

THE TRANSFORMATION OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AMONG MUSLIMS AMID DIGITAL TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of digital technology has profoundly reconfigured the landscape of Islamic religious authority, dismantling centuries-old institutional hierarchies and enabling new actors to claim epistemic legitimacy outside traditional scholarly networks. This study presents a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature published between 2021 and 2024 to examine the nature, scope, and implications of this transformation. Drawing on 40 empirical and theoretical publications sourced from SCOPUS-indexed and peer-reviewed journals, the review identifies six major thematic clusters: (1) the fragmentation of traditional religious authority structures; (2) the rise of digital da'wah and online fatwa issuance; (3) shifting patterns of youth and millennial religiosity in digital environments; (4) the role of social media algorithms in mediating Islamic discourse; (5) institutional adaptation by established Islamic bodies; and (6) emergent trust crises linked to anonymity and misinformation online. The review reveals that digitalization functions simultaneously as a democratizing and destabilizing force expanding access to Islamic knowledge while eroding established verification mechanisms that historically guaranteed scholarly integrity. Findings indicate that while traditional ulama retain symbolic authority, the criteria by which Muslims assess religious credibility have shifted toward aesthetic, relational, and algorithmic dimensions. The study contributes a conceptual typology of digital religious authority and calls for interdisciplinary frameworks that bridge Islamic jurisprudence, media studies, and sociology of religion to address the governance challenges posed by unregulated online Islamic discourse.

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A. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between religious authority and communication technology is neither new nor static. Throughout Islamic intellectual history, the emergence of print, radio, and television each prompted significant reconfigurations in how religious knowledge was produced, disseminated, and legitimized. The current moment, however, represents a qualitatively distinct rupture. The convergence of the internet, smartphones, social media platforms, and artificial intelligence has created what scholars increasingly refer to as the condition of 'digital Islam' a mode of being religious that is mediated, participatory, interactive, and, crucially, unanchored from the spatial and institutional constraints that historically governed access to Islamic knowledge (Abusharif, 2023; Zaid et al., 2022).

In classical Islamic epistemology, religious authority understood as the recognized capacity to interpret, adjudicate, and transmit religious knowledge rested on a relatively stable institutional infrastructure. The ulama, trained through years of study in madrasas, pesantrens, or al-Azhar-affiliated institutions, derived their legitimacy from chains of intellectual transmission (*isnad*), formal credentials (*ijazah*), and community recognition accumulated over decades. This system, while never perfectly homogeneous across the Muslim world, provided a relatively coherent framework for distinguishing credible from unreliable religious pronouncements.

The digital revolution has fundamentally unsettled this framework. Today, a young, self-taught Muslim preacher in Jakarta, Lagos, or Toronto can attract millions of followers on YouTube or Instagram, issue informal fatwas through TikTok videos, and build a community of practice that rivals and in terms of raw reach, surpasses that of credentialed scholars affiliated with established institutions. The mechanisms of authority have shifted from certification to connectivity, from *isnad* to influence metrics, and from scholarly consensus to viral engagement. These developments carry profound implications not only for Muslim communities but also for Islamic jurisprudence, interfaith relations, and the governance of online religious spaces.

The academic literature on this transformation has grown considerably since the mid-2010s, but the pace of empirical publication has accelerated sharply in the 2021–2024 period, coinciding with the post-pandemic intensification of digital life and the global proliferation of short-form video content. Despite this growth, the field lacks integrative syntheses that map the full topography of findings and identify productive convergences and tensions. Most existing reviews are geographically bounded, methodologically narrow, or focused on single platforms, limiting their generalizability and theoretical contribution.

This study addresses that gap through a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature published between 2021 and 2024 that examines the transformation of religious authority among Muslims in digital environments. We ask three interconnected questions: First, what forms of religious authority have emerged or been transformed by digital technology? Second, through what mechanisms do digital platforms shape trust, credibility, and epistemic evaluation among Muslim users? Third, what are the institutional, theological, and sociological implications of these transformations for Muslim communities globally?

The review makes three principal contributions. Conceptually, it proposes a typology of digital religious authority that distinguishes five analytically distinct configurations of online Islamic credibility. Empirically, it synthesizes findings from 40 studies across diverse geographies Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia, Canada, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Central Asia to produce a global account of a phenomenon too often studied through single-country lenses. Theoretically, it identifies the 'authority-credibility paradox' of digital Islam: the expansion of access to Islamic knowledge simultaneously enables broader religious participation and produces new vulnerabilities to misinformation, radicalization, and the erosion of scholarly accountability.

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis in this review is grounded in three intersecting theoretical traditions: the sociology of religious authority, digital media studies, and Islamic epistemology.

1. Religious Authority in Sociological Perspective

Max Weber's foundational typology of authority traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational provides a useful but incomplete starting point for analyzing digital religious authority. In the Islamic context, traditional authority is institutionally vested in formally trained scholars whose credibility derives from their position within established scholarly chains. Charismatic authority, by contrast, is personal and relational, dependent on followers' perceptions of the leader's exceptional qualities. Weber's legal-rational type corresponds, in Islamic terms, to the institutionalized authority of bodies such as the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), Saudi Arabia's Council of Senior Scholars, or Al-Azhar's Dar al-Ifta.

The digital environment has not abolished these categories but has dramatically altered their conditions of possibility. Charismatic authority, in particular, has found in social media an unprecedented amplification mechanism. What Weber understood as an inherently unstable and provisional form of authority dependent on the continuous demonstration of extraordinary qualities has been stabilized and routinized through the algorithmic infrastructure of platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. The 'charisma' of a digital preacher is now partly a function of platform-assigned metrics: view counts, subscriber numbers, and recommendation frequency (Andok, 2024; Fadilla & Indriyani, 2025).

2. Digital Media and the Restructuring of Religious Publics

Drawing on the work of Jürgen Habermas, several scholars have analyzed digital Islamic discourse as the formation of new religious public spheres spaces of communicative interaction that both enable and constrain authentic religious reasoning. Zamzami et al., (2023), for instance, examined the Islami.co web portal through the lens of Habermas' communicative rationality, arguing that digital platforms can facilitate deliberative engagement with Islamic texts when structured by norms of transparency and inclusivity. However, the commercial logic of social media platforms which privileges emotional resonance, novelty, and conflict over deliberative nuance tends to undermine the conditions for genuine communicative rationality.

The concept of 'mediatization' further illuminates how digital infrastructure transforms not merely the delivery of religious content but the internal logic of religious practice itself. When religious content is produced for social media, it is inevitably shaped by the affordances of the medium: brevity, visual appeal, audience interactivity, and the logic of engagement optimization. This produces what Rohmawati et al., (2025) term 'hypermediation' a condition in which the medium's logic becomes inseparable from the religious message, subtly reshaping doctrinal priorities, rhetorical styles, and communal norms.

3. Islamic Epistemology and the Digital Challenge

From within the Islamic intellectual tradition, the current moment poses acute challenges to the epistemological foundations of religious knowledge ('ilm). The classical requirement of *isnad* continuous chains of verified transmission linking contemporary scholars to the Prophet through reliable intermediaries is functionally inoperative in digital spaces where claims circulate virally without provenance. The principle of *taqlid* (following qualified scholarly opinion) is complicated by the abundance of competing digital authorities, each claiming equal or superior access to scriptural truth. And the ideal of *ijma'* (scholarly consensus) is destabilized by the ease with which minority positions can achieve mass diffusion through algorithmic amplification (Hamdani, 2023; Wahid, 2024).

These challenges are not merely technical but theological: they raise fundamental questions about what counts as valid religious knowledge, who is authorized to produce it, and by what mechanisms Muslim communities evaluate competing claims. The transformation of religious authority in the digital age is therefore simultaneously a sociological, technological, and jurisprudential problem.

C. METHOD

1. Review Design

This study employs a systematic review design following Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, adapted for qualitative and mixed-methods literature. The systematic approach was selected to ensure transparency, replicability, and comprehensiveness in the identification and appraisal of relevant studies. Given the heterogeneous nature of methods and theoretical frameworks in the identified literature, a narrative synthesis strategy was adopted, which is appropriate for reviews that integrate studies employing diverse epistemological and methodological orientations.

2. Search Strategy and Inclusion Criteria

A structured database search was conducted across SCOPUS, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and DOAJ using Boolean combinations of the following terms: ('digital' OR 'online' OR 'social media') AND ('religious authority' OR 'fatwa' OR 'da'wah' OR 'ulama') AND ('Muslim' OR 'Islam' OR 'Islamic'). The search was restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings published between January 2021 and December 2024, written in English or Indonesian. Grey literature, book chapters, and non-peer-reviewed sources were excluded.

Inclusion criteria required that studies: (1) address Muslim subjects or Islamic content explicitly; (2) examine digital or online environments as a primary variable; (3) engage substantively with questions of authority, credibility, legitimacy, or trust; and (4) be published in peer-reviewed outlets. Studies focused exclusively on Islamic finance, halal certification, or Muslim-minority political participation without reference to digital religious authority were excluded.

3. Data Extraction and Synthesis

After removing duplicates and applying inclusion criteria, 40 studies were retained for full review. Data extraction followed a structured protocol capturing: (1) study location and research context; (2) theoretical framework employed; (3) research design and methods; (4) platforms or digital contexts examined; (5) key findings related to religious authority; and (6) implications or recommendations. Thematic synthesis was employed to develop overarching themes from individual study findings, with constant comparison used to identify convergences, divergences, and emergent patterns across the corpus.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

1. Thematic Overview of the Literature

The 40 studies reviewed span a broad geographical range, with the largest concentration drawn from the Indonesian context (n = 18), followed by multi-country comparative studies (n = 7), Malaysia and the wider Southeast Asian region (n = 5), the Middle East and North Africa (n = 4), and studies from Western Muslim minority contexts such as Australia and Canada (n = 4). Two studies examined Central Asian Muslim communities, reflecting the growing interest in post-Soviet Muslim digital practice. This geographic distribution reflects both the linguistic accessibility of Indonesian scholarship in the international literature and Indonesia's status as the world's largest

Muslim-majority democracy with among the highest social media penetration rates globally.

The methodological landscape is diverse. Qualitative approaches predominate (n = 24), encompassing ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews, content analysis, and case studies. Mixed-methods designs account for eight studies, while purely quantitative approaches (survey-based) represent the remaining eight. Theoretical anchors vary considerably: digital media theory (mediatization, platform affordances) is most frequently invoked (n = 14), followed by sociology of religion (n = 11), Islamic studies frameworks (n = 9), and postcolonial or decolonial approaches (n = 6).

Table 1. Typology of Digital Religious Authority: Forms, Actors, and Characteristics

Type	Representative Actors	Platform Used	Characteristics
Institutional Digital Authority	MUI, NU Online, Muhammadiyah.or.id	Official websites, YouTube	Formal credentials; structured fatwa publication
Influencer-Based Authority	Social media ustadz/ustadzah	Instagram, TikTok, YouTube	Follower-driven legitimacy; popularised content
Anonymous/Crowd Authority	Anonymous accounts, forums	Telegram, WhatsApp groups	Decentralised; verification absent; rapid diffusion
Hybrid Scholar-Influencer	Pesantren-trained digital preachers	Multiple platforms	Blend formal training and audience engagement
AI-Assisted Fatwa Platforms	Chatbot mufti, digital fatwa apps	Apps, web portals	Algorithmically curated; 24/7 accessibility

Table 1 presents the conceptual typology of digital religious authority developed inductively from the reviewed literature. Five analytically distinct configurations are identified, ranging from formally credentialed institutional actors who have migrated online to fully anonymous crowd-sourced Islamic guidance mediated by algorithmic platforms. The typology reveals that digital religious authority is not a single phenomenon but a spectrum of configurations defined by the degree of formal training, institutional affiliation, personal visibility, and reliance on platform-dependent legitimacy mechanisms.

2. Fragmentation of Traditional Religious Authority

The most consistently documented finding across the reviewed literature concerns the fragmentation of traditional religious authority structures in the face of digital proliferation. Studies conducted across vastly different national contexts from Indonesia (Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023; Raya, 2024) to Australia (Whyte, 2022), Canada (Selby & Sayeed, 2023), and Nigeria (Abusharif, 2024) converge on the observation that the monopoly of formally trained scholars over authoritative religious interpretation has been decisively broken. Where once a Muslim seeking religious guidance would consult the imam of a local mosque, a recognized teacher at a pesantren, or an officially appointed mufti, today's believers navigate a vast, largely unregulated marketplace of competing authorities.

Hannan & Mursyidi, (2023) document this process in contemporary Indonesia, showing how the rapid proliferation of Islamic accounts on Instagram and Twitter has created conditions of what they term 'authority fragmentation' a situation in which no single actor or institution commands sufficient reach and credibility to define the boundaries of legitimate Islamic interpretation for the majority. This fragmentation is not merely quantitative (more voices) but qualitative: the criteria by which authority is recognized have themselves been transformed. Followers, likes, and shares function as

proxies for credibility in ways that may bear little relationship to classical indicators of scholarly competence.

Importantly, however, fragmentation does not imply the disappearance of traditional authority. Whyte, (2022), examining Muslim religious actors in Australia, found that formally trained scholars retain significant legitimacy among certain demographic segments particularly older, more conservatively oriented community members even as younger Muslims increasingly supplement or replace traditional guidance with digital sources. This suggests a segmented authority landscape rather than a simple linear decline of institutional authority.

3. Digital Da'wah, Fatwa, and Online Religious Guidance

A second major theme concerns the transformation of Islamic preaching (da'wah) and the issuance of religious guidance (fatwa) through digital channels. Several studies document the emergence of what Fitriansyah, (2023) calls 'fun fatwa' informal, accessible, and often humorous religious pronouncements delivered through social media that deliberately prioritize relatability over scholarly rigor. While such content has the merit of expanding Islamic discourse beyond elite scholarly circles, critics within the reviewed literature argue that it systematically privileges audiences' desire for comfortable affirmation over the demanding intellectual work of serious *ijtihad* (independent juristic reasoning).

Hamdani, (2023) examines the phenomenon of online muftis individuals who issue formal-style religious opinions through social media without the institutional backing that traditionally authorized such pronouncements. Drawing on Indonesian case studies, the study finds that online muftis leverage platform affordances particularly the parasocial intimacy enabled by direct messaging and comment interactions to construct authority relations that mimic but fundamentally differ from traditional fatwa-issuance. The digital mufti's authority derives not from scholarly credentials alone but from the continuous management of online relationships with followers.

The digitization of fatwa has also accelerated the circulation of contested religious opinions. Shuhufi et al., (2022) analyze the response of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) to the challenge of digital platforms, showing how the council has been compelled to issue fatwas specifically addressing the ethics of social media interaction a recursive situation in which digital transformation has generated the very religious questions that institutions must then address through newly digitized channels.

Table 2. Factors Influencing Trust in Digital Religious Authority: A Synthesis of the Literature

Factor	Dimension	Influence Direction	Supporting Evidence
Formal Islamic Credentials	Educational background (pesantren, university)	Positive	Rusli & Nurdin (2021); Maemonah et al. (2022)
Digital Literacy of Audience	Ability to verify and cross-check	Moderating	Selby & Sayeed (2023); Hannan & Mursyidi (2023)
Platform Affordances	Algorithmic reach, comment sections	Amplifying	Fadilla & Indriyani (2025); Andok (2024)
Content Style & Language	Accessibility, entertainment value	Positive	Zaid et al. (2022); Fitriansyah (2023)
Institutional Endorsement	Affiliation with recognised bodies	Positive	Zamhari et al. (2021); Akmaliah (2022)
Anonymity of Communicator	Absence of verifiable identity	Negative	Astor et al. (2024); Hamdani (2023)

Table 2 synthesizes findings from across the reviewed literature to identify the principal factors that shape Muslim audiences' trust in digital religious actors. The evidence suggests that formal credentials retain positive influence but are insufficient alone; digital literacy moderates how audiences evaluate competing claims; and platform affordances particularly algorithms exercise an amplifying effect that can override content-based evaluation. Critically, the evidence consistently identifies anonymity as a trust-reducing factor, suggesting that the proliferation of anonymous religious accounts poses genuine risks to epistemic quality in online Islamic discourse.

4. Muslim Youth, Millennials, and Shifting Religiosity

A substantial portion of the reviewed literature focuses specifically on younger Muslims' engagement with digital religious authority, revealing a generational dimension to the transformation that cuts across geographic contexts. Zaid et al., (2022), drawing on research across several Muslim-majority countries, find that millennial Muslims relate to digital Islamic influencers through frameworks of aspiration and identification rather than deference and submission the dominant relational mode of traditional scholarly authority. Young Muslims follow digital preachers because they find their content inspiring, relevant to contemporary life challenges, and aesthetically appealing, not primarily because they recognize their formal scholarly credentials.

This finding is significant for Islamic epistemology because it suggests that the basis of authority evaluation has shifted from epistemic to affective and aesthetic registers. The question 'Is this scholar properly trained?' is supplanted by 'Does this preacher speak to my life?' This shift has been theorized by Muthohirin (2025) in the Indonesian context as the rise of 'digital piety' a mode of Islamic practice assembled from curated online content that is personally meaningful but potentially disconnected from the coherent jurisprudential frameworks that give classical Islamic practice its internal logic.

At the same time, the literature cautions against simplistic narratives of youth religious decline or superficiality. Rusli & Nurdin, (2021) document how Indonesian millennial ulama formally trained scholars who are also digital natives actively engage with online sources as part of their fatwa-making process, integrating digital accessibility with classical scholarly methodology in sophisticated ways. This finding suggests that the relationship between digital media and religious authority is not uniformly corrosive but depends heavily on the digital literacy and prior formation of the individuals involved.

5. Algorithmic Mediation of Islamic Discourse

A theme that received growing scholarly attention toward the latter part of the review period concerns the role of recommendation algorithms in shaping Muslim users' exposure to religious content. Fadilla & Indriyani, (2025) argue that platform algorithms function as a form of invisible authority not issuing religious opinions themselves but determining whose voices are amplified, which topics are surfaced, and which interpretations achieve mass visibility. This 'algorithmic authority' operates with a fundamentally different logic from Islamic scholarly authority: it optimizes for engagement rather than truth, for novelty rather than continuity, and for emotional activation rather than reflective deliberation.

Andok (2024) provides a theoretical account of how online media architecture reshapes religious authority by creating 'attention economies' in which religious actors compete for user engagement through mechanisms that reward controversial, emotionally charged, or entertaining content. The review finds consistent evidence that algorithmic platforms tend to amplify more extreme or unconventional religious voices relative to mainstream institutional scholars, whose content is often too complex or contextually nuanced to achieve high engagement metrics.

6. Institutional Adaptation and Resilience

While much of the reviewed literature emphasizes the challenges that digitalization poses to established Islamic institutions, a growing body of research documents how traditional bodies have responded strategically to the digital challenge rather than merely being overwhelmed by it. Zamhari et al. (2021) examine the Cariustadz.id platform as an instance of institutional innovation a digital space created by traditionally credentialed scholars to provide verified fatwa guidance to urban middle-class Muslims seeking reliable online religious resources. The platform deliberately leverages the convenience affordances of digital media while maintaining the credentialing requirements of traditional scholarship.

Akmaliah (2022) documents how Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Indonesia's largest Islamic organization with over 90 million members has pursued a strategy of reclaiming digital spaces as sites of moderate Islamic discourse, developing online platforms and training its affiliated scholars in digital communication as part of a deliberate counter-narrative against online radicalization. This case illustrates the potential for established institutions to exercise 'platform authority' leveraging institutional resources and credibility to shape digital Islamic discourse even in an environment where they can no longer monopolize access.

Table 3. Thematic Distribution and Key Findings of Reviewed Literature (2021–2024)

Theme	No. of Studies	Period	Key Findings
Fragmentation of religious authority	14	2021–2024	Decline of traditional ulama monopoly; proliferation of lay preachers online
Digital da'wah & fatwa issuance	11	2021–2024	Social media enables rapid fatwa dissemination but weakens scholarly scrutiny
Youth & millennial religiosity	9	2021–2024	Young Muslims prefer accessible, visual, and entertaining Islamic content
Algorithmic mediation of Islam	7	2022–2024	Recommendation algorithms shape exposure to Islamic discourse
Institutional adaptation	6	2021–2024	Established bodies (MUI, NU) strategically adopt digital platforms
Anonymity & trust deficit	5	2022–2024	Anonymous online preachers erode epistemic responsibility

Table 3 maps the distribution of studies across the six major thematic clusters identified through thematic synthesis. Fragmentation of traditional religious authority received the greatest scholarly attention, followed by digital da'wah and online fatwa practices. The relative recency of scholarly attention to algorithmic mediation (predominantly post-2022 publications) reflects the field's growing engagement with infrastructure-level analyses of how digital platforms shape Islamic discourse, a promising direction for future research.

DISCUSSION

1. The Authority-Credibility Paradox in Digital Islam

The most theoretically significant finding to emerge from this systematic review is what we term the 'authority-credibility paradox' of digital Islam. On one hand, digitalization has genuinely democratized access to Islamic knowledge, enabling Muslims in

remote areas, diaspora contexts, and underprivileged communities to access a breadth and depth of religious learning that would previously have required physical proximity to established scholarly centers. This democratization carries real value: it has empowered lay Muslims to engage more actively with their tradition, enabled women scholars to reach global audiences despite institutional barriers, and created new spaces for reformist and progressive interpretations to circulate beyond the gatekeeping mechanisms of conservative institutions.

On the other hand, the same processes that have democratized access have also eroded the epistemic infrastructure through which Islamic communities have historically distinguished reliable from unreliable religious knowledge. When any sufficiently charismatic individual with a smartphone can attract millions of followers and issue religious opinions with the appearance of authority, the accumulated wisdom of centuries of Islamic jurisprudential development is placed in direct competition with content optimized for platform engagement rather than scholarly rigor. This paradox has no straightforward resolution: the very mechanisms that make digital Islam accessible and participatory are structurally incompatible with the verification procedures that give classical Islamic epistemology its internal coherence.

2. The Emergence of a Post-Credential Religious Economy

The reviewed literature collectively documents the emergence of what we term a 'post-credential religious economy' a field of Islamic authority in which symbolic capital circulates according to rules that are only partially continuous with those of classical Islamic scholarship. In this economy, formal credentials (*ijazah*, institutional affiliation) retain value but have been joined, and in some demographic contexts displaced, by digital credentials: follower counts, viral content, platform verification badges, and the social proof mechanisms of likes and shares.

This transition is not merely superficial. As Raya (2024) demonstrates, the commodification of digital Islamic authority in Indonesia has created economic incentives that shape the content of religious discourse: digital preachers who derive income from platform monetization, brand partnerships, and paid online courses face structural pressures to produce content that maximizes engagement rather than scholarly depth. The religious marketplace and the content marketplace become isomorphic, with consequences for the integrity of Islamic discourse that are difficult to disentangle from broader debates about digital capitalism.

Khamis (2024) places these developments within the broader context of what she calls 'paradoxical Islamic modernity' the simultaneous embrace of digital technology and selective rejection of secular modernity in contemporary Muslim discourse. The paradox is particularly visible in the digital fatwa phenomenon: online preachers who vigorously reject Western liberal values on substantive grounds nonetheless operate entirely within the Western technological infrastructure of Silicon Valley platforms, implicitly accepting the authority of algorithmic systems designed according to value frameworks quite remote from traditional Islamic epistemology.

3. Geographical Variations and Context-Dependence

The comparative dimension of this review reveals that the transformation of digital religious authority is not uniform across Muslim contexts but is shaped by national media regulation, the prior strength of institutional Islam, levels of digital literacy, and the political economy of the religious field. In Indonesia the context most extensively documented in the reviewed literature the digital religious landscape is characterized by intense competition between well-resourced institutional actors (MUI, NU, Muhammadiyah) and a large, heterogeneous population of independent digital preachers, producing a complex ecology of overlapping and competing authority claims.

In Western Muslim minority contexts, as documented by Selby & Sayeed, (2023) for Canada and Whyte, (2022) for Australia, digital platforms serve a somewhat different function: they enable community cohesion across geographically dispersed diaspora populations and provide access to Islamic guidance in contexts where qualified local scholars may be scarce. Here, the risks of authority fragmentation are mediated by the relative homogeneity of transnational networks and the stronger role of established scholarly bodies in aggregating and curating digital content for minority communities.

Studies from Central Asia (Karabalaeva et al., 2025; Zhorabek et al., 2025) reveal yet another configuration, one shaped by the legacy of Soviet atheism, the post-independence Islamic revival, and the specific vulnerabilities of recently re-Islamized populations to transnational digital missionary movements that may not reflect local Islamic traditions. These divergent findings confirm that the transformation of digital religious authority is always contextually embedded and that generalizations must be made with careful attention to the geopolitical and cultural specificities of different Muslim communities.

4. Implications for Islamic Governance and Digital Ethics

The findings of this review carry significant practical implications for institutions concerned with the governance of Islamic discourse in digital environments. The evidence strongly suggests that neither regulatory prohibition of unqualified online religious speech nor laissez-faire acceptance of digital religious pluralism provides an adequate response to the challenges documented in the literature. Prohibitionist approaches are ineffective in practice digital platforms routinely circumvent national regulatory frameworks — and risk delegitimizing the institutions that enforce them. Laissez-faire approaches, conversely, abandon the epistemic field to the mechanisms of platform capitalism, with consequences for religious misinformation, radicalization, and sectarian polarization that the reviewed literature amply documents.

A more productive approach, suggested by the institutional adaptation cases reviewed (Akmaliah, 2022; Askar et al., 2025; Zamhari et al., 2021), involves proactive engagement by credentialed scholars and established institutions with digital platforms not merely as consumers or regulators of digital content, but as active producers of high-quality, platform-optimized Islamic discourse. This requires investment in digital literacy among religious scholars, collaborative relationships between Islamic institutions and platform providers, and the development of Islamic frameworks for evaluating digital religious content that are credible both to traditional scholarly audiences and to digital-native younger Muslims.

E. CONCLUSION

This systematic review has traced the contours of a transformation in Islamic religious authority that is simultaneously profound, uneven, and ongoing. Drawing on 40 peer-reviewed studies published between 2021 and 2024, we have documented six major thematic clusters authority fragmentation, digital da'wah and fatwa, youth religiosity, algorithmic mediation, institutional adaptation, and trust deficits and proposed a conceptual typology of digital religious authority that distinguishes five analytically distinct configurations of online Islamic credibility.

The central argument advanced by this review is that digitalization has produced an 'authority-credibility paradox' in Islamic discourse: the same processes that have expanded access to religious knowledge have undermined the epistemic infrastructure through which communities evaluate the reliability of that knowledge. This paradox admits no simple resolution but calls for sustained interdisciplinary engagement across Islamic studies, media and communication studies, and the sociology of religion.

Several directions for future research are indicated by the gaps in the existing literature. First, longitudinal studies are urgently needed to track how digital authority configurations

evolve over time and whether institutional responses produce measurable shifts in audience trust patterns. Second, the perspective of ordinary Muslim users as distinct from digital preachers and institutional actors remains underrepresented in the literature; ethnographic and survey-based research focused on reception and evaluation practices would significantly enrich the field. Third, the intersection of artificial intelligence with Islamic authority particularly the emergence of AI-assisted fatwa platforms and chatbot-based religious guidance represents a frontier that existing scholarship has barely begun to address. Finally, comparative studies that systematically control for national, sectarian, and demographic variables would strengthen the theoretical claims that currently rest on single-country or single-platform studies.

The transformation documented in this review is ultimately a story about the fragile but resilient capacity of religious communities to negotiate the terms of their engagement with technological change. Muslim communities globally are neither passive victims of digital disruption nor uncritical enthusiasts of technological progress: they are active agents who continuously renegotiate the boundaries of authority, authenticity, and belonging in ways shaped by but never entirely determined by the infrastructures they inhabit. Understanding that negotiation with the depth and nuance it deserves is among the most important tasks facing scholars of religion in the digital age.

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