

From the Spotlight to the Shadows: Ex-HTI's Digital Da'wah in Rebuilding Authority through Social Media

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Abstract

The dissolution of HTI by the Indonesian government in 2017 has given birth to a new form of religious authority facilitated by da'wah through social media. This group utilizes various digital platforms such as Instagram, Youtube, Facebook, and websites to continue spreading the Caliphate ideology. This research analyzes how the Ex-HTI group conducts its da'wah, as represented by the Muslimah News and Back to Muslim Identity accounts across different social media platforms. Researchers used a qualitative content analysis using Wilson's framework to examine the da'wah strategies on the BMI, Muslimah News, and Felix Siauw accounts. The findings show that the Ex-HTI group has transformed into a different way of da'wah to continue propagating the ideology of the Caliphate. The transformation is not limited to the way of da'wah from offline to online. However, the da'wah of the HTI group before it was dissolved, which was carried out openly (spotlight), has now been transformed into a more covert form (shadows). In addition, the use of social media in this new da'wah model has also created a new kind of religious authority for the Ex-HTI group through the figure of Felix Siauw, an Ustadz who is widely accepted by the public.

Keywords: da'wah, Ex-HTI, social media

Introduction

In the digital era, social media has become a primary tool for religious groups to expand their influence and maintain authority. This research investigates how Ex-HTI uses social media to rebuild its authority after the government dissolved the organization in 2017. Despite lacking legal recognition, Ex-HTI continues to use digital platforms to spread the Caliphate ideology and competes ideologically with other da'wah groups, such as NU, Muhammadiyah, and Salafi. This research uniquely integrates the evolution of religious authority with contemporary media use.

Religion and media are two increasingly inseparable elements in modern society. In his study, Cheong explores the dynamic relationship between new media and religion, examining their mutual influence and the implications for contemporary society. According to Cheong, recent studies have demonstrated that new media have a significant role in shaping, maintaining, and developing religious authority and organization in spiritual organizations (Cheong, 2017). This assertion is supported by the findings of *Communicative Perspectives, Practices, and Changing Authority in Spiritual Organizations*. By leveraging a range of online and offline communication practices, religious communities can sustain their collective identities and adapt their organizational structures in response to technological advancements and global cultural shifts. The advent of social media has precipitated a paradigm shift in the conventional structures of

* Manuscript received September 2025, revised October 2025, and approved for publication November 2025

<https://doi.org/10.47655/dialog.v48i2.1009>

Dialog, 48(2), 2025, 146-164

<https://jurnaldialog.kemenag.go.id>, p-ISSN:0126-396X, e-ISSN:2715-6230

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religious authority, thereby facilitating the dissemination of direct messages by religious groups, engendering the emergence of novel, more adaptable, and diversified authorities, and disrupting the modus operandi of religious authority practices (Buckley et al., 2023).

The advent of digital technologies has rendered religious practice possible outside of institutional spaces, thereby allowing individuals to connect with their religious communities outside of physical places of worship (Gao et al., 2024). Social media has emerged as a platform that enables groups lacking traditional authority to re-establish their legitimacy. The advent of social media has engendered the emergence of novel forms of power and authority that are not contingent upon conventional organizational structures. This assertion is particularly salient in the context of Ex-HTI, which, having previously held formal status, has since relinquished its official recognition.

Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), an organization with fundamentalist Islamic leanings, serves as a noteworthy case study in the use of social media by religious groups to disseminate their ideological message. On July 19, 2017, the Minister of Law and Human Rights issued a decree (No. AHU-30.AH.01.08) that dissolved HTI, thereby revoking its legal entity as a mass organization. Following the dissolution, Indonesia witnessed a surge in discourse surrounding its identity as a democratic nation. However, this issue falls outside the scope of this particular paper. Prior to its dissolution, HTI had implemented a robust and rigorous cadre system. However, following its dissolution, the group has primarily relied on social media as the primary platform for its proselytizing activities. The use of the internet by Ex-HTI individuals also challenges the notion that the internet is inherently incompatible with religion, a perspective often rooted in secularization arguments (Dulkiah et al., 2023).

These changes signify a substantial shift in the nature of religious authority in the digital era. The advent of social media has effectively democratized speech, thereby challenging the conventional structures of authority. However, in the case of Ex-HTI, social media has become a very effective tool to strengthen solidarity among Hizbut Tahrir members and expand their network (Setia, 2021). Ex-HTI can be regarded as “the Other” a demographic that constitutes a small minority and is not dominant (S. U. Haq & Kwok, 2024). This group utilizes social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and websites to disseminate the Caliphate ideology, with the objective of shaping public opinion and attracting new adherents. It is evident that social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, along with the Muslimah News website, have emerged as significant conduits for disseminating religious messages within the Muslim community. This assertion is further substantiated by the notable presence of accounts such as BMI (Back to Muslim Identity) on these digital platforms. These media enable the dissemination of ideas across diverse societal strata, even in the absence of a structured organization (Selby & Funk, 2020). The presence of Felix Siau has led to the emergence of him as a new figurehead in the group, capable of reaching a broader audience, including young sympathizers, in a more appealing and in line with their interests manner (Wai Weng, 2024).

This phenomenon presents a significant challenge to traditional religious authorities in their efforts to regulate groups that employ digital media to circumvent legal restrictions. This research is significant for analyzing the Ex-HTI’s da’wah strategy on social media. The analysis also demonstrates how they reconfigure authority within the context of ideological competition with other preaching groups, including NU, Muhammadiyah, and Salafi.

Research on Ex-HTI has been conducted by numerous scholars, with a particular focus on the organization’s history and activities preceding its dissolution. A study conducted by Setia examined how Ex-HTI employed a regeneration approach through halaqah and print media to disseminate its ideology. Furthermore, several studies have explored how Ex-HTI utilized social media platforms, such as Muslimah News, to address specific issues, particularly those pertaining to women and gender (Fadilla, 2023; Niam, 2023).

However, previous studies, although they have made significant contributions, still leave an academic gap regarding a comprehensive understanding of the adaptations and strategies of non-formal religious groups in the digital realm. Specifically, the extant scientific discourse evinces two substantive limitations. First, studies on Ex-HTI strategies in social media often focus exclusively on partial dimensions, such as gender issues, without incorporating a holistic analysis of ideological narratives, especially those that intersect with efforts to reconstruct their authority as a whole. Secondly, extant studies continue to exhibit a paucity of specificity and depth, hindering their capacity to elaborate on the manner in which Ex-HTI employs social media to comprehensively reconstruct its authority in the post-dissolution phase. This reconstruction, as evidenced by cross-platform analysis of prominent social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and websites, underscores the pivotal role of individual figures in this process.

This phenomenon raises important academic questions about how religious authorities thrive and adapt in the digital era, despite the dissolution of their formal institutions. It also challenges long-standing theoretical understandings of religious legitimacy and authority, stimulating new scholarly discourse on digital media's potential to aid a movement's survival and influence. This study addresses this gap in the literature by comprehensively analyzing the narratives Ex-HTI constructs through its primary platforms and prominent figures such as Felix Siau. The objective is to ascertain how religious perspectives are formed, disseminated, and transmitted via digital content.

Based on these academic issues, this study formulates the following research questions:

1. How does the transformation of digital da'wah strategies after the dissolution facilitate the reconstruction of their authority on social media?
2. How does Felix Siau's figure as a representation of new authority contribute to the process of reconstructing the authority of the former HTI amid the dynamics of digital da'wah?

This research is expected to provide a broader understanding of how groups that have lost formal legitimacy are able to adapt in the digital space, as well as make a substantial theoretical contribution to the study of religious authority and digital media.

Research Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a Content Analysis design. The implementation of the utilized framework is based on the guidelines of Steven Lloyd Wilson, which are relevant for examining social science data originating from social media (Wilson, 2022). Wilson emphasizes that social media has created an unprecedented scale of mass communication, making content the meanings and concepts shared an important source, thus requiring a methodological approach tailored to this digital environment. This study aims to examine the messages, symbols, themes, and strategies of da'wah disseminated, with a focus on Ex-HTI's efforts to reconstruct their authority after the dissolution. Paradigmatically, this study seeks to interpret the constructed meaning and understand the process of transformation of their social communication.

Primary data for this study were sourced from digital posts disseminated by three key Ex-HTI actors, the The BMI (Back to Muslim Identity) page account, the Muslimah News account, and the Felix Siau character account. These three accounts were selected using the Purposive Sampling technique because they represent three types of post-dissolution authority narrators, organizational authority (BMI), media authority (Muslimah News), and individual/character authority (Felix Siau). The selection was based on their consistency in producing relevant digital narratives. Data was collected from the multi-platforms used by these three accounts, including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and websites. The adoption of this multi-platform approach had a dual purpose. In addition to serving as a data triangulation technique to validate findings, collecting data from various digital channels was crucial to revealing the full spectrum of Ex-HTI's da'wah strategies. This allows researchers to identify and compare in detail the differences

in rhetoric and communication tactics used to maximize the spread of ideology in each different digital ecosystem. This research is located in the virtual environment of these platforms, and data collection specifically focuses on content posted or updated between December 2023 and May 2025. This period was chosen to ensure the relevance and topicality of the narratives used in the post-dissolution HTI consolidation strategy.

The content analysis process was executed in three stages: (1) Data Collection, (2) Content Categorization, and (3) Narrative Analysis. The Data Collection stage involved detailed data archiving, which included collecting digital uploads (including images/visuals embedded in posts) from specified accounts. The Content Categorization stage was carried out to organize the data systematically, where the content was classified based on themes, symbols, and communication strategies applied. Visual analysis is performed on the symbols and visual representations contained in the images to reveal the framing strategies of the caliphate ideology.

The final stage is Narrative Analysis, which aims to identify broader communication patterns. Specifically, this stage includes examining how messages interact with the audience, primarily through the analysis of comments and responses to each post. The analysis of these interactions is conducted to understand how the meaning of messages is interpreted and negotiated by users, in line with concept of the audience's capacity to give significance to social media messages (Benrazek, 2022). By analyzing these three stages of the collected data, this study documents how the Ex-HTI group has transformed in spreading their Caliphate ideology digitally.

Results and Discussion

Adaptation of Da'wah Strategies by the Ex-HTI After Its Dissolution

Before the dissolution of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) in 2017, the Ex-HTI group had already developed its own da'wah strategy. During the post-reform period, the maximized the use of print and electronic media. Print media included publications such as *Buletin Al-Islam*, *Majalah Al-Wa'ie*, and *Tabloid Media Umat*. Meanwhile, in the realm of electronic media, several television stations, including TV One, MNC TV, and Trans 7, had featured discussions on the Caliphate issue, inviting Ustadz Ismail Yusanto as the spokesperson for HTI through the talk show *Indonesia Lawyers Club (ILC)* on TV One (A. M. I. Haq, 2023). However, all of these strategies underwent significant changes after HTI was officially dissolved in 2017. Despite these changes, the core spirit of the group's da'wah efforts to challenge the Pancasila ideology and advocate for the establishment of an Islamic state remained unchanged (Ichwan & Slama, 2022).

After HTI's dissolution, the spread of its ideology became less overt but could still be observed. The shift from offline to online da'wah is one of the positive impacts of mediatization for the HTI group. HTI's presence on social media proved to be highly effective, experiencing rapid development during its time. They were able to adapt by utilizing other accounts and new methods to continue their da'wah activities on social media. This indicates that social media, in the context of da'wah, has become a new avenue for promoting specific political interests (Choirin et al., 2025). Several accounts associated with or affiliated with Ex-HTI, such as BMI (Back to Muslim Identity) and Muslimah News, have become key milestones in the escalation of their da'wah efforts.

Muslimah News

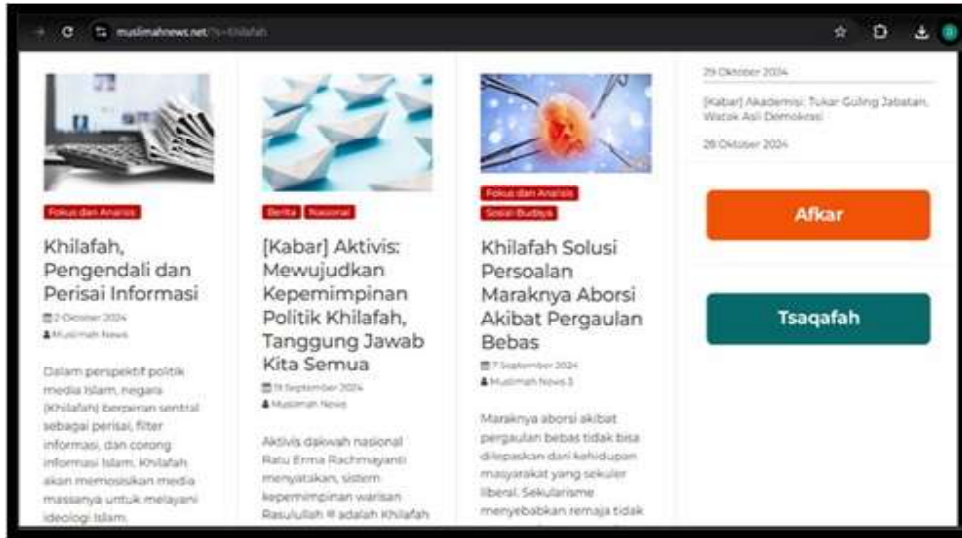


Figure 1 Homepage of the Muslimah News website

Muslimah News operates not only its Website and Facebook but also on Instagram. As its name suggests, “Muslimah,” the Facebook page and account provide studies and publications predominantly focusing on women’s issues. Although the sections on the website still publish articles related to state and social issues, particularly the Caliphate ideology in opposition to Western secularism, the content of *Muslimahnewscom.net* tends to concentrate on reinforcing the role and understanding of women in Islam, offering practical and spiritual guidance for daily life, and addressing issues relevant to modern Muslim women (Fadilla, 2023). Although HTI is not explicitly mentioned on the website, research by (Herdiansah et al., 2023) has identified connection between the website and Ex-HTI, based on the ideology and da’wah that were previously characteristic of HTI.

Furthermore, this website does not solely focus on gender issues but functions as a that produces and disseminates the ideological understanding of Ex-HTI. The posts and narratives constructed are expansive. Therefore, viewing *Muslimah News* merely as a da’wah tool promoting issues related to Muslim women would be an incomplete perspective. For a more comprehensive analysis, the researcher has successfully identified the following data.

Table 1 Number of Visitors and Followers of Muslimah News Social Media

Platform	Quantity
Web	171,417 visitors
Instagram	97,000 followers
Facebook	71,000 followers

The number of visitors to the website and followers across the three platforms above demonstrates how *Muslimah News* has optimized digital media as its primary tool for da’wah. The website is utilized to target readers, enabling them to understand in depth and complexity the topics being narrated. With a visitor count reaching 171,417 in November 2024, *Muslimah News* has shown that its in-depth content successfully attracts an audience seeking information based on textual analysis. Moreover, based on the analysis by *pro.similarweb*, the average reading time per visitor on the website is approximately 4 minutes and 51 seconds. This indicates that readers engage with the content in a complex and thorough manner. This finding further legitimizes *Muslimah News* as a knowledge-based source of authority.

This contrasts with the use of Instagram, which is more focused on visualization for younger, featuring infographics of the issues narrated in full on the website. With 97,000 followers, this platform reaches a younger audience through a lighter format compared to the website. Facebook, on the other hand, serves as a broadcaster for the website, encouraging Facebook users to visit the site via the links attached to each Facebook post. *Muslimah News'* strategy of utilizing various digital platforms reflects their ability to adapt to the diverse needs of their audience. Social media has effectively mediated religion with digital technology (Ko³odziejska et al., 2023), as evidenced by the high audience numbers, indicating that this strategy is effective in disseminating ideological narratives and strengthening the legitimacy of Ex-HTI's authority in the digital space.

Table 2 Sample Articles Published by Muslimah News Website

Coding	Content	Author	Time
Up-to-date issues	Environmental Lessons from Tin Corruption	Abu Nadzifah	5 January 2025
Against Secularism and Capitalism	Secularism, the Cause of the Destruction of the Family's Natural State	Juanmartin, M. Kes.	6 May 2024
Islamic State	Viewing Taxation as a National Financing Tool from an Islamic Economic Perspective	Meti Astuti, S.E.I., M. Ek	2 January 2025
	Coding Education from Primary School. the Digital Age Requires a Caliphate Education System	Noor Afeefa	3 December 2024
The Palestinian Issue	The Responsibility of the People towards Palestine is to Allah SWT	Sulistiawati Ummu Salamah	28 January 2025
Global Politic	Global Economic Crises Are Cyclica	Ustaz Dwi Condoro Triono, Ph.D.	22 June 2024
Women in Islam	Women in positions of power will not benefit women	Ummu Nashir N.S.	29 October 2024

Based on the content and narratives that have been examined, the majority of *Muslimah News'* content focuses on anti-secularism, strengthening the narrative of the Islamic state, and critiquing global issues. It also places significant emphasis on women's issues and Palestine. On this account, the website is used for writing in-depth and long articles, while Instagram and Facebook are more geared towards lighter content, highlights, or campaigns promoting the main articles on the website. The central narrative that emerges on this account is the notion of Islam as a universal solution to the various challenges facing Indonesia, such as in education, healthcare, economy, culture, and politics. An example of this is an article titled "Women Trapped by Online Loans, the State Fails to Achieve Welfare."



Figure 2 Article published by the Muslimah News Com website

The article published on May 11, 2025, titled "Women in the Grip of Online Loans (Pinjol), The State Fails to Achieve Welfare", highlights the narrative of women who have lost the figure of a father or husband as a provider, making them vulnerable to falling into the grasp of online

loans. The framework of the article underscores the failure of the state to protect women. Furthermore, a study (Rifai, 2021) had previously examined, in depth, the discourse surrounding women across various aspects, such as education, healthcare, economy, culture, and politics, through this website.

Globally, the narrative presented is a critique of the secular, capitalist, and democratic systems, which are regarded as the “culprits” behind all societal issues. Ultimately, as a movement that was once overtly transnational in its ideology, its larger goal is to advocate that the Caliphate is the ideal system of governance, as highlighted in the various narratives put forward. The narratives conveyed by *Muslimah News* reflect a targeted strategy, focusing on relevant issues and providing critiques of opposing ideologies. Through carefully chosen themes, such as the article titled “*Secularism, the Cause of the Erosion of Family Fitrah*,” written by Juanmartin, M. Kes., a women’s health activist, the website specifically explores the negative impacts of secularism on the family structure as a relevant issue. It simultaneously presents sharp criticism of the ideology and offers an Islamic solution. *Muslimah News* has successfully captured the audience’s attention, further strengthening Ex-HTI’s authority. The use of digital media has been a key factor in expanding the reach of their message and solidifying support.

Upon further investigation, the authors on this website represent a diverse range of voices. Not only religious authorities, such as Ustadz/Ustadzah, but also academics and writers, such as Meti Astuti, S.E.I., M. Ek, an economist and lecturer. Thus, the debates presented aim to provide an understanding of Islam in the current world reality using a scientific approach. This framing seeks to discuss, from an academic perspective, how the world order, which is often dominated by Western ideologies, could function better using the Islamic framework itself.

Additionally, the topics covered by the writers are no longer solely centered around religious da’wah but extend to issues that are widely discussed in Indonesia, including economic, political, health, and educational matters. For instance, the article titled “*Examining Taxes as a Tool for National Financing through the Islamic Economic View*”, written by Meti Astuti, S.E.I., M. Ek, published on January 2, 2025, critiques the 12% increase in Value-Added Tax (VAT) as a form of the flawed Democratic system, which is seen as “exploiting” the poor for the benefit of the elite. The article proposes an Islamic economic solution to the issue of compulsory taxes, presenting a contrasting approach to the current system.

“...The tax system established by the Caliphate is clearly different from the taxes imposed by capitalist states, both in terms of their background, purpose, and objectives.” (January 2, 2025)

This quote emphasizes that Ex-HTI seeks to capture the audience’s attention by criticizing the capitalist system and offering an alternative, namely the Caliphate. In the shadows, they create an idealized narrative of how the Caliphate works for justice and welfare, hiding from legal pressures while still presenting the system as the ideal and superior solution. On the *Muslimah News* account, the religious authority used to discuss various issues does not only come from sources with traditional religious legitimacy, but also from scholars, writers, and academics. Thus, religious authority for its followers is not solely anchored in the figure of an Ustadz, but also in other layers of society, while simultaneously showing that Muslim women and female authority are recognized and facilitated.

From the audience’s perspective, we can see that such a da’wah strategy has at least succeeded in gaining public sympathy. The audience on Facebook actively engages with this account, responding to the issues raised by the account. Some audiences even agree with the ideas presented by this account, as shown below:

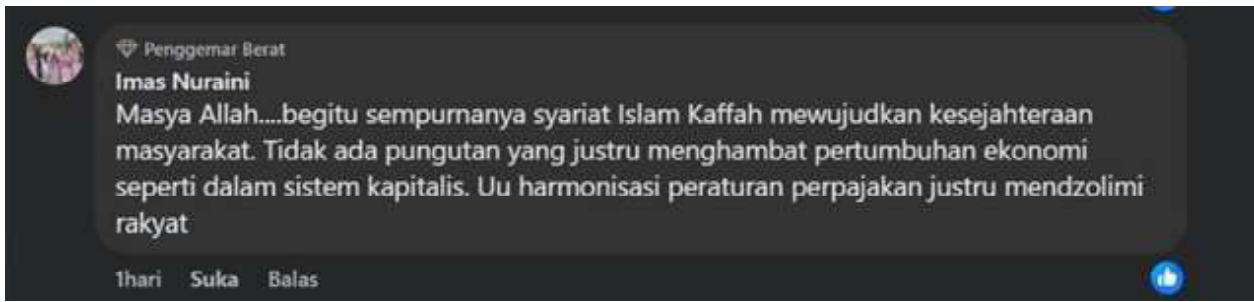


Figure 3 Comments on the Muslimah News Facebook account

The explicit content of the audience interaction from the Muslimah News Facebook account, as shown in Figure 3, is detailed below:

“Masya Allah (What God has willed)....how perfect the Islamic Sharia Kaffah is in realizing the welfare of the community. There are no levies that actually hinder economic growth, as is the case in the capitalist system. The law on the harmonization of tax regulations actually oppresses the people” (Imas Nuraini, 2 January 2025).

This comment by Imas Nuraini clearly illustrates the communication patterns utilized by Ex-HTI in spreading ideological narratives on digital platforms. Comments on Facebook related to the issue of taxation reflect Ex-HTI’s communication patterns. Audience interactions in the comment section of Muslimah News.com Facebook, particularly from accounts labeled as ‘Heavy Fans’ such as Nuraini indicate a high level of ideological engagement and acceptance. Their comments explicitly reflect the core narrative of Ex-HTI, namely the advocacy for ‘Islamic Shari’ah Kaffah’ and criticism of the capitalist-secular system.

Although formal membership identification with Ex-HTI cannot be confirmed from these comments, the strong ideological alignment and ‘Heavy Fan’ status suggest that these audience members harbor a deep sympathy for the narratives promoted. This also serves as evidence of *Muslimah News* success in reconstructing Ex-HTI’s authority in the digital space, attracting a community actively vocalizing their ideology. Some accounts bearing the ‘Heavy Fan’ badge have even reshared posts from *Muslimah News*.

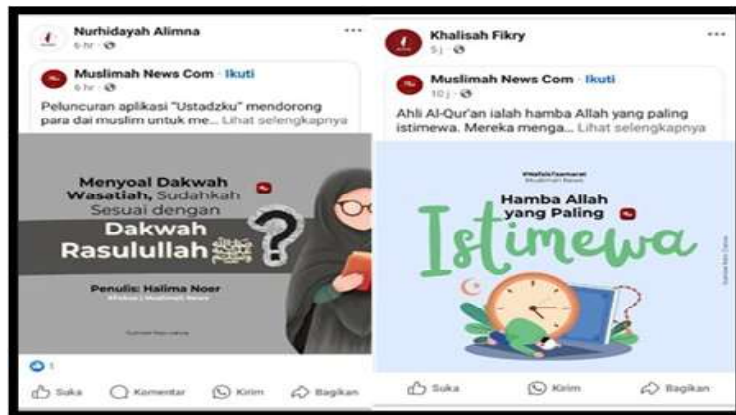


Figure 4 Comments on the *Muslimah News* Facebook Account

This indicates that the audience is becoming an active participant in spreading da’wah, with signs of a high level of engagement and ideological acceptance. As demonstrated in Figure 4, this participation includes active content creation and sharing by followers, such as posts discussing complex religious topics like the adherence of ‘Wasathiyah Da’wah’ to the ‘Da’wah of the Messenger

of Allah' and the qualities of 'The Most Special Servant of Allah'. Instead of simply criticizing government policies, they direct attention toward an alternative system, Islam Kaffah, which is portrayed as the ideal solution (Chaqoqo & Ma'mun, 2022). This strategy aims to build a sharp contrast between the oppressive capitalist system and the allegedly perfect Islamic Shari'ah. Facebook provides a broad space for discussion, both through public comments and private groups, allowing for a more dynamic development of this discourse. With an indirect approach that avoids overt criticism, Ex-HTI uses this space to strengthen their alternative narrative without facing direct scrutiny. This pattern is part of their effort to reconstruct legitimacy and authority in the shadow space, where ideological support can be gradually reinforced through deeper interactions within the online community.

The use of digital media by Ex-HTI, particularly through platforms such as *Muslimah News*, shows how the group has adapted to technological advancements to continue their da'wah after HTI's dissolution in 2017. This also serves as evidence that digital media has stimulated changes in the production and dissemination of knowledge about Islam (Ibrahim, 2024). This research indicates that Ex-HTI is utilizing various platforms such as websites, Instagram, and Facebook to rebuild their legitimacy in the digital space. The use of social media also supports findings from previous studies, which show that digital da'wah is increasingly dominating in the post-reform era and becoming the primary channel for spreading ideologies, while also serving as a form of moderating da'wah (Åhman & Thorén, 2021; Choirin et al., 2025).

BMI (Back to Muslim Identity)

Ex-HTI's da'wah efforts are also focused on a specific segment of the Muslim youth and female students, through the *Back to Muslim Identity* page on Instagram. This platform has become a tool for the Ex-HTI group to promote the concept of Islam *Kaffah*, similar to the group's previous slogan of political resistance through Islam (Hendri et al., 2024). Targeting Muslim youth and female students specifically, this page actively narrates its da'wah using both written content and images that criticize and oppose Capitalism and Secularism, while striving to replace these ideologies with leadership stemming from the Islamic group.



Figure 5 Post on the Instagram Account @backto_muslimidentity

The Instagram post titled 'Real Change' directly challenges the democratic process, stating that true change does not involve merely replacing leaders every five years but must be rooted exclusively in Islamic Sharia, thereby rejecting the secular, capitalist, democratic system which is portrayed as incapable of delivering real justice (@backto_muslimidentity, 21 December 2024).

This content serves as a key piece of evidence for the account's broader strategy through Instagram, the Back to Muslim Identity page actively resists the leadership and current Indonesian

government regime, including how democracy in Indonesia is functioning. The narrative presented on this account argues that the failure of the Indonesian political system is due to leadership figures who do not adhere to Islamic teachings. Therefore, it posits that to improve Indonesia's political system, leadership should come from the Islam Kaffah group. The framework used by the Back to Muslim Identity page on Instagram involves adopting a critical and rational perspective, as its primary audience is university students. The basis for criticism is drawn from verses of the Qur'an or Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, which are then contextualized to critique the issues at hand. An example of this is shown below.



Figure 6 Post on the Instagram account @backto_muslimidentity

A post published on December 21, 2024, by the Instagram account Back to Muslim Identity, titled “Suara Aktivistis: Pergiliran Kekuasaan Itu, Niscaya” (Activist Voice: The Rotation of Power is Certain), offers a theological critique of secular governance. Drawing on Qur’anic verse Ali Imran 3:140, the post asserts that the rise and fall of civilizations is a divine cycle, not a democratic achievement. It frames systemic change as inevitable (*keniscayaan*), but insists that true transformation must reject entrenched capitalist structures and embrace Islamic values as the foundation for justice and prosperity.

In this published, *BMI* used an excerpt from Surah Al-Imran, verse 140, as the basis for its critique of the Indonesian government and democracy. The framing presented suggests that the secular capitalist system has shackled the Muslim community through nationalism. According to this narrative, this system has disrupted the social order, leading to widespread injustice on earth. Therefore, the rotation of power by the *Islam Kaffah* group is seen as an inevitability. In this context, the account positions the activists of the group to play a role in replacing the current Indonesian government.

Table 3 Sample Content Uploaded by the Instagram Account @backto_muslimidentity Instagram. Followers: 37.3 K

Instagram Followers: 37.3 K		
Coding	Content	Time
The Hypocrisy of Democracy	The corrupt mother of democracy, and replacing it with an Islamic system that truly brings justice and real solutions	21 December 2024
	The arrest of thousands of students participating in pro-Palestinian demonstrations in the US	3 July 2024
The Injustice of Capitalism	Nearly 10 million Gen Zers are unemployed	29 June 2024
Women in Islam	Only with the implementation of Islam within the framework of the state can women's honour be preserved	8 December 2024
Islamic Kaffah	It is time for us to break free from man-made systems and laws and turn to the comprehensive system and laws of Allah, where sovereignty lies in the hands of Allah	11 November 2024
	Let us become Muslim women who play a role, Muslim women who contribute to the struggle for Islam in its entirety	10 November 2024

The framing constructed by the *BMI* page on Instagram represents a form of resistance by the Ex-HTI group against the government that dissolved their organization. These posts aim to replace democracy with an Islamic system of governance through the Caliphate, while promoting the comprehensive implementation of Islamic values. The *BMI* account reflects the anti-democracy sentiment of the Ex-HTI group.

Felix Siauw's Figure as a New Form of Authority in the Ex-HTI Da'wah Movement

As Cheong has stated, the advancement of technology has given rise to new forms of authority in religion. In this study, the da'wah efforts of the Ex-HTI group after its dissolution have created a new approach to preaching by adapting technology through social media. The Ex-HTI group, through *Back to Muslim Identity* and *Muslimah News*, has engaged in digital da'wah practices. The shift in the Ex-HTI's preaching methods from conventional to digital is evidence that religion has adapted to technological advancements, resulting in the emergence of a new form of authority.

In this research, the new form of authority referred to by Cheong is the figure of Felix Siauw as a marketing preacher who is accepted by the public (Wai Weng, 2024). In the past, traditional religious authority was rigid and conservative, primarily occupied by religious leaders whose roles in guiding the community were deemed valid. However, new religious authorities today are often individuals who leverage social media (Åhman & Thorén, 2021). The emergence of this new form of authority is an interesting subject for study, particularly in terms of how a new figure has emerged in virtual spaces without being formally validated as a religious leader with scholarly qualifications. In essence, individuals who succeed in branding themselves through social media can easily occupy this new space of religious authority.

The contextualization of this new authority within the da'wah of the Ex-HTI group after its dissolution is represented by the figure of Felix Siauw, who has transformed from a member of HTI to a preacher who is more readily accepted by society. The HTI group itself has faced significant opposition from the broader public, particularly due to concerns about its potential threat to the unity of the Indonesian state. What is intriguing is how public opposition to HTI contrasts with the acceptance of Felix Siauw as a preacher. Despite his previous affiliation with HTI, the public's reception of him demonstrates how Felix Siauw has become a new form of religious authority.

In essence, the acceptance of Felix Siauw by society remains a topic of public debate, especially through social media. Some members of the public are aware of Felix's past affiliation with HTI.



Figure 7 Comments on the Instagram account @felix.siauw

Audience interaction from the Instagram account @felix.siauw, as shown in Figure 7, is described below.

“Channged direction after the khilafuk sales didn't work. Former HTI leader making a new strategy. The important thing is not to spread hatred and be intoxicated by religion” (Jeffcatsoltan, 18 November 2024).

This comment by @jeffcatsoltan indicates that he is aware that Felix Siauw is a former member of HTI. Meanwhile, some members of the public have engaged in debate by introducing the discourse that Felix Siauw is considered more democratic and has distanced himself from the group.



Figure 8 Comments on the Instagram account @felix.siauw G Figure 8.

Audience interaction from the Instagram account @felix.siauw, as shown in Figure 8, is described below.

“The one who is actually problematic is the one who says Ustad Felix has issues with Pancasila” (Iamcahyanii, 07 November 2024).

Through the debates in the comments, it is evident that there are differing perceptions among the public regarding Felix Siauw, particularly in relation to his connection with the HTI group. Felix Siauw’s approach to da’wah integrates religion, particularly the concept of Tawhid, with technology. Through his Instagram account @felix.siauw, he showcases his friendly demeanor by frequently engaging in conversations with his followers through comment replies. A distinctive feature of his da’wah method is his ability to embrace and align with the thought patterns of the post-millennial generation (Qadaruddin & Bakri, 2022). Additionally, Felix Siauw maximizes social media by utilizing filters on his content to make it more appealing to his followers.

Felix engages in da’wah in a flexible manner, expanding his da’wah network with religious authority beyond the HTI group. This communication strategy has made him more accepted by society, regardless of his background. As a result, Felix Siauw’s account has garnered 1.4 million followers. On Instagram, he often posts clips from podcasts featuring various public figures.

Table 4 Sample Content Uploaded by Instagram Account @felix.siauw

Instagram		
Followers: 1.4 M		
Coding	Content	Time
The Palestinian issue	The liberation of Al-Aqsa Mosque	14 December 2024
Ittiba’ Rasulullah	Thank you all for coming and joining us in remembering the Prophet Muhammad.	18 December 2024
The situation in Syria	My first response was to pray for the safety, well-being and blessings of Syrian Muslims	9 December 2024
Debt Law	What does it feel like to have debts that you will never be able to pay off?	7 November 2024

Felix, through his Instagram account, does not engage extensively in da’wah in the *Islam Kaffah* style. Instead, the content presented leans more toward clips from Felix’s podcast with various parties. The content on Instagram serves primarily as highlights, directing followers to longer video formats. Additionally, Felix’s distinctive approach to da’wah is clearly segmented to target the younger generation. Thus, the issues raised on Instagram are framed in a contemporary

and relaxed manner, appealing to young people. Below are some figures who have participated in podcasts and content with Felix Siau.

Table 5 Sample of @felix.siau's Collaborative Content with Various Other Parties

Instagram		
Followers: 1.4 M		
Collaborators	Content	Time
Daddy Corbuzier	The last king podcast, let's go to yukngaji	2 January 2025
Canggihfit	The physical characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad to Dracula...	31 December 2024
Koiyocabe	The leaders who claim to be authentic	24 December 2024
Raymond Surya Chins	Religion is not just a matter of ritual	13 December 2024
Ferry Irwandi	Shamanism	12 December 2024
Aab Elkarimi	Stay calm at home	16 November 2024
Medy Renaldy	Can we design our own death?	6 November 2024

Unlike Instagram, Felix's da'wah through his YouTube account *Felix Siau* features longer videos. Felix frequently responds to dynamic issues that are currently being discussed and debated within society, including various issues and contests occurring within the Indonesian government and regime. The framing created by Felix is that his da'wah is presented through videos in which he provides responses and commentary on the issues that are circulating in public discourse.

The position of *Islam Kaffah* da'wah that Felix practices through his YouTube account is conveyed implicitly. Felix does not explicitly present a detailed explanation or da'wah about *Islam Kaffah*. Rather, the Islamic values are integrated into case studies of current, widely discussed issues. As a result, the viewers of his content subconsciously accept the values that Felix Siau seeks to convey. Felix's approach to da'wah takes the position of returning every issue to an Islamic worldview. Below is a coding map of how Felix's da'wah is conducted through the YouTube platform, based on the titles of the videos he creates.

Table 6 Sample Content Uploaded by Instagram Account @felix.siau

Youtube		
Subscriber: 1.76 M		
Coding	Content	Time
Anti-government	12% tax	23 December 2024
Religious Issues with Mainstream Groups	Selling iced tea (X) Selling religion (V)	4 December 2024
Woman in Islam	The Thing I Fear Most About My Wife	17 September 2024
Caliphate	Remember 1453	29 May 2024
The Palestinian issue	Concrete Action for Palestine Proof of Our Love for Palestine	17 April 2024 7 February 2024
The family in Islam	How to Manage Emotions in the Household	22 January 2024
Islamic leadership	For example, Guide to Choosing in 2024	28 December 2023

Felix's adaptation to issues that are currently in the public eye, coupled with the framework he uses by highlighting his closeness to the younger generation, has made him widely accepted by society. When linked back to Felix's presence in the media as a new authority figure, it is noteworthy that genealogically, Felix is a Chinese-born convert to Islam. How, then, can a Chinese individual transform into someone who occupies religious authority in Islam? The emergence of this new authority has been facilitated by the presence of new media. In traditional religious authority, Felix would not have easily been able to occupy the old authority position. However, the advent of media has helped transform Felix Siau from a convert to someone who has

successfully established a new religious authority. In fact, Felix has even been given the title of Ustadz. The formation of new authority through digital media is considered highly effective in reaching specific groups, in this case, the youth, who cannot be effectively reached by traditional authorities (Ko³odziejska et al., 2023).

Felix Siau, as a new authority figure, is seen as having strengthened the da'wah efforts of the Ex-HTI group after its dissolution through *Back to Muslim Identity* and *Muslimah News*. While Felix employs a different strategy compared to *BMI* and *Muslimah News* in his da'wah approach, they share the same overarching mission. This difference in approach does not imply that he is part of the HTI group, which was disbanded by the government. On the contrary, this difference in da'wah methods is what has made Felix more widely accepted by the public compared to *Back to Muslim Identity* and *Muslimah News*. This can be seen from the substantial gap in follower count and engagement between them on Instagram.

Table 7 Comparison of Number of Followers

Number of Followers on the Instagram Platform				
Back To Muslim Identity	Muslim	Muslimah News	Felix Siau	
	37.3 K	97.1 K	1.4 K	

Felix Siau's success in da'wah clarifies his position as a manifestation of new authority within the Ex-HTI group. Felix's strategy involves masking his da'wah and raising issues that are then related to the religious values he wishes to convey. This is where the process of change (From the Spotlight to the Shadow) occurs, as observed by the researcher. Before its dissolution, the HTI group used direct and overt da'wah methods. However, post-dissolution, Ex-HTI, through the new authority represented by the figure of Felix Siau, has adopted a more subtle approach to da'wah. This strategy has proven successful, making Felix more widely accepted by society.



Figure 9 Screenshot of 12% tax content on Felix Siau's YouTube account

The explicit content of the audience interaction from Felix Siau's youtube account, as shown in Figure 9, is detailed below:

"Felix's explanations are proportional, everything feels just right and pleasant to listen to. Many born Muslims should be ashamed of this convert who fights for Islam as brought by the Prophet, with intention solely for Allah. His da'wah intention is strong to educate the nation's youth without any title or position. Alhamdulillah, thank you to Felix Siau for all your kindness in educating the people of this country. May Allah bless and honor all your struggles until the afterlife" (Garts02, 25 December 2024)

Through the screenshot of the comment above, it can be seen that Felix Siau's approach to discussing issues such as taxation has been well received by the public. Felix emphasizes a logical

and rational perspective, explained in detail so that his audience can accept the explanation, which is perceived as reasonable. There is a process of knowledge negotiation facilitated by digital media, in this case, the platform used by Felix Siauw. The public's statements through these comments are also responded to and supported by a significant number of others, as seen in the number of "likes" on the comments. The public's acceptance of Felix Siauw as a figure within the Ex-HTI group has also led to a response regarding his contestation with other mainstream religious figures. Felix Siauw is considered successful in competing with authority figures from other religious groups.

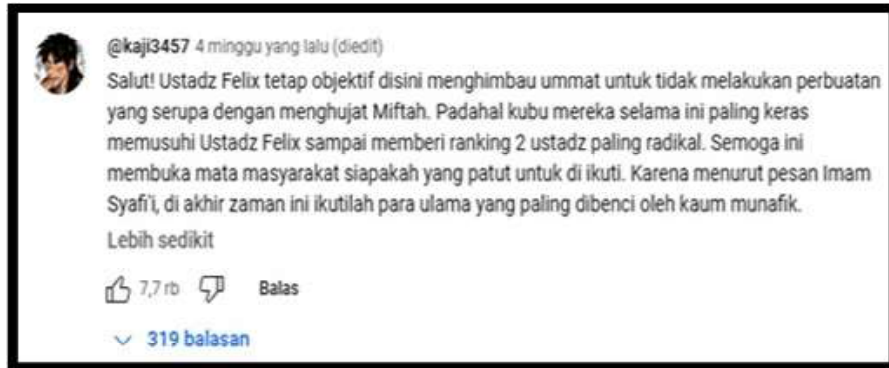


Figure 10. Screenshot of comprehensive content discussing stupidity on Felix Siauw's YouTube account

The explicit content of the audience interaction from Felix Siauw's youtube account, as shown in Figure 3, is detailed below:

"Salute! Ustadz Felix remains objective here, urging the ummah not to do the same by insulting Miftah. Even though their camp has been the harshest in opposing Ustadz Felix, even ranking him as the second most radical ustadz. Hopefully this opens the eyes of the people to who should be followed. Because according to the message of Imam Syafi'i, in the end times, follow the scholars most hated by the hypocrites" (kaji3457, 06 November 2024).

The comment section, as a space for public discussion, illustrates that the public's acceptance of Felix Siauw is reflected in comparisons made between his da'wah and that of mainstream religious groups. This suggests that the public has embraced the religious values conveyed by Felix Siauw through his da'wah as part of the Ex-HTI group. The researcher highlights the contradiction in the public's acceptance of Felix Siauw in contrast to the Ex-HTI group. While the public has readily accepted Felix Siauw, they have rejected the Ex-HTI group. Interestingly, a genealogical review reveals that Felix Siauw was formerly a member of the HTI group, which was disbanded by the government (A. M. I. Haq, 2023).

Reconstruction of Authority Legitimacy in the Ex-HTI Group After Its Dissolution

The dissolution of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) in 2017 not only formally ended the existence of the organization but also triggered a significant transformation in their da'wah strategy. This change was not merely a technical adaptation but a strategic effort to rebuild ideological authority under social and political pressure. The religious authority that emerged after this transformation occupied a central and powerful position, playing a significant role in shaping the discourse on religion within digital media (Buckley et al., 2023). Before its dissolution, HTI relied on print media such as *Buletin Al-Islam* and *Jurnal Al-Wa'ie* to openly disseminate its ideology. However, after the dissolution, they transitioned to the digital space, which offered anonymity and the ability to reach a broader audience without geographical constraints. Communication through social media became an effort to ensure the survival and existence of the religious group in the

virtual space (Fröh & Robinson, 2024).

Platforms such as *Muslimah News* and *Back to Muslim Identity* (BMI) became the group's primary strategy in this effort. *Muslimah News*, explicitly targeting Muslim women, does not only address women's issues but also presents more idealistic and ideological concerns. Meanwhile, BMI uses visual appeal to reach the younger generation with a more relaxed approach, while consistently spreading the ideas of *Islam Kaffah*. This transformation reflects a shift from direct, overt da'wah to a more subtle and strategic approach a transition from "the spotlight to the shadows."

In Cheong's analysis of the vitality of new media, it is explained that digital media has the power to shift traditional authority structures into more flexible and individual-based ones. This analysis challenges the values of the old authority, which traditionally relied on figures such as *Kiai* or *Ulama* (Schmidt, 2021). This perspective is relevant in understanding how Ex-HTI utilizes social media to rebuild their authority. However, Cheong does not fully explain how digital media can be used to conceal political agendas beneath a spiritual narrative. The case of Ex-HTI shows that platforms like *Muslimah News* and BMI are not only tools for spreading ideology but also means for managing public image and avoiding direct scrutiny by formal authorities.

Cheong also discusses how digital spaces influence the individualization of spirituality, which often leads to fragmentation within religious communities. However, in the context of Ex-HTI, this fragmentation is not seen as a weakness. Instead, it opens opportunities for them to build a broader and more dispersed ideological network, while remaining strongly consolidated. Social media, with its working algorithms, becomes an effective tool for creating digital spaces of discussion that not only connect the community but also strengthen their collective identity.

External challenges such as surveillance or social pressure have not diminished the group's enthusiasm. In the digital world, they can move beyond geographical boundaries, but interestingly, they also create more closed spaces where only their views are reinforced and difficult to be influenced by other perspectives.

In modern society, authority has become more flexible and responsive to social changes. Groups like Ex-HTI take advantage of this by linking current issues, such as education and healthcare, to their ideology of *Islam Kaffah*, thus remaining relevant amid social and political transformations. This reconstruction of Ex-HTI's legitimacy through digital media shows their ability to adapt to a less favorable environment. This strategy is not merely an effort for survival but also a way to rebuild authority that is more relevant to the modern era. The new authority that is formed will be considered accepted if the transmission of knowledge can be normatively explained within a specific population (Ciptadi, 2024). By utilizing digital technology, Ex-HTI has succeeded in creating new spaces to maintain their ideology, demonstrating how marginalized groups can use innovation to survive and even thrive in a challenging socio-political context.

Conclusion

This research concludes that efforts to reconstruct the authority of the former Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia after its dissolution in 2017 have been successful through strategic adaptation in the digital realm, while also answering the two research questions posed. First, the da'wah strategy has undergone a total transformation from a spotlight model based on physical/institutional presence to a shadows model based online. This shadows strategy is intensively executed through social media, which now functions as a counter-public space. Accounts such as *Muslimah News* and *Back to Muslim Identity* are prime examples, packaging ideological messages in a subtle and persuasive manner. This change confirms that social media has become a vital infrastructure for maintaining religious authority after the ban. Second, the success of this reconstruction is supported by the crucial role of Felix Siau as a representative of the new authority. Felix Siau, with his popular and flexible style, functions as a bridge of legitimacy, where acceptance of his individual persona facilitates acceptance of the caliphate ideology, making authority in the digital era more

personal than institutional. These findings confirm that the state ban has only shifted the ideological battlefield of the former HTI to a complex and decentralized digital realm.

However, there are academic gaps that need to be filled by further research to deepen our understanding of the implications of digital da'wah. Future research needs to focus on two specific areas. First, the social and psychological impact of digital da'wah on its audience needs to be studied in depth. Focus should be given to how messages packaged through shadow strategies directly influence the formation of ideological identity and trigger changes in mindset among followers. Further studies should go beyond content analysis and involve audience-based studies. Second, it is important to investigate how social media mechanisms influence ideological polarization among da'wah audiences. This includes analyzing the role of platform algorithms in creating echo chambers or filter bubbles that reinforce the Ex-HTI narrative and limit audience exposure to opposing views. These two aspects will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term influence of digital da'wah in shaping public opinion and political ideology dynamics in Indonesia's digital space.

Acknowledgments

This research has not been funded by any party. The researcher would like to express gratitude to all individuals and organizations who have provided assistance during the course of this study.

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