# FROM MOSQUE TO MEGABYTE: THE FRAGMENTATION OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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## Abstract

*This study critically examines the reconfiguration of Islamic religious authority within contemporary digital ecosystems, investigating how algorithmic visibility, platform logic, and engagement metrics reshape religious legitimacy, interpretive agency, and communal belonging. Employing a qualitative thematic analysis of recent scholarly literature alongside selected cases from digital da'wah, online fatwa distribution, and algorithmic mediation, the study delineates four pivotal structural transformations: the ascendancy of micro celebrity preachers, the decentralization of juristic authority, the commodification of religious knowledge, and the algorithmic stratification of the ummah. The findings demonstrate that religious discourse is not merely transmitted through digital infrastructures but is actively constituted and transformed by them, engendering hybrid forms of authority that synthesize theological erudition with digital capital. The study concludes by advocating for a fundamental reconstruction of theories of religious authority to accommodate the contemporary negotiation of Islamic power at the nexus of knowledge production, algorithmic visibility, engagement metrics, and platform governance.*

## 1.    INTRODUCTION:

### The Digital Disruption of Islamic Authority

The digital transformation of contemporary societies has profoundly altered the epistemic foundations of religious authority, particularly within the Islamic tradition. Historically, Islamic authority was embedded within a hierarchical, institutionalized system predicated upon *sanad* (chains of transmission), mastery of classical jurisprudential texts, and formal institutional recognition. Religious legitimacy derived from scholarly lineage, certification (*ijazah*), and affiliation with established institutions such as Al Azhar, national fatwa councils, or recognized bodies of *ulama*. Authority functioned as an accumulated scholarly inheritance, its production and validation governed by rigorous methodological protocols and shared interpretive conventions. However, the proliferation of digital infrastructures has profoundly destabilized these traditional hierarchies, engendering what scholars increasingly recognize as a fundamental reconstruction—and indeed fragmentation of Islamic authority within networked spaces (Zaman, Ansori, & Saefudin, 2025).

Contemporary scholarship demonstrates that the emergence of digital da'wah ecosystems has facilitated the rise of novel religious actors operating outside conventional institutional frameworks (Tabaika & Roibin, 2025). The legitimacy of figures such as YouTube preachers, Instagram influencers, TikTok scholars, and micro celebrity *da'i* derives less from formal religious credentials than from online visibility, affective

appeal, and algorithmic amplification (Fitriansyah & Lubis, 2023). Their authority is performative, relational, and spectatorial in character. These digital religious entrepreneurs cultivate carefully curated personas centered on piety, charisma, and lifestyle aesthetics, with legitimacy co produced through audience interactions comments, shares, subscriptions, and real time engagements within a symbolic economy of religious capital (Fitriansyah & Lubis, 2023).

A critical consequence of this transformation is the digitalization of fatwa practice. Traditionally, fatwa issuance was institutionalized to ensure methodological rigor, peer accountability, and contextual sensitivity. In the digital sphere, however, online fatwa forums and social media platforms have reconfigured this practice into a competitive, decentralized marketplace of legal opinion (Rachman, Saumantri, & Hidayatulloh, 2025). The phenomenon of "fatwa on demand" reflects a broader trajectory toward religious consumerism, wherein individuals seek rulings that resonate with personal convictions, political allegiances, or lifestyle preferences (Fauzi et al., 2026). This shift fundamentally alters the classical mufti mustafti relationship, transforming it from a formalized consultative exchange into a transactional interaction mediated by digital interfaces. As religious knowledge becomes increasingly accessible through digital means, it simultaneously becomes vulnerable to the dissemination of decontextualized, oversimplified, or methodologically suspect rulings that circumvent traditional jurisprudential safeguards (Zaman et al., 2025).

Empirical research across diverse Muslim majority contexts including Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt, and Northern Nigeria—reveals that digital platforms operate not as neutral conduits for religious expression but as dynamic spaces that actively constitute religious discourse and identity formation. For instance, a study of Pakistani youth demonstrates that YouTube mediated Islamic content significantly influences religious identity formation, tolerance, and belief development within deeply mediated contexts (Bano & Hafeez, 2025). Similarly, research in Indonesia and Egypt illustrates how social media preachers strategically navigate digital spaces, leveraging platform affordances to enhance their authority and visibility (Fauzi et al., 2026; Sirait, 2024). These developments signal the emergence of what may be termed "platformized religion," wherein technological affordances actively shape theological expression and interpretive practices.

Crucially, the transformation of Islamic authority cannot be fully apprehended without examining the algorithmic infrastructures that govern digital platforms. Algorithms function as non human epistemic intermediaries, filtering, prioritizing, and promoting religious content based on engagement metrics rather than scholarly rigor (Fuadi, 2025). Within what may be theorized as "algorithmic Islam," platform logics privilege emotionally charged, visually compelling, or provocative content, frequently at the expense of nuanced juristic discourse. This algorithmic mediation restructures the Islamic public sphere such that virality supersedes validity, speed overtakes deliberation, and affective intensity trumps substantive reasoning. Consequently, digital authority becomes contingent upon visibility within algorithm driven systems, producing hybrid legitimacy that fuses religious credibility with monetization strategies, influencer markets, and attention economies (Masruha et al., 2025).

This transformation extends beyond individual preachers to reconfigure the collective *ummah* itself. Digital spaces reshape communal religious identity, substituting geographically grounded communal affiliations with networked identities structured around usernames, follower counts, and digital stratification (Zaman et al., 2025). This environment generates forms of solidarity mediated by digital participation while simultaneously producing new hierarchies of power determined by platform metrics. The resulting ambiguities—wherein boundaries between scholarship, activism, entertainment, and entrepreneurship dissolve—pose fundamental challenges to established Islamic epistemological norms.

Collectively, the literature indicates that the digital era has not merely supplemented traditional

Islamic authority but has fundamentally reconfigured it. Power is increasingly migrating from institutional custodianship to networked influence; from validation through *sanad* to legitimacy conferred by metrics; and from localized scholarly deliberation to globally distributed algorithmic circulation (Rachman et al., 2025). This study synthesizes emerging scholarship on online fatwas, YouTube scholars, micro celebrity *da'i*, and algorithmic governance to critically examine the reconstruction of Islamic authority within digital environments. It interrogates whether digitalization democratizes religious knowledge or instead subjects Islamic discourse to novel forms of technological control and platform capitalism. By mapping convergences, tensions, and unresolved debates within contemporary scholarship, this review contributes to broader discussions on mediation, post traditional authority, and the politics of digital religion in modern Muslim societies.

## 2. Problematizing Islamic Authority in the Digital Age

Historically, Islamic religious authority was grounded in epistemic legitimacy derived from scholarly training (*ilm*), chains of transmission (*isnad*), institutional recognition, and communal trust. However, the emergence of social media platforms, algorithmic recommendation systems, and digital participatory cultures has profoundly disrupted these hierarchical structures. Authority is no longer exclusively conferred by scholarly peers or institutional bodies but is increasingly determined by metrics of visibility—followers, shares, likes, and algorithmic amplification. Although a growing body of scholarship addresses digital Islam, a significant gap remains in theoretically integrating traditional patterns of religious authority with contemporary digital mediation frameworks. Existing literature documents the proliferation of online preachers, digital fatwas, and virtual Islamic practices but offers insufficient analytical attention to how digital infrastructures fundamentally restructure authority, legitimacy, and interpretive control. Furthermore, there is limited critical analysis of how platform capitalism, micro celebrity culture,

and audience participation are transforming the production of Islamic legal and theological knowledge.

The central problem, therefore, is the absence of a comprehensive analytical framework that explains how Islamic authority is being reconstructed—not merely relocated—within digital ecosystems. Without such a framework, scholarship risks conceptualizing digital religion as a mere extension of offline forms rather than recognizing it as a site of epistemic discontinuity where new hierarchies, epistemologies, and communal stratifications are emerging. This article addresses this gap by examining how digital infrastructures mediate religious legitimacy and how authority is negotiated at the intersection of traditional scholarship, algorithmic governance, and participatory digital publics.

## 3. Research Questions

- How do digital platforms and algorithmic infrastructures reorganize the production, circulation, and legitimation of Islamic religious authority?

## 4. Theoretical Foundations: Tracing the Transformation of Islamic Authority

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.

### 4.1. Performative Piety: The Emergence of Micro Celebrity Preachers

Classical Islamic authority was founded on transmission through *sanad*, institutional certification, and mastery of the *turath* (classical

corpus). The production and validation of religious knowledge were organized through institutions such as pesantren, national fatwa councils, and established universities. However, contemporary scholarship demonstrates that digital infrastructures have fundamentally undermined this centralized model of power (Tabaika & Roibin, 2025). Tabaika, Barizi, and Arif (2025) argue that digital da'wah reconstructs authority as mediated by media performance rather than inherited scholarly capital. Authority becomes relational and continuously negotiated through audience interaction. Similarly, Sirait's (2024) ethnographic work on Indonesian online preachers reveals that digital religious leaders cultivate performative personas grounded in piety, nationalism, and lifestyle aesthetics to cultivate influence. This shift indicates a transformation from credential based authority to legitimacy founded on personal branding and audience appeal.

Baidawi (2025) conceptualizes these actors as micro celebrity *da'i*, whose authority is reproduced through platform presence and fan economies rather than official status. The digital preacher emerges not merely as a transmitter of doctrine but as an entrepreneur of religious meaning actively engaged in influencer culture. This transformation restructures the symbolic economy of Islamic knowledge: legitimacy now depends on charisma, emotional resonance, and algorithmic amplification alongside—or sometimes in place of—scholarly depth. Notably, Fauzi et al. (2026) demonstrate that in the Egyptian context, the "digital minbar" exemplifies a hybrid space where traditional scholars strategically leverage platform affordances to maintain relevance. This suggests that digital authority does not entirely supplant institutional authority but produces hybridized forms negotiated between legacy institutions and emergent digital actors.

## 4.2. Algorithmic Governance: The Politics of Computational Visibility

A critical intervention in recent literature concerns the role of algorithms as active participants in religious discourse. Fuadi (2025) introduces the concept of "Islamic algorithms" to elucidate how platform logics shape the visibility and legitimacy of religious actors and their communication strategies. Algorithmic systems prioritize engagement metrics—watch time, likes, comments—over scholarly accuracy, thereby restructuring religious hierarchies around optimization for statistical performance. Akib, Fauziyah, and Hasanah (2025) extend this argument by demonstrating how algorithmic systems within social media environments shape hadith interpretation. They contend that algorithmic authority produces selective amplification, favoring simplified and emotive readings over complex scholarly discourse. This phenomenon, which they term "algorithmic reductionism," compresses intricate jurisprudential traditions into easily digestible, short form content optimized for platform demands.

Fitriansyah and Lubis (2023) further illustrate how preachers strategically optimize their da'wah content to align with algorithmic logics, using the case of Habib Ja'far to demonstrate that religious actors are not merely passive subjects of algorithms but active agents navigating platform constraints. However, the power dynamic remains asymmetrical: algorithms function as non human epistemic curators that quietly determine what becomes authoritative within digital Islam. This body of scholarship collectively reconceives authority as increasingly technologically mediated, wherein religious truth becomes entangled with computational visibility in ways that produce what might be termed "platformized orthodoxy."

## 4.3. The Fragmentation of Juristic Authority: Fatwas in the Digital Marketplace

Scholarship on online fatwas reveals significant transformations in Islamic legal practice. Traditionally, fatwa issuance was institutionalized within structured systems ensuring methodological rigor and peer accountability. Hamdani (2023) documents how online muftis now issue rulings through social media, email, and comment boxes, often responding to complex theological queries in real time. This practice disrupts the temporality and deliberative character of Islamic jurisprudence. Masruha et al. (2025)

characterize the digitization of fatwas as the transfer of Islamic legal authority into a decentralized marketplace. This creates a "fatwa on demand" environment where individuals engage in what scholars term "fatwa shopping"—selecting rulings that align with personal preferences or ideological orientations. The mufti mustafti relationship is thus transformed from an institutionally mediated consultative process into a consumer centered transaction.

Fauzi et al. (2026) observe that while digital fatwas enhance accessibility and broaden reach, they simultaneously erode collective scholarly deliberation and blur the distinction between authoritative legal opinion and mass commentary. This environment facilitates the proliferation of anomalous or decontextualized rulings, generating interpretive fragmentation in the absence of uniform vetting mechanisms. Ibrahim's (2024) study of Northern Nigeria contextualizes online fatwa practices within broader infrastructural changes, emphasizing the necessity of situating digital authority within local socio political and economic contexts rather than treating it as a globally uniform phenomenon.

## 4.4. The Stratified Ummah: Digital Capital and Socio Religious Hierarchy

Although digital platforms are often celebrated as democratizing forces for religious knowledge, recent scholarship complicates this narrative by revealing emergent forms of stratification. Zaman et al. (2025) argue that digital platforms transform Islamic solidarity from territorially grounded communal belonging into networked affiliations structured by usernames, follower counts, and engagement metrics. The digital ummah, far from being egalitarian, constitutes a stratified space where symbolic capital—accumulated through digital literacy, aesthetic presentation, and algorithmic optimization—becomes a primary source of influence. Sirait's (2024) research demonstrates that digital preachers cultivate visual coherence and lifestyle aesthetics to signal authenticity. Within this context, piety becomes performative and visually curated, potentially reducing religious identity to consumable content. Authority becomes increasingly associated with

visual branding and marketability rather than theological expertise, raising critical questions about the commercialization of da'wah and the integration of religion with influencer capitalism.

## 4.5. Participatory Hermeneutics: Audiences as Co Producers of Religious Meaning

A final stream of scholarship focuses on the participatory dimensions of digital religious publics. Roni (2026) analyzes audience contestation surrounding a controversial lecture by Ustaz Evie Effendi, demonstrating how comment sections function as sites of theological negotiation. Audiences are not passive consumers but active participants who interpret, critique, and validate religious authority. This participatory dynamic generates what might be termed "public hermeneutics," wherein orthodoxy is negotiated collectively in real time. However, this openness simultaneously fosters polarization and echo chambers, as algorithms tend to reinforce ideological homogeneity (Sirait, 2024). The literature thus presents a paradox: digital Islam simultaneously democratizes religious discourse and fragments it, rendering authority more accessible yet more precarious, more visible yet more dependent on platform governance.

Across diverse contexts—Indonesia, Egypt, Nigeria, and transnational Muslim digital publics—the literature coalesces around the thesis that Islamic authority is undergoing structural reconfiguration (Ibrahim, 2024). However, several gaps remain. First, comparative cross regional research that examines the intersection of algorithmic governance with local political religious institutions is scarce. Second, while studies often focus on single platforms, there is limited research on cross platform authority dynamics (e.g., YouTube versus TikTok versus Instagram). Third, theoretical engagement with broader frameworks—mediatization theory, platform capitalism, sociology of knowledge—remains underdeveloped. This review positions Islamic authority in the digital age as a contested and ambivalent sphere shaped by institutional negotiation, algorithmic governance, consumer religiosity, and participatory publics. Rather than signaling the erosion of traditional authority, digitalization

restructures it into mobile, stratified, and platform specific forms of legitimacy.

## 5. Research Methodology: A Systematic Literature Review Approach

This study employs a qualitative systematic literature review (SLR) designed to critically examine the transformation of Islamic authority in the digital age, with particular focus on online fatwas, YouTube scholars, religious influencers, and the emergence of algorithmic Islam. The SLR method was selected due to the conceptual complexity, interdisciplinary character, and geographically dispersed nature of the phenomenon under study, necessitating systematic identification, assessment, and synthesis of existing scholarship rather than primary data collection.

The review draws on peer reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, doctoral theses, conference proceedings, and institutional fatwa documents published between 2015 and 2025, capturing the evolution and consolidation of digital religious practices over the past decade. Comprehensive searches were conducted in academic databases including Scopus, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Project MUSE. Official documents from recognized religious authorities— such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), JAKIM (Malaysia), and Dar al Ifta (Egypt)—were also consulted to establish a jurisprudential baseline for comparison with digital practices.

The search strategy encompassed both supply side (religious actors and institutions) and demand side (audience practices and consumption patterns) dimensions of digital Islam. Keywords included: Islamic authority, digital da'wah, online fatwa, algorithmic Islam, YouTube scholars, religious influencers, cyber imams, TikTok da'wah, digital ummah, fatwa shopping, algorithmic visibility, and performative piety. Boolean operators (AND/OR) were employed to refine results and ensure thematic precision.

Inclusion criteria required that publications directly address the intersection of Islamic jurisprudence, religious authority, and digital media, or critically explore how algorithms and platform infrastructures constitute religious discourse. Studies were required to be published in English and represent Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern, African, or Western Muslim contexts. Exclusion criteria eliminated studies concerned exclusively with non Islamic religious traditions, general political communication not explicitly connected to Islamic authority, and non peer reviewed opinion pieces lacking methodological rigor.

Analysis was structured around systematic thematic synthesis. Initial open coding identified recurring themes across the literature, which were subsequently synthesized into three overarching analytical categories: (1) From Sanad to Digital Capital, (2) Algorithmic Epistemology, and (3) Participatory Publics. To enhance validity and reliability, the review maintained transparency in search strategy, applied inclusion criteria consistently, and triangulated findings across different geographical settings. Ethical considerations included adherence to citation norms, accurate representation of authors' arguments, and reflexive awareness of potential biases in the literature—particularly tendencies toward either idealizing digital democratization or overstating religious fragmentation.

## 6. Findings: Mapping the Structural Transformations of Islamic Authority

The thematic analysis of the selected literature reveals that the transformation of Islamic authority in the digital era unfolds across five interconnected thematic domains. Collectively, these themes demonstrate that Islamic authority has not disappeared but has been reorganized within platformized spaces governed by engagement metrics, technological infrastructures, and audience interactivity.

### 6.1. The Shift from Credential Based to Performative Legitimacy

The first major finding concerns the transition from credential based authority to performative legitimacy. Traditionally, Islamic authority was predicated on *sanad* (scholarly lineage), institutional affiliation, and command of classical texts. However, digital spaces reward media proficiency, charisma, and aesthetic presentation

over formal accreditation (Baidawi, 2025). Authority becomes relational and continuously negotiated through metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and follower counts.

Sirait's (2024) ethnographic studies of Indonesian digital preachers reveal that online religious actors cultivate meticulously managed personas of piety, nationalism, and lifestyle branding to sustain presence and influence. Similarly, Baidawi (2025) characterizes these actors as micro celebrity *da'i* whose legitimacy derives from follower economies and emotional appeal rather than institutional endorsement. Fauzi et al. (2026) describe this phenomenon as an emerging "digital minbar" wherein clerical authority is realigned through hybrid forms that combine traditional scholarship with platform optimization strategies. These findings indicate that authority in digital Islam is not destroyed but repositioned, as inherited scholarly capital gives way to digitally mediated symbolic capital.

## 6.2. Algorithmic Curation as Epistemic Gatekeeping

The second prominent finding concerns algorithmic mediation as a structuring force in contemporary Islamic discourse. Digital platforms do not function as neutral distribution channels but operate as curators of religious content through opaque recommendation systems. Fuadi (2025) introduces the concept of "Islamic algorithms" to explain how platform logics shape communication strategies and determine which voices are amplified and which are suppressed. Engagement based metrics prioritize emotionally evocative, visually compelling, and easily consumable content over nuanced theological exposition.

Akib, Fauziyah, and Hasanah (2025) extend this argument by demonstrating how hadith interpretation is reconfigured within social media environments, with algorithmic systems favoring simplified readings while marginalizing complex scholarly discourse. This produces what they term "algorithmic reductionism"—the compression of theological complexity into short form content optimized for TikTok or Instagram Reels. Fitriansyah and Lubis (2023) show that preachers

strategically adapt to algorithmic logic through careful optimization of titles, thumbnails, and video structures to maximize visibility. Thus, algorithmic governance functions as a non human epistemic curator, quietly defining what becomes authoritative within digital Islam. Power becomes intertwined with computational visibility rather than purely scholarly validation.

## 6.3. The Marketization of Islamic Legal Discourse

A third critical finding concerns the digitization and marketization of fatwas. Historically, fatwa issuance was subject to institutional control and scholarly deliberation. However, social media platforms, comment sections, and livestreams now enable instantaneous responses to complex legal inquiries. Hamdani (2023) documents how this shift alters the temporality and hierarchical structures of Islamic jurisprudence, as online muftis issue rulings at unprecedented speed.

Masruha et al. (2025) characterize this transformation as the emergence of a decentralized fatwa marketplace, wherein users engage in "fatwa shopping"—selecting rulings that align with personal preferences or ideological commitments. This consumerist orientation reconstitutes the mufti mustafti relationship from a structured consultation into a transactional exchange. Fauzi et al. (2026) observe that while digital fatwas enhance accessibility and broaden reach, they simultaneously erode collective scholarly deliberation and blur the distinction between authoritative legal opinion and mass commentary. This environment facilitates the proliferation of anomalous or decontextualized rulings, generating interpretive fragmentation in the absence of uniform vetting mechanisms.

## 6.4. The Emergence of Participatory Theological Discourse

The fourth finding concerns the participatory dynamics of digital religious publics. Roni (2026) demonstrates that comment sections on platforms such as YouTube function as sites of active theological contestation, wherein audiences critically engage with, challenge, and reinterpret religious pronouncements. This participatory

dynamic generates what may be termed "public hermeneutics"—a mode of interpretation wherein orthodoxy is negotiated collectively rather than imposed by clerical elites.

However, this democratization carries inherent tensions. Algorithmic reinforcement of user preferences tends to create echo chambers and ideological polarization (Fuadi, 2025). Ibrahim (2024) situates these dynamics within broader digital infrastructures in Northern Nigeria, demonstrating how online Islamic practices disrupt institutional authority while simultaneously fostering fragmentation and ideological escalation. The literature thus reveals a fundamental paradox: digital platforms simultaneously democratize religious discourse and fragment it, rendering authority more accessible yet more contested.

### 6.5. Digital Capital and the Stratification of the Ummah

The fifth finding reveals that despite discourses of democratization, digital Islam reproduces and even amplifies social stratification. Zaman et al. (2025) demonstrate that digital platforms transform Islamic solidarity from territorially grounded communal belonging into networked affiliations structured by usernames, follower counts, and engagement metrics. The digital ummah is far from egalitarian; it constitutes a stratified space wherein symbolic capital—accumulated through digital literacy, production quality, and algorithmic optimization—determines influence and visibility.

Sirait (2024) and Baidawi (2025) illustrate how performative piety functions as a mechanism of differentiation, with curated images, branded lifestyles, and aesthetic coherence serving as markers of authenticity and authority. Islamic discourse becomes increasingly integrated with influencer capitalism, wherein digital capital—followers, monetization capacity, engagement rates—emerges as the new currency of religious prestige. This hierarchy reflects and potentially amplifies existing socio economic inequalities, raising critical questions about the accessibility and representativeness of digital Islamic authority.

Across diverse geographical contexts—Indonesia, Egypt, Nigeria, and transnational Muslim digital publics—the findings converge on a central thesis: Islamic authority is being restructured rather than eroded. Power is reconstituted as performative, algorithmically filtered, fragmented across digital fatwa markets, contested within participatory publics, and stratified by digital capital accumulation. The digital age generates hybrid forms of authority wherein traditional scholarship, platform governance, and audience interactivity converge in complex and often contradictory configurations.

### 7. Discussion: Reconstructing Islamic Authority at the Algorithmic Intersection

The digitalization of Islamic religious life represents not merely a process of technological adaptation but a structural reconfiguration of power, knowledge production, and communal formation. Classical Islamic authority—historically grounded in *isnad* based transmission, institutional accreditation, and mastery of esoteric knowledge within institutions such as Al Azhar University and traditional pesantren networks—increasingly intersects with networked models of legitimacy predicated on metrics of visibility and platform logic (Zaman et al., 2025). Contemporary scholarship illustrates that online da'wah reconstitutes authority in individualized and participatory forms wherein charisma, media fluency, and aesthetic presentation function as alternative qualifications. Follower counts, engagement rates, and algorithmic amplification constitute a form of symbolic digital capital that fundamentally reshapes hierarchies of religious influence.

Platform algorithms, functioning as non human epistemic curators, systematically privilege emotionally compelling and easily digestible content, thereby promoting the reduction of complex jurisprudential discourse to decontextualized religious soundbites. This algorithmic reductionism ensures that provocative or controversial content receives disproportionate amplification while simultaneously fostering echo chambers that reinforce existing doctrinal commitments (Bano & Hafeez, 2025).

Simultaneously, digital publics have emerged as active participants in theological production: interactive features transform audiences into co interpreters who challenge, confirm, or reinterpret fatwas in real time (Roni, 2026). These participatory dynamics disrupt traditional institutions such as Majelis Ulama Indonesia, which now must legitimate its rulings within competitive digital spaces where authority is continuously negotiated.

The proliferation of monetized religious content raises ethical and jurisprudential challenges, prompting the development of frameworks for digital fiqh. For instance, MUI Fatwa No. 1 of 2024 concerning zakat payments to content creators exemplifies how classical jurisprudence is being reinterpreted to address digitally dependent economies. However, despite narratives of democratization, digital Islam simultaneously reproduces stratification: usernames rather than communal belonging structure access, while differential access to technological infrastructure, aesthetic literacy, and monetization pathways create a layered digital ummah (Zaman et al., 2025).

Collectively, the literature suggests that Islamic authority in the digital era is neither undermined nor secularized but is reconstituted in hybrid forms wherein classical scholarship, influencer culture, computational governance, participatory publics, and platform capitalism converge to produce a dynamic, visibility oriented, and economically complex religious order. This transformation demands that scholars of religion move beyond binary frameworks of decline or democratization and instead develop more nuanced theoretical approaches capable of capturing the entanglement of theological tradition with algorithmic modernity.

## 8. Conclusion: Toward a Theory of Platformized Islamic Authority

This systematic review has demonstrated that Islamic authority in the digital age has undergone fundamental structural transformation rather than simple decline or secular dispossession. The transition from institutionally grounded, *isnad* based legitimacy to platform mediated visibility constitutes a paradigmatic shift in the production, circulation, and validation of religious knowledge. Traditional sources of authority—historically monopolized by institutions such as Al Azhar University or national fatwa organizations like Majelis Ulama Indonesia—no longer exercise exclusive interpretive control. Instead, authority is increasingly negotiated within algorithmically structured spaces wherein engagement metrics, digital literacy, and media performance emerge as new forms of symbolic capital.

The study has identified five interrelated transformations. First, religious legitimacy has shifted toward metrics: charisma, aesthetic presentation, and follower economies now supplement—or in some cases supplant—formal scholarly qualifications. Second, algorithmic infrastructures function as non human epistemic curators, privileging emotionally appealing and highly engaging content over nuanced juristic discourse. Third, digital publics engage in active theological negotiation, with audiences becoming co producers of religious meaning through comment based contestation and fatwa shopping. Fourth, the emergence of digital fiqh demonstrates the adaptability of Islamic jurisprudence, with scholars reinterpreting classical categories to address monetized content creation, online transactions, and algorithmically structured livelihoods. Fifth, despite its democratizing potential, digital Islam reproduces new hierarchies based on technological access, media proficiency, and platform presence, creating a stratified digital ummah.

Collectively, these findings underscore that digital Islam constitutes a distinct epistemic order wherein classical jurisprudence, influencer culture, participatory publics, and computational governance converge. Rather than weakening Islamic normativity, digital transformation compels its adaptation within the conditions of platform capitalism and networked modernity. Future research must move beyond the binary opposition of decline and democratization to examine the long term implications of algorithmic authority for doctrinal coherence, spiritual authenticity (*ikhlas*), and institutional trust. Understanding these dynamics is essential for

comprehending how Islamic authority will evolve within an increasingly datafied religious landscape.

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