



RELIGIOUS GATEKEEPING BY THE CENTER FOR QUR'ANIC STUDIES (PSQ): THE CURATION OF USTAZ ON THE CARIUSTADZ.ID PLATFORM

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Abstract

This study examines the religious gatekeeping mechanisms employed by the Center for Qur'anic Studies (PSQ) to curate ustaz and ustazah (Islamic preachers) for the Cariustadz.id platform, in response to the crisis of credibility regarding religious authority in the digital sphere. The central issue addressed is how PSQ executes its screening (gatekeeping) function regarding the religious competence of these preachers, guided by three research questions: (1) how PSQ's gatekeeping mechanism operates across five levels of influence individual, routine, organizational, institutional, and social system; (2) how religious competence and a dakwah (preaching) persona characterized by friendliness (ramah) and compassion (rahmah) are operationalized as selection criteria beyond formal academic credentials; and (3) how this mechanism functions as a strategy for PSQ's dakwah wasathiyyah (moderate) in the digital space. Employing a qualitative case study method, the research gathers data through in-depth interviews, platform observation, and analysis of official Cariustadz.id documents, interpreting the findings through Gatekeeping Theory (Lewin; White; Shoemaker & Vos), a framework adapted from mass media studies. The results indicate that the curation process does not rely solely on academic credentials but also prioritizes a preaching persona that is both competent and characterized by friendliness and compassion, reflecting the dakwah persona of PSQ's founder, M. Quraish Shihab. The study concludes that Cariustadz.id's gatekeeping serves as an instrument for PSQ's dakwah wasathiyyah strategy in the digital realm; it also extends previous research (Rakhman, Zain, & Muthi'ah, 2025) which described a similar process through the framework of "digital isnad" (chains of transmission) by offering an organizational gatekeeping lens that encompasses institutional strategic dimensions previously underexplored.

Keywords *Religious Gatekeeper, Preacher Curation, Cariustadz.id, Dakwah Wasathiyyah, Digital Religious Authority*

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of the post-Reformasi 1998 media landscape has fundamentally changed the patterns of production and distribution of religious authority in Indonesia.¹ Media liberalization, which ended the state's strict control during the New Order era, created space for various actors to produce Islamic discourse in the public sphere. This process was later expanded by the presence of the internet and social media. The digital space allows anyone to become both a producer and distributor of religious messages without going through formal religious institutions, leading to a shift in religious authority

¹Van M. Bruissenen, "Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the 'Conservative Turn,'" *Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 170, nos. 2-3 (January 2014): 382-84, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-17002007>.

from traditional institutions toward technologically adaptive figures, including celebrities and public personalities without adequate religious educational backgrounds.²

This condition gives rise to the phenomenon of “instant preachers” (dai instan): popularity and engagement levels often become indicators of a digital preacher’s success, not necessarily aligned with scholarly competence, as also highlighted by a PPIM UIN Jakarta survey identifying several popular ustaz who produce content containing radicalism. The algorithmic logic of social media, which tends to prioritize engaging content over depth of knowledge, further intensifies the problem of credibility in religious sources.

In the context of contests over religious authority, a number of moderate Islamic organizations and institutions, including Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and platforms such as Islami.co and Ibtimes.id, respond by producing counter narratives grounded in religious moderation (Islam Wasathiyah). One relevant institutional response is Cariustadz.id, a platform initiated by the Center for Qur’anic Studies (PSQ) to connect the public with ustaz or ustazah who have undergone curation based on certain standards.³ Unlike the logic of algorithmic popularity, Cariustadz.id places institutional curation as the basis for determining a preacher’s eligibility to appear in digital space a mechanism conceptually aligned with gatekeeping in communication studies.

Shoemaker and Vos (2009) argue that gatekeeping is not limited to selecting information by mass media; it also involves institutional decisions, organizational values, and workplace routines that determine which messages and which actors are allowed to be passed on to the public.⁴ In digital preaching, the curation process of ustaz can therefore be understood as a form of religious gatekeeping: a mechanism that determines who gains access as an authoritative source in conveying religious messages.⁵

Research on Cariustadz.id has progressed, yet has mainly focused on platform output. Zamhari, Han, and Zulkifli (2021) examine Cariustadz.id at a macro level as a strategy for adapting traditional religious authority to maintain influence amid post-Reformasi authority fragmentation, positioning the platform as a counter-narrative instrument against digital conservatism.⁶ Zunaiddi and Budiman (2023) move to a meso level, analyzing religious narrative construction in the platform feature “Ask the Ustaz” (Tanya Ustaz) and identifying a tendency toward moderated, tolerant, and accommodating answers to diversity among scholars supporting the argument that the platform serves as an arena for

² Mónica Andok, “The Impact of Online Media on Religious Authority,” *Religions* Vol. 15, no. 9 (September 2024): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15091103>.

³ Arif Zamhari, Muhamad Ibtiissam Han, and Zulkifli Zulkifli, “Traditional Religious Authorities in New Media: Cariustadz.Id Platform as An Alternative Cyber Fatwa and Da’wah Media among the Middle-Class Urban Muslims,” *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 21, no. 1 (June 2021), <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v21i1.20300>.

⁴ Pamela J. Shoemaker and Tim P. Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory*, Edisi Pertama (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁵ Mokhammad A’lan Tabaika, Ahmad Barizi, and Yunifa Miftachul Arif, “Digital Da’wah and The Reconstruction of Islamic Authority,” *Al-Balagh: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 10, no. 2 (September 2025): 371–410, <https://doi.org/10.22515/albalagh.v10i2.12116>.

⁶ Zamhari, Han, and Zulkifli, “Traditional Religious Authorities in New Media.”

the reproduction of Islam Wasathiyah discourse.⁷ Ardani et al. (2025), through a dialogical perspective of Buber and Freire, highlights the micro level: the communication relationship between ustaz and users in the “Personal Guidance” feature (Bimbingan Personal), while also identifying tendencies of commodification of dakwah through the rating and donation features.⁸

These three studies agree in positioning Cariustadz.id as a strategic medium for strengthening moderate Islam and PSQ as an actor that preserves traditional religious authority through digital technology. However, they differ in analytical level: institutional authority (macro), narrative content (meso), and communication interaction (micro). All of them consistently assume the presence of ustaz in the platform as given, without explaining the mechanism behind it: who determines the eligibility of prospective preachers to enter the platform, what standards are used, and what ideological values underpin the selection process. In the gatekeeping framework initiated by Lewin and developed by White, the question of who is filtered in and who is filtered out is the most fundamental aspect of information production, including in this context the production of religious authority itself.

Based on these gaps, this study focuses on the mechanisms of ustaz curation and selection on the Cariustadz.id platform as a practice of religious gatekeeping in the digital era. It shifts the analytical starting point from the product of religious authority (what preachers deliver) toward the process of authority production (how someone obtains legitimacy to speak on behalf of Islam in digital space).⁹ The theoretical contribution of this research lies in expanding the application of gatekeeping theory previously developed in mass media and journalism studies into studies of digital religious authority. It also explains how religious moderation is reproduced not merely through published narratives, but already at the stage of selecting religious actors granted access to produce them.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach in the form of a case study examining the curation and selection process of ustaz implemented by the Center for Qur’anic Studies (PSQ) through the Cariustadz.id platform. The study was conducted from December 2025 to June 2026 at PSQ. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation. The researcher serves as the human instrument, supported by an interview guide, observation sheet, and documentation checklist. Interviews are used to obtain information about the curation process, selection

⁷ Zunaidi Nur, “Understanding the Qur’an and Hadith in Social Media: A Review of Religious Narratives on the Cariustadz.Id Platform,” *Al-Misykah: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur’an Dan Tafsir* 4, no. 2 (2023): 233–50, <https://doi.org/10.19109/almisykah.v4i2.18671>.

⁸ Heny May Widiyawati, Baharudin Ardani, and Canra Krisna Jaya, “Membangun Komunikasi Dialogis Dalam Dakwah Online (Studi Kasus Website Cariustadz.Id),” *Jurnal Da’wah: Risalah Merintis, Da’wah Melanjutkan* 8, no. 2 (December 2025): 81–90, <https://doi.org/10.38214/jurnaldawahstidnatsir.v8i2.378>.

⁹ Michael Karlsson, Elizabeth Van Couvering, and Johan Lindell, “Publishing, Sharing, and Spreading Online News: A Case Study of Gatekeeping Logics in The Platform Era,” *Nordicom Review* 43, no. 2 (October 2022): 190–213, <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2022-0012>.

standards, decision-making considerations, and the values used to assess prospective ustaz. Observation is conducted on the curation workflow, verification mechanisms, and interactions during selection. Documentation includes curation guidelines, registration forms, preacher profiles, archives of activities, and information from the official Cariustadz.id and PSQ websites. Data analysis uses the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), including data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions in the form of narratives, matrices, and thematic categorization.

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RESULTS

This section is structured to answer the first research question: how PSQ's gatekeeping mechanism operates across five levels of influence as formulated by Shoemaker and Reese.¹¹ The analytical design maps statements from key informant database and administration staff of Cariustadz.id, who have performed curation functions for more than three years into the five levels of the Hierarchical Model of Influences. This mapping is important because what appears as a simple curation process on the surface (registration forms and document verification) contains a much more complex and interconnected layer of decision making.

Individual Level

Interview data indicates that early-stage curation decisions heavily depend on the personal judgment of a single administrator. An informant explicitly stated, *"The first person who examines me... indeed, the administrative flow that first checks is Mas Sani."* This subjective assessment includes reading the candidate ustaz/ustazah's media social track record, including interpretation of the tone and orientation of the uploaded dakwah content.

Informants even use evaluative personal terms such as "his study is safe," "sensitive," or "directed" terms that do not refer to formal rubric categories, but rather reflect the cognitive framework of the gatekeeper built from three years of experience. This finding aligns with White's classic study of "Mr. Gates" (White, 1950), where the selection of information here, religious authority is not free from the subjective evaluation of the gatekeeper, even though at subsequent levels such judgments are confirmed collectively.¹²

Routine Level

The data shows two procedural routes that have become institutionalized in practice: independent registration through a Google Form containing educational history, preaching experience, and links to social media and a recommendation route from ustaz

¹⁰ Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis* (SAGE, 2014), h. 14.

¹¹ Pamela J. Shoemaker and Tim P. Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory*, h. 34

¹² Paul C. Endrejat and Bernard Burnes, "Draw It, Check It, Change It: Reviving Lewin's Topology to Facilitate Organizational Change Theory and Practice," *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 60, no. 1 (March 2024): 87–112, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00218863221122875>.

or ustazah who are already members.¹³ Verification routines include checking CVs, searching for social media accounts, and cross-checking other ustaz/ustazah especially those from the same alma mater or educational institutions as the candidate. Interestingly, the verification duration is not uniform: the independent route averages around two to three weeks, whereas the recommendation route may be completed within one to two days. Informants confirmed that *“there is no time estimate... there isn’t any... the SOP does not yet exist.”* This reveals a routine that is institutionalized operationally (tacit routine), but not formally codified, creating a governance gap that is relevant to discuss further in the Discussion section.

Organizational Level

Individual and procedural routines are shaped by PSQ’s explicit institutional orientation emphasizing independence from particular Islamic mass organizations (ormas). An informant stated, *“Cari Ustadz.id is also not affiliated with any particular organization... all are welcomed as long as the ustaz/ustazah are competent.”* At the organizational level, continuous evaluation is also visible: any ustaz who has been active is inserted into a utilization database, and feedback from the organizers of studies or communities is discussed internally within one to two days after the event.¹⁴ Cases of disabling an ustaz due to the content of a study deemed offensive to government policies during the pandemic, and a case of permanent blocking of a popular figure due to controversial statements ahead of the election, show that the organization acts as a guardian of institutional value consistency even after the preacher passes initial curation.

Institutional Level

External institutional networks appear to function as additional sources of legitimacy without being a dominant formal factor.¹⁵ Informants explained that *“many ustaz/ustazah on Cari Ustadz are alumni of PTIQ, IIQ, and UIN, and not a few of them are affiliated with NU and Muhammadiyah... it is not the dominant factor but... it is one of our references.”* In addition, the Ministry of Religious Affairs’ religious moderation policy serves as a normative reference in curation and evaluation, even though it is not implemented as structural formal attachment. These institutional relations function as a loosely coupled legitimacy network enough to strengthen platform credibility, but not binding the platform to a single institutional authority.

Social System Level

At the most macro level, the findings show that Cariustadz.id’s curation direction is consciously positioned against the logic of social media virality that dominates

¹³ *FAQ CariUstadz.Id*, n.d., <https://cariustadz.id/faq>.

¹⁴ Safran Safar Almakaty, “Gatekeeper Theory in the Digital Media Age: A Comprehensive and Critical Literature Review,” no. 2025102484, preprint, Preprints, November 3, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202510.2484.v1>.

¹⁵ Nairui Xu, “Is There Any News Left after Gatekeeping? A Journalistic Perspective from Beijing on the Multi-Level of Analysis,” *Galactica Media: Journal of Media Studies* 4, no. 1 (March 2022): 15–34, <https://doi.org/10.46539/gmd.v4i1.166>.

contemporary digital dakwah.¹⁶ Informants revealed internal discussions about the possibility of increasing content pursuit of virality, but this option was rejected by the Board of Experts and internal teams based on the consideration that chasing virality would make Cariustadz.id similar to preachers whose scholarly competence is “not quite appropriate.” This attitude is also reflected in a strategic decision not to open a TikTok account explicitly reflecting the tension between algorithmic logics of digital platforms and the epistemic logics of institutional contexts, which Rakhman et al. (2025) also describe as “a structural tension between epistemic authority and digital virality.

Table 1. Gatekeeping Mechanisms Across Five Levels

Level	Key Actors	Main Findings
Individual	Database and administration staff	Early assessment is personal-subjective based on social media track record and CV
Routine	Registration form, recommendation route, almamater cross check	Routine runs consistently but is not formally codified (no written SOP, no formal appeal mechanism)
Organization	Internal Cariustadz.id team, PSQ Board of Experts	Independence from ormas affiliations; continuous evaluation; disabling based on value congruence
Institution	PTIQ, IIQ, UIN, NU, Muhammadiyah, Ministry of Religious	Affairs Loosely coupled legitimacy network rather than formal structural attachment
Social System	Discourse on religious moderation, contestation of viral digital preachers	Rejecting algorithmic virality logic to maintain wasathiyah value consistency

Religious Competence and the “Friendly and Compassionate (Ramah & Rahmah)” Dakwah Persona as Selection Criteria

To answer the second research question, the analysis is designed to identify selection criteria operating beyond and alongside the formal academic credentials mapped in the theoretical review (Qur’anic reading, mastery of classical texts, ijazah, pesantren background). Interview data reveals the existence of an additional layer of unwritten criteria that becomes a sharp differentiator in day to day curation.

Avoidance of preachers who rely on humor as their primary appeal. Informants stated, “*People in Indonesia tend to like ustaz/ustazah who are funny... unofficially, Cari Ustadz seems to avoid including ustaz/ustazah who ‘sell’ jokes.*” This implies that popular appeal becomes a warning signal for gatekeepers contrary to the general logic of social media popularity.

Strict application of public communication ethics. Ustaz/ustazah whose delivery style is considered crude, or whose word choice is judged inappropriate, are consistently not

¹⁶ Sharlene Vallance, *The Gatekeeper Dynamic: Updating Lewin’s Gatekeeping Theory for the Age of Digital Advertising Ecosystems*, August 11, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16794118>.

accepted into the database regardless of their scholarly competence. This was confirmed through a concrete case: a figure was included for two years but was permanently blacklisted by the internal team after a statement-laden video judged disrespectful went viral during the election period.¹⁷

The decisive confirmation of “ramah & rahmah” operationalization. The two avoidance criteria avoiding the “selling jokes” style and avoiding harsh tone were directly confirmed by informants as the operationalization of the institutional tagline *“Friendly and Compassionate (Ramah dan Rahmah)”* when the researcher confronted these findings. The informant responded firmly, *“Absolutely, Ma’am Ayun.”*

This preaching persona is explicitly attributed to the dakwah character of PSQ’s founder, Prof. M. Quraish Shihab. According to informants, he is widely known as a figure who is not inclined toward ormas yet is often misunderstood by the public due to the depth of his scholarship. This persona is transmitted not only through entry selection, but also through continuous coaching forums that bring verified ustaz or ustazah together with Abi Quraish and the PSQ Board of Experts.

The significance of these findings is that the criterion of “scholarly competence but harsh and controversial in style” does not pass curation, even when academic competence is met. In other words, formal scholarly competence is a necessary condition, but not sufficient; alignment with the ramah-rahmah preaching persona is the decisive factor at the final stage.

Curation as a Wasathiyyah Dakwah Strategy in Digital Space

The third research question was answered by asking informants directly whether the curation mechanism can be interpreted as a strategy for disseminating wasathiyyah dakwah. Informants answered affirmatively without hesitation: *“Yes, including a strategy... the curation process we have done is a strategy to maintain PSQ’s values, one of which is wasathiyyah.”*

The operationalization of wasathiyyah in curation is not implemented through rejection of affiliation with particular ormas or religious ideologies. Instead, it is realized through a principle of conditional inclusion: ustaz or ustazah from various organizational backgrounds are accepted as long as their scholarly competence can be justified and their manner of delivery is consistent with rahmah and ramah values. An informant emphasized: *“We are not pro any specific ormas... we are in the middle; we accept everyone as long as it is wasathiyyah moderate then rahmah and ramah.”*

This principle is an embodiment of wasathiyyah as an active middle position (not passive neutrality), consistently maintained even when facing market pressures in digital spaces to chase virality, as shown in the social system level findings.

The linkage of this strategy with the Ministry of Religious Affairs’ religious moderation policy was also confirmed by informants as a reference that strengthens rather than replaces the wasathiyyah orientation that has been PSQ’s vision since its founding. Therefore, the curation of ustaz on Cariustadz.id operates as a dual instrument: internally

¹⁷ Michael Karlsson, Elizabeth Van Couvering, and Johan Lindell, “Publishing, Sharing, and Spreading Online News: A Case Study of Gatekeeping Logics in The Platform Era,” *Nordicom Review* 43, no. 2 (October 2022): 190–213, <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2022-0012>.

it functions as a quality control mechanism, while externally it functions as an instrument for disseminating wasathiyyah Islam narratives in a contested digital space.¹⁸

DISCUSSION

This study's findings directly answer the three questions raised in the Introduction: how PSQ's gatekeeping mechanism operates across multiple levels; how religious competence and dakwah persona are operationalized as selection criteria; and how the mechanism functions as a wasathiyyah dakwah strategy. In brief, the findings emphasize that gatekeeping on Cariustadz.id is not a single administrative process, but a layered process ranging from the personal evaluation of an administrator to broader institutional ideological orientation. It is also a process that places communication persona (**ramah-rahmah**) on par with and at points even more decisive than formal academic credentials alone.

Interpretation of the Layered Mechanism

The significance of individual and routine levels lies in exposing an institutional paradox. On the one hand, PSQ succeeds in building strong institutional legitimacy through affiliation with the Board of Experts and networks of reputable Islamic education (organizational and institutional levels). On the other hand, the first and most decisive gate in the selection process relies on the subjective judgment of an individual without a written rubric, with no fixed time standards, and no formal appeal mechanism for rejected candidates.

This empirically explains what previously identified only implicitly as “non-transparent verification criteria” and “the absence of an appeal process for rejected applicants.”¹⁹ This study clarifies why this condition occurs: not due to administrative negligence, but because of the platform's operational logic that deliberately maintains personal flexibility at the first gate. Informants explicitly confirmed that rejection reasons are not detailed because “it is often somewhat sensitive.”

Thus, procedural ambiguity that appears as a governance weakness is, in this context, a strategy to maintain social-religious relationships within a relatively small and interconnected preacher community something not captured by conventional mass media gatekeeping frameworks that assume large, impersonal newsroom organizations.

Interpretation of the Ramah-Rahmah Persona Criteria

The finding that communicative persona becomes the final determinant of curation success goes beyond formal scholarly competence alone. It also answers the gaps identified in the Introduction. Previous studies (Zamhari et al., 2021; Zunaiddi & Budiman, 2023; Ardani et al., 2025) assumed the presence of ustaz in the platform as given, without

¹⁸ Zamhari, Han, and Zulkifli, “Traditional Religious Authorities in New Media.”

¹⁹ Alwi Bani Rakhman, Lukman Zain, and Anisatun Muthi'ah, “Digital Isnād System and Religious Legitimacy: Examining The Qualification and Authorization Process of Islamic Authority on Cariustadz.ID Platform,” *Mashdar* 7, no. 1 (July 2025): 79–98, <https://doi.org/10.15548/mashdar.v7i1.11108>.

explaining the unwritten standards behind it. This study shows that the standard is not merely about scholarly affiliation or theological alignment, but about a consciously adopted communication aesthetic designed to mirror the preaching personality of the institute's founder.

This finding aligns with previously mapped prophetic values of humanization (*humanisasi*), liberation (*pembebasan*), and transcendence (*transendensi*). Yet it provides sharper empirical evidence: the humanization dimension in curation practice is concretely realized in systematic rejection of two communication patterns dakwah relying on comedy as the main attraction, and dakwah using crude or confrontational diction. Both are considered contrary to the *ramah-rahmah* image attached to Quraish Shihab.

The rejection of the “selling jokes” style is also a distinctive finding compared to general expectations in digital dakwah literature. While much scholarship shows that popular appeal (relatability, humor, personal closeness) tends to be the primary capital of digital preachers for building engagement, Cariustadz.id treats popular appeal of that kind as a warning signal to be filtered out thus enriching understanding that digital religious gatekeeping does not always move in the same direction as algorithmic logic of popularity, but can intentionally move in the opposite direction.²⁰

Interpretation of the Strategic Function of Wasathiyyah

The finding that curation functions as a wasathiyyah dakwah strategy strengthens and extends the argument by Zamhari et al. (2021) that Cariustadz.id is a counter-narrative to digital conservatism. However, if Zamhari et al. frame the argument at the macro institutional level and Zunaidi & Budiman at the narrative content level, this study demonstrates that wasathiyyah operates much earlier than the stage of narrative production at the stage of filtering who is entitled to become a producer of narratives.

In Cariustadz.id's curation practice, wasathiyyah is not an ideological label attached after content production.²¹ Instead, it is an active selection criterion consistently maintained even under commercial and algorithmic pressures to chase virality, as reflected in the deliberate decision of the Board of Experts to reject virality-based content strategies and even to refrain from using TikTok.

This finding contributes theoretically by directly addressing the literature gap: moderation in digital space is not only reproduced through published narratives (as emphasized by Zunaidi & Budiman), but first produced through actor-selection mechanisms layered and influenced by ideological considerations at broader social system levels thereby expanding the application of the Hierarchical Model of Influences from conventional journalism into digital religious authority contexts.²²

²⁰ Eva F. Nisa, *Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram Amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia*, Vol. 5 (2018): 68–99.

²¹ Heny May Widiyawati, Baharudin Ardani, and Canra Krisna Jaya, “Membangun Komunikasi Dialogis Dalam Dakwah Online (Studi Kasus Website Cariustadz.Id),” *Jurnal Da'wah: Risalah Merintis, Da'wah Melanjutkan* 8, no. 2 (December 2025): 81–90, <https://doi.org/10.38214/jurnaldawahstidnatsir.v8i2.378>.

²² André K. Rodarte and Robert Richardson, “Hierarchy of Influences,” zh8q_v1, preprint, SocArXiv, October 8, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/zh8q>.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that Cariustadz.id applies religious gatekeeping mechanisms that are institutional, systematic, and value-based in the curation of ustaz and ustazah in digital space. Unlike social media mechanisms that tend to rely on popularity, algorithms, and user engagement, Cariustadz.id places scholarly competence, moral integrity, commitment to religious moderation, and social responsibility as the primary standards for determining a preacher's eligibility. Therefore, gatekeeping functions not only as an administrative selection mechanism but also as a mechanism for shaping credible religious authority in the digital era.

From the perspective of Shoemaker and Vos' Gatekeeping Theory, the selection mechanism in Cariustadz.id takes place through several stages, ranging from setting academic requirements, verifying the track record of preaching, receiving recommendations from already-registered ustaz, evaluating religious orientation and national insight, to ongoing coaching after acceptance. The process indicates that decisions about who is worthy to become a source of dakwah result from interactions among organizational values, institutional routines, and professional considerations aimed at maintaining the quality of religious information received by society.

The results also reveal that curation serves as an important instrument in building and maintaining the credibility of the Center for Qur'anic Studies (PSQ) as a digital dakwah institution. Such credibility is built on three main foundations: institutional legitimacy derived from PSQ's reputation, from M. Quraish Shihab and his Board of Experts; a strict curation process for sources; and selection of religious figures who have scholarly authority, moral integrity, and a defensible preaching track record. The combination of these aspects strengthens public trust in the platform and positions Cariustadz.id as a credible alternative reference amid the proliferation of unverified digital religious content.

Additionally, the study finds that gatekeeping practices on Cariustadz.id not only focus on technical aspects of filtering sources, but also reflect profetic communication values. The humanization dimension is realized through emphasis on moderate, dialogical dakwah that respects diversity; the liberation dimension appears through efforts to prevent the spread of intolerant narratives, hate speech, and politicization of religion; while the transcendence dimension is expressed through affirming the importance of scholarly competence and preaching orientation grounded in Qur'anic values. Consequently, curation does not merely protect preaching quality, but also ensures that dakwah messages circulating in digital space bring social benefit and reflect Islam Wasathiyah values.

Theoretically, this study expands the application of Gatekeeping Theory in the context of digital religious communication by showing that the gatekeeping object is no longer limited to filtering information, but also includes selecting actors, religious authorities, and legitimating sources of religious messages. Practically, the findings indicate that the curation model implemented by Cariustadz.id can serve as a best practice example for other digital dakwah institutions in building a credible, accountable, moderate, and responsive dakwah ecosystem toward the challenges of digital media development.

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