

## New Ustazah: Hijrah & Transformation of Da'wah Authority among Celebrities in Indonesia

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### Keywords

*Ustazah, Celebrity, Authority, Da'wah, Hijrah*

### Abstract

*This study examines the phenomenon of celebrities who have undergone hijrah (spiritual migration) and subsequently taken on roles as religious preachers. The rise of celebrity ustazah significantly impacts the da'wah landscape, altering both the authority and perception of Islamic propagation. Many celebrities embracing hijrah not only undergo spiritual transformation but also contribute to a shift in the structural dynamics of religious outreach. Through these channels, celebrity ustazah emerge as influential religious figures, sometimes challenging established authorities. Using a qualitative netnographic method, this research gathers data from online news, social media, and YouTube. The study finds that the authority of celebrity ustazah is formed through intertwined aspects such as popularity, personal transformation, piety, and social engagement. However, methodological and scope limitations necessitate further in-depth exploration of this phenomenon.*

### Kata kunci

*Ustazah, Selebritis, Otoritas, Dakwah, Hijrah*

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji fenomena selebriti yang telah menjalani hijrah (migrasi spiritual) dan kemudian mengambil peran sebagai pengkhotbah agama. Kebangkitan ustazah selebriti secara signifikan berdampak pada lanskap dakwah, mengubah otoritas dan persepsi penyebaran Islam. Banyak selebriti yang memeluk hijrah tidak hanya mengalami transformasi spiritual tetapi juga berkontribusi pada pergeseran dinamika struktural penjangkauan agama. Melalui saluran ini, ustazah selebriti muncul sebagai tokoh agama yang berpengaruh, terkadang menantang otoritas yang sudah mapan. Menurut teori Etos, kredibilitas mereka dibangun di atas integritas moral, niat baik, dan kompetensi. Dengan menggunakan metode netnografis kualitatif, penelitian ini mengumpulkan data dari berita online, media sosial, dan YouTube. Studi ini menemukan bahwa otoritas ustazah selebriti terbentuk melalui aspek-aspek yang saling terkait seperti popularitas, transformasi pribadi, ketakwaan, dan keterlibatan sosial. Namun, keterbatasan metodologis dan ruang lingkup memerlukan eksplorasi lebih lanjut tentang fenomena ini.

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## Introduction

Today, da'wah has garnered increasing attention from various social groups, including celebrities. The growing trend of celebrities transitioning into preachers has

enlivened the religious landscape and redefined the authority and conception of Islamic propagation. Traditionally, da'wah authority was based on scholarly expertise, religious knowledge, experience, and institutional backing. However, this framework is undergoing a shift. Formal religious institutions, such as *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and *majelis taklim* (Islamic study groups), are now being supplemented and, in some cases, replaced by digital media (Qudsy, 2019; Nisa, 2018). Digital platforms have given rise to new influential figures, including religious personalities (Kloos, 2019).

Popularity, personal experiences, and spiritual transformations have become the new currency of legitimacy in the realm of da'wah. Religious references are not solely based on intellectual genealogy, scholarly lineage, or institutional recognition but also on perceived piety and mass appeal (Duraesa & Ahyar, 2021). Popularity itself has become a benchmark of competence, wherein media and market forces play a decisive role. The intersection of popularity, piety, and spiritual experiences structures public recognition and social legitimacy. Public trust is increasingly reflected through social media engagement, sermon requests, and followership, establishing a novel form of religious authority.

The emergence of celebrity *ustazah* represents a broader transformation of religious figures. Traditionally, *ustazah* refers to female religious educators in madrasahs, pesantren, and Islamic study groups (Hasanah, 2017). Similar to Nyai in Javanese culture, the term *ustazah* signifies social recognition of religious knowledge and dedication to Islamic education. In addition to *ustazah*, other terms such as *muballighah* and *da'iyah* are used to describe female Islamic preachers (Rengkaningtias, 2018). These titles position them as transmitters of religious knowledge, crucial in shaping Muslim communities (Helmiannoor & Musyarapah, 2019). Historically, *ustazah* have held religious authority due to their intellectual, spiritual, and educational lineage, often associated with Islamic institutions such as pesantren and madrasahs (Rahmah, 2018). This recognition places them among the ranks of ulama, muftis, and religious educators (Ali et al., 2017).

The concept of religious authority has evolved, shifting from traditional institutions to digital platforms. This transformation parallels the historical role of female Islamic scholars, such as Aisyah, the wife of Prophet Muhammad, who was a prominent religious teacher with numerous male and female disciples (Sugito & Hasanah, 2016). Similarly, in Indonesia, historical figures such as Nyai Ahmad Dahlan, Nyai Hasyim Asy'ari, and Rahma El-Yunusiah exemplify the role of female religious educators (Burhanuddin, 2002; Muhammad, 2020). However, with technological advancements, the definition of *ustazah* has expanded beyond formal religious education. Today, many *ustazah* are recognized through media exposure, gaining religious authority by appearing on television, social media, and other public forums (Kloos, 2019; Kloos & Künkler, 2016). Some former celebrities have transitioned into *ustazah*, redefining their social roles and public recognition through religious engagement (Lyansari, 2022).

Religious authority in da'wah, similar to broader Islamic authority, is tied to public recognition, expertise, and legitimacy in delivering religious teachings (Volpi & Turner, 2007). In Indonesia, figures such as *ulama*, *ustazah*, and *kyai* are considered religious authorities (Hasanah & Anam, 2022). Traditionally, religious legitimacy was based on mastery of Islamic literature and proximity to authoritative sources (Turner, 2007). Unlike the hierarchical structure of Christian authority centered on the Pope, Islamic authority is more decentralized, allowing individuals with religious knowledge and public recognition to gain influence. Islamic institutions such as *pesantren*, *madrasahs*, and Islamic study groups have historically reinforced religious authority by maintaining traditional sources of knowledge (Hosen, 2019). Classical Islamic texts, often written in Arabic, have been key references for religious figures, though translation efforts have increased accessibility (Bruinessen, 1990). Beyond scholarly expertise, religious authority is also established through understanding and practicing Islamic teachings while earning public trust (Kim, 2010).

As da'wah authority is closely linked to competence, moral character, and recognition, qualified preachers have traditionally held it (Hasanah, 2020). M. Natsir highlights the essential qualifications of a *da'i*, including religious knowledge (*tafakkuh fiddin*), understanding of human nature (*tafakkuh finnas*), and effective communication skills (Natsir, 1996). Additionally, moral integrity and faith commitment are fundamental traits of da'wah figures (Zaidan, 1985; Aziz, 1997). However, in contemporary contexts, public recognition has become crucial in determining da'wah legitimacy. Media exposure and audience engagement now significantly shape a preacher's authority, sometimes even surpassing scholarly qualifications (Volpi & Turner, 2007; Hosen, 2019). The recognition of religious figures by society, Islamic organizations, and the state further influences their status. Market dynamics and digital platforms have also redefined religious legitimacy, emphasizing popularity alongside traditional scholarly qualifications (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2020; Wai Weng, 2022).

The evolving role of *ustazah* underscores a broader shift in religious authority. The emergence of celebrity *ustazah* illustrates how religious legitimacy is increasingly shaped by public perception rather than formal institutional affiliations. This transformation reflects a more open, flexible, and media-driven religious landscape, where da'wah extends beyond traditional settings into digital spaces. As da'wah adapts to societal and technological changes, it remains a dynamic field influenced by evolving cultural, social, and media contexts (Al-Qardhawi, 2007).

This study examines how celebrity *ustazah* establishes religious authority within contemporary Islamic discourse. From Aristotle's Ethos theory, the credibility of a speaker or communicator—such as a preacher—is determined by three key components: (1) good competence in knowledge, expertise, and experience; (2) good moral character as an indicator of trustworthiness; and (3) goodwill, or the genuine intention to convey meaningful messages (Higgins & Walker, 2012; Hasanah, 2020). This research aims to

complement existing studies by analyzing the transformation of da'wah authority among celebrity *ustazah*. It explores the ways in which the presence of these new figures reshapes conceptions of religious legitimacy, providing insight into why and how this transformation occurs.

Additionally, this study posits that da'wah has become a platform for public inspiration and social change. The emergence of celebrity preachers—many of whom were once part of the entertainment industry—demonstrates religious authority's evolving and adaptable nature. This article will address two key research questions: (1) How does the transformation of da'wah authority occur among celebrity *ustazah*? (2) Why does this transformation take place within this specific group?

## **Method**

The research adopts a qualitative approach with a netnographic methodology to explore cultural experiences reflected in digital traces, practices, networks, and social media systems. Netnography integrates multiple research approaches into three primary categories: data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Kozinets, 2010). Similar to ethnography, netnography is methodologically related to ontological, epistemological, and axiological principles, focusing on cultural understanding, contextualization within daily life, and the exploration of social systems. However, its primary subjects are virtual or internet-based communities (Kozinets, 2010). Netnography has been widely applied across various disciplines, including politics (Mahestu & Sumbogo, 2020), anthropology (Kulavuz-Onal, 2015), and media studies (Murthy, 2008; Mpofu et al., 2022). Data was collected through online media searches, social media platforms, and YouTube, focusing on the da'wah activities of celebrity *ustazah* and related academic studies and media reports. The collected data was then categorized and systematically displayed for further analysis. Following Sugiyono's (2022) framework, the data analysis process involved data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and verification.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **The Emergence of Celebrity Preachers**

In recent years, an increasing number of celebrities have transitioned into religious preachers, significantly influencing the da'wah landscape in public spaces. Some of them have even been conferred social recognition as *ustaz* or *ustazah*, a title that symbolizes public acknowledgment and legitimacy of their dedication to Islamic propagation. Among the celebrity preachers who have received this title are Neno Warisman and Astri Ivo, who were publicly recognized earlier, followed by Pipik Dian Irawati, Peggy Melati Sukma, and Oki Setyana Dewi (Utami, 2022). Before engaging in da'wah, these three figures were already well-known public figures in the entertainment industry. Their hijrah transformed their personal lives—including their appearance, lifestyle, and social interactions—and redefined their professions. Their daily activities became centered

around religious preaching, and their transformation extended to adopting a more *syar'i* (Islamic-compliant) dress code. Some of them even chose to wear the niqab, fully covering their faces in public. Beyond changes in profession and appearance, hijrah also became a turning point for redefining their identities. For instance, Peggy Melati Sukma embraced a new identity by changing her name to "Khadijah" (Lyansari, 2020).



Source: Various sources. From left to right: Ustazah Oki, Umi Pipik, Ustazah "Khadijah" Peggy Melati Sukma.

Figure 1. Celebrity preachers in religious preaching sessions

These celebrity preachers deliver sermons in offline religious gatherings and actively engage in online preaching, publishing books, and sharing inspirational messages with their audiences and followers. Their presence on social media further strengthens their position as modern-day religious figures. Each *ustazah* has a unique background and approach to da'wah.

Pipik Dian Irawati, widely known as Umi Pipik, began her journey as a preacher following the death of her husband, Ustaz Jefri Al Bukhari (UJ), in 2013. After her husband's passing, she took on the role of both a single parent and a preacher, continuing his da'wah mission. In 2017, during her pilgrimage to Mecca, she decided to wear the niqab, a practice she has maintained ever since. Aside from preaching, she also manages *Yayasan Sahabat Syurga*, a foundation focused on education and social welfare (Khoiriyah, 2017).

Ustazah Peggy Melati Sukma, now known as Ustazah Khadijah, underwent *hijrah* in 2012. Her transformation extended beyond adopting a *syar'i* dress code—she immersed herself in Islamic studies, engaged in humanitarian work, and became a dedicated preacher. She has traveled extensively for da'wah domestically and internationally and documented her journey in a book. In 2017, she decided to wear the niqab and significantly reduced her social media presence. She now dedicates her time to preaching alongside her husband in New Zealand and managing *Yayasan Khadijati Amanati Indonesia*, a foundation focused on social initiatives (Geatri, 2022; Lyansari, 2020).

Oki Setiana Dewi, a former popular actress, has also gained recognition as a preacher. Since 2008, she has actively participated in Islamic study groups at her

university and nearby *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools). To deepen her religious knowledge, she pursued higher education at UIN Jakarta and PTIQ for her doctoral studies. Her career as a preacher began in 2014 when she was invited to speak at a da'wah program on a television channel (Aminah, 2018). Over the years, her preaching activities have expanded across multiple platforms, including television and social media. In 2016, she established *Yayasan Maskanul Huffadz*, a foundation dedicated to providing educational support for orphaned and underprivileged Qur'an memorizers.

### ***Hijrah and Da'wah***

*Hijrah* and da'wah are two fundamental processes in the establishment of Islam. They share a close relationship, where *hijrah* serves as a means to strengthen da'wah, and da'wah, in turn, aims to transform societal conditions and behaviors in alignment with religious principles. Linguistically, *hijrah* means "migration" or relocation. In a broader Islamic context, it encompasses "spatial migration," referring to the physical relocation undertaken for religious purposes, as Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) exemplified. Religious migration remains relevant today in various parts of the world (Demichelis, 2019). Additionally, *hijrah* signifies a shift in attitude, representing a transition from one state to a better condition in accordance with Islamic teachings (Yunus, 2019). This transformation is often referred to as "spiritual migration."

In contemporary times, *hijrah* has evolved into a widespread phenomenon among Muslims, encompassing behavioral, mental, and physical transformations. The *hijrah* movement has become a significant trend in Indonesia, particularly in urban millennial communities (Hamudy & Hamudy, 2020). Numerous *hijrah* communities have emerged in major cities, each with distinctive da'wah approaches. The unique characteristics of the *hijrah* movement are closely tied to the advancements in media technology. Social media platforms are powerful tools for disseminating ideas and promoting da'wah, with the central message encouraging individuals to "migrate" toward a more devout lifestyle. As a result, *hijrah* has reshaped the Islamic religious landscape in Indonesia (Akmaliah, 2020).

The *hijrah* movement has also led to the emergence of new religious figures who are widely recognized within their communities as role models. Among these figures are Felix Siau and Ustaz Hanan Attaki, who have garnered significant influence (Muthohirin, 2021). This movement has further given rise to new religious leaders from diverse backgrounds, including young Islamic scholars, artists, and celebrities who have joined the *hijrah* movement (Sari et al., 2020; Rahayu, 2022). Following their *hijrah*, celebrities and other individuals often become active in da'wah, either as advocates or preachers.

Da'wah, in essence, means to call, invite, and guide people toward the path of Allah and Islam (Hamka, 2018). It also signifies the command to promote righteousness and prevent wrongdoing (Taimiyah, 1995). Moreover, da'wah entails transforming individuals and societies into better conditions in accordance with Islamic principles

(Khotimah, 2017). It is a divine mandate that was initially entrusted to the prophets and subsequently passed down to the Muslim community (Natsir, 1996).

As a divine obligation, da'wah is a vertical and horizontal relationship. Vertically, da'wah represents an act of worship and obedience to Allah, as emphasized in various Quranic verses (Ali Imran: 104, Ali Imran: 110, An-Nahl: 125). Every individual is encouraged to engage in da'wah according to their abilities. Horizontally, da'wah functions as a means of social engagement, guiding people toward salvation in both this life and the hereafter (Setyawan, 2020). In this framework, da'wah seeks to correct deviant behaviors, promote moral values, and create a society that adheres to Islamic teachings. Ultimately, da'wah is a transformative process that aims to refine social conditions and elevate human conduct in accordance with Allah's guidance.

### **Hijrah, Religiosity, and Authority**

Celebrity *ustazahs*, who have gained prominence as preachers, have undergone significant life transitions leading them to the *hijrah* path. This transformation encompasses spiritual, moral, intellectual, and identity changes. The *hijrah* journeys of these three former celebrities were often triggered by personal crises, life challenges, or emotional turmoil. Umi Pipik, despite her resilience, faced profound emotional struggles following the passing of her husband, Ustaz Jefri Al Bukhari, along with other hardships that eventually led her to a pivotal transformation (Khoiriyah, 2017). Similarly, Peggy Melati Sukma experienced deep existential distress amid her fame, which did not bring her peace. Her personal struggles, including a failed marriage, business setbacks, illness, and loss of close friends, drove her to question her faith. This crisis ultimately became a turning point, leading her to rediscover God and embrace a religious path (Puspasari, 2018). Oki Setiana Dewi, from a young age, faced family challenges, including her mother's severe illness amid economic difficulties. These experiences fostered her spiritual awakening and inspired her to alter her behavior and appearance in accordance with Islamic teachings. She later realized that every hardship brought her closer to God's greater plan, as she shared in a [YouTube](#) video detailing her *hijrah* journey.

The *hijrah* experiences of these celebrity ustazah transformed their lives into more religiously committed ones and elevated their social standing. Religiosity can be categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions. Intrinsic religiosity involves deep personal convictions, often rooted in spiritual experiences, while extrinsic religiosity is observable through behavior and appearance (Majid, 2008). The shift in their daily activities towards more religious engagements, such as studying and teaching Islam, was accompanied by a transformation in appearance. Many adopted the *syar'i* dress code, including wearing the niqab (face veil), as a symbol of religious devotion. However, not all individuals wear the niqab solely for religious purposes—it can also be a means of seeking personal security, recognition, or psychological comfort (Rohmaniyah et al., 2022). The niqab has also been interpreted as an assertion of group identity or as a form

of protest against globalized cultural influences that diverge from Islamic values (Sunesti et al., 2018; Ahmad et al., 2021). The decision of celebrity *ustazah* to wear the syar'i attire or niqab has reinforced public trust, positioning them as paragons of heightened piety.

Hijrah serves as a transformation of both behavior and public image, shaping how individuals are perceived by society. This transformation offers opportunities for greater acceptance and the capitalization of public trust (Lyansari, 2018). The increasing public admiration for their piety and spiritual journey has led these *ustazah* to utilize their personal capital by deepening their religious knowledge. What initially began as a personal necessity has evolved into a public expectation, reinforcing their preacher authority. Mastery of Islamic knowledge (*tafakkuh fiddin*), as emphasized by M. Natsir, is a fundamental requirement for preachers (Natsir, 1996). Many *ustazah* who initially had limited religious knowledge engaged in intellectual hijrah by studying Islam more rigorously, informally with religious teachers or attending Islamic study groups (*majelis ilmu*).

Some also pursued formal religious education, as seen in Ustazah Oki's case, where she pursued postgraduate studies in Islamic studies. The enhancement of a preacher's competence aligns with Aristotle's concept of ethos, which defines credibility as the foundation of authority (Hasanah, 2020). Intellectual hijrah is a critical step in strengthening public trust, gradually shaping the religious authority of celebrity *ustazah*. The construction of authority is not solely based on spiritual transformation, appearance, and intellectual growth but is also reinforced through social activism. Active involvement in religious and social institutions supports consolidating their preacher status (Kim, 2010).

### **Da'wah, Repentance, and Strengthening Piety**

The spiritual journey and life trials experienced by celebrity *ustazah* have significantly shaped their religious transformation. Their da'wah efforts, centered on spreading goodness and reinforcing Islamic values, have inspired many individuals toward personal change. The transformation towards greater religious devotion is not solely conveyed through verbal preaching but is also reflected in their appearance and behavior. For instance, Umi Pipik's decision to wear the niqab during her pilgrimage in 2017 was inspired by a close friend who had previously undergone *hijrah*. Although she had been engaged in da'wah earlier, it was only after experiencing what she perceived as divine guidance that she made the decision to fully adopt the niqab (Khoiriyah, 2017). This exemplifies how da'wah is not always about verbal persuasion; it is also demonstrated through conduct, character, and role modeling. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions often influenced others through their exemplary moral behavior, making Islam appealing through their integrity (Arnold, 2019). Preaching is not only about calling others to Islam but also about self-improvement. Oki Setiana Dewi has also expressed that da'wah is a shared responsibility among all Muslims, serving as a



means of self-purification and a collective effort toward becoming the best community, as stated in the Qur'an (Ali Imran: 110).

For celebrities, the transition into religious preachers is not merely a career shift; it is the culmination of their *hijrah* journey. Da'wah is a means to enhance personal piety and an avenue for repentance (Triantoro, 2018). These individuals reshape their identities through da'wah and seek to leave behind their past lifestyles. Preaching serves as both an internal and external shield, protecting them from the morally challenging environment of the entertainment industry (Zahara et al., 2020). By immersing themselves in da'wah circles, they strengthen their spiritual commitment and expand their influence.

Furthermore, da'wah serves as a means of reinforcing religious authority, both through personal piety and adherence to Islamic practices. Institutional engagement, such as the establishment of religious organizations, further solidifies their authority. This institutional framework mirrors the strategies employed by traditional religious leaders to maintain credibility and influence (Hosen, 2019). Beyond conventional religious institutions, media utilization enhances their popularity and extends their reach. What initially begins as a personal journey of spiritual purification evolves into a larger movement of religious inspiration. Celebrity *ustazah* have become influential figures in contemporary religious discourse, even serving as central figures in the *hijrah* movement (Istigfarin et al., 2021).

The presence of celebrity *ustazah* in the da'wah sphere, often regarded as a sacred domain, elevates their status both in the eyes of God and society. From a religious perspective, preachers are considered among those with the best speech in the sight of God (Fussilat: 33). From a societal standpoint, they are seen as custodians of religious truth and moral guidance, continuing the prophetic mission. They serve as beacons of light in times of darkness and as sources of relief in times of hardship (Natsir, 1996; Hamka, 2018). While their role as preachers grants them significant influence, it also subjects them to intense social scrutiny. The public closely monitors any misstep they make. This societal control mechanism has been evident in various instances, such as the controversy surrounding Ustaz Abdullah Gymnastiar's (AA Gym) polygamy, which, despite being religiously permissible, was met with strong societal resistance. Similarly, Ustazah Oki Setiana Dewi faced public criticism over her sermon on domestic violence, which was perceived by some as tolerating abusive behavior (Smith & Wardatun, 2022).

Becoming a preacher is a profound decision that not only shifts one's career trajectory but also redefines one's public image. This transformation enhances their perceived piety and broadens their religious influence.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *hijrah*, da'wah, and new media are interconnected in shaping socio-religious changes and act as driving forces for the emergence of new structures of religious authority. From the perspective of Aristotle's Ethos theory, celebrity *ustazah* establish their authority in a non-traditional sequence—starting with

good moral character by transforming their behavior, attitude, and appearance through *hijrah*. The second stage involves engaging in good actions, such as religious outreach and sharing their spiritual experiences with the public via new media platforms. Finally, they deepen their religious knowledge, whether for personal spiritual development or for dissemination to the public, by studying privately with scholars, engaging in self-directed learning, or formally enrolling in religious education institutions to enhance their competence. This process contrasts with the traditional religious authority-building approach of *kyai*, *ustaz*, and *ustazah*, who first establish their credibility through mastery of religious knowledge acquired in formal institutions such as *pesantren*, *madrasahs*, or Islamic study circles, where the transmission of scholarly lineage (*sanad*) takes place. Through their expertise in Islamic sources, traditional religious figures impart knowledge directly to students and the wider community in structured learning environments. Typically, traditional religious authorities solidify their legitimacy through long-term community recognition and trust.

In the contemporary era, new media has played a significant role in shaping the rise of religious figures, particularly in the realm of Islamic preaching. The emergence of celebrity *ustazah* exemplifies this phenomenon, where public acceptance and the structuring of authority cannot be separated from their pre-existing popularity as public figures. In establishing their religious authority, celebrity *ustazah* further reinforce their legitimacy through networking, institutional affiliations, social activism, and intellectual engagement. This article contributes to the discourse on da'wah authority by highlighting that religious legitimacy is not solely derived from increased religious knowledge, moral character, and spiritual practice but is also influenced by spiritual experiences and the public perception of piety. The study concludes that the consolidation of da'wah authority among celebrity *ustazah* is shaped by several key factors: the utilization of new media, popularity, *hijrah* experiences, piety, and social engagement in tangible actions. However, this research has methodological and thematic limitations, necessitating further studies that provide a more comprehensive exploration of the evolving dynamics of religious authority in the digital age.

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