



## Beyond the Religious Authority: A Genealogy Analysis of Leaders' Legitimacy in Indonesian Islamic Communities

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### Abstract:

The authority of the kyais in Islamic boarding schools today cannot be fully understood solely through traditional theories that focus on knowledge and sanad. In the contemporary context, the legitimacy of kyais is also influenced by factors such as social relations, descent and digital media. This study aims to analyze the process by which the authority of the kyais is established in the Islamic boarding school community. The method used is qualitative, with a case study approach, and data collection through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. The results of the study show that the process of establishing the authority of the kyais in the Islamic boarding school community is carried out through scientific genealogy (sanad keilmuan), genealogy of descent (*nasab/dzurriyah*), and adaptation to modernity through social media and digital public spaces. These findings show that the authority of the kyais is not fixed but is shaped through a social process that continues to change alongside the use of digital media, symbols, and cultural interactions.

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## INTRODUCTION

The authority of a kyai is not only formed through the competence of the person concerned, but the authority of the kyai is also formed historically and socially. One of the important issues in Indonesian Islamic studies today is the gap between classical theories of religious authority and social realities on the ground (Aziz, 2023; Romli et al., 2025). Traditionally, religious authority in Islam is understood to derive from religious knowledge, moral example, and a continuous lineage of knowledge (Lumbard, 2024; Saada, 2023). However, in practice now the legitimacy of the kyai does not only depend on these factors, but is also influenced by socio-economic capabilities and media which influence the views of the community in a number of Islamic boarding schools. Like the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School, a phenomenon has emerged where young kyai or famous figures in the digital world are starting to gain influence that can rival the authority of traditional kyai. This suggests a change in the sources of legitimacy that is not fully explained by classical theory. Therefore, research is needed that can combine traditional authority theory with evolving social realities to understand how the legitimacy of the kyai is built and maintained in the current era.

Many studies on the authority of the kyai and the legitimacy of the kyai have been conducted, but most of them still focus more on structural and historical aspects without paying attention to the genealogical and social processes that accompany them Wajdi, (2025). Classic research Nu'man, (2025) emphasizes the role of Islamic boarding schools

and scientific networks as the basis for the legitimacy of the kyai, while Amaliyah, (2025) examines the influence of kiai on the politics and social aspects of society. Although these studies provide a strong foundation, there is still little research that discusses how the legitimacy of the kyai is constructed through genealogical relationships and social symbolism in the context of modernity Al-Ghifari et al., (2024) It has touched on the discussion of cultural authority but has not analyzed how spiritual and social genealogies become new sources of legitimacy in the contemporary era. Therefore, this research plays an important role in developing the study of classical religious authority by highlighting the genealogical aspects and modern social dynamics in the formation of the legitimacy of the kyai.

The novelty in this research lies in the genealogical approach in analyzing the process of formation and inheritance of the legitimacy of the kyai. Instead of seeing legitimacy as something fixed and only sourced from sanad or charisma. This research shows that the authority of the kyai is a dynamic construct built through a network of knowledge, biological relationships, and social recognition. Research at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School found that the legitimacy of the kyai is a combination of scientific lineage, *dzurriyah* descent, and adaptation to the development of the times. The genealogical approach makes it possible to trace not only blood relations, but also the transmission of spiritual values and authority. Thus, this research offers a new perspective on religious authority as a result of construction involving genealogical and social factors, not something theological that is passed down through generations or formally.

The main objective of this research is to examine the process of forming the authority of the kyai in the Islamic boarding school community. Social change and the emergence of new authorities raise questions about how legitimacy is maintained and recognized within Islamic communities, especially in Islamic boarding schools. Based on observations at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School, the legitimacy of the kyai involves interaction between religious knowledge, sanad, biological descent, and community recognition. This dynamic shows a change in the meaning of authority from purely religious authority to broader socio-religious authority. Thus, this study aims to answer the question: How is the Legitimacy of Kyai in the Indonesian Islamic Community, especially in the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School, Formed and Inherited Genealogically and How Does This Authority Develop from Formal Religiousness to More Inclusive Social Recognition?

The legitimacy of the kyai in the Indonesian Islamic community is formed through a process that involves various aspects such as scientific, spiritual, social and cultural (Kawakip & Sulanam, 2023; Yani et al., 2022). The authority of a kyai does not only come from his lineage or scientific chain of command but also from his ability to adapt and balance between tradition and modern progress (Saleh, 2025; Soong, 2025). Initial studies at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School showed that recognition of kyai can be achieved through social involvement, community service, and acceptance of moral values passed down between generations. This process shows that the legitimacy of the kyai is the result of social interactions that continue to develop in accordance with the times. Therefore, this study seeks to test the hypothesis whether the authority of the kyai has now transcended formal religious boundaries and developed into a genealogical and social authority, combining spirituality, exemplary conduct, and adaptability as the basis of legitimacy in the modern Indonesian Islamic community.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research was conducted at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School and focused on the process of forming the authority of the kyai which was analyzed through genealogical, social, and cultural dimensions in the context of modern Indonesian Islamic communication. The Lumajang Islamic Boarding School was chosen as the unit of analysis because it is considered to represent a social space that allows tracing the formation of the authority of the kyai through the genealogy of knowledge (*sanad ilmu*), lineage (*dzurriyah*), and the ability to adapt to the dynamics of modernity, including the use of digital as a new medium for religious legitimacy. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the process of formation, reproduction, and maintenance of the authority of the kyai through daily practices in the pesantren environment. Data was collected from various Islamic boarding school informants, including Islamic boarding school supervisors (senior Kyai and young Kyai), students, Islamic boarding school administrators, and community leaders, through observation techniques, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. The senior kyai provided an explanation regarding the sanad of knowledge and the history of the legitimacy of Islamic boarding schools, while the young kyai explained the dynamics of the transformation of authority through the use of social media. The Islamic boarding school administrators explained the role of institutional structures in supporting the authority of the kyai, while the students conveyed perspectives related to the internalization of adab values, the practice of respect, and the symbolic acceptance of the kyai as a spiritual and social leader figure.

Data analysis in this study refers to the Miles and Huberman model which includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. In the reduction stage, the data obtained is selected and classified into main themes related to the process of forming the authority of the kyai, such as the scientific lineage (*sanad*), genealogical relations, the social role of the kyai, and the manifestation of authority in the modern context. The data presentation stage is carried out through matrices and thematic narratives to systematically describe how the authority of the kyai is constructed through historical, spiritual, social, and digital interactions that are continuously reproduced in the life of the Islamic boarding school. The verification process is carried out by applying triangulation of sources, methods, and time to increase the validity of research findings. In addition, content analysis is used to examine various Islamic boarding school documents and biographies of kyai, while discourse analysis is used to understand how the authority of kyai is formed symbolically through speech, rituals, daily practices, and representation in the public sphere. Through this series of analysis processes, the research shows that the authority of the kyai is a genealogical and social construct that is dynamic and adaptive, and continues to develop in line with changing times without separating itself from the roots of the pesantren tradition.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### Genealogy of Science (*sanad ilmu*)

The results of the study show that the genealogy of knowledge (*sanad ilmu*) at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School is a system of transmission of religious knowledge that is structured continuously, which connects the kyai and teachers with their previous teachers up to the pioneering scholars of the Islamic scientific tradition. This scientific

chain of command is the basis for the legitimacy of knowledge, which ensures that the knowledge taught has a spiritual foundation, clear methods, and a history of knowledge that can be accounted for. In the context of Islamic boarding schools in Lumajang, the genealogy of knowledge is not only understood as a path of inheritance of texts and methods of reading yellow books, but also functions as symbolic capital that strengthens the position of the kyai as the legitimate successor to the Islamic boarding school's scientific tradition. Therefore, the sanad of knowledge is an important foundation in establishing religious authority, gaining social recognition, and maintaining the continuity of the intellectual tradition of Islamic boarding schools from one generation to the next.

The following are the results of interviews regarding scientific genealogy (*sanad ilmu*) with several informants: For us, the sanad of knowledge is paramount. The asatid (teacher) and kyai (religious teachers) who teach the scriptures are not merely passing on the knowledge of previous teachers. Every knowledge that we convey must have a teacher who guides it, there must be a path upwards, meaning it must connect to the teacher, for example, if we teach the book Fathul Qorib, then we must connect to whoever previously taught it, namely the previous teacher, then connect to the authors of the book, that is what is meant by sanad. Therefore, the sanad is not merely a list of names, but proof that the knowledge we teach has a clear and continuous lineage, extending back to previous teachers, the great and authentic scholars. It is this sanad that ensures the authenticity of the knowledge within the Islamic boarding school.(KS)

As a young Islamic boarding school preacher, I see that in society they are more receptive to preaching from preachers who have a strong sanad. People believe because I learned directly from the masyaikh at the Lumajang Islamic boarding school which is known to have a strong scientific path. When I preach, they believe that what I convey is not mere empty talk but part of a strong scholarly tradition with a clear path. The sanad (chain of narration) also distinguishes Islamic boarding school kyai (Islamic boarding school preachers) from religious figures who lack a clear scholarly path (KM).

At the Islamic boarding school, we were taught the importance of sanad so that knowledge is not lost and is not imparted carelessly. We as students have more faith in teachers who have a chain of transmission that conveys knowledge with a clear and strong chain of transmission, namely the dzuriyah founders of the Islamic boarding school. What we feel is that the sanad brings blessings of knowledge that are clearer and more tangible when learning from people whose sanad is strong and what makes us more confident that the Islamic boarding school's scientific tradition will be maintained from generation to generation is the sanad (S).

When you hear the instructions, you feel calmer and as if you are given a guarantee that the kyai is really learning from the right teachers. This Islamic boarding school in Lumajang is indeed well-known among the people because of its strong sanad, so when a young kyai appears, the people are more confident and do not hesitate to accept his teachings even though the times have changed. But what makes us more confident is the sanad, which means it is the main benchmark for believing that someone's knowledge is correct and can be followed (M).

Based on the interview results, the genealogy of knowledge (*sanad ilmu*) at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School shows that the authority of the kyai is formed through historical connections with the chain of scholars of previous generations, thus religious legitimacy does not solely rely on individual intellectual abilities, but also on symbolic authority inherited through a clear and well-maintained path of knowledge transmission.

The sanad is understood as a marker of the authenticity of teachings and a guarantee that the knowledge imparted remains aligned with the pesantren's scholarly tradition. This understanding is then internalized by the students and the community as the primary benchmark for accepting and recognizing the authority of the kyai. Therefore, kyai who have a strong sanad of knowledge tend to be more easily accepted and respected, because they are seen as the legitimate successors of established scientific traditions. Ultimately, the genealogy of knowledge functions as cultural capital that strengthens the charisma of the kyai, mediates social recognition, and ensures the continuity of the reproduction of religious authority in the structure of Islamic boarding schools in Lumajang.

**Table 1. Genealogy of Science (*sanad ilmu*)**

Main aspects	Indicators/Manifestations in the Field	Researcher Interpretation
The connection between teachers and students ( <i>sanad ilmu</i> )	The relationship between knowledge is maintained through the traditions of talaqqi, bahtsul masa'il, and the teaching of yellow books directly from kyai to students; the sanad of knowledge is recorded and passed down between generations.	Sanad (continuity of knowledge from previous scholars) becomes spiritual legitimacy, confirming the authority of the kyai because he is considered the heir to legitimate and valid knowledge.
Heir to the Scientific Tradition	Senior kyai pass on learning methods, reference books, and teaching styles to the younger generation of kyai; the transmission process is carried out through intense interaction and spiritual closeness.	The inheritance of knowledge is a cultural process that maintains the authenticity of the Islamic boarding school so that the authority of the kyai is more easily accepted because he brings the same knowledge as the founder of the Islamic boarding school.
Historical Connection with the Founder of the Islamic Boarding School	The teaching structure, curriculum of the books, and pattern of cadre formation refer to the model established by the founder; the name of the founding scholar is always mentioned in religious studies and rituals.	Historical connections strengthen the position of Islamic boarding schools as institutions that have a strong foundation in the tradition of Salaf scholars, making sanad the identity of the institution as well as a symbol of moral authority.
Continuity of the Sanad of the Yellow Book	Certain yellow books may only be taught by kyai who have received the sanad directly from previous scholars; the sanad's approval is carried out symbolically on special occasions.	The sanad of the yellow book is a sign that the kyai has special authority, so that the kyai who has it is considered more trustworthy in understanding and teaching knowledge.
Collective Recognition of the Authority of the Sanad	Students and the community respect kyai with a sanad because they are considered to have a clear path to knowledge, and scientific lineage is the main reference for accepting religious authority.	The testimony from these interviews demonstrates the powerful symbolism of the sanad, where the authority of the kyai is accepted without question, as it is perceived to carry historical and spiritual legitimacy.

The genealogy of knowledge at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School is the main foundation in the formation of the authority of the kyai through ongoing scientific relations between teachers and students, the inheritance of teaching practices, and historical connections with the founder of the Islamic boarding school. The scientific chain of kinship is understood as a form of spiritual legitimacy which confirms that the knowledge taught by the kyai has a clear basis and is connected to previous ulama santri, so that this authority is accepted naturally by both the santri and the community. The inheritance of learning methods, the tradition of yellow books, and moral examples also strengthen the continuity of Islamic boarding school traditions and maintain the authenticity of the scientific identity passed down from one generation to the next. Due to the mutual recognition of the chain of knowledge, kyai who have a clear scientific path are generally more trusted and more worthy of being used as religious references. Thus, the genealogy of knowledge is not only the basis of knowledge, but also plays a role as a symbolic and cultural source that strengthens the legitimacy of the kyai's leadership in the pesantren environment.

### **Genealogy of Descendants (*nasab/dzurriyah*)**

The findings of this study illustrate that genealogy of descent (*nasab/dzurriyah*) plays an important role in the leadership structure of the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School. Several Islamic boarding schools in this region are historic, having been established since 1912 and still maintain a genealogical leadership style, where descendants of the founders hold a central role in continuing the school's scholarly and spiritual traditions. Currently, the boarding school is led by KH. SS, a direct descendant of the founder and renowned for his strong scholarly credentials and extensive experience studying at the Jombang Islamic Boarding School. This background strengthens his authority through a combination of lineage and scholarly chain of succession. Furthermore, the institutional structure of the Islamic boarding school is further strengthened by the role of KH. AWN, as Head of the Kyai Foundation at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School. He is part of a large Islamic boarding school family who has educational experience at the Pasuruan Islamic Boarding School, so the legitimacy of his leadership is supported by a combination of lineage and intellectual authority. Thus, the leadership pattern of Islamic boarding schools in Lumajang shows that the genealogical connection with the founders of the Islamic boarding schools, combined with the intellectual journey of the caretakers in the large Islamic boarding schools in East Java, is the main foundation for the continuity of authority, prestige, and stability of Islamic boarding school leadership to this day.

The genealogy of descent (*nasab/dzurriyah*) at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School can be understood as a pattern of legitimacy of leadership that is based on the biological lineage of the founder of the Islamic boarding school, where the *dzurriyah* is positioned as the legitimate successor to traditions, values and religious authority that are inherited continuously. In the context of this Islamic boarding school, lineage is not only interpreted as a blood bond, but also as a symbol of spiritual and moral continuity which is believed to bring blessings and maintain the integrity of the vision of the founder of the Islamic boarding school's struggle. The position of *dzurriyah* in the leadership structure is seen as more appropriate, more authentic, and more trustworthy because

they are considered to have a deep understanding of the history, character, and direction of development of Islamic boarding schools. The respect given by the students and the community to the descendants of the founder further strengthens this legitimacy, so that lineage functions as cultural capital that determines acceptance of the authority of the kyai. Thus, genealogy plays an important role in the process of leadership reproduction, maintaining social stability, and maintaining the identity of Islamic boarding schools from one generation to the next.

The following are the results of interviews with various informants, regarding the Genealogy of Descendants (*nasab/dzurriyah*):

**Table 2 Genealogy of Descendants**

Source person	Direct Statement	Core Findings
Senior Kyai	Lineage, in the eyes of Islamic boarding schools, is a trust that must be upheld by the descendants of the founders, who are considered responsible for continuing the pesantren's legacy. The community and students also have greater trust because they see the descendants as successors who bring blessings and continuity to the pesantren.	<i>Nasab</i> is seen as Trust and the main source of leadership legitimacy.
Young Kyai	I feel that the public is more receptive to what we convey because we are descendants of the founder. This makes it easier for us to carry out the overall mandate of <i>da'wah</i> . However, lineage is not the only important factor; it must be accompanied by the validity of the authoritative knowledge, which must be recognized and respected.	Descendants of the founders provide symbolic capital in the acceptance of authority.
Students	From the very beginning of our stay at the boarding school, we were taught etiquette toward the teachers and the pesantren family ( <i>dzurriyah</i> ). For us, the kyai (cleric) descended from the founder holds a special place, even though there are other <i>ustadz</i> with profound knowledge. It has become a tradition for us, as students and the community, to respect him.	Students internalize lineage-based respect as part of Islamic boarding school etiquette.
Community Leaders/Residents	The community feels more at ease when those leading are descendants of the founders. We believe they understand the direction of the Islamic boarding school better from their ancestors. Lineage makes the community more resilient in following the teachings.	The community sees the <i>dzurriyah</i> as the legitimate heir to the vision of Islamic boarding school leadership.

Based on the interview results in table 2, the genealogy of descent (*nasab/dzurriyah*) at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School is one of the key elements in the formation and sustainability of the authority of the kyai. Findings in the field show that lineage is not understood solely as a biological bond, but rather as symbolic capital that has strong legitimating power in the social order of Islamic boarding schools. The descendants of the founders are seen as the legitimate successors of the traditions, values and vision of the Islamic boarding school, thus gaining the initial trust of the students and the surrounding community. This pattern of respect continues to be reproduced through the practice of Islamic boarding school etiquette, institutional

traditions, and deep-rooted social expectations, so that students view *dzurriyah* as a figure worthy of respect and following. On the other hand, society often associates lineage with blessings, moral continuity, and the stability of Islamic boarding school leadership. Meanwhile, young kyai acknowledge that genealogical status provides initial legitimacy that facilitates social acceptance, although it still needs to be supported by scientific capacity and spiritual maturity. Thus, the genealogy of descent acts as a basis for legitimacy that continues to live, strengthens leadership patterns, and maintains the sustainability of Islamic boarding schools through widely accepted traditions and history.

The strong foundation of legitimacy in the leadership structure of the Islamic boarding school plays a role as a genealogy of descent (*nasab/dzurriyah*) at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School. Lineage here is not only understood as a blood bond, but also as a symbol of spiritual, moral and historical continuity from the founder of the Islamic boarding school. The results of the study show that the status as a descendant of the founder provides initial trust capital so that the figure of the kyai, especially the next generation, is relatively more easily accepted by students and the community. This respect is maintained through the practice of Islamic boarding school etiquette, narratives of the founder's exemplary behavior, and long-rooted social expectations, so that lineage is seen as a marker of legitimate and proper leadership. Society tends to associate *dzurriyah* with inherited blessings and authority, while young kyai feel that genealogical identity provides initial legitimacy which then needs to be strengthened through scientific capacity and social service. Thus, the genealogy of descent functions as a socio-cultural mechanism that continuously reproduces the authority of the kyai and is widely accepted in the pesantren environment.

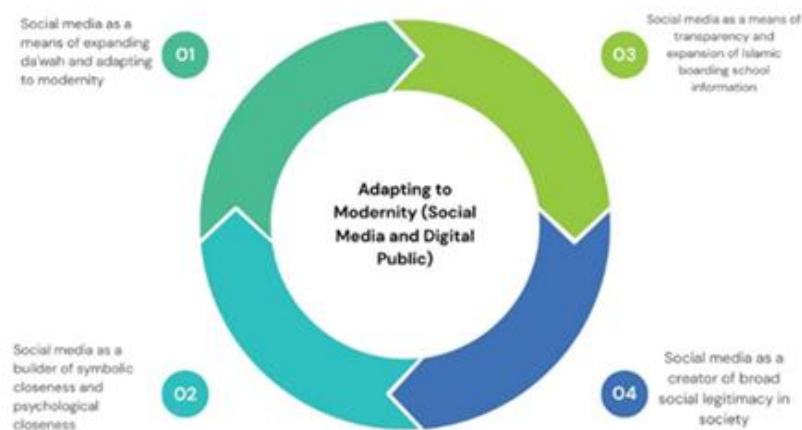
### **Adapting to Modernity through Social Media and Digital Public Spaces**

The results of the study show that adaptation to modernity through social media and digital public spaces at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School can be understood as a process of changing the authority and role of the kyai through the use of digital platforms as a new space to build, display, and expand religious influence outside the Islamic boarding school environment. This adaptation reflects the ability of Islamic boarding schools, especially young kyai, to respond to developments in the era by delivering preaching, teaching, and building self-representation through social media such as YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram. Social media not only functions as a communication tool, but also as a space for expression that allows kyai to demonstrate their scientific capacity, moral example, and establish emotional closeness with students and the community. In this context, modernity is not understood as a threat to the tradition of Islamic boarding schools, but rather as a strategic means to strengthen legitimacy, expand the reach of da'wah, and maintain the relevance of Islamic boarding schools in an increasingly digital society. This digital adaptation shows that religious authority at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School is formed through a combination of traditional capital such as sanad and nasab with digital social capital that is more open, participatory, and responsive to the needs of today's community.

**Table 3 Adaptation to Modernity (Social Media and Digital Public)**

Indicator	Informant's Statement	Informant
<b>Social media as a means of expanding da'wah and adapting to modernity.</b>	Social media has now become a new platform for preaching. Many congregants who cannot attend Islamic boarding schools still follow my lectures on YouTube or TikTok. In this way, Islamic boarding school teachings remain relevant amidst changing times.	Young Kyai
<b>Social media as a builder of symbolic closeness and psychological closeness.</b>	We felt closer to the young kyai because we could see his daily activity on Instagram. He seemed more modern, responsive, and close to his students. Social media made that connection seem seamless.	Senior Students
<b>Social media as a means of transparency and expansion of information about Islamic boarding schools</b>	Now, information about Islamic boarding school activities spreads quickly because we post everything on the school's official Facebook page. It's easier for the public to follow activities and understand the school's developments.	Islamic Boarding School Administrators
<b>Social media as a creator of broad social legitimacy in society</b>	Even though we're busy, we can still listen to the young kyai's lectures on Facebook. Even though we can't meet in person, we feel close and trusting. Many community decisions are also influenced by the views of the young kyai on social media.	Public figure
<b>Social media as a creator of broad social legitimacy in society</b>	Even though we're busy, we can still listen to the young kyai's lectures on Facebook. Even though we can't meet in person, we feel close and trusting. Many community decisions are also influenced by the views of the young kyai on social media.	Public figure

Based on the interview results, the researcher interpreted that adaptation to modernity through the use of social media at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School is an important element in expanding, strengthening, and renewing the religious legitimacy of young kyai. Social media is not only used as a channel for conveying da'wah, but also as a space to present oneself by demonstrating the kyai's scientific capacity, emotional closeness, and relevance to the needs of today's generation. Through digital platforms, young kyai reach a wider audience, including those unable to attend in-person Islamic boarding schools, enabling inclusive and flexible preaching. Students interpret the presence of young kyai on social media as a manifestation of openness and adaptability to current developments, which in turn strengthens their sense of closeness and loyalty. Meanwhile, the public views social media as a means of facilitating access to religious guidance, thus strengthening the legitimacy of the kyai through religious experiences formed from digital interactions. Thus, social media plays a role as a new space for the formation of legitimacy, which indicates that the authority of the kyai today no longer only depends on the traditions of the Islamic boarding school, but also on the ability to adapt to the modern public space.



**Figure 1. Adaptation to Modernity (Social Media and Digital Public)**

Figure 1 shows four main indicators of the adaptation of the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School to modernity through the use of social media as stated by the informants. The first indicator, social media is used as a means of expanding da'wah as well as a response to changing times, where digital platforms enable religious messages to reach congregations who cannot attend Islamic boarding schools in person. Second, social media builds symbolic and psychological closeness, as conveyed by senior students who feel closer to young kyai because they can follow his activities regularly via Instagram. Third, social media plays a role in increasing transparency and expanding the dissemination of information about Islamic boarding schools, as can be seen from the use of official Islamic boarding school Facebook accounts which make it easier to access various Islamic boarding school activities and developments. And finally, social media also helps to create broader social legitimacy, as expressed by one community leader, by holding online studies it can increase closeness and trust and even influence the dynamics in citizen decision-making. So overall, the picture of the four indicators confirms that social media does not merely function as a communication tool, but also becomes a strategic space that expands the reach of influence, increases transparency, and strengthens the legitimacy of young kyai in the context of modern society.

The changes in the religious authority of kyai, especially young kyai, are an adaptation to modernity through the use of social media and digital public spaces at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School. Digital platforms are being utilized as a new and useful tool to strengthen social relationships, expand the reach of preaching, and maintain the relevance of religious messages amidst the changing times. Where through social media such as YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram, young kyai not only convey Islamic teachings, but also build symbolic and psychological closeness with students and the community who regularly follow their activities. On the other hand, Islamic boarding school administrators use digital media to increase information transparency, so that various activities at the Islamic boarding school can be widely accessed by the public. It should not be forgotten that society also feels the emergence of a new form of social legitimacy through digital interactions, because the views and messages of young kyai on social media also influence their attitudes and social decisions. Thus, this digital adaptation confirms that religious authority in Islamic boarding schools no longer solely relies on traditional capital such as sanad and nasab, but is also formed through digital capital that is more open, participatory, and in line with the demands of modernity.

## Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the formation of the authority of the kyai at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School did not just happen but was the result of three main elements, namely the genealogy of knowledge (*sanad ilmu*), genealogy of descent (*nasab/dzurriyah*), and the ability to adapt to modernity through the use of social media and public spaces. These three elements work together and strengthen each other in building the legitimacy of the kyai's leadership, both within the pesantren environment and in broader social relations. The authority of the kyai here is not only constructed through Islamic scholarly tradition and mastery of texts, but also through the symbolic inheritance of the pesantren founder, who possessed the ability to demonstrate that authority in a relevant way in modern social spaces. This finding confirms that the authority of the kyai is a genealogical and dynamic social construct, not simply the result of a static structural position or personal charisma.

Theoretically, the genealogy of knowledge (*sanad ilmu*) established in this study is in line with the classical view of traditional authority in Islam, as explained by Max Weber through the concept of traditional authority, where legitimacy is built through the continuity of tradition and collective recognition of inherited values (T. Magalhães, 2022). The scientific lineage here functions as symbolic capital in the context of Islamic boarding schools (Ibrahim et al., 2024) which guarantees the validity of a kyai's knowledge and morals. This finding also confirms previous studies (Hasan, 2025) which explains that the main basis for the formation of the authority of the kyai is the network of knowledge and relations between teachers and students. However, this study expands this understanding by showing that the sanad of knowledge not only acts as a source of academic legitimacy, but also as a social process that bridges public acceptance and strengthens the charisma of the kyai amidst the dynamics and competition of contemporary religious authority.

Meanwhile, research findings regarding the genealogy of descent (*nasab/dzurriyah*) show that the legitimacy of Islamic boarding school leadership is greatly influenced by blood relations with the founder of the Islamic boarding school. Lineage here cannot only be understood as a line of descent, but also as a symbol of spiritual, moral and historical continuity that forms social beliefs and perceptions of blessings. This finding is in line with the concept of ascribed authority, where leadership legitimacy is obtained not only through individual achievements, but also through inherited status (Ellenberg & Kruglanski, 2024). From a sociological perspective, this pattern can be understood as a process of reproducing symbolic authority that is cultural and historical in nature. This research also complements the findings of (Waheed, 2025) about the cultural authority of the kyai by showing that lineage functions as symbolic capital that is internalized in the practice of Islamic boarding school etiquette, social expectations, and community acceptance so that the process of leadership reproduction remains stable and there is minimal resistance.

The third dimension, regarding adaptation to modernity through the use of social media and digital public spaces, shows significant changes in the way religious authority is built and maintained. The findings of this study indicate that kyai, especially young kyai, are starting to utilize social media as a new space to build legitimacy through creating emotional closeness, displaying scientific competence, and increasing public visibility. This phenomenon is in line with the concept of communicative authority and mediated

authority, which states that legitimacy no longer depends entirely on traditional structures alone, but also on a person's ability to build trust through the media (Munir, 2023; Rachman et al., 2025). The results of this study also support the findings (Berger & Golan, 2024) This study demonstrates that digital space has become a new site for the formation of religious authority. However, unlike the view that digitalization poses a threat to traditional authority, this study demonstrates that in the context of Islamic boarding schools, social media functions as an extension of existing genealogical authority.

This finding shows a fairly fundamental difference when compared with a number of previous studies. Many previous studies have viewed modernity and digital media as factors that are considered to be a threat to the traditional authority of the kyai. However, this study actually shows that the authority of the kyai at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School is not replaced by popular figures in the digital space, but continues to be reproduced through a combination of traditional capital such as *sanad*, *nasab*, and digital capital. By referring to the Weberian authority theoretical framework, this finding can be concluded that the authority of the kyai in this Islamic boarding school is a hybrid form of a combination of traditional authority and charismatic authority mediated by technology (Febrian, 2024). In this context, it explains that the authority of the kyai did not decline but transformed and adapted to changing social conditions.

The theoretical implications of this research lie in strengthening the study of religious authority through a more comprehensive social genealogical approach (Siddiqui, 2022). This research confirms that the authority of the kyai cannot be understood simply from the perspective of knowledge or personal charisma, but rather as the result of a complex interaction between genealogical factors, social structure, and the role of the media. Conceptually, these findings broaden the understanding of religious authority as a dynamic construct that is continuously reshaped through social, symbolic, and digital practices. Thus, this study contributes to the development of authority theory in the context of Islamic leadership in Indonesia, while also opening up opportunities for further research to examine variations in gender, generation, and other Islamic boarding school contexts in the dynamics of religious authority in the modern era.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study confirm that the formation of the authority of the kyai at the Lumajang Islamic Boarding School is the result of three main findings, namely, the genealogy of knowledge (*sanad ilmu*), the genealogy of descent (*nasab/dzurriyah*), and the adaptation of modernity through digital media and public spaces. The chain of knowledge here plays a role as a foundation for religious legitimacy that guarantees the community's acceptance of the authority of the kyai, the continuity of tradition, and the validity of knowledge. Meanwhile, the lineage of the founder of the Islamic boarding school functions as a symbolic asset that increases the confidence of the students and the wider community, while also ensuring the stability and continuity of leadership in the Islamic boarding school. The digital adaptations made, particularly by the younger generation of kyai, show that religious authority is also formed through building emotional closeness, increasing visibility, and active interaction in the digital environment. These findings confirm that the authority of the kyai does not solely originate from contextual scientific capacity or hereditary factors, but rather is the result of a multi-layered and contextual social process, and connects the traditions of Islamic boarding schools with the demands of modern society.

The research provides a significant scientific contribution by enriching the study of religious authority, showing that the legitimacy of kyai has characteristics related to lineage and adaptability. The findings of this study also strengthen the theoretical framework of authority by examining the relationship between sanad, science and digital media in the formation of religious leadership in Islamic boarding schools. The strength of this research lies in the use of an in-depth qualitative analysis approach based on interviews, observations, and documentation, so that it is able to describe the dynamics of the authority of the kyai empirically and contextually. However, this study has limitations because it only focuses on one Islamic boarding school, and has not accommodated comparisons with other Islamic boarding school contexts, wider intergenerational variations, or gender dimensions. Therefore, further research needs to be developed with a more diverse range of locations and a comparative or survey approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding and provide a basis for formulating policies and strategies to strengthen Islamic boarding schools amidst the ongoing dynamics of social change.

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