

## Identity, Cult, and Charisma: The Contestation of Online Da'wah on @halimahalaydrus's Instagram Account

*Isa Anshori<sup>1</sup>, Zainal Mukhlis<sup>1</sup>, Almi Novita<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>State Islamic University of Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia  
Corresponding Email: i.anshori@uinsa.ac.id

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### Abstract

This research aims to explore and analyze how identity, cult, and charisma are formed within the context of da'wah on social media, specifically through the Instagram account @halimahalaydrus. By employing a netnographic approach, the study observes the interactions, content, and community dynamics developed on this social media platform. This method enables researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of da'wah by analyzing the texts, images, and comments associated with the account. The results reveal that Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus' identity on social media is shaped not only by her characteristics but also by the digital communication strategies she employs. Through consistent content, strong spiritual narratives, and direct engagement with her followers, Ustadzah Halimah successfully builds an image as an assertive and inspiring spiritual leader. The formation of a cult occurs not only through direct teachings but also through the active involvement of her followers on Instagram, which strengthens the bonds within the digital community. Moreover, Ustadzah Halimah's charisma is recognized and reinforced by her followers, aligning with Weber's definition, where charisma stems not only from her personal qualities but also from the acceptance of her followers. Ustadzah Halimah's charisma was not solely derived from herself, but was co-constructed by the community that formed a cult around her. Ismail Fajrie Alatas emphasizes that authority is not merely position or power, but the ability to build temporal relationships, connecting past values with the current context, and creating a community that can internalize these values (Cultivating Community). Da'wah through the Instagram account @halimahalaydrus illustrates how identity, cult, and charisma evolve in the digital age, highlighting significant changes in the construction and maintenance of religious authority.

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi dan menganalisis bagaimana identitas, kultus, dan karisma dibentuk dalam konteks dakwah di media sosial melalui akun Instagram @halimahalaydrus. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan netnografi, penelitian ini mencoba mengamati interaksi, konten, dan dinamika komunitas yang terbangun di platform sosial media tersebut. Metode ini memungkinkan peneliti untuk memahami fenomena dakwah secara mendalam dengan menganalisis teks, gambar, dan komentar yang terkait dengan akun tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa identitas Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus di media sosial terbentuk tidak hanya oleh karakteristik pribadinya, tetapi juga oleh strategi komunikasi digital yang diterapkannya. Melalui konsistensi konten, narasi spiritual yang kuat, dan interaksi langsung dengan pengikutnya, Ustadzah Halimah berhasil membangun citra sebagai pemimpin spiritual yang tegas dan inspiratif. Pembangunan kultus terjadi tidak hanya melalui kajian langsung, tetapi juga melalui keterlibatan aktif pengikutnya di Instagram, yang memperkuat ikatan komunitas digital. Sedangkan karisma Ustadzah Halimah diakui



dan diperkuat oleh pengikutnya, sesuai dengan definisi Weber, di mana karisma tidak hanya berasal dari kualitas pribadinya tetapi dikonstruksi bersama oleh masyarakat yang membentuk kultus di sekitarnya. Ismail Fajrie Alatas menekankan bahwa kewibawaan bukan semata-mata jabatan atau kekuasaan, melainkan kemampuan membangun hubungan temporal, menghubungkan nilai-nilai masa lalu dengan konteks kekinian, dan menciptakan komunitas yang mampu menginternalisasi nilai-nilai tersebut (Cultivating Community). Dakwah melalui akun Instagram @halimahalaydrus menunjukkan bagaimana identitas, kultus, dan karisma berkembang di era digital, serta perubahan signifikan dalam pembangunan dan pemeliharaan otoritas keagamaan.

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**Keywords** Cult; Charisma; Identity; Halimah Alaydrus; Social Media Dakwah.

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## **Introduction**

In the 21st century, the development of information technology has brought about significant changes in various aspects of life, including da'wah activities. The emergence of social media as a result of technological advancements has transformed the landscape of da'wah in Indonesia. What was once conducted in public spaces has now shifted into the digital realm through cyberspace.<sup>1</sup> This digital da'wah model presents an opportunity for millennials, who tend to be more connected to the digital world.<sup>2</sup> In addition to being unrestricted by space and time, digital da'wah also makes it easier for audiences to grasp the messages conveyed, as it often uses everyday conversational language and can be tailored to the needs of social media users.<sup>3</sup>

The shift in the communication paradigm for disseminating da'wah messages allows preachers to reach a larger and more diverse audience. The evolution of da'wah communication aligns with technological advancements, requiring preachers to extend the reach of their message through social media. Instagram has become one of the preferred platforms for online da'wah due to its ease of accessibility. This makes it possible to optimize da'wah in terms of time, distance, process, and cost.<sup>4</sup> This change in the communication paradigm indirectly offers preachers a significant opportunity to have a broader impact in spreading religious messages.

In the past, preachers conveyed Islam primarily through public stages and traditional media. However, today, da'wah can be easily disseminated via social media.<sup>5</sup> The presence of women on social

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<sup>1</sup> Devianti Putri Kusumastuti, 'Kontestasi Wacana Islam Nusantara Di Media Sosial (Analisis Wacana Kritis Norman Fairclough Pada Akun Instagram NU Online Tahun 2018)' (Universitas Gajah Mada, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Reza Mardiana, 'Daya Tarik Dakwah Digital Sebagai Media Dakwah Untuk Generasi Milenial', *Komunida: Media Komunikasi Dan Dakwah* Vol.10, no. 2 (2020): 150.

<sup>3</sup> Abdul Karim, 'Dakwah Melalui Media: Sebuah Tantangan Dan Peluang', *AT-TABSIR: Jurnal Komunikasi Penyiaran Islam*, Vol. 4, no. 1 (2016): 162.

<sup>4</sup> Dessy Kushardiyanti1, Zaenal Mutaqin, and Aulia Sholichah Iman Nurchotimah, 'Tren Konten Dakwah Digital Oleh Kontent Creator Milenial Melalui Media Sosial TikTok Di Era Pandemi Covid-19', *Orasi: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 12, no. 1 (2021): 98.

<sup>5</sup> Istina Rakhmawati, 'Perkembangan Media Sebagai Sarana Dakwah', *AT-TABSIR: Jurnal Komunikasi Penyiaran Islam* 4, no. 1 (2016): 49-70.

media contributes to popular culture,<sup>6</sup> where women are often depicted as spectacles for men and portrayed as beings associated with beauty.<sup>7</sup> This can indirectly perpetuate stereotypes and limitations that restrict their presence in media discourse. When women appear in the public sphere, the media often focuses on their physical appearance rather than their message.<sup>8</sup> As a result, women are frequently objectified for men's visual gratification, with their intellectual capacity and contributions overlooked in various aspects of life.

The rise of social media is connected to several less dramatic, yet pervasive, shifts relating to their integration into the mundane practices of day-to-day life.<sup>9</sup> On social media, women are often portrayed in domestic roles, and stereotypes suggest that they are not suited to participate in the public sphere.<sup>10</sup> Despite this, many women have now embraced social media as a platform for da'wah, spreading Islamic teachings without abandoning their primary role in household management. Today, numerous female preachers actively use social media as a medium for online da'wah. Among them is Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus, a sharifah born in Indramayu, whose lineage traces back to the Prophet Muhammad through the Alaydrus clan. She is the 39th descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, with her lineage recorded in Rabithah Alawiyah.

Her name has gained increasing prominence since the da'wah content she posted on social media went viral and attracted a large following. This is partly because she never shows her face on social media, even though in public she wears a veil/niqab. For female followers (akhwat) who wish to see Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus' face, they must attend her *majlis* (knowledge gatherings). Additionally, her prohibition against recording her da'wah during these gatherings has further piqued the interest of her social media followers. Fatimah Husain (2023) explains that women, or sharifah, who trace their lineage to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), possess the authority to take on the role of da'wah in the public sphere.<sup>11</sup> Thus, it is no surprise that Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus' presence in public attracts significant attention.

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<sup>6</sup> Jamalul Muttaqin, 'Ulama Perempuan Dalam Dakwah Digital: Studi Kebangkitan Dan Perlawanan Atas Wacana Tafsir Patriarkis', *Living Sufism: Journal of Sufism and Psychotherapy* Vol. 1, no. 1 (2022): 92–105.

<sup>7</sup> Uswatun Hasanah, 'Perempuan Dan Dakwah Kontemporer', *Reflektika* 12, no. 12 (2016): 33–42.

<sup>8</sup> Feryna Nur Rosyidah and Nunung Nurwati, 'Gender Dan Stereotipe: Konstruksi Realitas Dalam Media Sosial Instagram', *Share : Social Work Journal* 9, no. 1 (2019): 10, <https://doi.org/10.24198/share.v9i1.19691>.

<sup>9</sup> Stina Bengtsson and Sofia Johansson, "The Meanings of Social Media Use in Everyday Life: Filling Empty Slots, Everyday Transformations, and Mood Management", *Journal Social Media+Society*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Fabrizio Santoniccolo, Tommaso Trombetta, Maria Noemi Paradiso, and Luca Rollè. "Gender and Media Representations: A Review of the Literature on Gender Stereotypes, Objectification and Sexualization", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Fatimah Husein, 'Ustadzah Ba'alawi Dan Kemunculan Otoritas Keagamaan Baru Di Ruang Publik Indonesia: Pendekatan Feminist Epistemology', *Pidato Pengukuhan Guru Besar Dalam Bidang Filsafat Agama*, 2023, 1–62.

According to Aini and Kailani (2021), it is stated that an individual's identity can serve as a new "soft" discourse to convey certain ideas to their followers.<sup>12</sup> This occurs because a person's identity has a strong influence on shaping the views and beliefs of their audience. This research aims to examine how identity, cult, and charisma play a role in the form of da'wah contestation on social media, with a case study of the Instagram account @halimahalaydrus. To understand the phenomenon, this research uses a netnography approach, an ethnographic method applied to digital spaces, to explore the practices, symbols, and social interactions that take place in online communities. Through observations of posted da'wah content, as well as interactions between Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus and her followers—in the form of comments, likes, and reposts—the researcher explores how the process of religious authority construction takes place in virtual space.

The netnography approach allows researchers to read Instagram space not just as a place to share content, but as an arena for contestation of religious authority, where legitimacy and influence are shaped through visual aesthetics, religious narratives, and follower engagement. To understand the complexity of such authority, this research utilizes two main theoretical frameworks. First, Weber's charisma theory, which explains that charismatic authority comes from followers' perceptions of the existence of extraordinary qualities in the leader. This charisma is often personal and non-rational, and in the digital context, appears through the performance of piety, touching communication style, and an impression of spirituality that is consistently displayed. In the case of Ustadzah Halimah, this charisma can be seen from how she limits physical visibility on social media but is still able to build emotional closeness with the audience.

Second, Ismail Fajrie Alatas' theory of religious authority, which offers the perspective that authority in the Islamic tradition is not only supported by personal performance, but also by genealogical structures, social networks, and the practice of scientific representation. Alatas emphasizes that the descendants of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*), as claimed by Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus, are an important element in constructing authority in the Indonesian Muslim public, especially amidst the trend of revival of traditional and symbolic authority. By combining netnographic observation and the two theoretical frameworks, this study explores how identity as a sharifah (woman descendant from the Prophet), the cult of followers (who idealize the figure of Ustadzah), and personal-spiritual charisma shape the dynamics of new religious authority on social media.

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<sup>12</sup> Rezki Putri Nur Aini and Najib Kailani, 'Identity and Leisure Time: Aspiration of Muslim Influencer on Instagram', *Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies* Vol. 5, no. 1 (2021): 57–80, <https://doi.org/10.21009/005.01.03>.

### **Biographical Sketch of Halimah Alaydrus**

Halimah Alaydrus was born in Indramayu on April 2, 1979. She is a preacher, writer, and motivator who has made significant contributions to the fields of religion and self-development in Indonesia.<sup>13</sup> Coming from a family with strong religious traditions, Halimah pursued her religious education in several prominent Islamic boarding schools. In 1991, she studied at Pesantren Darullughah Wadda'awiyah in Bangil, Pasuruan, and in 1995, she continued her studies at Pesantren At-Tauhidiyah in Tegal, East Java. The following year, she moved to Pesantren Al-Anwar Sarang in Rembang, Central Java. The pinnacle of her education was at Pesantren Daruz Zahra in Tarim, Hadramaut, Yemen, in 1998.<sup>14</sup>

Halimah began her da'wah career by teaching at Daruz Zahra in Hadramaut, Yemen, and later continued as a teacher in various assemblies both in Indonesia and abroad, including major cities such as Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Oman, Australia, and Egypt.<sup>15</sup> In addition to teaching, she has also served as a translator for international preachers (da'iahs) and has been a guest speaker on a private radio station in Indonesia.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Halimah is known as the founder and owner of Muhasabah Cinta Event,<sup>17</sup> a platform that organizes various da'wah and self-development events. She actively teaches at various majelis taklim in Jakarta and its surrounding areas, as well as being a guest speaker at numerous seminars in Indonesia and abroad. Her da'wah and academic journeys have taken her to various provinces in Indonesia and countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Oman, Egypt, Brunei, and Australia.

As an author, Halimah has published several books focused on self-development and spirituality. Some of her notable works include: *Bidadari Bumi*, which tells the stories of nine righteous women; *Tutur Hati*, a collection of writings from her blog, Twitter, and Facebook; *Pillars of Light*, which narrates the lives of the four companions of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) who were among the first to convert to Islam; and *Muhasabah Cinta*, which offers stories and advice on marriage. Her books are not only popular among Indonesian readers but have also gained an audience in other countries.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to her work in da'wah and education, Halimah frequently appears as a guest speaker on various private radio stations, offering insights and inspiration on religious life and self-

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<sup>13</sup> Tamita Fatwana Yuna and Ahmad Tamrin. Sikumbang, 'Beyond Visuals: Komunikasi Dakwah Ustazah Halimah Alaydrus Di Instagram', *JuRnal Sosiologi Agama Indonesia (JSAI)* 4, no. 2 (2023): 161.

<sup>14</sup> 'Profile', *Halimah Alaydrus Official* (blog), accessed 24 June 2024, [https://www.halimahalaydrus.com/p/blog-page\\_9.html](https://www.halimahalaydrus.com/p/blog-page_9.html).

<sup>15</sup> Topikurrohman and Maya Maulidia, "Eksplorasi Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus' Language Style and Personality in Da'wah Through Youtube Media", *JKS: Jurnal Spektrum Komunikasi*, Vol. 12, No. 3, (September, 2024), 354.

<sup>16</sup> Fatimah Husein, "Ustadzah Ba'alawi Dan Kemunculan Otoritas Keagamaan Baru di Ruang Publik Indonesia: Pendekatan Feminist Epistemology", 20-23.

<sup>17</sup> In The Instagram Bio @halimahalaydrus.

<sup>18</sup> 'Profile'.

development. Her commitment and dedication to spreading knowledge and religious values have earned her widespread respect and admiration. As a female preacher known as a descendant of a sharifah, Halimah Alaydrus carries strong spiritual and historical legitimacy due to her direct lineage from the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). This lineage is one of the key attractions for her followers.<sup>19</sup>

Raised in an environment steeped in religious values and Islamic education, Halimah's early education was greatly influenced by her family and community, who instilled solid Islamic teachings in her. She did not rely solely on her family heritage but also pursued both formal and informal religious education.<sup>20</sup> She attended numerous Islamic educational institutions, where she deepened her knowledge of the Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic law, and theology. Her commitment to religious learning and teaching drove her to continually develop herself and seek a deeper understanding of Islam. Halimah also actively participates in various seminars and workshops to further enrich her knowledge and skills in preaching.<sup>21</sup>

Halimah Alaydrus' influence in the world of da'wah is profound, particularly in her use of social media as a platform to spread the teachings of Islam. Her digital presence has opened the door for many other female preachers, inspiring them to leverage technology in their preaching efforts. Through her inspirational and educational content, Halimah has successfully built a strong and supportive community among her followers. She is also actively involved in various social and humanitarian initiatives, demonstrating that da'wah is not only about preaching but also about taking real actions that benefit society.<sup>22</sup>

Halimah Alaydrus exemplifies how, with dedication and sincerity, one can bring meaningful change to the lives of many. Her life and work inspire countless individuals to continuously strive to improve themselves and contribute to the well-being of others. One form of follower engagement, for example, can be seen in the comments of the @fzhsip account:

*"Semoga cinta ku padamu menjadi sebab Nabi Muhammad mengenal dan memandang ku wahai ustadzah, sebab tak punya apa-apa kecuali cinta, cinta kepadamu dan kepada Rasulullah. Betapa kami rindu dengan Rasulullah, betapa dada kami sesak merindukan-Nya".*

("Hopefully my love for you will be the cause of the Prophet Muhammad knowing and looking up to me, O ustadzah, because he has nothing but love, love for you and Messenger of Allah. How we miss the Messenger of Allah, how our chests are tight for missing Him)."

Furthermore, not only the comments from the @fzhsip account, there are approximately 4,057 other positive comments show how great the impact of Ustadzah Halimah's da'wah is, which not only

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<sup>19</sup> Fatimah Husein, 'Ustadzah Ba'alawi Dan Kemunculan Otoritas Keagamaan Baru di Ruang Publik Indonesia, 21.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>21</sup> Mariati Aprilia Harahap, "ReLigious Commodification: The Performance Of 'Ustādha Halimah Al-Alaydrus' On Dakwah Stage In Targeting Indonesian Audiences", *INSIS: International Seminar of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, (2024).

<sup>22</sup> Fatimah Husein, 25.

reaches the congregation directly, but also extends to the online community. This expression shows how the figure of Ustadzah Halimah is a spiritual medium that revives the people's longing for the Prophet Muhammad.

Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus's da'wah strategy in building spiritual closeness with her followers shows a form of reshaping or re-adjustment of the tarekat rituals that have characterized the Ba'Alawi tradition, by emphasizing aspects of love for the Prophet, dhikr, and Maulid celebrations in a format that is more widely accessible through social media. In line with Ismail Fajrie Alatas's findings, which show how Ba'Alawi scholars have adapted the practice of tarekat by emphasizing prophetic piety and projecting a new form of prophetic authority that is relevant to the demands of the times.<sup>23</sup>

Ustadzah Halimah represents the continuity of this strategy in the digital realm, namely by visualizing the piety and charisma of the Prophet Muhammad through herself as a gentle, compassionate, and inspiring figure. By presenting religious nuances that touch emotionally through digital da'wah content, Halimah not only preserves the symbols of traditional spirituality but also provides new meanings that resonate with the lives of her followers in the modern era. Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus' consistent and massive presence on social media, especially Instagram, is a powerful testament to the influence and reach of her da'wah in the digital space.

As of June 1, 2025, the official Instagram account @halimahalaydrus has more than 2.8 million followers, significantly increasing from 2.1 million followers at the end of 2023 when the researcher first made observations.<sup>24</sup> This increase reflects both her growing popularity and the public's trust in her da'wah. In all her endeavors, Halimah remains steadfast in her mission to spread kindness and elevate the spiritual quality of life for Muslims, wherever she may be.

### **Cults in the Digital Age: Building a Community of Followers**

In the digital era, social media has become a highly effective platform for forming and strengthening cults, especially for public figures with charismatic appeal, such as Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus. In this digital context, charisma is cultivated not only through consistent personal branding but also through ongoing, intense interactions with followers. Cheong (2012), in his book *Digital Religion, Social Media and Culture: Perspectives, Practices, and Futures*, explains that social media plays a key role in creating an environment where charisma narratives thrive, bolstered by the active participation of followers.<sup>25</sup>

On the Instagram account @halimahalaydrus, the consistency of uploaded content is not only a form of self-expression but also a means of building a strong identity and inviting emotional

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<sup>23</sup> Ismail Fajrie Alatas, "Becoming Indonesians: The Bā 'Alawī in the Interstices of the Nation", *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 45-108.

<sup>24</sup> Official Instagram Account @halimahalaydrus.

<sup>25</sup> Pauline Hope Cheong, *Digital Religion, Social Media, and Culture: Perspectives, Practices, and Futures* (P. Lang, 2012).

engagement from followers. The characteristics of a cult on social media are evident in how followers respond, not just in support but also in reinforcing the narratives built by Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus. This cult formation is visible in the comment section of the Instagram account @halimahalaydrus, which is regularly filled with responses from followers on every feed or reel post. For example, in posts related to advice or prayers, within less than 24 hours, over 1,310 positive comments were received,<sup>26</sup> praying for Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus' recovery as a revered cult figure.



Picture 1. Followers' comments on one of @halimahalaydrus' posts

In this context, the process of cult formation can be observed through the responses of @halimahalaydrus followers, as each post is filled with praise, prayers, and expressions of hope. Beyond Instagram interactions, the community of followers is further cultivated through da'wah safaris across various regions in Indonesia. Unexpectedly, the enthusiasm of Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus' followers is no longer confined to social media responses but is also evident in her study gatherings, which consistently exceed the venue's capacity.

For instance, during her da'wah safari in Surabaya on February 25, 2024, held at Graha Samudera Bumimoro, the crowd's enthusiasm was overwhelming. The space was filled to capacity, with attendees scrambling to secure the best spots, hoping to get closer to Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus. The congregation's eagerness vividly illustrates her charismatic appeal. This is a testament to how charisma successfully attracts thousands of followers, strengthened and expanded through a combination of direct interaction in study assemblies (majelis kajian) and digital platforms (social media). Social media, in particular, has the power to quickly organize and mobilize the masses, amplifying the charisma and forming a cult of admiration and reverence towards her figure.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Halimah Alaydrus post on Instagram @halimahalaydrus, accessed on 03 August 2024.

<sup>27</sup> Abd Hannan and Ach. Fatayillah Mursyidi, "Social Media and the Fragmentation of Religious Authority among Muslims in Contemporary Indonesia", *Digital Muslim Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2023.



Picture 2. The Atmosphere of the Muslimah Study at Samudera Bumimoro Building, Surabaya

The picture illustrates the recognition of Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus' charisma and authority. Indirectly, these types of responses often contain elements of reverence. It is not uncommon for posts on the @halimahalaydrus account to be filled with comments from her followers that glorify her with phrases such as "you are our role model", "soul soother", "light in my heart", "my hubabah," and other expressions that contribute to the cult of a prominent figure. In this case, the followers are not only receiving her message but are also actively involved in enhancing her image as a charismatic authority figure, recognized not only for her qualities but also for the acceptance and acknowledgment she receives.

Beyond her active preaching on social media and conducting da'wah tours to various regions, the personal narratives of Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus' life journey play a crucial role in fostering emotional connections with her followers. Campbell and Tsuria (2021) explain that personal stories shared by public figures on social media have the power to create a collective identity among followers.<sup>28</sup> This is evident in the community surrounding Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus, as her personal stories often inspire her followers to emulate the spiritual path she advocates. For instance, when Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus shares her personal spiritual experiences, followers frequently respond with empathetic comments, expressing their desire to follow in her spiritual footsteps.

Additionally, symbolism has emerged through the use of hashtags such as #halimahalaydrus, #halimahalaydruspage, and #halimahalaydrusindonesia, which are among the top three hashtags that unify her followers under a shared identity. Sabrina (2018), explains that symbolism serves as a means of strengthening social bonds between followers who may not personally know one another.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, the formation of a cult following is also influenced by social media algorithms. These algorithms act as catalysts in the process, accelerating the spread of Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus' da'wah. Couldry (2013) explains that social media algorithms not only facilitate content dissemination

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<sup>28</sup> Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media* (Routledge, 2021).

<sup>29</sup> Anisa Rizki Sabrina, 'Literasi Digital Sebagai Upaya Preventif Menanggulangi Hoax', *Communicare: Journal of Communication Studies* 5, no. 2 (n.d.).

but also shape how followers perceive the figures they follow.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, the algorithm, by repeatedly displaying Halimah Alaydrus' content to her followers, indirectly reinforces the charismatic narrative being constructed while also expanding her community's reach.

Ultimately, the cult surrounding a figure like Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus not only reveals new dynamics of power in the digital era but also raises ethical questions regarding the boundaries of charisma and authority constructed through social media. In academic discourse, this phenomenon calls for a deeper exploration of the social and cultural implications of cult formation in the digital age. Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus, as a figure who has successfully built a loyal and committed following through social media, reflects a broader transformation in the concepts of power and authority in the digital era. Therefore, this analysis not only examines how Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus builds and sustains her community of followers but also offers a critical reflection on the increasingly complex phenomenon of cults in the digital age.

### **Charisma and Its Influence: Max Weber's Perspective**

This research uses Max Weber's charisma theory approach to understand how figures such as Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus build religious authority through social media. In the context of modern society, which has experienced a shift in religious authority from formal institutions to personal figures who are present digitally, Weber's concept of charismatic authority is very relevant. Weber distinguishes three forms of authority: traditional, legal-rational, and charismatic.<sup>31</sup> Charismatic authority, according to Weber, stems from followers' recognition of the extraordinary qualities of an individual who is believed to be able to bring spiritual transformation to their community. Accordingly, the study uses this approach as an attempt to explain how Ustadzah Halimah's presence on social media is not only as a deliverer of da'wah, but also as a figure who gains legitimacy from the emotional attachment of her followers.

In Max Weber's view, charisma is one of the three main forms of authority (as mentioned earlier), alongside traditional authority and legal-rational authority. This discussion focuses on charismatic authority. Charismatic authority is a type of authority based on the exceptional qualities of an individual, which make them respected and followed by others. In a social context, charisma often emerges when people seek a figure they believe can guide them. Weber explains that charisma is not an inherent trait but a social construction recognized by followers.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Nick Couldry, *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> Max Weber, *Economy And Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology* (London: University of California Press, 1963).

<sup>32</sup> Agustinus Gergorius Raja Dasion, Muna Yastuti Madrah, and Mukhijab, *Tiga Diskursus Kuasa dalam Sosiologi: Max Weber, Karl Marx, & Michel Foucault - Jejak Pustaka* (Jejak Pustaka, n.d.).

However, Weber also emphasized that the charisma of an individual, recognized as possessing extraordinary abilities and having a vision and mission considered noble by their followers, is temporary. Its sustainability depends on the leader's ability to meet the expectations of their followers. If a charismatic leader fails to maintain this, the charisma that was once built and possessed will fade as the leader fails to sustain it. Thus, in Weber's view, charisma is not just about personal qualities but also about the dynamic interaction between leaders and followers, which must be continuously renewed to remain relevant and effective.

In the context of Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus' da'wah, one of the keys to her success in building a community (*jam'ah*) lies in her highly effective and interactive communication strategy when delivering da'wah messages to her followers. Her presence on social media has made her one of the most influential figures within the Muslim community, especially in Indonesia. Her charisma is rooted in her ability to relate religious teachings to everyday life. The da'wah content she shares on the @halimahalaydrus Instagram account often addresses issues relevant to society, particularly those faced by women today, making her messages easier for her audience to accept.

Weber argues that charismatic authorities often need institutions to survive in the long term, which allows their charismatic legacy to continue after them.<sup>33</sup> This concept helps us understand how a religious or social leader, such as Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus, builds an institution to extend her charismatic influence. Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus is known as the founder of the Muhasabah Cinta Event, which serves to extend her influence through the da'wah and Muslimah study events she regularly holds throughout the region, especially in Indonesia. The presence of the Muhasabah Cinta event exemplifies how charisma can be built and maintained through a careful and directed communication approach.

Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus' charisma is also influenced by her ability to utilize technology to expand her reach. During the pandemic, when all forms of communication were limited, she used social media to interact with her congregation. This interaction created a more personal and emotional connection between her and her followers, which indirectly strengthened her charisma. In this digital era, her ability to leverage technology has established her as an authority figure who has made a significant impact on the lives of her followers. The content she shares on social media has influenced their spirituality, with many considering her a "spiritual role model," as her preaching resonates with their daily lives.

The changes in the views and behaviors of her followers illustrate the influence of Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus' charisma. The combination of strong religious beliefs and a modern lifestyle not

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<sup>33</sup> Alan Sica, *Max Weber and the New Century* (Transaction Publishers, n.d.).

only inspires changes in her followers' behavior but also provides them with a framework for developing a more comprehensive religious identity. At the same time, she offers an ideal identity model for her followers. In doing so, she is able to create a cohesive community where shared values can be reinforced through discussion spaces, contributing to a broader social impact.

This suggests that, according to Weber, charisma not only affects individual followers but also fosters wider social change. This aligns with Max Weber's theory of charismatic authority, wherein followers perceive charismatic leaders as possessing extraordinary qualities and spiritual advantages that bring them closer to God.<sup>34</sup> In certain situations, charisma can play an important role in establishing authority. Authority and leadership often emerge in religious and social contexts that require inspiration or dramatic change.

### **Identity, Cult, and Charisma of Halimah Alaydrus: Fajri Alatas' Theory**

Religious identities have undergone significant transformations in the digital era, where social media platforms play a major role in shaping, displaying, and reinforcing these identities. Contemporary thinker Ismail Fajrie Alatas offers an in-depth perspective on this phenomenon, particularly in the context of how religious figures like Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus build identity, cult, and charisma through social media. As a means of disseminating religious messages, social media serves as a space where identity is formed through complex interactions between leaders (figures) and followers. A well-structured communication strategy on social media not only strengthens Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus' position as an authority figure but also facilitates the formation of a cult around her.

Identity on social media is not static; it is a dynamic construction that is continuously formed through interactions between individuals and their audiences. According to Alatas, religious identity can be built through strategically produced and disseminated content.<sup>35</sup> As a charismatic da'iyah, Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus has not only succeeded in building a congregation but also in establishing a strong identity on social media through a personal narrative that consistently emphasizes religious values relevant to her audience.

The beginning of her appearance on social media raises many questions, particularly regarding her style of dress—simple yet peaceful, without the need to show her face, representing a woman filled with calm and faith. Initially, this identity was built alongside visual symbols and a consistent narrative to emphasize the religious identity she aimed to project. According to Alatas, in a religious context, these visual symbols are shaped and adjusted to align with the expectations and needs of the congregation or followers. As a da'iyah who also began her career as a writer, she utilizes personal

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<sup>34</sup> Dasion, Madrah, and Mukhijab, *Tiga Diskursus Kuasa dalam Sosiologi*.

<sup>35</sup> Ismail Fajrie Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority: Menyemai Sunnah, Merangkai Jamaah*, n.d.

narratives as a tool to build her identity. She occasionally shares her personal experiences, infused with her spiritual journey and advice rooted in Islamic teachings that are relevant to modern life.

In constructing her identity, this type of narrative is very effective because it provides a personal touch that allows followers of @halimahalaydrus' Instagram account to feel closer and more connected to the religious figure they follow. Through various posts on her account, we can see that she presents herself as a spiritual guide who imparts wisdom through her deep religious knowledge and personal spiritual experiences. Her content is accompanied by explanations relevant to everyday life. Her identity is formed by integrating daily life experiences with religious teachings, attracting followers who seek spiritual guidance fitting the context of modern life.

In addition to identity, cult formation is influenced by how she maintains relationships with her followers on social media. Alatas explains that in the digital age, cults often develop from intense relationships between charismatic leaders and their followers, where personal interactions can indirectly strengthen a sense of loyalty.<sup>36</sup> Through the features available on the Instagram platform, such as live sessions, direct messages (DM), and comments, closer interactions can be established between Ustadzah Halimah as a cult figure and her followers. Alatas argues that this kind of interaction contributes to the formation of a cult, where followers feel a special bond with a figure they consider to possess extraordinary knowledge and wisdom.

As a charismatic da'iyah whose lineage is traced back to the Prophet Muhammad through her parents, recorded in Rabithah Alawiyah as the 39th descendant, Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus has become one of the most influential female preachers on social media. Alatas defines charisma as a quality attributed to an individual by their followers. In the case of Halimah Alaydrus, her charisma is evident in the way she delivers religious messages filled with empathy, calmness, and wisdom. While her influence is often associated with her syar'i attire and facial expressions – visible only to some female attendees at her majelis—her interactive communication style has a greater impact on how she is perceived by her followers.

Weber argues that charisma is often identified through appearance and behavior that demonstrate moral and spiritual strength, which then shapes how an individual is viewed by their followers.<sup>37</sup> Alatas, however, contends that charisma is not only determined by one's ability to influence others' thinking but also by the capacity to build strong emotional connections with followers, especially in the digital age. In this era, where communication can be cultivated through digital spaces, this ability further enhances her authority as a charismatic figure within her community.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ismail Fajrie Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority: Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2021).

<sup>37</sup> Dasion, Madrah, and Mukhijab, *Tiga Diskursus Kuasa dalam Sosiologi*.

<sup>38</sup> Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority?*

In the digital context, identity, cult, and charisma are often driven by the consistency and relevance of narratives reinforced by personal interactions. Thus, the cult surrounding Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus is not solely based on her personal charisma but also on the religious narrative she consistently constructs and delivers via social media. This provides a clearer understanding of how Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus builds her authority online.

Her identity as a spiritual guide is shaped through consistent narratives and visual symbols, while the cult is formed by meaningful and relevant personal interactions, reinforced by her empathetic charisma. This indirectly strengthens her connection with her followers on social media, helping her maintain her authority as a female religious figure. Furthermore, her presence on social media has successfully challenged the stigma that women cannot speak or participate in religious discussions in the public sphere, defying traditional norms.

### **Conclusion**

This research explores three interconnected aspects: the formation of digital religious identity, the emergence of cult-like followings in the age of social media, and the dynamics of charisma, analyzed through the theoretical lenses of Max Weber's concept of charisma and Ismail Fajrie Alatas' formulation of religious authority. The findings demonstrate that Ustadzah Halimah Alaydrus' digital identity is carefully constructed through strategic communication on Instagram. Her consistent posting, narrative emphasis on love for the Prophet, spiritual aesthetics, and direct engagement with followers contribute to shaping her image as a compassionate yet authoritative female religious leader. Beyond this, her community reflects not only digital presence but also offline loyalty, as many followers attend her study circles and religious gatherings. Social media—especially Instagram—amplifies this connection, enabling continuous affective interaction and reinforcing her role as a center of spiritual guidance. Her charisma is not solely based on inherent traits but is continuously constructed through recognition and affirmation by her followers, in line with Weber's notion of charisma as a relational phenomenon.

These findings contribute to broader discussions on how religious authority is negotiated and performed in the digital era. By combining Weber's classical framework with Alatas' analysis of prophetic authority within the Bā Alawī tradition, the study demonstrated how traditional spiritual lineages are recontextualized through modern media. Ustadzah Halimah's da'wah shows how charismatic legitimacy is built—not only through lineage or institutional endorsement, but through digital visibility, performative piety, and emotional resonance. This research thus advances scholarly understandings of how social media transforms religious communication, enabling figures like Ustadzah Halimah to embody a form of hybrid authority that resonates with contemporary Muslim audiences, especially among urban and digitally active followers.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. First, it focuses primarily on one case study, which may limit the generalizability of its findings across other digital preachers or religious traditions. Second, while the analysis highlights follower engagement, it does not systematically examine follower demographics or motivations beyond comment analysis. Future research could employ mixed methods—such as in-depth interviews with followers or digital ethnography over longer periods—to understand the dynamics of affective online communities. In addition, comparative studies between male and female preachers, or across Islamic schools and traditions, would also enrich the discourse on gender, authority, and digital religious practices in contemporary Muslim societies.

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