

DEFINING *PIOUS* WOMEN: A Critical Discourse Analysis on Religious Sermons on Youtube

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Abstract

This article examines how female preachers negotiate their religious authority through the construction of definitions of the “pious woman” in religious sermons uploaded to YouTube. Using a qualitative approach and Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis, this study analyzes a selection of sermon videos delivered by three female preachers—Ning Sheila Hasina, Ning Nawal, and Ning Khilma Anis—by examining the dimensions of textual construction, discursive practices, and sociocultural practices. The findings indicate that the three female preachers construct the virtuous woman through three distinct registers: Ning Sheila through the framework of fiqh and hadith, Ning Nawal through the taxonomy of the five characteristics of piety, and Ning Khilma Anis through Javanese cultural metaphors. In terms of discursive practice, the three sermons circulated through different production and distribution channels: two of them through institutional redistribution within the Nahdlatul Ulama media network, and the other through an independent live-streaming channel. In terms of sociocultural practice, these sermons address the tension between traditionally inherited norms of wifely obedience and women’s growing economic independence by negotiating—rather than openly rejecting—prevailing patriarchal norms. This study concludes that the religious authority of these three female preachers stems from a combination of textual and scholarly references, the borrowing of legitimacy

from senior male clerics, institutional positions, and personal charisma, and operates within an established patriarchal religious structure.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, Religious Authority, Pious Women, Digital Dakwah*

Introduction

Religious outreach in Indonesia has undergone a significant shift with the proliferation of sermons on YouTube. This phenomenon encompasses three aspects: the shift of religious authority from local pulpits to the digital sphere, the transformation of sermons into participatory media, and the emergence of both new opportunities and risks in the digital public sphere. YouTube now functions as a digital pulpit where sermons, religious studies, and fatwas are uploaded, accessed, debated, and reposted by users (Pranoto, 2023; Hamdani, 2023; Pratiwi, 2025).

Unlike conventional pulpits, which are local and one-way in nature, YouTube provides access across space and time, allowing sermons to be rewatched personally and on-demand (Soim, 2025; Panuju, 2022), while also facilitating interaction through comment sections, live streaming, and the “subscribe” feature, thereby forming a virtual congregation or a new digital community (Fuente-Cobo, 2023; Fakhruddin, 2026). This shift has also transformed the basis of religious authority: preachers now build credibility not only through mastery of knowledge but also through identity, networks, interaction with the audience, and communication styles aligned with the platform’s logic, such as storytelling and charismatic presentation (Pranoto, 2023; Rokibullah, 2025; Hilmi, 2021). This space opens opportunities to strengthen religious moderation and literacy, but it also risks fueling polarization, disinformation, and the fragmentation of authority (Handayani, 2025; Khotimah, 2024; Soim, 2025).

Amid this shift, female da’iyah such as Ning Sheila, Ning Imaz Fathimatuz Zahra, and Ning Khilma Anis have emerged as new authoritative figures. Their emergence reflects a shift in religious

authority from a male-dominated institutional model toward a more individual, digital, and performative model—though one that remains negotiated within the boundaries of patriarchy and norms of female piety (Lyansari, 2022; Raya, 2024; Hasyim, 2025). All three project authority particularly on issues of women's morality, as women's religious authority in Indonesia has historically been most readily accepted when addressing and speaking about women, family, the body, etiquette, and gender relations (Kloos, 2016; Muhtador, 2020; Said, 2024). This authority generally draws on three sources: recognized religious education, networks of Islamic boarding schools or communities, and the ability to present convincingly in digital public spaces—a process accelerated by social media as a space that democratizes Islamic discourse (Kloos, 2016; Lyansari, 2022; 'Ulyan, 2023).

However, the construct of the “pious woman” that they present is not a neutral category, but rather the result of an interpretation steeped in theological, social, and gender interests, as well as an arena of contestation over who has the right to define women's piety (Izza, 2025; Mustafa, 2024; Nugroho, 2024). This situation underscores a fundamental tension between religious authority structures—which have historically been male-dominated—and the emergence of female da'iyahs demanding the right to speak and interpret; a recognition that, according to several studies, remains limited and subject to negotiation, rather than fully replacing male dominance (Ghafournia, 2022; Nasir, 2024; Said, 2024).

Research on digital da'wah can be categorized into three interrelated areas: digital da'wah in general, the authority of female religious teachers (ustazah/da'iyah) on social media, and gender representation in religious sermons. A review of studies on digital da'wah concludes that social media makes da'wah more interactive, encourages participation through comment sections, sharing features, discussions, webinars, and live Q&A sessions, while also creating space for women's voices and more inclusive interpretations ('Ulyan,

2023). In line with this, a study on female religious scholars on social media found that many female religious scholars are active on various platforms with diverse communication styles; however, maintaining their influence in da'wah requires digital literacy, technological literacy, and humanistic literacy (Uyuni, 2023).

Another study on women's authority shows that social media helps female religious teachers (*ustazah*) establish authority that is relatively on par with men's through simple, interactive, and contextual communication, including the use of *maqāṣid syari'ah* and references to earlier scholars (Uyuni, 2022). A case study on Oki Setiana Dewi demonstrates that digital religious authority is built through emotional storytelling, consistent aesthetic branding, and active engagement with the audience, although the study remains a single-case design without audience interviews (Nasution, 2025). Meanwhile, a study on Ning Imaz indicates that women's digital da'wah can expand the negotiation of gender roles, yet it remains within theological boundaries through the naturalization of **fitrah** and a shift in terminology from "equality" to "gender justice" (Hasyim, 2025).

In the realm of gender representation, a number of analyses of sermons and da'wah programs reveal that representation remains skewed: men are more dominant as speakers, topics of equality receive insufficient attention, and some content still positions men as superior to women (Uswatussolihah, 2024). A study of YouTube sermons on women by various preachers in East Java even revealed typologies of sexism, misogyny, and negative stigmas that varied among preachers, influenced by the preachers' backgrounds, audience dynamics, and patriarchal culture (Hasanah, 2023). Meanwhile, a study on feminist da'wah on YouTube shows that female preachers often construct women's roles—particularly in the domestic sphere—while simultaneously sparking debates regarding gender power dynamics and assumptions of dominance or restrictions on women (Syam, 2022).

These three areas converge on a clear gap: existing research generally consists of single-case studies, descriptive studies, or studies focused on the general contributions of a female religious teacher, and few have compared multiple female preachers simultaneously using Fairclough's three-dimensional framework in its entirety—namely, text analysis, discourse practices, and sociocultural practices (Nasution, 2025; Uyuni, 2023).

Even studies employing Fairclough's model in this field are generally still limited to a single medium or corpus—such as radio programs or classifications of sermons on women's issues—and have not systematically compared the discourse strategies of multiple digital da'iyahs across dimensions (Uswatussolihah, 2024; Hasanah, 2023). This gap constitutes the primary significance of this study: without a comprehensive comparison across multiple female preachers, it is difficult to understand how differences in bases of authority, rhetorical strategies, and social contexts shape the ways in which women negotiate the meaning of piety in digital spaces, as well as how these differences influence the public's acceptance or rejection of their religious authority.

Based on this gap, this study formulates three research questions. First, how do the sermons by Ning Sheila, Ning Nawal, and Ning Khilma Anis construct the definition of a pious woman? Second, how do the processes of production, distribution, and consumption of these sermons shape and negotiate the religious authority of these three female preachers? Third, how does the socio-cultural and religious context of Indonesia influence and, in turn, be influenced by this discourse?

Results and Discussion

The Concept of the Pious Woman in Exegesis and Jurisprudence

In the traditions of exegesis and hadith, “salihah” is primarily understood as a woman who is obedient to Allah; in the context of marriage, this is interpreted more specifically as a wife who is obedient to her husband, preserves her modesty, safeguards her husband’s property, and keeps household secrets (Soleha, 2022; Qodir, 2023). In fiqh and family etiquette, this meaning has expanded into a list of practical obligations such as covering one’s aurat, guarding one’s speech, serving one’s husband, asking permission when leaving the house, being patient, and managing domestic affairs (Susanto, 2023; Waskito, 2022; Alami, 2023).

Theologically, *salihah* is defined as essentially equivalent to *saleh* -that is sincere devotion in worship, faith, and moral conduct- with Quranic Surah al-Ahzab 35 serving as the basis that both men and women are equally bound by the requirements of Islamic law (Pebiyanti, 2023; Waskito, 2022). However, when Quranic verse al-Nisa 4:34 is interpreted in the context of the husband-wife relationship, its meaning becomes more gender-specific through two key attributes: *qanitat* (obedience to both Allah and one’s husband) and **hafizah lil-ghaib** (safeguarding her husband’s honor, secrets, and property in his absence) (Soleha, 2022).

Socially, this term operates on four levels: regulating women’s behavior, speech, morals, and modesty (Waskito, 2022; Pebiyanti, 2023; Anugrah, 2024); linking piety with domesticity and contentment at home (Soleha, 2022; Jauhari, 1970); serving as a moral label that judges women as “good” or “deviant” (Soleha, 2022; Taufiqotuzzahro, 2024; Kumala, 2020); and is used in training programs to shape the ideal Muslim woman (Pebiyanti, 2023; Majid, 2021). This concept is fluid because it shifts depending on the medium, interpretive authority, and social context: on TikTok, its

meaning is shaped through symbols and ideological themes (Fernando, 2023), while on YouTube and Instagram, it can be constructed in a textualist manner to restrict women's movements and position domesticity as the primary ideal (Soleha, 2022; Fadia, 2023), although some more moderate interpretations legitimize women working in public spaces as long as they uphold Islamic dignity and ethics (Fadia, 2023).

Religious Authority and Gender Negotiations

Religious authority in Islam derives from several mutually reinforcing sources, rather than from a single basis: the lineage of the kiai provides traditional legitimacy through historical ties to predecessors and the pesantren culture (Habib, 2025); the scholarly tradition of the pesantren remains the core of authority, as ulama must be recognized as masters of the texts and connected to centers of Islamic learning (Ismah, 2016; Bukhari, 2026); and personal charisma is also important as a spiritual draw that mobilizes the trust of followers (Habib, 2025; Bukhari, 2026; Malicha, 2026).

Social media does not eliminate traditional authority but makes it more flexible, participatory, and dependent on public interaction. Digital authority is typically built on a combination of traditional capital—such as Islamic boarding schools or lineage—and new forms of communication on platforms, where interaction, Q&A sessions, and content sharing enable followers to help shape interpretive authority (Habib, 2025; Norlaila, 2025). For female religious scholars, digital adaptation expands the reach of their religious outreach across generations and strengthens women's participation in religious discussions (Norlaila, 2025).

Spheres of religious authority have historically been dominated by men, and women often have to work harder to prove their worth (Ghafournia, 2022; Ismah, 2016; Nadia, 2024). Women negotiate authority through community-based authority—offering advice, resolving socio-religious issues, and building congregational

trust (Ismah, 2016)—and employ Islamic language drawn from within the tradition, rather than always relying on the language of liberal resistance, to carve out religiously legitimate spaces (Liberatore, 2019; Koburtay, 2022). Networks such as KUPI strengthen women's collective authority by challenging patriarchal interpretations, incorporating women's experiences, and producing more inclusive fatwas (Rohmaniyah, 2022; Kloos, 2023; Abdul, 2025). Overall, religious authority appears to be a combination of lineage, scholarship, charisma, and media visibility, while women carve out space by combining scholarly legitimacy, community work, spiritual strategies, and collective authority to challenge the dominance of male clerics without necessarily stepping outside the framework of Islamic tradition.

Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model and Gende's Ideology

Fairclough's three-dimensional model explains discourse through text, discursive practices, and sociocultural practices, and then links these to power relations and ideology (Xing, 2024; Feighery, 2016). The textual dimension examines linguistic features within a text—vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, syntax, and text structure—to see how representations, relationships, and identities are constructed through language choices (Amjad, 2025; Kusumaningsih, 2024; Magfira, 2022). Lexical choices and metaphors can signal ideological positions (Wu, 2023; Leotti, 2021; Javed, 2025), while grammar, *transitivity*, modality, and quotation strategies help normalize social hierarchies, including gender, even though seemingly neutral text structures often actually steer readers toward specific meanings (Jamshaid, 2026; Kusumaningsih, 2024; Murtini, 2026).

The dimension of discourse practice explains the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption, as well as how texts circulate within a broader discursive order—including who produces the texts, for whom, and through which media and genres (Amjad, 2025; Feighery, 2016; Morais, 2025). In this dimension, intertextuality

and interdiscursivity emerge when various discourses and genres are interwoven within a single communicative event, such that discourse practice functions as a mediator between textual forms and the broader social context (Xing, 2024; Feighery, 2016; Morais, 2025).

The sociocultural dimension of practice broadens the analysis to include the situational, institutional, and social contexts surrounding a text, focusing on how discourse is shaped by social structures while simultaneously helping to shape norms, values, ideologies, and power relations (Ajmal, 2024; Feighery, 2016; Amjad, 2025). The situational level examines the context of the specific event in which the text is produced (Morais, 2025); the institutional level highlights how the media, the law, or policies regulate possible meanings (Leotti, 2021; Murtini, 2026); and the social level interprets dominant ideologies—such as patriarchy, capitalism, honor, or morality—as the framework that structures discourse (Singh, 2025; Wu, 2023; Agustina, 2023).

This model is relevant for deconstructing gender ideology because CDA is designed to reveal how language reflects, reproduces, and normalizes power and inequality (Amjad, 2025; Farhadytooli, 2025; Leotti, 2021). In feminist scholarship, the focus is not merely on the representation of women, but rather on how hierarchical gender orders are maintained through both subtle and overt discursive practices—for example, media that normalize masculine authority and marginalize women's voices, or news discourse that positions women as victims and domestic actors while portraying men as public authorities (Lazar, 2007; Javed, 2025; Jamshaid, 2026). A robust gender analysis must also be intersectional, as gender ideology is intertwined with class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and geography (Lazar, 2007, 2005; Esposito, 2024).

Method

The subjects of this study are three religious lecture videos uploaded to YouTube, each featuring one female preacher: Ning Sheila Hasina, Ning Nawal, and Ning Khilma Anis. These three videos were selected through purposive sampling because they explicitly address the topics of women’s morality, roles, and piety, in line with the focus of this study.

No	Da’iyah	Video Title	Source	Statistic
1.	Ning Sheila	“Kajian Perempuan: Sering Terlupakan, Jihad Seorang istri”	FikihReuploaded by the NU Official IniChannel Sejati	Verified 1.55 million subscribers, sourced from @fatayatnulamongan (Fatayat NU Lamongan) 59,000 views, uploaded approximately 2 months prior to data collection
2.	Ning Nawal	“Tekankan Peran Ibu, Nawal: Perempuan Kunci Lahirnya Generasi Berkarakter”	NU Online NingChannel	(verified 1.55 million subscribers) 611 likes
3	Ning Khilma	“Wanita Tahu!” Khilma Bikin Tersadar Hakikat Seorang	WajibFirst NingMedia AnisIndonesia TersadarChannel Sejati	Shof (78,000 subscribers) 33 likes, duration 19 minutes 21 seconds

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The three videos represent variations in digital da'wah distribution platforms: two videos were reposted by a major religious media channel affiliated with NU (NU Online), while one video came from a smaller-scale independent da'wah production channel (First Shof Media Indonesia). This variation allows the study to capture differences in production context and audience reach among da'iyah, while also being relevant to the dimension of discursive practice in Fairclough's analysis.

The analysis was conducted using Fairclough's three dimensions. The text dimension was used to examine linguistic aspects such as lexical choice, sentence structure, intertextuality, and argumentative patterns presented in the videos. The discursive practice dimension was used to examine the processes of production, distribution, and audience response. Meanwhile, the sociocultural practice dimension was used to connect the discourse findings with the sociopolitical context, power relations between the state and civil society, and the religious authority of women in the digital public sphere. Primary data sources were obtained from transcripts of selected YouTube videos featuring religious discourse and critiques of public policy by female religious scholars.

Findings

The following analysis follows Fairclough's three-dimensional model as outlined in the theoretical framework: the textual dimension, the discourse practice dimension, and the sociocultural practice dimension. These three dimensions are applied to the transcript of a lecture by Ning Sheila Hasina "*Ngaji Fikih Perempuan: Sering Terlupakan, Inilah Jihad Sesungguhnya Seorang Istri*", Ning Nawal "*Tekankan Peran Ibu: Perempuan Kunci Lahirnya Generasi Berkarakter*", and Ning Khilma Anis

"Nasehat Ning Khilma Anis Bikin Tersadar Hakikat Sejati Seorang Perempuan".

Textual Dimension: The Construction of the Virtuous Woman in Sermon Texts

Ning Sheila Hasina structures her text around a key hadith that is repeated verbatim twice -at the beginning and near the end of the lecture-namely, the parable of the pious woman as a rare "*burung gagak yang berparuh merah*" one in a hundred. This repetition serves as an argumentative frame: the rarity of the pious woman is used as the premise for all the advice that follows. Lexically, Ning Sheila uses the terms "obedience to Allah" and "obedience to one's husband" in parallel "there are two kinds of obedience: obedience to Allah and obedience to one's husband", a grammatical choice that equates two objects of obedience that are theologically distinct in rank. The modality of obligation emerges through the constructions "which is difficult" and "cannot be reversed" when she explains that a wife's obedience must not be conditional on her husband's kind treatment. The pattern of transitivity in this text highlights women as the party that yields "we choose to yield, for the sake of the household's well-being", while the act of yielding is reconstructed through religious metaphors as jihad and worship, the rewards of which "can be far greater than those of someone who engages in jihad." Interestingly, this text also contains explicit social criticism of women's economic independence that is not balanced by spousal equality, citing anecdotal data that the majority of divorce suits are filed by wives-a rhetorical strategy that uses contemporary social phenomena to re-legitimize the norm of obedience.

Ning Nawal constructs the concept of a "high-quality Muslim woman" through a taxonomic textual structure: five sequential qualities — "Siddiqah" (honest), "afifah" (chaste and steadfast in faith), "mujahidah" (striving hard), "Alimah"/"khabirah" (knowledgeable and experienced), and "Abidah" (devout in worship).

This layered structure differs from Ning Sheila's linear-narrative pattern of argumentation; here, textual cohesion is built through explicit sequential markers ("first... second... third") that resemble the pedagogical-training genre. Lexical choices in this dimension are dominated by references to historical female figures as authoritative evidence: Sayyidah Maryam, Karimah bint Ahmad (author of the tafsir "Al-Lu'lu' wal Marjan"), Umu Aiman (a female companion who participated in the jihad of the Hijrah), the daughter of Imam Malik (a memorizer of hadith), and Sayyidah Sukainah, who is explicitly mentioned as having proposed three clauses in her marriage contract—a ban on polygamy, full rights to her property, and the right to leave the home—before ultimately divorcing when those clauses were violated. The selection of these examples highlights women's agency in negotiating marriage terms—a more progressive portrayal than the one in Ning Sheila's text, which emphasizes unconditional obedience. However, the text still concludes with a formulation that directs the role of the mother as the ultimate decision-maker ("in this act of worship, the mother is the ultimate decision-maker"), thereby ultimately folding women's intellectual and historical authority back into domestic and maternal roles.

Ning Khilma Anis employs a distinctively different textual strategy: the use of Javanese cultural metaphors as a primary argumentative device. Women are portrayed as *sokoguru* - the main structural pillars of a traditional *Joglo* house -rather than mere accessories. A historically demeaning term like *konco wingking* (companion) is deconstructed and imbued with new meaning, reframing the woman as a "director" who orchestrates household affairs from behind the scenes. The text's structure utilizes two alliterative mnemonic frameworks: *tutur, uwur, sembur* (wise counsel, material provision, and prayer) and *ngandel, kendel, bandel, kandel* (trust, courage, resilience, and economic self-reliance). A rhetorical question-and-answer pattern, such as "What is *ngandel*? Trust." creates an interactive, pedagogical rhythm characteristic of popular lecture styles

that invite the audience's imaginative participation. The text's modality leans toward explicitly advocating for women's economic independence ("engage in trade, to be independent, to be *kandel*"), a stance reinforced by these metaphors "*Kamu tidak perlu ijin untuk terbang*" At the same time, the text incorporates regulations regarding digital behavior (e.g., "when using social media, fill it with positive things... don't overshare"), signaling a metatextual awareness of the context in which the message is disseminated namely, as livestreamed content.

Comparatively, all three *da'iyahs* define the *salihah* (pious) woman as a figure who upholds household stability, yet they do so using different lexical foundations: Ning Sheila draws on Hadith texts and normative *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence); Ning Nawal references the lineage of classical female Islamic figures; and Ning Khilma Anis employs Javanese metaphors and proverbs. A tension between the encouragement of female independence and the reaffirmation of domestic roles emerges across all three texts-albeit with varying degrees of intensity-being most explicitly negotiated by Ning Sheila and most loosely addressed by Ning Khilma Anis.

The Dimension of Discursive Practice: Production, Distribution, and the Negotiation of Authority

Regarding the dimension of production, the three lectures exhibit distinct circulation patterns. The lectures by Ning Sheila and Ning Nawal were initially produced within the institutional framework of Nahdlatul Ulama; Ning Sheila's video originated from the Fatayat NU Lamongan channel before being reposted by the national NU Online channel (1.55 million subscribers), whereas Ning Nawal's lecture was distributed directly via that same national channel. This tiered redistribution pattern-moving from a local branch channel to a national-scale central channel-demonstrates how the NU institution functions as a mechanism for legitimation and the amplification of circulation (acting as a discursive practice that mediates between the

text and the broader social structure). In contrast, Ning Khilma Anis's lecture was distributed through a smaller-scale, independent production channel (First Shof Media Indonesia, 78,000 subscribers) explicitly identified in the content as a live broadcast ("because it is live streaming") thereby illustrating a production model that is more personal and less tethered to formal religious organizational structures.

Intertextuality among the three female preachers is also clearly evident and constitutes a significant finding: in her lectures, Ning Khilma Anis directly mentions "Neng Nawal" ("when Neng Nawal leads the Central Java region in her preaching") and "Neng Aida," thereby situating herself within a network of preachers who know one another and appear successively at the same forums. These cross-references serve as empirical evidence of a shared "order of discourse": the three preachers are not isolated figures but rather part of a circuit of women's religious study groups—connected both socially and digitally—with each possessing a distinct specialization (their respective forms of "preaching" are described differently: writing novels, providing regional leadership, and delivering sermons).

The strategies for establishing credibility also differ among the three. Ning Sheila relies on interdiscursivity with classical texts—directly quoting *Ihya Ulumuddin* and hadith, complete with proper pronunciation—and references the opinions of a senior authoritative figure ("Buya Kava"), a legitimation strategy rooted in scholarly lineage (*sanad*). Ning Nawal employs a similar strategy but draws from a broader corpus of references (such as *Al-Lu'lu' wal Marjan*, *Uswatun Hijab*, and *Risalah Mu'awwana*) while also citing the highly respected NU scholar KH. Maimun Zubair ("Mbah Maimun") to reinforce her authority among the NU audience. In contrast, Ning Khilma Anis builds credibility primarily through personal narratives and life experiences—her father's death, her journey as a novelist, and her experiences as a daughter-in-law in Kudus—a strategy leaning more toward relatability and experience-based authority rather than purely

textual-scholarly authority. These differences demonstrate that digital religious authority is negotiated through varying combinations of classical-textual capital and personal-narrative capital, reflecting each *da'iyah's* specific position within institutional structures and *dakwah* (preaching) networks.

Dimensions of Sociocultural Practice: Gender, Authority, and Social Context

The three lectures cannot be separated from the contemporary Indonesian socio-religious context—specifically, the tension between the norm of wifely obedience inherited from classical *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) traditions and the social reality of women's increasing economic independence. Ning Sheila explicitly links her discussion to field data regarding the high number of divorce petitions filed by wives, as well as the discourse on women's empowerment championed by organizations such as Fatayat NU itself. Here, it is evident how religious discourse operates as a response to social anxieties concerning shifting gender relations within the household: rather than rejecting women's independence, the lectures negotiate it by reframing obedience as a spiritual path equal in value to **jihad**, thereby preserving patriarchal norms without presenting them as an overt restriction on women's autonomy.

Ning Nawal, representing the NU institution at the regional level (leading the Central Java chapter), exercises her authority within a more formal, organizational framework. The lineage of classical Muslim women figures she highlights serves a dual purpose: on one hand, it provides historical legitimacy for women's involvement in scholarly and public spheres—nging from female Quranic exegetes and hadith memorizers to women who demanded marriage clauses protecting their rights—yet on the other, these examples are presented within the institutional framework of NU, which is dominated by male leadership structures. Consequently, the female authority portrayed operates within, rather than outside, the boundaries of existing

tradition-aligning with the pattern of negotiating patriarchy described in the theoretical framework.

Ning Khilma Anis represents a specific sociocultural context: a synthesis of Javanese-*pesantren* culture and an awareness of digital media as a new public sphere. Her use of metaphors such as *sokoguru* (pillar/foundation) and *konco wingking* (partner in the background/domestic sphere) demonstrates a negotiation of gender stereotypes rooted in Javanese culture, rather than merely in Arab *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) traditions. Her explicit advocacy for economic independence—through activities like trading and financial self-reliance—reflects the social context of the self-sufficient *pesantren* (exemplified by the "Gus-Ning" phenomenon, where young religious figures act as both entrepreneurs and preachers) emerging among the young *pesantren* elite. Furthermore, her warnings regarding social media ethics—such as advising against "oversharing"—underscore that her lecture consciously addresses an audience living in the digital realm, while also illustrating how digital sociocultural practices help shape the content of the religious message itself.

Overall, the three female preachers negotiate female religious authority in distinct ways that nonetheless converge on a similar pattern: women are granted an authoritative space precisely when addressing issues concerning women, the family, and domestic morality, while the critiques or shifts in values they propose—such as economic independence, marital rights, or female self-confidence—are articulated within the language and framework of traditional Islam, rather than as an overt challenge to the historically male-dominated structure of religious authority.

Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the textual analysis of the three lectures by relating them back to the two theoretical frameworks previously outlined: the concept of the *salihah* (pious)

woman in *tafsir* (exegesis) and *fikih* (Islamic jurisprudence), and the concepts of religious authority and gender negotiation.

The meaning of *salihah* operates between two poles: a theological pole that equates it with *saleh* (encompassing obedience in worship, faith, and character, as referenced in Surah Al-Ahzab: 35), and a gender-specific pole that narrows the definition to a wife's obedience to her husband, characterized by the traits of *qanitat* (devout obedience) and *hafizat lil-ghaib* (guarding what is unseen/protecting the husband's honor in his absence) (Soleha, 2022; Waskito, 2022). The findings from the three lectures reveal that the three female preachers occupy different positions along this spectrum, thereby confirming the thesis that the concept of *salihah* is fluid and shifts depending on the medium and the authority of the interpreter (Fernando, 2023; Taufiqotuzzahro', 2024).

Ning Sheila Hasina aligns most closely with the gender-specific pole. She explicitly equates "obedience to God" with "obedience to a husband" as a single, unified path of obedience—a direct operationalization of the *qanitat* logic, which theoretical discourse identifies as an interpretation of Surah An-Nisa 4:34 within the context of the marital relationship (Soleha, 2022). By reframing acts of concession and patience within the household as an act of worship whose spiritual reward surpasses that of *jihad*, she is effectively redefining the concept of *hafizat lil-ghaib*—safeguarding the honor and stability of the household when a husband fails to fulfill his obligations—as the pinnacle of piety. This pattern aligns with findings that the term *salihah* (pious woman) serves as a normative instrument for regulating women's behavior and domesticity (Waskito, 2022; Soleha, 2022; Jauhari, 1970), while simultaneously addressing a social anxiety she herself highlights: the rise in women's economic independence and its correlation with divorce filings.

Ning Nawal leans toward a broader theological perspective. Her taxonomy of five traits—*siddiqah* (truthful), *afifah*

(chaste/virtuous), *mujahidah* (striving/dedicated), *alimah/khabirah* (knowledgeable/expert), and *abidah* (devout)—frames piety as a simultaneous intellectual, spiritual, and social endeavor, aligning with the interpretation of *salibah* (the female pious one) as a form of comprehensive obedience equivalent to that of the male *saleb* (Pebiyanti, 2023; Waskito, 2022). The examples she selects—such as Karimah binti Ahmad, an author of Quranic exegesis, and Sayyidah Sukainah, who negotiated specific clauses in her marriage contract—expand the scope of *salibah* beyond mere domesticity. Yet, consistent with the concept's fluid nature, Ning Nawal's text ultimately concludes by positioning the "mother" as the primary determinant of family worship—a "folding back" to the social function of domesticity identified in existing theories (Soleha, 2022; Jauhari, 1970), even though her line of reasoning stems from a more egalitarian premise.

Ning Khilma Anis demonstrates the most significant departure from the vocabulary of formal *fikih* (Islamic jurisprudence). She rarely employs technical terms such as *qanitat* or *hafizāt lil-ghaib*; instead, she constructs the concept of the *salibah* (virtuous woman) through Javanese cultural metaphors (such as *sokoguru* and *konco wingking*). This directly illustrates the theoretical finding that the meaning of *salibah* in video and digital media can be shaped by local symbols and idioms rather than relying solely on textual references (Fernando, 2023). The social function she emphasizes—regulating speech through the triad of *tutur*, *uwur*, *sembur*—aligns with the functions of "regulating behavior, speech, and character" identified in existing theory (Waskito, 2022; Pebiyanti, 2023; Anugrah, 2024). However, her advocacy for economic independence ("trading," being *kandel*) resonates with moderate interpretations that legitimize women working in the public sphere, provided they uphold dignity and ethical standards (Fadia, 2023); this positions her as the *da'iyah* (female preacher) with the most flexible definition of the boundaries of domesticity among the three.

Religious authority stems from a combination of lineage, *pesantren*-based scholarship, personal charisma, and—increasingly—digital visibility (Habib, 2025; Ismah, 2016; Bukhari, 2026); meanwhile, women typically negotiate authority through community-based foundations and Islamic discourse rooted in tradition, rather than by rejecting that tradition (Ismah, 2016; Liberatore, 2019). This pattern manifests differently across the three *da'iyahs* (female preachers).

Ning Sheila's authority is most prominent in her textual scholarship: she directly quotes the **Ihya Ulumuddin** and hadith, while also citing the views of "Buya Kava" as a senior authoritative figure. This strategy reinforces the theoretical premise that "*pesantren* scholarship remains the core of authority, as ulama must be recognized for their mastery of texts" (Ismah, 2016; Bukhari, 2026). The Fatayat NU institution—the original source of the video, which was subsequently redistributed by the national channel NU Online—also exemplifies women's community-based authority within a major religious organization; this aligns with findings that women negotiate authority through "community-based authority: offering counsel, resolving socio-religious issues, and building the congregation's trust" (Ismah, 2016).

Ning Nawal shows a pattern of negotiating authority that borrows legitimacy from a male ulama figure who is highly respected within NU, namely KH. Maimun Zubair ("Mbah Maimun"). This strategy of citing the advice and views of senior figures is a concrete example of how "digital authority is usually built from a combination of old capital... with new communication performance on the platform" (Habib, 2025) - Ning Nawal positions herself as a transmitter and reinterpreter of established male authority, while strengthening her own position as a regional leader in the NU women's organizational structure, which emphasizes that "social position" is also a source of legitimacy (Habib, 2025).

Ning Khilma Anis most clearly relies on personal charisma and narratives of life experiences rather than formal textual references, in accordance with the Weberian concept of charisma in theory as "spiritual attraction and the ability to mobilize followers' beliefs" (Habib, 2025; Bukhari, 2026; Malicha, 2026). His highly personal, humorous, and media-aware communication style (referring to himself being live) reflects a pattern of "digital authority... dependent on public interaction" (Habib, 2025; Norlaila, 2025). Interestingly, his cross-references to "Neng Nawal" and "Neng Aida" reveal an informal mechanism of collective authority: the three da'iyah mention and acknowledge each other's expertise in the same forum, a pattern that is structurally, this resembles the way networks like KUPI strengthen women's collective authority (Rohmaniyah, 2022; Kloos, 2023), albeit on an informal scale rooted in religious study circles rather than formal *fatwa* institutions.

Overall, the three *da'iyahs* demonstrate that women's religious authority in the digital space is not constructed outside of tradition; rather, it emerges through varying combinations of textual references, borrowed legitimacy from senior male religious scholars, institutional positioning, and personal charisma—confirming the thesis that women secure authoritative space by negotiating, rather than displacing, the dominance of male authority within existing religious structures (Ghafournia, 2022; Ismah, 2016).

Conclusion

This study shows that Ning Sheila, Ning Nawal, and Ning Khilma Anis construct the definition of a virtuous woman through three different frameworks: Ning Sheila, through a framework of fiqh and hadith that equates obedience to God and to one's husband; Ning Nawal through a taxonomy of five traits of piety that is broader in scope but ultimately centers on the role of the mother; and Ning Khilma Anis through Javanese cultural metaphors that allow greater room for women's economic independence. In terms of discourse practices, the three demonstrate distinct patterns of production and distribution—two sermons circulated through the NU's institutional redistribution channels (from branch-level to national-level channels), while the third sermon was distributed via an independent production channel in the form of a live broadcast—while simultaneously being connected within a network of female preachers who cross-reference and acknowledge each other's authority. In the sociocultural practice dimension, all three sermons respond to the tension between the traditional norm of wifely obedience and the social reality of women's increasing economic independence by renegotiating that norm rather than openly rejecting it.

These findings address the research question: the definition of a “pious woman” is constructed in a fluid and contextual manner based on the scholarly foundations and individual styles of each female preacher; their religious authority is shaped through a combination of textual references, the borrowing of legitimacy from senior ulama, institutional positions, and personal charisma; and the resulting discourse continues to operate within—rather than outside—the framework of religious traditions and structures that have historically been male-dominated.

Theoretically, this study enriches the field of Critical Discourse Analysis in the context of gender-based digital da'wah by demonstrating how Fairclough's three-dimensional model can simultaneously explain text construction, discourse circulation, and

social context within a single corpus of multiple female da'iyahs—an approach that, according to the literature review, has rarely been fully implemented. Practically, these findings can help the public understand how women's religious authority is constructed and negotiated in digital spaces, while also serving as material for reflection on religious media literacy

This study has several limitations. The corpus includes only one video per female preacher, so any generalizations about the overall preaching style of each figure must be made with caution. The transcripts used were generated automatically and may contain transcription errors, particularly regarding Arabic and Javanese terms. This study also does not analyze audience responses (comment sections, interactions, or virality), which are actually relevant to the dimension of text consumption in Fairclough's model.

Further research is recommended to expand the corpus by including more videos per female preacher, incorporate an analysis of audience reception, and compare the female preachers' discursive strategies with those of male preachers or with female preachers on other platforms such as TikTok and Instagram to test the consistency of the findings across different media.

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