



## Algorithmic Religious Authority and the Transformation of Fatwa Legitimacy in Indonesian Digital Muslim Communities

Rena Zulfaidah<sup>1</sup>, Abdul Hakim<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Jawa Barat, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Correspondence: [2259310047@student.uinsgd.ac.id](mailto:2259310047@student.uinsgd.ac.id)

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### ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital platforms and artificial intelligence has transformed the structure of religious authority and fatwa legitimacy in contemporary Muslim societies, particularly in Indonesia. Algorithmic systems on YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and AI-based Islamic applications increasingly mediate the production and dissemination of Islamic legal guidance, creating tensions between traditional scholarly authority and digitally constructed legitimacy. This study examines how algorithmic governance reshapes ulama authority and influences public acceptance of Islamic legal opinions in Indonesian digital Muslim communities. Using a socio-legal approach combined with digital ethnography, the research analyzes digital religious content, online Islamic interactions, and AI-assisted fatwa systems through qualitative thematic analysis. The findings reveal that algorithmic visibility, audience engagement, and platform monetization increasingly determine religious influence, often surpassing institutional recognition and scholarly credentials. Digital environments also encourage fragmented legal interpretation, accelerated religious consumption, and personalized Islamic guidance. The study concludes that algorithmic religious authority requires integrated governance frameworks combining digital literacy, institutional verification, and maqasid al-shariah-based ethical principles to preserve scholarly integrity within digital Islamic ecosystems.

### ABSTRAK

Perkembangan pesat platform digital dan kecerdasan buatan telah mengubah struktur otoritas keagamaan dan legitimasi fatwa dalam masyarakat Muslim kontemporer, khususnya di Indonesia. Sistem algoritmik pada YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, dan aplikasi Islam berbasis AI semakin memediasi produksi dan penyebaran panduan hukum Islam, sehingga memunculkan ketegangan antara otoritas keilmuan tradisional dan legitimasi yang dibentuk secara digital. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana tata kelola algoritmik membentuk ulang otoritas ulama dan memengaruhi penerimaan masyarakat terhadap pendapat hukum Islam dalam komunitas Muslim digital Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan sosio-legal yang dipadukan dengan etnografi digital untuk menganalisis konten keagamaan digital, interaksi Islam daring, dan sistem fatwa berbantuan AI melalui analisis tematik kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa visibilitas algoritmik, keterlibatan audiens, dan monetisasi platform semakin menentukan pengaruh keagamaan, bahkan sering melampaui pengakuan institusional dan kredensial keilmuan. Lingkungan digital juga mendorong fragmentasi interpretasi hukum, percepatan konsumsi keagamaan, dan munculnya bimbingan Islam yang bersifat personal. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa otoritas keagamaan algoritmik memerlukan kerangka tata kelola terintegrasi yang menggabungkan literasi digital, verifikasi institusional, dan prinsip etika berbasis maqasid al-shariah guna menjaga integritas keilmuan dalam ekosistem Islam digital.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Digital Disruption of Religious Authority

The contemporary religious landscape in Indonesia is experiencing a profound transformation driven by the convergence of digital platforms, algorithmic systems, and artificial intelligence technologies. Social media platforms have introduced unprecedented spaces for the formation and negotiation of religious authority within Muslim societies, fundamentally shifting how Islamic knowledge and fatwas are disseminated, accessed, and legitimized (Azka & Awang, 2026). This transformation represents not merely a technological change but an epistemological rupture in the structure of Islamic scholarly authority, moving from traditional institutional frameworks toward algorithmically amplified religious actors whose influence depends increasingly on visibility, popularity, and audience engagement rather than scholarly competence and methodological rigor.

The urgency of examining this phenomenon stems from several interrelated factors that challenge the foundations of Islamic legal discourse in Indonesia. With internet penetration reaching 78.19% in 2023, social media has become a battleground for religious narratives, amplifying both moderate and extreme ideologies while creating new patterns of fatwa consumption and legitimacy construction (Rahmawati, 2025). The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) continues to maintain doctrinal legitimacy through procedural and scholarly rigor, yet it increasingly struggles to compete with the affective appeal and immediacy of online religious influencers who reshape religious discourse through personalization, storytelling, and interactivity (Zayyadi et al., 2025). This structural tension between traditional expertise and digital popularity raises fundamental questions about the future of Islamic legal authority in an algorithmic age.

The global scholarly discourse on digital religion has expanded significantly, with frameworks such as Heidi Campbell's networked religion theory and Stig Hjarvard's mediatization theory providing foundational conceptualizations of how digital media transforms religious practice and authority (Himam, 2025). Studies across diverse contexts, from Egypt to Nigeria, have demonstrated that digital platforms democratize access to Islamic knowledge while simultaneously challenging classical models of scholarly legitimacy rooted in *isnād*-based transmission and institutional recognition (Fauzi et al., 2026). Research on digital fatwas in Nigeria reveals that digitalization does not eliminate traditional scholarly authority but reconfigures it into relational and networked forms where credibility is co-produced through scholarly reputation, technological mediation, and audience engagement (Habeebullah et al., 2026).

However, significant research gaps persist in understanding the specific mechanisms through which algorithms shape religious visibility and public preference within Southeast Asian Muslim-majority contexts. Most existing studies examine platforms or content strategies without thoroughly analyzing how algorithmic governance interacts with the unique institutional configurations of Indonesian Islam, including the roles of Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and independent digital preachers (Mandalia & Zainul, 2026). Furthermore, the emergence of AI-based Islamic applications introduces new dimensions of religious mediation that require examination through both Islamic legal theory and digital media scholarship.

Within Indonesia specifically, research has documented the rise of digital Islamic preachers such as Hanan Attaki, Abdul Somad, Adi Hidayat, and Khalid Basalamah, who have effectively attracted young Muslims through social media while generating debates about their interpretive approaches (Akmaliah, 2025). Studies reveal that platforms like Instagram have given rise to virtual Muslim communities, or the "e-Ummah," transforming the landscape of religious authority through contestation among accounts representing Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and independent Salafi movements (Syatar et al., 2024). Digital platforms decentralize authority by enabling youth to access

alternative religious knowledge, with young people forming peer-based spiritual communities in digital spaces that relocate religious learning outside institutional frameworks (Himam, 2025).

Yet Indonesian scholarship has not systematically examined how algorithmic architectures promote polarizing content, create disparities between moderate and extreme content virality, accelerate hoax and hate speech dissemination, and fragment religious authority across digital ecosystems (Rahmawati, 2025). The relationship between platform monetization, content simplification, and the erosion of methodological depth in fatwa production remains underexplored. Moreover, the growing integration of AI chatbots and Islamic guidance applications into everyday religious practice among Indonesian Muslims warrants urgent scholarly attention.

This study addresses the central problem of how algorithmic systems reshape the authority of ulama and influence public acceptance of Islamic legal guidance within Indonesian digital Muslim communities. The research is guided by three interconnected questions: First, how do platform algorithms influence the circulation, visibility, and reception of fatwa content in Indonesian digital spaces? Second, what tensions emerge between traditional scholarly authority based on credentials and institutional recognition versus digitally constructed legitimacy based on engagement metrics and platform performance? Third, how do emerging AI-based Islamic applications reconfigure the relationship between muftis and mustaftis in contemporary fatwa-seeking practices?

## 1.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study integrates three complementary frameworks. First, digital religion theory conceptualizes how online environments do not merely transmit religious messages but actively reshape religious expression through platform-specific affordances and algorithmic logics (Jafar et al., 2025). Second, mediatization theory, particularly Hjarvard's formulation, explains how media becomes increasingly independent of social institutions while simultaneously transforming religious authority and practice according to media logics (Setianto, 2026). Third, Islamic legal theory (*usul al-fiqh*) provides normative criteria for evaluating fatwa legitimacy, including scholarly qualification, contextual discernment (*taḥqīq al-manāṭ*), and institutional oversight (Atallah, 2026). These frameworks are synthesized through the lens of *maqasid al-shariah* to assess how digital transformations serve or undermine the foundational objectives of Islamic law.

This research aims to achieve three primary objectives: (1) to analyze the mechanisms through which algorithmic systems influence fatwa visibility, circulation, and legitimacy construction within Indonesian digital Muslim communities; (2) to examine the tensions and negotiations between traditional ulama authority and emerging forms of digital religious influence; and (3) to develop a conceptual framework of algorithmic religious authority that explains the evolving relationship between technology, Islamic law, and Muslim public life while proposing ethical guidelines for responsible digital fatwa governance.

This study contributes to contemporary digital Islamic studies through several dimensions. Theoretically, it advances a conceptual framework of algorithmic religious authority that bridges Islamic legal theory with digital media scholarship, demonstrating how the affordances of social media, including interactivity, visuality, and algorithmic curation, reshape cognitive and normative engagement with Islamic texts and authority structures (Zhorabek et al., 2025). Methodologically, the integration of digital ethnography with socio-legal analysis offers a replicable approach for examining religious authority transformation across diverse contexts. Practically, the research provides actionable insights for religious institutions, policymakers, and educators seeking to cultivate digital ecosystems that preserve both accessibility and scholarly integrity in an increasingly mediated religious landscape.

## 2. LITERATUR REVIEW

### 2.1 General Research Trends in Digital Religious Authority

The scholarly discourse on digital religious authority has expanded dramatically over the past decade, reflecting the profound transformation of religious practice and authority structures in networked environments. Research demonstrates that digital platforms create contested spaces where religious meaning is actively constructed, negotiated, and challenged through new forms of expression that transcend traditional institutional boundaries (Syatar et al., 2024). The rise of social media has introduced what scholars term "cyber Islamic environments" (CIEs), hybrid spaces that democratize access to religious knowledge while simultaneously risking fragmentation of understanding, shallowness of meaning, and potential intolerance (Alfi et al., 2025). Studies consistently reveal that new religious authorities have effectively attracted young Muslims to their teachings by leveraging social media's reach, fundamentally altering intergenerational patterns of religious learning and authority (Akmaliah, 2025).

Contemporary research identifies three dominant trends shaping this transformation. The first concerns factors driving authority shifts, including algorithmic architectures, platform affordances, and changing audience expectations. The second examines processes of authority negotiation, particularly how traditional credentials interact with digital performance metrics. The third analyzes impacts on Islamic legal discourse, religious identity formation, and institutional adaptation strategies. Across these trends, scholarship increasingly recognizes that digital mediation does not merely expand access to religious guidance but fundamentally alters the conditions under which religious authority is constituted, recognized, and contested (Atallah, 2026).

### 2.2 Factors Driving the Transformation of Religious Authority

The algorithmic governance of digital platforms emerges as a primary factor reshaping religious authority in contemporary Muslim societies. Research demonstrates that social media algorithms play decisive roles in shaping religious visibility and public preference, often privileging simplified, emotionally engaging religious content over methodologically grounded scholarship (Azka & Awang, 2026). This algorithmic logic produces what scholars term an "authority paradox": although Muslim users continue to value preachers with strong religious education, the content they encounter most frequently is determined by algorithmic visibility rather than scholarly depth, producing hybrid forms of religious authority where scholarship, communicative style, and platform performance increasingly intersect (Harisi et al., 2026).

Platform-specific affordances further shape authority construction in distinctive ways. YouTube offers structured, in-depth religious discourse, while TikTok contributes to rapid dissemination of visualized religious messages, with both reinforcing spiritual awareness and interfaith empathy through different mechanisms (Fakhrudin et al., 2026). Instagram functions as a site where religious meaning and authority are actively constructed through digital credibility, algorithmic visibility, and audience interactivity, enabling accounts to represent, challenge, and redefine religious authority through infographics, videos, and quotes (Syatar et al., 2024). WhatsApp-mediated da'wah shapes trust and religious authority through peer-led interactions, where authority is cultivated less through formal credentials than through interactive consistency, humility (tawadhu'), and sincerity (ikhlas) (Abdurrahman et al., 2026).

Monetization dynamics introduce additional complexity, as platform economic logics increasingly influence religious content production. Studies document the emergence of "celebrity preachers" (ustadz selebgram) who blend religious authority with popular culture aesthetics, raising concerns about the commodification of da'wah and theological superficiality resulting from viral content optimization (Najiha, 2025). This convergence of algorithmic amplification and commercial incentives reshapes what constitutes authoritative religious speech in digital environments.

### **2.3 Processes of Authority Negotiation in Digital Spaces**

The process of authority negotiation in digital environments involves complex interactions between traditional scholarly legitimacy and emerging forms of digital credibility. Research reveals that digitalisation expedites the disintermediation of religious authority, favoring popularity, emotional resonance, and engagement metrics over methodological rigor and scholarly validation (Siregar et al., 2025). Digital preachers exemplify divergent yet converging strategies for negotiating authority within digital religious environments, with epistemic, affective, and algorithmic dimensions of legitimacy functioning concurrently to shape public reception of religious guidance.

Institutional responses to digital transformation vary significantly across Indonesian Islamic organizations. Social media convergence enables decentralized communication, reshaping traditional religious authority while expanding outreach to digitally native demographics (Mandalia & Zainul, 2026). Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah emphasize moderate and inclusive Islamic narratives in their digital strategies, while other groups adopt more doctrinal approaches, with all demonstrating differentiated audience-targeting and platform strategies aligned with organizational values. Traditional authorities must actively negotiate their role amid the decentralizing forces brought about by digital platforms, either integrating digital preachers into religious discourses or resisting such influences (Himam, 2025).

The digitalization of isnād (chain of transmission) represents a particularly significant reconfiguration of classical authority mechanisms. Research on platforms like CariUstadz.id reveals systematic isnād reconceptualization through centralized vetting mechanisms that function as digital fatwa verification boards, performing credential assessment before endorsement while transparently displaying validated credentials (Rakhman et al., 2025). This dual mechanism preserves classical principles of transmission continuity and scholarly credibility while adapting them to digital environments through technology-facilitated authentication that maintains epistemic rigor without requiring physical co-presence.

### **2.4 Impacts on Islamic Legal Discourse and Practice**

The impacts of algorithmic mediation on Islamic legal discourse extend across epistemological, institutional, and practical dimensions. Research demonstrates that algorithms significantly shape the visibility of da'wah content and influence everyday encounters with religious messages, with short content (15-60 seconds) on TikTok and Instagram Reels yielding engagement rates 3-5 times higher than long-form content (Alfi et al., 2025). This reality leads to simplification of complex religious material into sound bites that lose crucial nuance, with themes of prohibiting heresy (32%), criticizing modern lifestyle (25%), and practical worship guides (18%) dominating digital content, thereby reconfiguring the hierarchy of religious authority where digital popularity outweighs depth of knowledge.

The fragmentation of interpretive authority generates what scholars term "epistemic distortion," where Qur'anic interpretations on digital platforms reflect selective reading and cherry-picking of verses that support motivational narratives, frequently detaching scriptural meaning from scholarly traditions (Azizah et al., 2025). Authority over interpretation shifts from ulama to digital influencers, creating fragmented epistemic environments that privilege virality over exegetical rigor. This trend extends to family dynamics, where digital interactions that young Indonesian Muslims establish with charismatic figures lead to redefinition of religious legitimacy and intra-family authority (Himam, 2025).

The emergence of AI-based Islamic applications introduces additional complexity. AI-powered chatbots and guidance systems present both opportunities and challenges, offering advantages in accessibility, consistency, and handling high query volumes while raising concerns about the absence of empathy, contextual understanding, and the spiritual dimensions essential to legitimate fatwa issuance (Ahmed, 2024). Research indicates that while AI facilitates unprecedented access to religious texts, the persistence of "algorithmic hallucinations," the absence of spiritual lineage (sanad), and the lack of moral intentionality (niyyah) necessitate careful human oversight to safeguard Islamic legal tradition integrity (Askaraliev & Utayev, 2026).

## 2.5 Critical Evaluation of Previous Studies

While existing scholarship provides valuable insights into digital religious authority transformation, several limitations constrain current understanding. Most studies employ cross-sectional and qualitative designs that cannot capture long-term impacts of digital interpretation on religious practice (Hidayat et al., 2026). The role of social media algorithms in determining visibility of progressive versus conservative interpretations has not been widely studied, while research contexts remain focused on urban communities with limited attention to rural areas, eastern Indonesia, and groups with limited digital access. Male perspectives are also relatively rarely explored in studies of gendered dimensions of digital religious authority.

Methodologically, studies often analyze platform-specific content without examining cross-platform dynamics or the interactions between different digital ecosystems. The relationship between algorithmic recommendation systems and radicalization pathways requires more systematic empirical investigation, as does the effectiveness of institutional adaptation strategies in preserving scholarly authority while engaging digital audiences. Furthermore, existing frameworks inadequately address the unique configurations of Indonesian Islam, where multiple major organizations (MUI, NU, Muhammadiyah) interact with independent digital actors in complex patterns of competition and collaboration.

## 2.6 Novelty and Research Direction

This study advances the literature by developing an integrated analytical framework that brings Islamic legal theory (*usul al-fiqh*) into sustained dialogue with mediatization theory and digital religion scholarship (Atallah, 2026). The framework identifies interrelated transformations affecting the epistemic foundations, institutional gatekeeping mechanisms, communicative forms, and normative accountability of fatwa practice. By examining how digital mediation reconfigures fatwa authority within the specific institutional configurations of Indonesian Islam, including the roles of MUI, NU, Muhammadiyah, and independent digital actors, this research fills critical gaps in understanding algorithmic religious governance in Global South contexts.

The novelty of this research lies in proposing a conceptual framework of algorithmic religious authority that explains the evolving relationship between technology, Islamic law, and Muslim public life. This framework positions algorithms not merely as technical infrastructure but as epistemic structures that shape production, consumption, and justification of religious knowledge (Abdullah, 2026). By integrating *maqasid al-shariah* considerations, the framework provides evaluative criteria for assessing whether digital transformations serve or undermine the foundational objectives of Islamic law, offering practical guidance for governance interventions that preserve both accessibility and scholarly integrity.

## 3. METHODS

### 3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design combining socio-legal analysis with digital ethnography to examine how algorithmic systems reshape Islamic religious authority in Indonesian digital Muslim communities. The socio-legal approach enables examination of how Islamic legal norms interact with technological transformations and social practices, while digital ethnography provides methods for observing and analyzing religious phenomena in online environments (Harisi et al., 2026). This integrated design follows the analytical-comparative methodology that reconstructs classical architecture of fatwa authority and systematically compares it with contemporary digitally mediated environments (Atallah, 2026).

The research adopts an interpretive paradigm that recognizes religious authority as socially constructed through interactions among scholars, platforms, and audiences rather than as fixed

institutional positions. This orientation aligns with contemporary scholarship positioning digital fatwas not merely as new channels of dissemination but as socio-legal arenas in which authority is negotiated among scholars, digital platforms, and religious audiences (Habeebullah et al., 2026). The qualitative design enables exploration of how meanings, legitimacy, and credibility are constructed and contested within digital Islamic environments.

### 3.2 Unit of Analysis

The primary units of analysis comprise three interconnected levels. First, at the platform level, analysis focuses on content distribution patterns, algorithmic recommendation mechanisms, and engagement metrics across YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp as primary sites of digital Islamic da'wah in Indonesia. Second, at the actor level, analysis examines content produced by institutional accounts (NU Online, Muhammadiyah), prominent digital preachers (Hanan Attaki, Abdul Somad, Adi Hidayat, Habib Ja'far), and AI-based Islamic applications. Third, at the audience level, analysis focuses on user interactions, comments, and engagement patterns that reflect reception and negotiation of digital religious authority.

Selection criteria prioritize accounts and content demonstrating significant reach and engagement within Indonesian Muslim digital communities. Following established methodology, the study analyzes content from accounts representing major organizational perspectives, including (nuonline\_id?) (Nahdlatul Ulama), (lensamu?) (Muhammadiyah), and independent accounts representing diverse theological orientations (Syatar et al., 2024). The temporal scope focuses on content produced between 2020-2025 to capture developments during and following the accelerated digital transformation associated with pandemic conditions.

### 3.3 Data Sources

Data Type	Source	Description
Primary Digital Content	YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp	Video sermons, short-form content, infographics, text-based posts from selected accounts
Platform Interaction Data	Comment sections, engagement metrics	User responses, likes, shares, comment threads reflecting audience reception
Institutional Documents	MUI fatwas, NU/Muhammadiyah guidelines	Official positions on digital ethics, social media use, and AI applications
Interview Data	Semi-structured interviews	Ulama, digital content creators, platform users, academic experts
AI Application Outputs	ChatMu GPT, MuslimAI.ai, IslamGPT	Responses to standardized religious queries for comparative analysis
Secondary Literature	Academic publications 2019-2026	Scholarly works on Islamic authority, digital religion, algorithmic governance

The selection of data sources follows established protocols for digital religion research, combining observation of digital proselytizing content with analysis of interactions on platforms and in-depth examination of relevant secondary literature (Taqwa & Lubis, 2025). Primary data collection focuses on viral content with significant engagement to capture dominant patterns in digital religious discourse.

### **3.4 Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection employs multiple complementary techniques aligned with digital ethnographic methodology. Non-participant observation of selected accounts involves systematic documentation of content types, posting frequencies, engagement patterns, and algorithmic visibility indicators over a six-month observation period (Rohmi et al., 2025). Content is sampled using purposive selection based on keywords, engagement levels, and relevance to fatwa-related themes.

Semi-structured interviews with 15-20 informants encompass diverse stakeholder perspectives, including: (a) ulama affiliated with MUI and major Islamic organizations; (b) digital preachers with significant platform followings; (c) young Muslim users who regularly consume digital religious content; and (d) academic experts in digital religion and Islamic law. Interview protocols explore perceptions of authority, legitimacy, and the role of algorithms in shaping religious knowledge access (Zayyadi et al., 2025).

Document analysis examines MUI fatwas issued between 2017-2023 concerning social media use and digital ethics, organizational guidelines from NU and Muhammadiyah on digital da'wah, and scholarly literature on algorithmic governance of religious content (Rahman et al., 2024). AI application outputs are collected through standardized prompts designed to test inclusivity, doctrinal balance, and ethical framing across platforms with distinct theological orientations (Marwantika & Dauda, 2025).

### **3.5 Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis employs thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework, proceeding through phases of familiarization, coding, theme generation, review, definition, and reporting (Iman, 2026). Analysis is organized around three dimensions corresponding to research questions: (1) descriptive analysis of digital fatwa practices and content patterns; (2) critical analysis of factors shaping authority transformation; and (3) transformative analysis of implications and proposed governance frameworks.

Content analysis integrates textual and visual elements following Critical Discourse Analysis approaches that examine relationships among text, discursive practice, and social context (Zairina et al., 2025). For AI application outputs, analysis applies criteria derived from maqasid al-shariah principles and indicators of religious moderation, including tolerance, anti-violence, national commitment, and acceptance of tradition (Naim et al., 2025).

Validity is strengthened through methodological, researcher, and theoretical triangulation, peer debriefing, and audit trail documentation (Rohmi et al., 2025). Inter-coder reliability is established through Cohen's kappa calculation for content categorization. Analytical findings are interpreted through the integrated theoretical framework combining digital religion theory, mediatization theory, and Islamic legal theory to generate conceptually grounded conclusions.

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1 Algorithmic Visibility and Digital Fatwa Practices: Descriptive Findings**

The analysis reveals fundamental transformations in how Islamic legal guidance is produced, circulated, and consumed within Indonesian digital environments. Digital platforms have emerged as primary channels through which fatwas and religious opinions reach contemporary Muslim audiences, with platform-specific logics shaping content characteristics. Research demonstrates that short da'wah content (15-60 seconds) on TikTok and Instagram Reels generates engagement rates 3-5 times higher than long-form content, incentivizing content simplification and fragmentation of complex religious material (Alfi et al., 2025).

The dominant content themes observed across platforms reveal distinctive patterns of digital religious discourse. Themes prohibiting heresy account for approximately 32% of viral religious content, followed by criticism of modern lifestyle (25%) and practical worship guides (18%), while more nuanced theological discussions receive comparatively limited visibility (Alfi et al., 2025). This thematic distribution reflects algorithmic preferences for content that generates strong emotional responses and clear binary positions rather than methodologically complex legal reasoning.

Platform usage patterns among Indonesian Muslim students demonstrate YouTube's dominance (38%) as the primary source for religious content, followed by Instagram (30%), TikTok (22%), and other platforms (Wibowo, 2026). The platforms most frequently accessed serve different functions: YouTube provides structured, in-depth religious discourse, while TikTok and Instagram facilitate rapid dissemination of visualized religious messages (Fakhrudin et al., 2026). Ethics and akhlaq content dominates consumption preferences (46%), reflecting audience interest in practical moral guidance applicable to everyday life.

Digital preachers have emerged as influential authority figures within these algorithmic environments. Among Indonesian Muslim students, Ustadz Hanan Attaki commands the largest following (32%), followed by Ustadz Adi Hidayat and Habib Ja'far al Hadar (24% each), Ustadz Abdul Somad (14%), and Ustadz Felix Siauw (6%) (Wibowo, 2026). These figures construct charismatic authority through strategic blending of traditional piety with modern relatability, with charisma becoming routinized through consistent, platform-specific content that fosters perceived intimacy with followers (Mutamakin et al., 2025).

The digital transformation of da'wah demonstrates significant content evolution from traditional spaces to digital spheres. Research shows that digital da'wah offers broad accessibility and creative modes of delivering religious messages while presenting challenges such as fragmented authority, content commercialization, and the proliferation of non-scholarly preaching (Afrijaludin et al., 2025). The process of aestheticization separates religiosity from traditional rituals and transforms it into part of individual identity, with sermons, short clips, and Qur'anic quotations presented adorned with visual effects and popular culture elements (Himam, 2025).

## 4.2 Critical Factor Analysis

The critical analysis reveals multiple intersecting factors that shape the transformation of religious authority in digital environments, generating structural tensions between traditional legitimacy mechanisms and emerging digital credibility markers.

**Algorithmic Governance and Visibility Hierarchies:** Algorithms function as gatekeeping mechanisms that determine which religious content reaches audiences, creating what scholars term a "structural gap" between traditional ulama authority and digitally popular religious figures (Azka & Awang, 2026). Platform algorithms significantly shape religious visibility and public preference, often privileging simplified, emotionally engaging content over methodologically grounded scholarship. This algorithmic logic does not merely amplify certain voices but fundamentally alters the criteria through which religious authority is recognized and accepted.

The paradox of algorithmic authority manifests in users' expressed preferences versus their actual consumption patterns. Although Muslim users continue to value preachers with strong religious education, the content they encounter most frequently is determined by algorithmic visibility rather than scholarly depth (Harisi et al., 2026). This produces hybrid forms of religious authority in which scholarship, communicative style, and platform performance increasingly intersect, challenging traditional hierarchies based solely on scholarly credentials.

**Institutional Responses and Adaptive Strategies:** Major Islamic organizations demonstrate differentiated strategies for navigating digital transformation. Research reveals that NU and Muhammadiyah actively adopt digital platforms to disseminate religious narratives, engage audiences, and construct institutional identities, with NU and Muhammadiyah emphasizing moderate and inclusive Islamic narratives while others adopt more doctrinal approaches (Mandalia & Zainul, 2026). The transformation of Aswaja Al-Nahdliyyah demonstrates efforts to promote and mainstream traditionalist narratives through digitization of figures and classical texts (turats), seeking to ensure that new religious spaces in the online world remain under control of authorized religious figures (Mudhofi & Karim, 2024).

Institutional adaptation strategies encompass several dimensions: strengthening academically grounded digital presence, expanding online fatwa services, launching social media campaigns, and developing multilingual outreach programs (Fauzi et al., 2026). However, practical enforcement of institutional fatwas is limited by users' digital habits, lack of awareness, and insufficient public dissemination, highlighting disconnects between normative guidance and digital consumption practices (Rahman et al., 2024).

**Contestation Among Digital Actors:** Analysis of Instagram accounts representing major Islamic organizations reveals significant variations in influence and content orientation. Independent Salafi accounts demonstrate larger followings compared to institutionally affiliated accounts, indicating considerable impact on digital discourse (Syatar et al., 2024). Content reflects distinct religious perspectives, with Salafi accounts emphasizing purification and strict adherence to Qur'an and Sunnah, while NU and Muhammadiyah highlight traditional practices and moral guidance. Contestation of religious authority is particularly evident in discussions about the role of the state, interfaith relations, and religious practices.

The emergence of digital apologetics movements further complicates authority structures, with figures constructing theological narratives and mobilizing collective identity through diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing strategies (Mukhroman & Napilah, 2025). This growth is facilitated by post-Reformasi political openness, algorithmic amplification, and increasing visibility of Islam in Indonesia's digital public sphere. While confrontational styles risk reinforcing religious polarization, they also democratize theological engagement by making complex debates accessible to wider publics.

#### **4.3 Emerging Frameworks of Digital Fatwa Legitimacy: Transformative Implications**

The transformative analysis reveals the emergence of new legitimacy frameworks that integrate traditional and digital elements while generating significant implications for Islamic legal practice and governance.

**Hybrid Authority Models:** The findings demonstrate that digital environments produce hybrid models of religious authority that combine elements of traditional scholarly legitimacy with digital performance criteria. Religious authority has become a dialogical structure negotiated through emotional and aesthetic preferences, with discussions about Islamic practices increasingly shaped by references to digital content (Himam, 2025). This transformation does not eliminate traditional authority but fundamentally reshapes it, requiring navigation of both scholarly credentials and algorithmic visibility.

Digital platforms function on three levels: as channels disseminating religious content, as languages reproducing religious meanings in visual and emotional forms, and as environments creating shared atmospheres for collective religious experience (Himam, 2025). This multi-level functioning means that platforms do not merely transmit fatwas but actively shape how religious guidance is

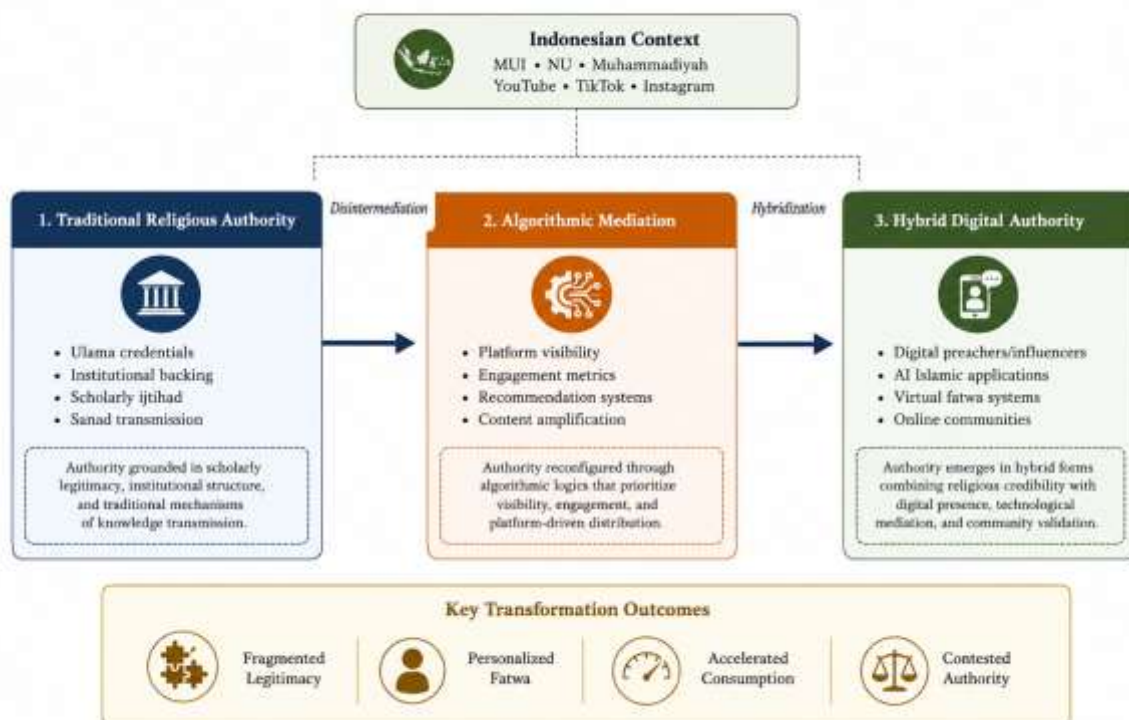
received, felt, and internalized by audiences. Authority construction now depends on performance across these multiple dimensions.

**AI-Mediated Religious Guidance:** The emergence of AI-based Islamic applications represents a new frontier in digital religious authority. Studies examining platforms such as ChatMu GPT and MuslimAI.ai reveal distinct theological orientations, with some grounding responses in specific organizational doctrinal sources while others prioritize emotional inclusivity and accessibility at the expense of jurisprudential depth (Marwantika & Dauda, 2025). Both exhibit limited transparency of sources and potential algorithmic bias, raising concerns about narrowing interpretive diversity.

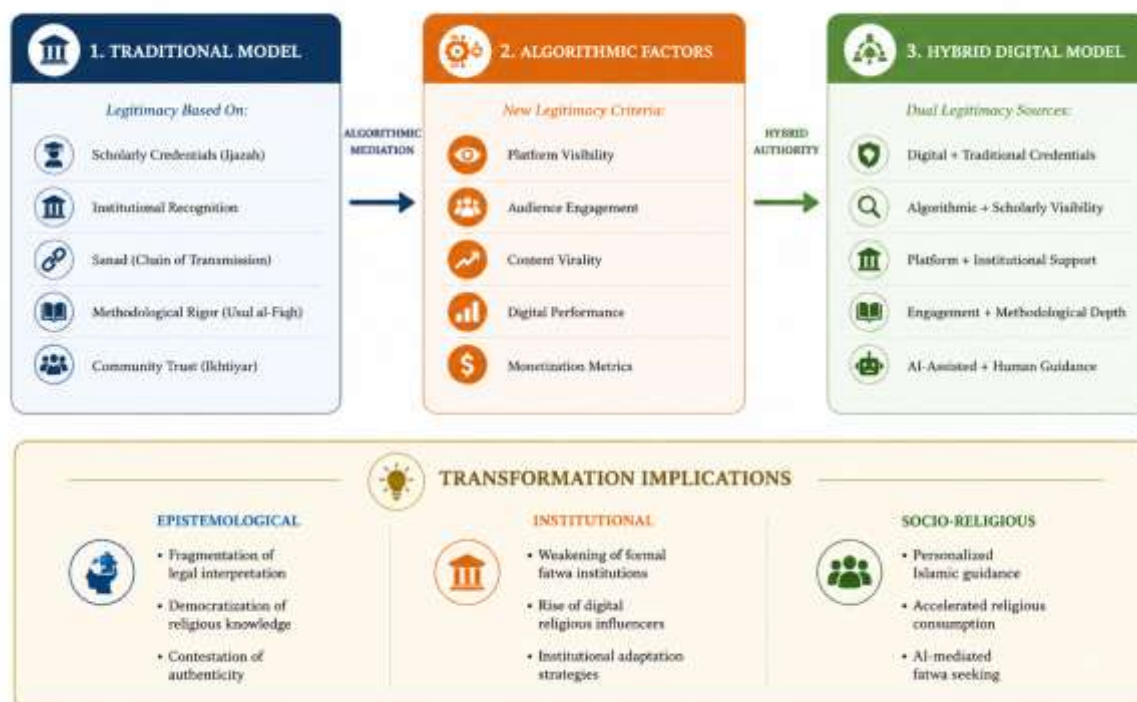
Research indicates that while AI offers significant utility in data retrieval, pattern recognition, and preliminary legal referencing, its limitations in contextual reasoning (waqi'), moral judgment, and ijtihad highlight the need for strict epistemic boundaries (Meerangani et al., 2026). AI-generated fatwas cannot fully replace human scholars due to limitations in contextual reasoning, absence of intention (niyyah), and lack of spiritual lineage (sanad) (Usmonov, 2025). This necessitates "human-in-the-loop" approaches that position AI as supportive tools rather than authoritative sources of religious guidance (Askaraliev & Utayev, 2026).

**Proposed Governance Framework:** Based on these findings, this study proposes a conceptual framework of algorithmic religious authority integrating three dimensions:

### Conceptual Framework of Algorithmic Religious Authority



## Transformation Model of Fatwa Legitimacy in Digital Era



The framework positions algorithmic mediation as transforming traditional authority through disintermediation and hybridization processes, generating hybrid digital authority that combines credentials, visibility, and engagement. Key transformation outcomes include fragmented legitimacy, personalized fatwa, accelerated consumption, and contested authority, with implications spanning epistemological, institutional, and socio-religious dimensions.

Practical recommendations derived from this framework include: (1) establishing institutional verification mechanisms analogous to digital isnād systems that perform credential assessment while maintaining public transparency (Rakhman et al., 2025); (2) developing digital literacy programs integrating critical evaluation skills with religious knowledge (Rahmawati, 2025); (3) creating collaborative networks among religious institutions, technology platforms, and educators; and (4) formulating ethical guidelines for AI-based Islamic applications grounded in maqasid al-shariah principles that ensure protection of religion (hifz al-din) and intellect (hifz al-'aql) (Abdullah, 2026).

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study has demonstrated that algorithmic systems fundamentally reshape Islamic religious authority in Indonesian digital Muslim communities through multiple intersecting mechanisms. Platform algorithms play decisive roles in determining fatwa visibility and public preference, often privileging simplified, emotionally engaging content over methodologically grounded scholarship. This produces a structural gap between traditional ulama authority based on credentials and institutional recognition versus digital popularity based on engagement metrics and platform performance. The emergence of hybrid authority models that combine traditional and digital legitimacy markers represents a fundamental reconfiguration rather than simple displacement of scholarly authority.

Digital environments facilitate fragmented legal interpretations, accelerated religious consumption, and the rise of personalized Islamic guidance increasingly mediated by AI-based applications. Major Islamic organizations demonstrate varied adaptive strategies, from strengthening

digital presence to expanding online fatwa services, yet practical enforcement of institutional guidance remains limited by users' digital habits and algorithmic dynamics. AI applications introduce new dimensions of religious mediation that require careful governance to preserve both accessibility and scholarly integrity.

The findings must be understood within Indonesia's distinctive religious institutional configuration, where multiple major organizations interact with independent digital actors in complex patterns. The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) continues maintaining doctrinal legitimacy through procedural and scholarly rigor, yet struggles to compete with the affective appeal and immediacy of online religious influencers (Zayyadi et al., 2025). This reflects broader tensions between Indonesia's pluralistic religious landscape and the homogenizing tendencies of algorithmic content curation.

The role of the state in Indonesia's digital religious sphere significantly shapes both autonomy and public perception of official religious institutions (Fauzi et al., 2026). Unlike more centralized religious governance systems, Indonesia's decentralized structure means that authority contestation involves multiple competing voices rather than simple state-versus-society dynamics. Digital platforms thus become arenas where organizational identities are constructed and negotiated alongside individual authority claims.

The post-Reformasi political context further shapes digital religious dynamics, with political openness enabling diverse voices while algorithmic amplification intensifies both moderate and extreme expressions (Mukhroman & Napilah, 2025). This context makes Indonesia a particularly important site for understanding how algorithmic religious authority functions in democratizing environments where multiple legitimacy claims compete for public acceptance.

The findings support and extend theoretical frameworks of mediatization and digital religion. Consistent with Hjarvard's mediatization theory, digital platforms increasingly operate according to media logics that transform religious communication and authority structures (Setianto, 2026). However, the Indonesian case demonstrates that mediatization does not produce secularization but enables continual rearticulation and popularization of Islamic values through new media formats.

Campbell's networked religion framework illuminates how digital platforms create participatory structures that decentralize authority while generating new forms of religious community (Najiha, 2025). The emergence of peer-based spiritual communities in digital spaces relocates religious learning outside institutional frameworks while generating hybrid identities blending tradition with personal interpretation. Platform algorithms function not merely as technical infrastructure but as what Foucault would term knowledge/power structures that shape epistemic access and authority recognition (Himam, 2025).

From Islamic legal theory perspective, the findings reveal tensions between classical criteria for fatwa legitimacy and contemporary digitally mediated environments. The classical architecture of fatwa authority rooted in scholarly qualification, isnād-based transmission, contextual discernment, and institutional oversight confronts challenges from visibility metrics, platform logics, and algorithmic amplification (Atallah, 2026). This generates what can be termed algorithmic religious authority, a new configuration where legitimacy depends on navigating both traditional credentials and digital performance criteria.

The transformation of religious authority revealed by this study can be understood through three interrelated dimensions. Epistemologically, digital platforms democratize access to religious knowledge while fragmenting interpretive authority, creating what scholars term "epistemic distortion" where virality substitutes for scholarly rigor (Azizah et al., 2025). The shift from sanad-based transmission to algorithmic amplification alters the very foundations of knowledge validation in Islamic scholarly tradition (Siregar et al., 2025).

Structurally, authority relations transform from hierarchical models based on institutional position to networked configurations where credibility is co-produced through reputation, mediation, and engagement (Habeebullah et al., 2026). Traditional institutions do not disappear but must navigate new environments where their authority no longer derives solely from institutional position. This produces adaptive strategies ranging from strategic digital engagement to ethical resistance.

Interactionally, the relationship between religious authorities and audiences transforms from one-way transmission to participatory engagement. Audiences become co-producers of religious meaning through comments, shares, and selective consumption patterns. This democratization generates both opportunities for broader religious engagement and risks of theological superficiality when complex legal reasoning is compressed into sound-bite formats.

The findings align with and extend previous research on digital religious authority transformation. Consistent with studies from Egypt, Nigeria, and other contexts, this research confirms that digitalization does not eliminate traditional scholarly authority but reconfigures it into relational and networked forms (Fauzi et al., 2026). The Indonesian case demonstrates distinctive features arising from its pluralistic religious institutional configuration and democratic political context.

The identification of an "authority paradox" aligns with previous findings that users value scholarly credentials while predominantly consuming algorithmically amplified content (Harisi et al., 2026). This study extends this observation by demonstrating how the paradox operates across different platform ecosystems and organizational contexts within Indonesia. The findings regarding AI-based applications similarly extend previous work on Islamic chatbots by examining how distinct theological orientations shape AI responses and the governance challenges this diversity creates (Marwantika & Dauda, 2025).

This research diverges from studies suggesting that digital transformation primarily weakens traditional authority, instead demonstrating complex processes of hybridization where traditional and digital legitimacy markers combine in new configurations. The proposed framework of algorithmic religious authority offers a more nuanced understanding of these dynamics than binary frameworks opposing traditional versus digital authority.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the rise of digital platforms and artificial intelligence has fundamentally transformed the structure of religious authority and fatwa legitimacy in contemporary Muslim societies, particularly in Indonesia. Traditional models of authority that were historically grounded in scholarly credentials, sanad transmission, institutional recognition, and methodological rigor are increasingly challenged by algorithmic systems that prioritize visibility, engagement, virality, and platform performance. As a result, religious influence is no longer determined solely by intellectual credibility, but also by digital circulation and algorithmic amplification within platform-based ecosystems.

The findings further reveal that algorithmic mediation has produced a hybrid model of religious authority in which traditional Islamic scholarship coexists with digital religious influencers, AI-assisted Islamic applications, and online fatwa systems. This transformation creates significant epistemological, institutional, and socio-religious consequences, including fragmented legal interpretation, democratization of religious knowledge, weakening of formal fatwa institutions, and the emergence of personalized Islamic guidance. Digital platforms simultaneously expand access to Islamic learning while intensifying contestation over authenticity, legitimacy, and methodological depth in Islamic legal discourse.

This article argues that the transformation of fatwa legitimacy in the digital era should not be understood merely as technological change, but as a broader reconfiguration of Islamic authority, knowledge production, and religious governance in Muslim societies. The study contributes to contemporary digital Islamic studies by offering a conceptual framework of algorithmic religious authority that explains how digital technologies reshape the relationship between ulama, platforms, institutions, and Muslim publics. The Indonesian experience further illustrates how Islamic institutions must adapt strategically to digital realities while maintaining scholarly integrity and ethical accountability in increasingly algorithm-driven religious environments.

## 7. CRediT Author Statement

**Rena Zulfaidah:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing – Original Draft, Visualization. **Abdul Hakim:** Conceptualization, Validation, Resources, Writing – Review & Editing, Supervision, Project Administration. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript. The authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work and have reviewed and approved the submitted version of the manuscript.

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