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Algorithmic Islam and the Transformation of Islamic Authority in the Digital Age

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Abstract

The rapid development of digital media ecosystems has significantly changed the composition, production, and scattering of the Islamic religious authority. Traditional power structures that rely on education, lineage, and mastery of classical work are increasingly merging with the algorithmic visibility, platform logic, and performance metrics of the digital age. This article aims to critically examine how Islamic authority is being reshaped in digital environments and the impact of social media platforms on religious legitimacy, interpretive authority, and community identity. The paper identifies the key structural transformations, including the emergence of micro-celebrity preachers, decentralization of judicial authority, monetization of religious information, and sorting the *ummah* by algorithms, which are based on a qualitative thematic analysis of the recent scholarly publications and selected examples of digital *da'wah*, distribution of fatwas online, and algorithmic mediation. The results suggest that religious discourse is not merely housed within digital infrastructures; rather, it is shaped and altered by them. This interaction leads to the emergence of new hybrid forms of authority, which arise from the fusion of theological and digital capital. Additionally, the article states that the modern Islamic power is becoming more and more bargained at the crossroads of knowledge, visibility, measure of engagement, and platform regulation, which continues to require the theory of the religious power to be reconstructed in the era of digital mediation.

Keywords: Digital religious authority, Islamic authority, digital capital, Social Media and Religion, Algorithmic Mediation, *Digital Da'wah*, religious legitimacy

Introduction

Digital transformation of modern societies has radically changed the epistemic basis of the religious power, especially in Islamic societies. Traditionally, the authority of Islam was integrated into a hierarchical and structured system that was based on the ideas of *sanad* (chain of transmission), knowledge of classical texts of jurisprudence, and institutional acknowledgment. The religious legitimacy was confirmed by the academic ancestry, certification (ijazah), belonging to the recognized institutions, including Al-Azhar, national fatwa councils, or authorized bodies of *ulama*. Authority was a cumulative academic property, with all its regulations subjected to rigorous methodological control as well as shared interpretive customs. Nevertheless, the

emergence of digital infrastructures has disrupted these traditional hierarchies, leading scholars to describe significant reconstruction in the times of fragmentation of Islamic authority.[1]

Recent research proves that the emergence of digital *da'wah* ecosystems has facilitated the emergence of new religious actors that do not work within conventional institutional structures.[2] The validity of such players as YouTubers, Instagram influencers, TikTok scholars, and micro-celebrity *da'i* is not achieved due to some kind of formal religious qualification but is a by-product of online presence, emotional appeal, and algorithmic reach.[3] Moreover, digital preachers are more likely to develop the personal brands of piety, charisma, and lifestyle aesthetics, which have to integrate legitimacy co-production, in reaction to the symbolic economy of religious capital, when comments, sharing, subscription, and real-time actions contribute to it.[4]

Among the key effects the dynamic shift, there is the digitalization of fatwas. In the past, the issuance of fatwas became institutionalized to ensure the methodological security, peer accountability, and situational dialogue. On the other hand, it has been turned into a competitive and decentralized marketplace of legal opinion through online fatwa forums and social media campaigns.[5] The alleged fatwa on command is the sign of an extended tendency of religious consumerism, as individuals, in demand, want to get rulings that reflect personal beliefs, political tendencies, or lifestyle.[6] This interaction changes the classical mufti-*mustafti* relationship, where it becomes less formalized as a consultative contact and more immediate as a transactional interaction with digital interfaces. As religious knowledge becomes democratic through digital access, it is also becoming easy to disseminate the de-contextualised, simplified, or even methodologically inadequate rulings that circumvent the traditional jurisprudential checkpoints.[7]

Empirical research particularly in Muslim settings, such as Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt, and Northern Nigeria, exposes that the digital platforms do not pass through as a passive medium of religious expression but as dynamic spaces that constitute religious expression and identity formation. As an example, the study of Pakistani youth also shows that Islamic material mediated by YouTube has affected religious identity formation, religious tolerance, and religious belief development in intensely mediated contexts. Equally, research in Indonesia and Egypt explains how social media preachers reorient themselves in digital space at a strategic position, to harness platform affordances to increase authority and visibility. These changes point to the fact that power

[1]Wahyu Khoiruz Zaman, Miswan Ansori, and Ahmad Saefudin, "From Ummah to Username: How Digital Platforms Reshape Islamic Solidarity And Stratification," *Al-Balagh: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 10, no. 2 (October 24, 2025): 411–44, https://doi.org/10.22515/albalagh.v10i2.12623 .

[2]Mokhammad A'lan Tabaika, Ahmad Barizi, and Yunifa Miftachul Arif, "Digital Da'wah and the Reconstruction of Islamic Authority," *Al-Balaqh: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 10 (2), (2025): 371-410, https://doi.org/10.22515/albalagh.v10i2.12116.

[3]Nuzul Fitriansyah, Torkis Lubis, "Mediating Alghorithm Mediating Da'wa: The New Preacher and Optimization of Social Media for Da'wa in the Case of Habib Ja'far," *Jurnal Penelitian* 20 (1), (2023): 1-12, https://doi.org/10.28918/jupe.v20i1.1092

[4]Fitriansyah, Lubis, "Mediating Alghorithm Mediating Da'wa," 1-12.

[5]Arief Rachman, Theguh Saumantri, and Taufik Hidayatulloh, "Transformation of Religious Authority in the Digital Era: A Post-Normal Times Analysis by Ziauddin Sardar on the Phenomenon of Social Media Da'wah," *Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 45, no. 1 (July 6, 2025): 107–22, https://doi.org/10.21580/jid.v45.1.25644.

[6]Muhammad Latif Fauzi, Imam Mustofa, Ibnu Akbar Maliki, and Faiz Husaini, "The Digital Minbar: Repositioning Religious Authority and the Dynamics of Islamic Law in Contemporary Egypt's Virtual Landscape," *MILRev: Metro Islamic Law Review* 5, no. 1 (January 18, 2026): 178–209, https://doi.org/10.32332/milrev.v5i1.11109.

[7]Zaman, Ansori, Saefudin, "From Ummah to Username: How Digital Platforms Reshape Islamic Solidarity and Stratification," 411–44.

is getting institutionalized in what can be called platformized religion, in which technological affordances influence theological expression and interpretive practices.[8]

Importantly, the transformation of the Islamic authority cannot be perceived without considering the algorithmic infrastructures that are used to control the digital platforms. Algorithms purposefully target non-human epistemic intermediaries, filtering, prioritizing, and promoting religious content through engagement measures and not academic rigor.[9] On what has been theorized as an algorithmic Islam, platform politics give precedence to emotionally charged, visually compelling, or provocative content, often to the exclusion of detailed juristic discourse. This algorithmic mediation recreates the Islamic public space in which the virality overpowers the validity, the swiftness of the deliberation, and the intensity of the effect. The digital power is; hence, pegged on appearance in algorithm-driven systems, and it is a blend of the religious authority and monetization strategies, influencer market, and attention markets.[10]

This transformation not only worked on the individual preachers but to the entire group of the *ummah*. The digital space changes the communal religious identity by substituting the geographically based communal identity with the networked identity structured around usernames, followers, and digital stratification. Here, the lines between scholarship, activism, entertainment, and entrepreneurship bring ambiguity that questions the normative differences in the context of Islamic epistemology. Collectively, the preceding literature indicates that the digital era has not only served as a supplement to traditional Islamic authority, but it has completely transformed it. Power is increasingly shifting out of the institutional custodianship into the networked influence; out of the validation of *sanad* to the legitimacy of metrics; out of the locally based scholarly deliberation to the globally based algorithm circulation.[11]

The study synthesizes recent research on online fatwas, YouTube scholars, micro-celebrity *da'i*, and algorithmic governance, to critically interrogate the reconstruction of Islamic authority in a digital environment. It proposes the question of whether digitalization makes religious knowledge more democratic or rather exposes Islamic discourse to new technological control and platform capitalistic regimes. Thus, the paper aims to map convergences, tensions, and unresolved debates in the current scholarship, which has contributed to the broader debates on mediation, post-traditional authority, and politics of digital religion in modern Muslim societies.

2. Problem Statement

Traditionally, the religious authority of Islam has been based on the epistemic legitimacy of scholarly training (*ilm*), chains of transmission (*isnad),* institutional acknowledgment, and communal trust. Nevertheless, the emergence of social media sites, algorithmic recommendation-based systems, and digital participatory cultures has disrupted these hierarchies. Power is no

[8]Murtala Ibrahim, "Islam in the Digital Infrastructure: The Rise of Islamic Cyber Practices in Northern Nigeria," *Religion, State and Society* 52, no. 2-3 (May 26, 2024): 114–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2024.2353956 .

[9]Syeda Ammarah Bano, and Erum Hafeez, "The Digitalization of Islam on YouTube and Pakistani Youth: Religious Identity, Belief, and Tolerance in a Digital Age," *Journal of History and Social Sciences* 16 (3), (2025):140-57, https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17297630.

[10]Masruha Masruha, Sofyan Munawar, Fadhli Zulmi, Asnawi Abdullah, and Husaini Husaini, "Digitization of Fatwas and Religious Authority: A Study on the Role of Social Media in the Interpretation of Islamic Law," *Journal of Mujaddid Nusantara* 2 (2), (2025):99-113, https://doi.org/10.62568/jomn.v2i2.421.

[11]Rachman, Saumantri, Hidayatulloh, "Transformation of Religious Authority in the Digital Era," 107–22.

longer granted to a scholar or a peer, but it is turning more and more towards visibility measures like followers, shares, likes, and algorithmic amplification. Although more academic work on digital Islam is emerging, there is still a lack of theoretical interconnection between traditional patterns of religious authority and modern digital mediation theory. Online preachers, online fatwas, and online Islamic practices are taking place, yet the idea behind their architecture is extremely insignificant in making structural changes to their authority, legitimacy, and interpretive control. Further, little analytic focus is given to how the process of production of the Islamic legal and theological knowledge is being transformed due to platform capitalism, micro-celebrity culture, and audience participation.

The key problem, in its turn, is the lack of a general analytical framework outlining the way in which the Islamic authority is reconstructed, not merely relocated to the digital ecosystems. Without such a framework, research is going to perceive digital religion as a continuation of the already existing offline forms, and not an area of discontinuity redefining epistemology, hierarchy, and stratification by means of community. The paper fills this blank space by examining how digital infrastructures mediate religious legitimacy and how the negotiation of authority is mediated in the space of the algorithms.

3. Research Questions

- What does the digital platform and algorithmic infrastructures reorganize in terms of productions, the circulation, and legitimation of Islamic religious authority?
- How can digital indicators of visibility (e.g., engagement, followers, algorithmic amplification) relate to the established indicators of Islamic scholarly legitimacy to bring about some hybrid manifestations of religious authority?

4. Literature Review

The transformation of Islamic religious authority in the digital era constitutes not merely a technological shift but a structural reconfiguration of epistemic legitimacy, interpretive power, and communal belonging. The literature converges around five interrelated debates: (1) the performative reconstruction of authority, (2) algorithmic mediation and platform governance, (3) the digitization and fragmentation of fatwas, (4) the stratification of the digital ummah, and (5) participatory religious publics. Collectively, these studies reveal that Islamic authority is no longer monopolized by institutional scholarship but is negotiated within platformized ecologies governed by visibility, engagement, and algorithmic logics.

The classical Islamic authority was founded on the transmission based on *sanad*, the institutional certification, and command of the *turath* (classical corpus). Production and validation of religious knowledge was organized by institutions like pesantren, national fatwa councils, and accepted universities. Nevertheless, recent scholarship has shown that digital infrastructures have undermined this centralized model of power.[12] Tabaika, Barizi, and Arif say that digital *da'wah* restores authority as mediated by the media performance, not inherited academic capital.[13] The authority is made relational and constantly negotiated in the process of the audience. Similarly, in

[12]Mokhammad A'lan Tabaika, and Roibin Roibin, "Digital Dawah and the Reconstruction of Islamic Authority," *Al-Balagh: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 10, no. 2 (September 19, 2025): 371-410, https://doi.org/10.22515/albalagh.v10i2.12116 .

[13]Tabaika, and Roibin, "Digital Dawah and the Reconstruction of Islamic Authority," 371-410.

his ethnographic work on online preachers in Indonesia, Sirait unveils that online religious leaders create comfortable personalities that are based on piety, nationalism, and lifestyle aesthetics in the name of gaining influence.[14] This is an indication of the change in authority that is founded on credentials to legitimacy, which is based on brand.

Baidawi conceptualizes these participants as micro-celebrity *dai*, whose power is reproduced by the presence of the platform and fan economies other than official status. The digital preacher, then, is not merely a discharger of dogma but an entrepreneur of religious significance who is active in the culture of the influencers. This revision determines the symbolic economy of the Islamic knowledge: legitimacy now depends on the charisma, emotional appeal, and algorithmic intensification instead of being based only on the depth of scholarship. Notably, Fauzi et al. show that the Egyptian setting presents the so-called digital *minbar* as an example where the clerical authority shifts to the hybrid spaces where traditional scholars strategically reorient learning platform affordances to stay relevant.[15] This suggests that digital authority does not entirely replace institutional authority but produces hybridized forms of negotiation between legacy institutions and digital actors.

One of the significant interventions in recent literature is the place of algorithms as active partakers of religious discourse. Fuadi provides the idea of Islamic algorithms to clarify the ways in which platform logics also determine the visibility and legitimacy of the religious actors, as well as the communication strategies.[16] The strategies of algorithms focus on the metrics of engagement, watch time, likes, commenting at the expense of academic accuracy, thus reorganizing religious hierarchies based on the optimization of statistics.

Akib, Fauziyah, and Hasanah go further to argue that algorithmic systems are affected by social media settings to interpret hadīths.[17] According to them, the algorithmic authority generates selective amplification, favoring simplified and emotive readings, as opposed to a more complex scholarly discussion. The outcome can be called algorithmic reductionism, a process of shrinking complicated jurisdictional customs into content that can be more easily digested and is of shorter length in order to meet the demands of platforms. Fitriansyah and Lubis also explain how preachers make smart plans on how to optimize their *da'wah* in order to fit with the algorithmic logic, specifically with the example of Habib Ja'far.[18] Their results emphasize the fact that religious actors are not mere victims of the algorithms but agents of platform rule. However, the balance of power is still uneven: algorithms are non-human epistemic editors, which organize what becomes authoritative in digital Islam with no explanation. This scholarship is a unanimous reconception of authority as being more and more mediated by technology. In the digital world, religious truth gets hijacked with computational visibility, and this results in a phenomenon that can be described as platformized orthodoxy.

[14]Rheinhard Sirait, "Making Islam Great Again: The Rise of Digital Preachers in Indonesia," (PhD Dissertation, University of Western Australia, 2024), *The UWA Profiles and Research Repository*, https://doi.org/10.26182/5nw0-2b67.

[15]Fauzi, Mustofa, Maliki, and Husaini, "The Digital Minbar: Repositioning Religious Authority and the Dynamics of Islamic Law in Contemporary Egypt's Virtual Landscape," 178–209.

[16]Zaman, Ansori, Saefudin, "From Ummah to Username: How Digital Platforms Reshape Islamic Solidarity and Stratification," 411–44.

[17]Fauzi, Mustofa, Maliki, and Husaini, "The Digital Minbar: Repositioning Religious Authority and the Dynamics of Islamic Law in Contemporary Egypt's Virtual Landscape," 178–209.

[18]Fitriansyah, Lubis, "Mediating Alghorithm Mediating Da'wa," 1-12.

The sources of online fatwas indicate that there is an important change in the Islamic law practice. Conventionally, the issuance of a fatwa was institutionalized in organized systems that are methodologically rigorous and accountable to others. Hamdani records how online muftis have come to give rulings via social media, email, and comment boxes, and usually do so in real time when responding to complicated theological requests.[19] This is something that distorts the temporality and deliberative nature of Islamic jurisprudence.

According to Masruha et al., the digitization of fatwas refers to the transfer of the Islamic legal power to a decentralized market.[20] This is a fatwa-on-demand environment, where people have what scholars refer to as fatwa shopping, where an individual gets to enjoy rulings based on his or her preferences or ideological orientations. Mufti-*mustafti* relationship is thereby turned into a consumer-centered relationship and is not institutionally controlled.

Fauzi et al. observe that although digital fatwas are more accessible and reach a larger audience, they cause a loss of deliberation among the scholars and a misunderstanding of the line between authoritative legal opinion and mass commentary.[21] This leads to the spread of anomalous or decontextualized rulings that creates the issue of interpretive fragmentation since there are no uniform vetting mechanisms. Notably, the context of online fatwa practices in relation to local socio-politics is presented by the study of Ibrahim in Northern Nigeria, where digital Islamic practices are framed within the context of the wider infrastructural changes.[22] This brings out the necessity of contextualizing digital power in local and political economies instead of thinking of it as a global entity.

Although the digital platforms have been praised as a democratizer of religious knowledge, recent research makes this story more complex by showing emerging types of stratification. Zaman, Ansori, and Saefudin believe that digital platforms turn the Islamic solidarity based on the territory-based communal belonging into the networked affiliation based on the structure of usernames, followers, and groups of engagement measurements.[23] Digital ummah is not egalitarian but a stratum space, and symbolic capital, building on digital literacy, aesthetic presentation, and algorithmic optimization, is the source of power. The study by Sirait reveals that digital preachers develop visual coherence and lifestyle aesthetic to indicate authenticity.[24] In this environment, piety becomes performative and visually curated. This commodification can easily end up undermining religious identity to consumable content. Power is becoming associated with visual branding and marketability as opposed to theological savvy. This change poses some very important questions about commercialization of *da'wah* and merging religion with influencer capitalism.

[19]Amamur Rohman Hamdani, "Fatwa in the Digital Age: Online Muftī, Social Media, and Alternative Religious Authority," *Hikmatuna: Journal for Integrative Islamic Studies* 9, no. 1 (June 28, 2023): 53–63, https://doi.org/10.28918/hikmatuna.v9i1.966 .

[20]Masruha, Munawar, Zulmi, Abdullah, and Husaini, "Digitization of Fatwas and Religious Authority," 99-113.

[21]Fauzi, Mustofa, Maliki, and Husaini, "The Digital Minbar: Repositioning Religious Authority and the Dynamics of Islamic Law in Contemporary Egypt's Virtual Landscape," 178–209.

[22]Murtala Ibrahim, "Islam in the Digital Infrastructure: The Rise of Islamic Cyber Practices in Northern Nigeria," 114–32.

[23]Zaman, Ansori, Saefudin, "From Ummah to Username: How Digital Platforms Reshape Islamic Solidarity and Stratification," 411–44.

[24]Rheinhard Sirait, "Making Islam Great Again: The Rise of Digital Preachers in Indonesia."

The last academic stream focuses on the participatory aspect of digital religious publics. The analysis of audience contestation as portrayed by Roni in her research about the controversial lecture given by Ustaz Evie Effendi reveals the purpose of the comment sections as venues of theological dialogue.[25] The audiences are not just observers, but participants who interpret, criticize, and approve religious authority. This is a participatory relationship that creates what can be called public hermeneutics, where orthodoxy is negotiated on the spot. Nevertheless, this openness further polarizes and builds echo chambers because algorithms create ideological homogeneity.[26] The paradox in the literature, thus is that digital Islam democratizes the religious discourse and disintegrates it at the same time. Authority is more easily available but also more insecure; it is more evident, but it also depends on the management of platforms.

The literature on this issue across contexts, i.e., Indonesia, Egypt, Nigeria, and Muslim digital publics, in general, coalesces on the thesis that Islamic authority is structurally reconfigured.[27] However, significant gaps can be identified in preceding literature. First, comparison across regions is scanty that could investigate the intersection of algorithmic governance with the local political-religious institutions. Second, whereas research has focused on single platforms, there is a relative scarcity of research on cross-platform authority relations (i.e., YouTube vs. TikTok vs. Instagram). Third, there is yet to be developed a theoretical interaction with wider frameworks, including mediatization theory, platform capitalism, and sociology of knowledge. This article also puts Islamic authority in the digital age as a controversial and ambivalent sphere that is influenced by institutional negotiation, algorithmic governance, consumer religiosity, and participatory publics. Instead of signaling the erosion of traditional authority, digitalization restructures it into mobile and stratified as well as platform-specific forms of legitimacy

5. Methodology

The research follows a qualitative Systematic Literature Review (SLR) which envisions the critical study of the Islamic authority change in the digital age, with specific focus on the online fatwas, online scholars on YouTube, religious influencers, and the emergence of algorithmic Islam. The SLR method was chosen due to the conceptual complexity, interdisciplinary character, and widespread distribution of the phenomenon under study in the contexts of different regions, which presuppose the systematic identification, assessment, and integration of the current scholarship instead of primary data collection in the field. The peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, doctoral theses, conference proceedings, and institutional fatwa documents published between 2015 and 2025 in order to capture the development and integration of the digital religious practices over the last two decades are reviewed. Significant academic databases, such as Scopus, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Project MUSE, were searched in their entirety to find official sources by known religious authorities, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), JAKIM (Malaysia), and *Dar al-Ifta* (Egypt), to generate a jurisprudential baseline of comparison to digital practices. The search strategy consisted of both the supply side (religious actors and institutions) and demand side (audience practices and consumption patterns) of digital Islam associated with the keywords of Islamic authority, digital *dawah*, online fatwa, algorithmic Islam, YouTube scholars, religious influencers, cybers imams, TikTok *dawah*, digital *ummah*, fatwa

[25]Ibrahim N Abusharif, "Religious Authority, Digitality, and Islam: The Stakes and Background," *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 8, no. 1 (May 2023): 109–19, https://doi.org/10.2979/jims.00010.

[26]Rheinhard Sirait, "Making Islam Great Again: The Rise of Digital Preachers in Indonesia."

[27]Ibrahim, "Islam in the Digital Infrastructure: The Rise of Islamic Cyber Practices in Northern Nigeria,"114–32.

shopping, algorithmic visibility, and performative piety. Results were refined by using the operators of Boolean operators (AND/OR) to make sure that results were thematically precise.

The inclusion criteria considered publications, which focused directly on the intersection of Islamic jurisprudence, religious authority, and digital media, or critically explore how algorithms and platform infrastructures construct religious stories; and had to be published in English to have the breadth and representation of Southeast Asian, Middle East, African, and Western Muslim contexts. The exclusion criteria were used to exclude studies that were concerned only with non-Islamic religious traditions, general political communication that was not explicitly connected with Islamic authority, and non-peer-reviewed opinion pieces that were not methodologically rigorous. The analysis was structured around a systematic thematic synthesis, with the initial step, open coding, performed on the first reading to reveal common themes that appeared across the text and which served as the foundation of the subsequent synthesis. Firstly, the theme of the Sanad to Digital Capital, secondly,the theme of Algorithmic Epistemology, and thirdly, the theme of Participatory Publics, the latter of which is how the digitization of religious knowledge can be mediated through the use of algorithms. To increase validity and reliability, the review has transparency in the search strategy, the inclusion criteria use is consistent and provides triangulation of results in different geographical settings. Ethics encompass following the rules of citation, precise representation of the arguments of authors, and the self-reflexive consideration of the possible bias in the literature, that is, the disposition towards the idealization of digital democratization or exaggeration of the fragmentation of religions. In this way, this rigorous, systematic process of the study can be regarded to have offered some form of analytical coherence, not only offering a critical mapping of how Islamic authority is being rebuilt in the current digital infrastructures.

6. Data Analysis

The thematic analysis of the chosen literature indicates that the process of transformation of Islamic authority in the digital era happens in five intertwined thematic areas: (1) performative reconstruction of power, (2) politics of algorithmic mediation and visibility, (3) digitalization and marketization of fatwas, (4) participatory publics and contested legitimacy, and (5) digital capital and socio-religious stratification. All these themes prove that Islamic authority did not vanish but is reorganized in platformized spaces with the rules of engagement metrics, technological infrastructures, and interaction with the audience.

6.1. From *Sanad* to Digital Performance: The Reconfiguration of Authority

The first main trend of the literature is shift towards the authority based on credentials to performative legitimacy. Conventionally, the Islamic power was based on the *sanad* (scholarly lineage), institutional support, and knowledge of classical literature. Nevertheless, the digital spaces reward media literacy, charisma, and aesthetic display rather than formal accreditation.[28] The power is transformed into a relationship and one that is constantly negotiated by metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and the number of followers.

The ethnographic studies of Sirait on the Indonesian digital preachers reveal that the online religious players develop well-managed personas of piety, nationalism, and lifestyle branding to

[28]Baidawi Baidawi, "Shaping Virtual Religious Authority: The Power of Digital Media on Micro-Celebrity Da'i," *Journal of Asian Wisdom and Islamic Behavior* 3 (1), (2025): 39–53, https://doi.org/10.59371/jawab.v3i1.93

maintain presence and power.[29] In the same way, Baidawi defines these actors as micro-celebrity *dai*' who ' their legitimacy is based on the economies of followers and emotional appeal, but not on institutional legitimacy.[30] According to Fauzi et al., this has been termed by the authors as emerging digital *minbar* whereby the clerical authority has been re-aligned in the hybrid forms, which involve traditional scholarship and platform optimization strategies.[31] The statistics accordingly indicate that power in digital Islam is not destroyed but repositioned as a shift in inherited academic capital to digitally mediated symbolic capital.

6.2. Algorithmic Islam and the Politics of Visibility

The second prevalent theme is that of algorithmic mediation as a form of structuring in the modern Islamic discourse. Digital platforms do not serve as neutral distribution channels but act as curators of religious information by promoting it by opaque recommendation systems. Fuadi presents the notion of the so-called Islamic algorithms because platform logics influence the communication strategies and determine which voices should be ranked higher than others, which should be ranked lower. The metrics based on engagement favor emotionally evocative, visually attractive, and easily consumable information in lieu of a sophisticated exposition of theology.[32]

Akib, Fauziyah, and Hasanah build on this argument, showing how the interpretative system of hadith reforms, in the context of social media, enhances simplified versions and reduces complex academic discussion. What it produces can be called algorithmic reductionism: theological complexity is squeezed into the small-form content of TikTok or Instagram Reels.[33] Fitriansyah and Lubis demonstrate that preachers utilize algorithmic logic with a strategic approach to titles, thumbnails, and videos to get as much visibility as possible. Therefore, algorithmic governance acts as a non-human epistemic curator, quietly defining what will be deemed as authoritative in the field of digital Islam. Power is interwoven with the computational visibility as opposed to pure scholarly validation.[34]

6.3. Digitization, Fatwa Shopping, and Legal Fragmentation

Another aspect of change that is of critical concern is the digitization of fatwas. The issuance of fatwas was subject to institutional control and deliberation in the past. Conversely, social media platforms, comment boards, and livestreams allow online audiences instant replies through social media. Hamdani records how Islamic jurisprudence has its temporality and hierarchy of authority changed as online muftis make decisions at a very fast pace.[35]

[29]Fitriansyah, Lubis, "Mediating Alghorithm Mediating Da'wa," 1-12.

[30]Fauzi, Mustofa, Maliki, and Husaini, "The Digital Minbar: Repositioning Religious Authority and the Dynamics of Islamic Law in Contemporary Egypt's Virtual Landscape," 178–209.

[31]Muhamad Hanif Fuadi, "Islamic Algorithms: How Digital Platform Algorithms Shape Islamic Communication Strategies and Religious Authorities," *Proceedings of International Conference on Religion, Social and Humanities* 4 (2025): 78–132.

[32]Hanif Fuadi, "Islamic Algorithms: How Digital Platform Algorithms Shape Islamic Communication Strategies and Religious Authorities," 78–132.

[33]Moh. Akib, Neyla Nuril Fauziyah, and Imroatul Hasanah, "Digital Authority Under Algorithmic Control: Reconfiguring Contemporary Hadith Interpretation in Social Media Spaces," *Tajdid: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin* 24 (2), (2025): 705–738, https://doi.org/10.30631/tjd.v24i2.5245

[34]Fitriansyah, Lubis, "Mediating Alghorithm Mediating Da'wa," 1-12.

[35]Amamur Rohman Hamdani, "Fatwa in the Digital Age: Online Muftī, Social Media, and Alternative Religious Authority," *Hikmatuna: Journal for Integrative Islamic Studies* 9 (1), (2023): 52–63.

The change which Masruha et al. characterize as the development of a decentralized fatwa marketplace relates to the development of a situation in which users are able to associate themselves with a type of fatwa shopping experience, picking and choosing rulings on their own or belonging to different ideological perspectives.[36] This consumerist disposition reconfigures the mufti-mustafti dynamics of a structured consultation to that of a transactional one. Fauzi et al. also state that although digital fatwas make them more democratic and more reaching, they also put the steps towards undermining the collective scholarly understanding and the distinction between authoritative opinion and commentary.[37] The data therefore indicate both democratization and fragmentation: accessibility increases, but coherence and institutional control decline.

6.4. Participatory Publics and the Contestation of Legitimacy

Religious authority is becoming increasingly negotiated in participatory public arenas in a digital form. As shown by Roni (2026), comment sections on YouTube serve as spaces of theological contention, as viewers, when commenting on religious statements, engage in active critical reinterpretation of these statements. The result of such a participatory dynamic is what can be referred to as public hermeneutics, where orthodoxy is being negotiated, not imposed on people by the clerical elites, but on the spot.

Nonetheless, algorithm-based reinforcement of user preferences brings about the effect of echo chambers and polarization.[38] Ibrahim (2024) places such dynamics in the context of larger digital infrastructures in Northern Nigeria, where the online use of Islamic practices in the country disrupts institutional authority and leads to the fragmentation and ideological escalation of religious discourse.

6.5. From *Ummah* to Username — Digital Capital and Stratification

Although the digital medium is seen to democratize access to religion, it creates new types of stratification. According to Zaman, Ansori, and Saefudin (2025), digital platforms convert Islamic solidarity to disjointed network affiliations that are organized by usernames, follower counts, and aesthetic conformity.[39] The digital ummah is not egalitarian but divided into digital literacy, quality of production, and symbolic capital levels.

Sirait (2024) and Baidawi (2025) also illustrate how performative piety, as a crafted persona, branded products, and the aesthetic creation of a lifestyle, serves as another means of differentiation within online communities. Islamic discourse has been integrated into influencer capitalism.[40] The hierarchy is reflective of the rest of the socio-economic inequalities, and digital capital (followers, monetization capacity, engagement) is the new currency of religious prestige.

In contexts in different countries, such as Indonesia, Egypt, and Nigeria, the data indicate that the Islamic authority is being reformed as opposed to being eroded. Power is recast in the form of performance, algorithmically filtered, disaggregated in the digital fatwa markets, competed over

[36]Masruha, Munawar, Zulmi, Abdullah, and Husaini, "Digitization of Fatwas and Religious Authority," 99-113.

[37]Fauzi, Mustofa, Maliki, and Husaini, "The Digital Minbar: Repositioning Religious Authority and the Dynamics of Islamic Law in Contemporary Egypt's Virtual Landscape," 178–209.

[38]Hanif Fuadi, "Islamic Algorithms: How Digital Platform Algorithms Shape Islamic Communication Strategies and Religious Authorities," 78–132.

[39]Zaman, Ansori, Saefudin, "From Ummah to Username: How Digital Platforms Reshape Islamic Solidarity and Stratification," 411–44.

[40]Sirait, "Making Islam Great Again: The Rise of Digital Preachers in Indonesia."

by the participatory publics, and stratified by accumulating capital in digital forms. All articles show that the digital age creates hybrid forms of power whereby traditional scholarship, platform governance, and audience interactions intertwine in complicated and even conflicting ways.

7. Discussion

The essence of religious life involves a fundamental restructuring of power, knowledge, and community formation, rather than simply adapting to technological changes. The classical Islamic authority, whose roots are historically based in the isnad-based transmission, institutional accreditation, and mastery of the esoteric knowledge in institutions like Al-Azhar University and traditional pesantren networks, is finding itself many intersections with a networked model of legitimacy that is based on metrics of visibility and platform logic.[41] Modern research illustrates that online da'wah recreates power into an individualized and participatory form where charisma, fluency with the media, and aesthetics serve as alternative qualifications. The number of followers, the level of engagement, and amplification of an algorithm become a kind of symbolic digital capital that is changing the hierarchies of power in this environment. Platform algorithms: by envisioning platforms as so-called non-human epistemic curator, they promote emotionally compelling and easily digestible information, which in turn promotes the reduction of the intricate jurisprudential debate to the short-form, decontextualization of a religious sound bite. Such an algorithmic reductionism guarantees the promotion of controversial or provocative content, but it also creates echo chambers that further support the preexisting doctrinal choices.[42] At the same time, digital publics have become active participants in theological production: comment sections and other interactive features make the audiences co-interpreters, subjects to challenge, confirm, or reinterpret fatwas in real time.[43] These participatory dynamics disrupt institutions, such as Majelis Ulama Indonesia, which now has to justify and publish judgments in competitive digital spaces. The expansion of monetized religious content introduces ethical and legal issues, prompting the development of digital fiqh frameworks. This includes the MUI Fatwa No. 1 of 2024 regarding zakat payments to content creators, which reinterprets traditional jurisprudence within the context of economies reliant on digital platforms. However, regardless of the alleged democratization, digital Islam is recreating the stratification: usernames, instead of a sense of community, structure the stratification of access to technological means, aesthetic literacy, and infrastructures of monetization, building a layered digital *ummah*. Combined, the literature suggests that Islamic authority in the digital era is neither undermined nor secularized but is recast in a hybrid form whereby classical scholarship, influencer culture, computational governance, participatory publics, and platform capitalism are combined to create a dynamic, appearance-oriented, and economically complex religious order.

8. Conclusion

This systematic review demonstrates that the Islamic authority in the digital age has undergone a fundamental structural transformation, rather than merely experiencing decadence or secular

[41]Zaman, Ansori, Saefudin, "From Ummah to Username: How Digital Platforms Reshape Islamic Solidarity and Stratification," 411–44.

[42]Bano, and Hafeez, "The Digitalization of Islam on YouTube and Pakistani Youth," 140–57.

[43]Muhammad Roni, "Negotiating Islamic Authority in Digital Public Space: Audience Contestation of Ustaz Evie Effendi's 'Misguided Prophet' Lecture on YouTube," *Journal of Indonesian Digital Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (June 15, 2026): 19–43, Accessed February 22, 2026. https://journal.zamzamischolar.com/index.php/JIDIS/article/view/14.

dispossession. It was argued that the change of the institutionally grounded, *isnad*-based legitimacy to the platform-mediated visibility is a paradigmatic shift in the sphere of religious knowledge production, circulation, and validation. Historically, sources of power, represented by institutions, such as Al-Azhar University or national fatwa organizations like Majelis Ulama Indonesia, were once a free monopoly of interpretation. Rather, power is more and more a negotiated aspect of the algorithmically organized spaces in which the measures of engagement, digital literacy, and media performance are emerging as the new forms of symbolic capital.

The study has identified five coupled changes. Initially, religious authority has shifted towards statistics, as charisma, presentation, and the dynamics of follower economies can even supplant formal academic credentials. Second, algorithmic infrastructures act as epistemic curators, non-human in nature, in favor of emotionally appealing and highly engaging knowledge at the expense of a delicate juristic discussion. Third, digital publics engage in theological negotiation, and secondary audiences are becoming co-producers of religious meaning by engaging in contestation by comment as well as in fatwa shopping. Fourth, the emergence of digital *fiqh* demonstrates the flexibility of jurisprudence, with scholars redefining classical categories to contribute to monetized content creation, online transactions, and income structures based on algorithms. Lastly, however, even with its democratizing potential, digital Islam recreates new forms of hierarchy, based on access to technologies, media proficiency, and platform presence, creating a stratified digital *ummah.*

Thereby, the study highlights that Digital Islam is a seamless epistemic order whereby the classical jurisprudence, culture of the influencer, participatory publics, and computational governance combine. Rather than rendering Islamic normativity weak, digital transformation compels it to change within the context of platform capitalism and networked modernity. Subsequent research should move beyond the simple dichotomy of decline versus democratization and examine the long-term effects of algorithmic authority on doctrinal consistency, moral sincerity (*ikhlās*), and trust in institutions. These dynamics are essential in terms of how the Islamic authority will evolve to a more data-intensive religious world.

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Dody Sulistio is sole author.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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