic educational arena. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources, methods, and theoretical perspectives, as well as member checking with informants. The research upheld academic ethics through informed consent, protection of participant confidentiality, objective data usage, and the avoidance of sectarian bias. Accordingly, this study aims to produce a valid and comprehensive portrayal of the religious authority of Habib and Gus within contemporary Islamic education in the digital sphere.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Nasab as Symbolic Capital in the Authority of Habib on Social Media

Based on in depth interviews, participatory observation of digital preaching activities, and documentation analysis of social media content produced by Habib and Gus figures, this study finds that religious authority in contemporary Islamic education within the digital sphere is constructed through a configuration of three principal dimensions: nasab (genealogical lineage), scholarship, and charisma. These three dimensions do not operate independently;

rather, they are interwoven in shaping social legitimacy and audience acceptance of religious figures on social media platforms.

The findings demonstrate that Habib figures derive strong legitimacy from lineage based authority (*nasab*), namely genealogical descent from the Prophet Muhammad. In digital preaching practices, symbols of *nasab* are frequently displayed explicitly through the use of honorific titles, family historical narratives, and audience responses that reflect high levels of reverence toward such lineage status. In this context, *nasab* functions not merely as a social identity but as symbolic capital that reinforces traditional authority within the digital public sphere. This finding aligns with the study of Alkatiri and Karim Hayaze (2022).

Which explains that the identity of the *habaib* in Indonesia continues to be reproduced through historical and symbolic constructions, thereby generating strong religious legitimacy in contemporary educational and preaching spaces. Thus, *nasab* is not simply a genealogical attribute; it operates as an instrument of authority that connects religious tradition with the social structure of modern Muslim society. Furthermore, the digital sphere introduces new dynamics in which lineage-based legitimacy undergoes renegotiation. Some audiences accept *nasab* as a sacred form of traditional authority, while others begin to question its relevance within modern society.

This condition illustrates that social media has become an open arena of authority contestation. Such findings support argument that the authority of the *habaib* in the digital era is reconstructed through transparency in congregational relations and increasingly complex patterns of online social interaction. Recent research also indicates that lineage based authority in the digital age is reproduced not only through traditional symbols but also through hybrid authority management strategies that combine tradition and modernity (Jamaludin et al 2025). assert that *habaib* in Indonesia have developed new patterns of legitimacy by utilizing social media to sustain genealogical authority while adapting to the demands of a more critical public.

This phenomenon further demonstrates that social media does not necessarily displace traditional authority; in many cases, it reinforces it through the mediatization of religion, a process in which religious authority becomes increasingly dependent on mechanisms of media representation. Emphasizes that the presence of new media can strengthen the authority of traditional *ulama* by expanding the reach of preaching and deepening audience attachment to particular charismatic figures (Rachmadhani, 2020). Accordingly, the legitimacy of *nasab* in the authority of Habib figures within the digital sphere may be understood as a configuration of symbolic capital that is continuously reproduced and negotiated both through traditional reverence and through technologically mediated modern contestation.

### **3.2. Scholarship and Pesantren Sanad as the Basis of Gus Authority in Digital Preaching**

In addition to lineage, this study finds that the authority of Gus figures is more predominantly constructed through scholarly legitimacy. Digital preaching content produced by Gus typically features references to classical Islamic texts, acknowledgment of *pesantren sanad*, and intellectual narratives affirming their position as successors to the scholarly tradition of the *ulama*. Audience recognition is granted not primarily on genealogical grounds, but rather on the basis of demonstrated intellectual capacity and depth of religious understanding articulated in digital sermons.

In the digital sphere, such scholarship is presented not merely as academic authority, but as the continuity of *pesantren* tradition that provides a strong foundation of legitimacy in contemporary Islamic education. These findings reinforce Amaliyah's (2025) analysis that the "Gus" phenomenon represents a process of routinizing charisma namely, the transmission of *pesantren* authority from one generation of *kiai* to their successors, which subsequently transforms into the modern public sphere (Amaliyah, 2025). In this regard, social media

functions as a new medium for the reproduction of pesantren scholarship within wider society. This transformation demonstrates that pesantren are no longer confined to traditional spaces; rather, they have adapted to technological developments through the digitalization of preaching and the expansion of Islamic educational outreach.

This process aligns with the concept of pesantren digital literacy, which emphasizes that pesantren scholarship can develop through the utilization of social media as a medium for learning and value transmission (Fadli & Dwiningrum, 2021). Within the context of digital Islamic education, Gus figures emerge as actors who extend pesantren authority from traditional institutional settings into virtual spaces. This confirms that the digital sphere has become a significant arena for the production of new forms of religious authority grounded in scholarship. Rachman (2025) explains that the transformation of religious authority in the digital era has reshaped patterns of ulama leadership, whereby scholarly legitimacy is increasingly reinforced through technological mediation and public communication on social media (Rachman, 2025).

Furthermore, digital preaching conducted by Gus figures constitutes part of pesantren efforts to promote religious moderation in the modern public sphere. Fasadena (2020) demonstrates that virtual preaching activities undertaken by kiai not only sustain traditional authority but also generate new patterns of educational relationships between ulama and congregations through online media (Fasadena, 2020). In this context, Gus as representatives of the younger pesantren ulama generation play a significant role in transforming chains of scholarly transmission (sanad) into digitally mediated authority widely accepted by new generations.

This observation is consistent with studies on the transformation of religious authority in online preaching, which emphasize that digital media strengthen the role of younger ulama in shaping the Islamic orientation of emerging generations (Hasanah, 2025). Thus, the legitimacy of Gus in the digital sphere demonstrates that pesantren scholarship remains the principal source of religious authority, now reproduced in a new format that is virtual, open, and transnational.

### **3.3. Digital Charisma and Audience Loyalty in Contemporary Islamic Education**

Another prominent finding of this study is the emergence of charisma as a significant dimension in the digital da'wah of Habib and Gus. Charisma no longer appears solely in its traditional form through physical presence, but is also constructed through digital performativity, such as rhetorical style, emotional proximity, comment interaction, and visual symbols that reinforce religious imagery. In this context, charisma is no longer entirely personal and immediate; rather, it is mediated by communication technology that shapes new relational patterns between religious figures and their audiences. Social media provides a space in which religious authority can appear more intimate, responsive, and populist, thereby fostering strong emotional bonds within virtual communities.

Observations of digital da'wah content indicate that audiences demonstrate high levels of loyalty through expressions of support, online participation, redistribution of sermons, and the internalization of Islamic educational values conveyed by these figures. This suggests that the digital sphere enables the formation of a new form of "virtual charisma" that reinforces the authority of religious figures in society. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of mediated charisma, wherein the charisma of religious figures is constructed through media representation and digital interaction rather than solely through traditional authority in physical spaces (Hjarvard, 2021).

These findings further confirm that digital da'wah does not merely transmit religious messages but also builds social communities grounded in figure-based loyalty. In the context

of religious influencers, social media-based religious figures function as actors who shape the religious identity of audiences through persuasive and emotionally resonant communication practices. Abidin's (2021) study on influencers demonstrates that public figures in digital spaces are capable of generating social attachment based on affection and trust, which in religious contexts may translate into religious loyalty (Abidin, 2021). This finding is also consistent with Kurniawan (2022), who emphasizes that charismatic leadership of kyai significantly influences the effectiveness of value based education, both within pesantren settings and in broader public religious spheres.

However, within the social media environment, such charisma undergoes expansion through digital mechanisms that allow religious figures to reach audiences across spatial and generational boundaries. This process indicates that contemporary Islamic education is increasingly shaped by figures who possess not only scholarly and symbolic authority but also the communicative capacity to construct digital charisma (Kurniawan, 2022). Moreover, the transformation of religious authority on social media illustrates that religious figures now function as "religious influencers" who shape Islamic values and behaviors on a wide scale (Campbell, 2021).

Eisenlohr (2020) similarly argues that modern religious practices increasingly depend on technological mediation, such that religious charisma and spiritual authority are formed through expansive digital communication networks (Eisenlohr, 2020). Thus, the digital charisma of Habib and Gus can be understood as a new form of religious authority in Islamic education, constructed through emotional relationships, media representation, and the social loyalty of virtual audiences. This phenomenon presents both a challenge and an opportunity for Islamic education: it expands the space for religious learning while simultaneously carrying the potential to foster personality-centered cults if not balanced by critical religious literacy.

#### **3.4. Contestation of Habib and Gus Authority in the Digital Arena**

This study also identifies the presence of symbolic contestation between the authority of Habib and Gus within the digital sphere. Habib figures tend to emphasize the legitimacy of nasab and symbols of traditional sacred lineage, whereas Gus figures underscore the legitimacy of pesantren-based scholarship and the rationalization of da'wah. On social media, these two figures interact in patterns that are at times complementary, yet also potentially constitute arenas of symbolic competition. This contestation is reflected in differences in preaching communication styles, audience bases, and the distinct ways each figure constructs religious authority before digital publics.

Thus, the authority of Habib and Gus is not only produced internally within traditional Islamic communities, but is also openly negotiated within the virtual public sphere. This phenomenon can be explained through Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the religious field, in which religious authority emerges from the contestation of symbolic capital among actors within a social space (Shorfana, 2025). In this framework, the symbolic capital of Habib derives from genealogy and the sacrality of lineage, while the symbolic capital of Gus is rooted in the intellectual tradition of pesantren, scholarly sanad, and institutional legitimacy.

The contestation becomes more intense in social media environments because digital platforms enable audiences to choose authorities more freely, while simultaneously generating fragmentation of religious communities based on figure-centered loyalty. Furthermore, social media functions as a new "field" that expands competition among religious elites through the digitalization of authority. Stig Hjarvard (2021) argues that the mediatization of religion causes religion and religious authority to become increasingly dependent on media logic, compelling religious figures to compete within an open arena of public attention. Consequently, both

traditional and pesantren-based authorities undergo transformation as they are required to adapt to the performative demands of digital communication.

This contestation can also be understood as part of broader structural shifts in global Islamic authority, wherein digital media creates conditions of “de-institutionalization of authority,” marked by the weakening monopoly of traditional institutions in determining religious legitimacy. Gary R. Bunt (2021) explains that digital spaces generate new forms of Islamic authority that are competitive and publicly oriented, thereby intensifying rivalry among religious figures with differing bases of legitimacy. Moreover, the symbolic contestation between Habib and Gus reflects fragmentation of authority along social identity lines. Stewart M. Hoover and Nabil Echchaibi (2020) emphasize that social media creates new spaces for “public religion,” where religious identity and authority are exchanged within public discourse often characterized by symbolic competition.

This perspective clarifies why the digital arena functions not only as a medium of da'wah but also as a battleground of legitimacy among religious elites. Accordingly, the contestation of Habib and Gus authority in the digital arena underscores that contemporary Islamic education cannot be separated from the dynamics of symbolic capital and elite religious competition. Social media has become a new space in which religious authority is produced, reproduced, and openly contested, ultimately shaping patterns of religiosity and Islamic learning within society.

## DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates that the religious authority of Habib and Gus on social media is constructed through distinct yet intersecting configurations of symbolic capital within the arena of digital da'wah (Faqihuddin 2023). In the case of Habib, nasab a genealogical claim of descent from Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) functions as the primary source of legitimacy, represented through honorific titles, historical family narratives, and audience recognition that reflects high symbolic reverence. From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu, nasab may be understood as symbolic capital that becomes effective when collectively recognized within a particular field.

The digital arena, in this context, constitutes a new social space in which such symbolic capital is produced, reproduced, and negotiated. In line with Bourdieu's concept of the religious field, the authority of Habib is not inherent, but rather the result of ongoing social recognition reinforced through media representation and audience response (Daulay2024). This phenomenon may also be interpreted through the typology of authority proposed by Max Weber, particularly traditional authority grounded in inherited legitimacy and genealogical sacrality. However, within the context of social media, such traditional authority undergoes a process of mediatization of religion as articulated by Stig Hjarvard, whereby religious authority becomes increasingly dependent on media logic and representational dynamics.

Thus, nasab functions not merely as a genealogical attribute, but as a symbol digitally curated to maintain relevance among modern audiences who are comparatively more critical. This negotiation illustrates that the digital sphere does not simply reproduce traditional authority, but also opens spaces for contestation and reinterpretation (Wahid, 2025). In contrast, the legitimacy of Gus in digital da'wah is more predominantly rooted in scholarship and pesantren based sanad. Authority is constructed through references to classical Islamic texts, narratives of scholarly transmission, and continuity of pesantren intellectual tradition. Within a Weberian framework, this form approximates rational-legal authority institutionalized within the pesantren educational system, while also representing the process of routinization of charisma that is, the transformation of personal kyai charisma into an institutionalized structure of inherited authority.

Social media in this context functions as a medium of epistemic expansion, extending the reach of pesantren tradition into virtual space and rendering it more open, participatory, and transnational. Consequently, pesantren scholarship emerges as an alternative form of symbolic capital that both competes with and dialogues alongside the genealogical legitimacy of Habib within the digital religious field. The third prominent dimension is digital charisma, which no longer manifests solely through physical presence but is constructed through communicative performativity persuasive rhetoric, emotional proximity, comment interaction, and visual aesthetics (Harro 2024). The concept of mediated charisma, as proposed by Hjarvard, explains that in digitally mediated societies, charisma is shaped through media representation and online symbolic interaction rather than exclusively through face to face relations. In this context, social media operates as a new field that converges religious logic and media logic, requiring religious figures to manage impressions, cultivate engagement, and sustain public attention.

The contestation between Habib and Gus in digital space reflects the dynamics of the religious field described by Bourdieu: each actor brings different forms of symbolic capital nasab versus scholarship into a competitive exchange of legitimacy (Amaliyah, 2025). This process is further intensified by the phenomenon of de-institutionalization of authority analyzed by Gary R. Bunt, wherein digital media weakens the monopoly of traditional institutions and creates space for pluralized authority. As a result, audiences possess greater freedom in selecting authoritative figures, which in turn generates fragmentation of religious communities based on figure-centered loyalty. From the perspective of public religion articulated by Stewart M. Hoover, religion in digital space becomes a public discourse characterized by symbolic exchange and identity-based competition.

Moreover, audience loyalty toward Habib and Gus indicates the formation of virtual charisma reinforced by affective attachment, online participation, and content circulation. This aligns with the findings of Crystal Abidin regarding the role of influencers in generating social attachment grounded in trust and affection, which in religious contexts transforms into religious loyalty (Humairah 2024). Thus, religious figures on social media function not only as preachers but also as religious influencers who shape the religious orientation of younger generations through persuasive and emotionally resonant communication.

Overall, these findings affirm that contemporary Islamic education on social media is the result of a complex interaction among genealogical symbolic capital, pesantren-based scholarship, and digital charisma within a digitized religious field. Religious authority is no longer singular or monopolistic; rather, it is competitive, mediated, and open to public negotiation (Husni 2022). Social media has become a space for the production, reproduction, and contestation of authority, directly influencing patterns of learning, congregational loyalty, and the construction of Islamic identity in modern society.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the phenomenon of Habib and Gus in contemporary Islamic education within the digital sphere represents a configuration of religious authority constructed through three principal dimensions nasab, scholarship, and charisma. These three dimensions are deeply intertwined in shaping the social legitimacy of religious figures on social media, while simultaneously influencing the orientation of Islamic education among Indonesian Muslim communities. Habib figures tend to derive authority from symbolic capital grounded in genealogical lineage and the sacrality of descent, whereas Gus figures more prominently assert legitimacy through pesantren-based scholarship, intellectual sanad, and the inherited authority of kyai within the tradition of Nahdlatul Ulama. At the same time, both are equally reinforced by

digital charisma constructed through media performativity, emotional proximity, and the loyalty of virtual audiences.

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