

Digital Fatwas and the Transformation of Religious Authority in Contemporary Muslim Societies

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Abstract

This article examines how digital fatwas transform religious authority in contemporary Muslim societies. The study begins from the problem that Islamic legal guidance is increasingly accessed through websites, social media, question-and-answer portals, searchable archives, short videos, and algorithmically mediated platforms, yet existing scholarship often treats online fatwas mainly as instruments of dissemination rather than as mediated forms of authority. Using a qualitative digital religion design, the study combines digital content analysis, netnographic observation, and thematic analysis of publicly accessible digital fatwa materials from institutional and non-institutional platforms. The findings show that digital fatwas reconfigure Islamic authority in four major ways. First, formal fatwa institutions become platformized through online consultation systems, searchable archives, thematic classification, anonymity, and digital service infrastructures. Second, the classical relation between the mufti and the questioner is transformed into networked Muslim publics, where fatwas circulate, are interpreted, and gain authority through wider audience participation. Third, digital media reshape Islamic legal reasoning by translating complex juristic deliberation into media-friendly formats marked by brevity, clarity, visibility, and shareability. Fourth, digital fatwas point toward future challenges of ethics, governance, artificial intelligence, privacy, accountability, and public trust. The article contributes theoretically by integrating Islamic legal studies, digital religion, and mediatization theory, arguing that contemporary fatwa authority must be understood through both classical juristic categories and digital media infrastructures.

keywords: digital fatwas, islamic authority, digital religion, mediatization, islamic legal reasoning

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana fatwa digital mentransformasi otoritas keagamaan dalam masyarakat Muslim kontemporer. Studi ini berangkat dari persoalan bahwa bimbingan hukum Islam semakin banyak diakses melalui situs web, media sosial, portal tanya jawab, arsip digital yang dapat ditelusuri, video pendek, dan platform yang dimediasi oleh algoritma. Namun, kajian terdahulu sering kali masih memandang fatwa daring terutama sebagai sarana penyebaran informasi, bukan sebagai bentuk otoritas keagamaan yang dimediasi oleh infrastruktur digital. Dengan menggunakan desain kualitatif dalam kajian agama digital, penelitian ini menggabungkan analisis konten digital, observasi netnografis, dan analisis tematik terhadap materi fatwa digital yang dapat diakses publik dari platform institusional dan non-institusional. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa fatwa digital merekonfigurasi otoritas Islam melalui empat pola utama. Pertama, lembaga fatwa formal mengalami platformisasi melalui sistem konsultasi daring, arsip yang dapat ditelusuri, klasifikasi tematik, anonimitas, dan infrastruktur layanan digital. Kedua, relasi klasik antara mufti dan penanya berubah menjadi publik Muslim berjejaring, tempat fatwa beredar, ditafsirkan, dan memperoleh otoritas melalui partisipasi audiens. Ketiga, media digital membentuk ulang penalaran hukum Islam dengan menerjemahkan deliberasi fikih yang kompleks ke dalam format yang ringkas, jelas, mudah terlihat, dan mudah dibagikan. Keempat, fatwa digital menunjukkan tantangan masa depan terkait etika, tata kelola, kecerdasan buatan, privasi, akuntabilitas, dan kepercayaan publik. Artikel ini berkontribusi secara teoretis dengan mengintegrasikan studi hukum Islam, agama digital, dan teori mediatisasi untuk memahami otoritas fatwa kontemporer.

kata kunci: fatwa digital, otoritas islam, agama digital, mediatisasi, penalaran hukum islam



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Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital media has transformed the ways contemporary Muslim societies produce, access, circulate, and contest religious knowledge. Islamic guidance that was once primarily mediated through mosques, madrasas, pesantren, formal fatwa institutions, printed books, and direct scholarly consultation is now increasingly encountered through websites, mobile applications, social media platforms, video channels, livestreamed sermons, religious question-and-answer portals, and algorithmically curated feeds. This development does not merely represent a technical shift from offline to online communication. Rather, it signals a deeper transformation in the ecology of Islamic authority, in which religious knowledge is shaped by the interaction between inherited scholarly traditions, institutional legitimacy, media infrastructures, platform visibility, digital literacy, and audience participation. Within this broader transformation, digital fatwas occupy a particularly significant position because fatwas are not ordinary religious opinions; they are normative responses to concrete legal, ethical, ritual, and social questions raised by Muslims in changing historical circumstances.

In Islamic legal history, the fatwa has functioned as a flexible instrument through which juristic reasoning responds to practical problems faced by individuals and communities. Although fatwas are generally non-binding legal opinions, their social and religious authority derives from the perceived competence of the mufti, the credibility of the interpretive method, the trust of the questioner, and the broader recognition of the scholarly or institutional context in which the fatwa is issued. Recent scholarship has emphasized that fatwas are not peripheral products of Islamic law, but are central to the formation, renewal, and circulation of Islamic legal discourse across different historical and social settings.¹ However, the emergence of digital fatwas complicates this classical structure. In digital contexts, the authority of a fatwa is not determined solely by the scholarly status of its issuer or the strength of its legal reasoning, but also by searchability, shareability, platform ranking, visual framing, affective resonance, audience engagement, and the perceived immediacy of religious answers.

This transformation has become increasingly visible in contemporary Muslim societies. Formal fatwa bodies now publish rulings through official websites and digital archives, while individual scholars, preachers, Islamic influencers, anonymous religious pages, and semi-formal question-and-answer platforms also provide fatwa-like guidance to large audiences. Digital platforms allow Muslims to ask sensitive questions anonymously, compare different opinions across national and madhhab boundaries, and access religious guidance without direct dependence on local authorities. Ali's study of internet fatawa shows that online fatwas have transformed the practice of *iftā'* by making legal opinions available in private, transnational, and interactive digital spaces, while also producing tensions between inherited juristic authority and new forms of public accessibility.² This indicates that digital fatwas should not be understood simply as traditional fatwas placed on websites, but as mediated legal-religious practices embedded in the communicative logic of digital culture.

The scholarly literature on Islam and digital media has already demonstrated that online environments reshape how Muslims relate to religious

¹ Omer Awass, *Fatwa and the Making and Renewal of Islamic Law: From the Classical Period to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009260923>.

² Shaheen Sardar Ali, "Internet Fatawa: Challenging Tradition and Modernity in Women and Gender Issues," in *Modern Challenges to Islamic Law* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 233–61, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139519670.010>.

authority. Bunt's concept of cyber-Islamic environments explains how digital technologies have enabled Muslims across diverse contexts to seek religious, legal, ethical, and spiritual guidance online, while also challenging conventional models of authority associated with imams, scholars, institutions, and traditional learning networks.³ Studies in digital religion further show that online and offline religious life are increasingly blended rather than separate, making digital media an important site for studying identity, community, ritual, learning, and authority.⁴ In the Indonesian context, social media has become a productive arena for Islamic learning, religious populism, and the reconfiguration of authority, where established religious institutions coexist and compete with popular preachers, online communities, and media-savvy Islamic actors.⁵

At the same time, the mediatization of religion perspective provides an important theoretical lens for understanding why digital fatwas cannot be reduced to doctrinal content alone. Mediatization theory argues that media do not function as neutral channels for transmitting religious messages; rather, media shape the conditions under which religion is represented, accessed, interpreted, and authorized. Hjarvard's analysis of mediatization and religious authority shows that both mass media and networked media can challenge existing religious organizations while also enabling new forms of religious belief, practice, and authority to emerge.⁶ Applied to digital fatwas, this perspective suggests that the authority of a fatwa is increasingly affected by media logic: brevity, immediacy, visibility, personalization, emotional intensity, and circulation. A digital fatwa may therefore gain influence not only because it is juristically rigorous, but also because it is algorithmically discoverable, visually persuasive, widely shared, and affectively convincing.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on digital Islam, online religious learning, and religious authority, several research gaps remain unresolved. First, many studies treat online fatwas primarily as a matter of dissemination, focusing on how fatwas are published through websites or social media. This approach is useful but insufficient because it tends to assume that authority is already formed before entering digital space. In fact, digital platforms actively participate in shaping the conditions under which fatwas become visible, persuasive, and socially authoritative. Second, Islamic legal studies often provide sophisticated analyses of *fatwa*, *ijtihād*, *madhhab*, *mufti* authority, and legal reasoning, but they do not always engage sufficiently with media theory, platform studies, algorithmic visibility, and audience participation. Conversely, digital religion studies are strong in analyzing media, networks, and online communities, but they sometimes lack adequate attention to the internal epistemology of Islamic legal authority. Third, empirical studies on digital Muslim publics often focus on *da'wa*, piety, identity, or Islamic influencers, while digital fatwas as a specific legal-religious genre remain comparatively under-theorized.

³ Gary R Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

⁴ H. A. Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*. (Routledge., 2020); Heidi A Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media* (Routledge, 2021).

⁵ Dindin Solahudin and Moch. Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority," *Religions* 11, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019>; Martin Slama, "Social Media and Islamic Practice: Indonesian Ways of Being Digitally Pious," in *Digital Indonesia: Connectivity and Divergence*, ed. Edwin Jurriens and Ross Tapsell (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017), 146–62.

⁶ Stig Hjarvard, "Mediatization and the Changing Authority of Religion," *Media, Culture & Society* 38, no. 1 (2016): 8–17, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715615412>.

Recent studies confirm the urgency of addressing this gap. A systematic review of online fatwa research found that the literature has generally clustered around two major themes: online fatwas and religious authority, and online fatwas as instruments of social engineering. This finding indicates that online fatwa research has developed but still requires deeper conceptual integration. Another recent study on anonymity and digital Islamic authority shows that not all influential religious actors online depend on visible personal charisma; anonymous religious websites and pages may also command significant authority by presenting themselves as neutral, universal, and non-sectarian sources of Islamic knowledge.⁷ This is highly relevant to digital fatwas because many online fatwa platforms construct authority not only through named scholars, but also through institutional branding, searchable archives, impersonal answer formats, and claims of doctrinal neutrality.

The specific problem addressed in this article is therefore the transformation of religious authority through digital fatwas in contemporary Muslim societies. The central tension lies between the classical logic of fatwa authority, which depends on scholarly competence, juristic method, and recognized chains of legitimacy, and the digital logic of authority, which depends on platform visibility, speed, accessibility, audience validation, and media circulation. This tension raises important questions for Islamic studies, religious studies, Islamic law, ethics, education, and digital religion. If Muslims increasingly encounter fatwas through search engines, short videos, anonymous websites, social media clips, and mobile applications, then the study of fatwa authority must move beyond the question of who issues the fatwa to examine how authority is produced, mediated, recognized, and contested within digital infrastructures.

This article is guided by the following research question: how do digital fatwas transform religious authority in contemporary Muslim societies? This question is developed into three more specific analytical questions. First, how is fatwa authority constructed and legitimized in digital environments? Second, how do platform visibility, audience interaction, and media logic reshape the relationship between muftis, institutions, fatwa-seekers, and wider Muslim publics? Third, what epistemic, ethical, and institutional challenges arise when Islamic legal guidance circulates through digital platforms? Based on these questions, the article aims to analyze digital fatwas as mediated forms of Islamic legal authority, to identify the mechanisms through which religious authority is reconfigured in digital contexts, and to develop an integrative framework that connects Islamic legal theory, digital religion studies, and mediatization theory.

Theoretically, this article combines three analytical perspectives. The first is the theory of religious authority, which understands authority not merely as a fixed institutional possession, but as a relational process involving recognition, trust, knowledge, performance, and legitimacy. The second is digital religion, which examines how religious practice and meaning are formed through the interaction between online and offline contexts, digital media, communities, identities, and institutional structures.⁸ The third is mediatization theory, which

⁷ A Astor, M Burchardt, and M Griera, "Digital Religion and the Reconfiguration of Religious Authority," *Social Compass* 71, no. 1 (2024): 3–20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00377686231234567>; A Astor, G Khir-Allah, and R Martínez-Cuadros, "Anonymity and Digital Islamic Authority," *Religions* 15, no. 12 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15121507>.

⁸ H A Campbell and L Connelly, "Religion and Digital Media: Studying Materiality in Digital Religion," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Materiality*, 2020, 471–86, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118660072.ch25>; Campbell and Tsuria, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*.

explains how media environments shape religious communication and alter the authority of religious institutions and actors.⁹ Through this framework, digital fatwas are analyzed not simply as legal opinions available online, but as mediated religious-legal practices that operate within a networked field of scholars, institutions, platforms, algorithms, and Muslim audiences.

The main argument of this article is that digital fatwas do not simply weaken traditional religious authority, nor do they automatically democratize Islamic knowledge in a neutral way. Rather, they reconfigure authority by creating new relationships between classical Islamic legal reasoning and digital media logic. On the one hand, digital fatwas expand access to Islamic guidance, enable transnational consultation, provide anonymity for sensitive questions, and allow formal institutions to reach wider publics. On the other hand, they also generate new risks: fragmentation of authority, decontextualized legal answers, competition between qualified and unqualified voices, reduction of complex juristic reasoning into simplified media content, and the increasing dependence of religious visibility on platform algorithms. The transformation of fatwa authority is therefore ambivalent: it opens new possibilities for Islamic legal communication while simultaneously intensifying epistemic and ethical challenges.

The academic significance of this article lies in its attempt to bridge Islamic legal studies and digital religion studies. Instead of treating digital fatwas as merely technological extensions of traditional *iftā'*, this article conceptualizes them as a distinctive site where Islamic legal authority is reconstructed through media infrastructures, audience practices, and platformed visibility. Its theoretical contribution is to show that contemporary fatwa authority must be analyzed through both normative-epistemic categories, such as *mufti*, *madhhab*, *ijtihād*, *dalīl*, and institutional legitimacy, and media-cultural categories, such as mediation, circulation, searchability, anonymity, engagement, and algorithmic visibility. The international relevance of this study lies in the transnational nature of digital fatwas, which cross national, linguistic, institutional, and sectarian boundaries. Its novelty consists in positioning digital fatwas not merely as online religious content, but as a critical arena for understanding the transformation of religious authority in contemporary Muslim societies.

Method

This study employs a qualitative digital religion design to examine how digital fatwas transform religious authority in contemporary Muslim societies. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the study does not seek to measure the statistical frequency of online fatwas, but to interpret how fatwa authority is constructed, mediated, circulated, and contested within digital environments. Methodologically, the study combines digital content analysis, netnographic observation, and thematic analysis. Digital content analysis is used to examine the textual, visual, institutional, and interactive features of online fatwas, while netnographic observation is used to understand how Muslim users encounter, respond to, and validate religious-legal guidance in public digital spaces. This design follows the methodological assumption that online religious communication must be studied as part of an embedded, mediated, and socially meaningful environment rather than as isolated digital text.¹⁰

⁹ Hjarvard, "Mediatization and the Changing Authority of Religion."

¹⁰ Christine Hine, *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); Robert V Kozinets, *Netnography: The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*, 3rd ed. (SAGE, 2020); Richard Rogers, *Doing Digital Methods* (SAGE, 2019).

The primary corpus of this study consists of publicly accessible digital fatwa materials produced and circulated through institutional and non-institutional online platforms. The corpus includes official fatwa websites, online question-and-answer services, searchable fatwa archives, social media posts containing fatwa-like religious-legal responses, short video fatwas, sermon clips that answer legal questions, user comments, captions, hashtags, and platform metadata where publicly available. The study focuses on digital fatwas and fatwa-like materials published between 2015 and 2025. This period is selected because it captures the consolidation of platform-based Islamic authority, the growth of mobile religious applications, the expansion of social media-based religious learning, and the increasing normalization of online fatwa consultation in Muslim publics.

The selection of platforms follows purposive sampling. Sources are selected based on four criteria: first, the platform must contain explicit fatwa, *iftā'*, religious-legal question-and-answer, or normative Islamic guidance content; second, the content must be publicly accessible without requiring private membership, personal login, or closed-group access; third, the platform must represent either institutional authority, such as official fatwa bodies and recognized Islamic organizations, or popular digital authority, such as widely followed preachers, Islamic media pages, or online religious consultation platforms; and fourth, the selected material must address contemporary legal, ethical, ritual, social, gender, economic, or technological questions faced by Muslim audiences. This purposive strategy is suitable because the study aims to analyze the mechanisms of authority formation rather than to produce a statistically representative sample of all online fatwas.

Data collection is conducted in three stages. The first stage involves mapping relevant digital fatwa platforms through keyword searches using terms such as *“online fatwa,” “digital fatwa,” “ask a mufti,” “Islamic Q&A,” “fatwa online,” “fatwa digital,” “hukum Islam online,” “tanya jawab agama,”* and their Arabic, English, and Indonesian equivalents where relevant. The second stage involves collecting selected fatwa texts, screenshots of public posts, captions, video transcripts, visible engagement indicators, comment threads, institutional descriptions, author profiles, and platform presentation features. The third stage involves organizing the collected material into a research database containing the date of publication or access, platform type, issuing actor, topic, format, language, source link, visible audience response, and analytical notes. Digital data are archived only for academic analysis, and all records are stored systematically to support transparency and retrievability.

The unit of analysis in this study is not limited to the fatwa text itself. Instead, each digital fatwa is treated as a mediated communicative event consisting of several components: the legal-religious answer, the question or problem addressed, the identity or institutional status of the issuer, the platform format, the cited religious sources, the mode of argumentation, the visual or audiovisual presentation, the engagement indicators, and the visible audience responses. This broader unit of analysis is important because digital fatwa authority is produced not only through juristic content, but also through media form, platform visibility, circulation, and reception. This approach is consistent with digital methods scholarship, which emphasizes the need to analyze online content together with its platform-specific conditions of production and circulation.¹¹

¹¹ Rogers, *Doing Digital Methods*.

The analytical procedure consists of deductive and inductive coding. Deductive codes are derived from the theoretical framework of the study, especially the concepts of religious authority, digital religion, mediatization, and Islamic legal normativity. These deductive categories include institutional legitimacy, scholarly credential, scriptural citation, madhhab reference, juristic reasoning, platform visibility, audience validation, anonymity, immediacy, accessibility, affective language, and contestation of authority. Inductive codes are generated from repeated reading of the corpus to identify themes that emerge from the data, such as the simplification of legal reasoning, the personalization of religious answers, the use of moral certainty, the role of comment-based validation, the tension between institutional and popular authority, and the transformation of the *mufti–mustafti* relationship. This coding strategy follows established qualitative coding procedures in which codes are developed, refined, compared, and grouped into broader analytical categories.¹²

The data are analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis. The analysis begins with familiarization, in which the researcher repeatedly reads the fatwa texts, observes platform contexts, and reviews user interactions. The second step is initial coding, where relevant textual, visual, and interactive features are marked. The third step is theme construction, where related codes are organized into larger themes concerning authority, mediation, legitimacy, and public participation. The fourth step is theme review, where the themes are compared across institutional websites, social media platforms, and popular religious content. The final step is interpretive synthesis, in which the themes are connected to the article's research questions and theoretical framework. This procedure follows the logic of thematic analysis as a flexible yet systematic method for identifying patterned meanings across qualitative data.¹³

To strengthen analytical validity, the study applies source triangulation and theoretical triangulation. Source triangulation is conducted by comparing materials from different types of digital sources, including official fatwa institutions, independent Islamic Q&A platforms, social media-based fatwa content, and user responses. Theoretical triangulation is conducted by reading the data through three complementary lenses: Islamic legal authority, digital religion, and mediatization theory. This triangulation enables the study to avoid reducing digital fatwas either to purely doctrinal legal texts or to ordinary social media content. Instead, digital fatwas are interpreted as hybrid religious-legal practices that combine normative Islamic reasoning, institutional or personal authority, platform logic, and public reception.

Ethical considerations are central to this research because the study deals with religious questions, digital traces, and potentially sensitive expressions of belief. The study only analyzes publicly accessible content and does not collect data from private accounts, closed groups, encrypted messaging spaces, or password-protected communities. Personal names of ordinary users are anonymized unless they belong to public religious figures or official institutions whose identity is directly relevant to the analysis. User comments are paraphrased where necessary to reduce traceability. The study also avoids reproducing sensitive personal questions in ways that could expose the identity or vulnerability of questioners. These procedures are informed by current internet research ethics, which

¹² Johnny Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 4th ed. (SAGE Publications, 2021).

¹³ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

emphasize contextual integrity, user vulnerability, privacy expectations, and the distinction between public accessibility and ethical usability of online data.

This study also recognizes several methodological limitations. First, because the corpus is limited to publicly accessible digital materials, the analysis cannot fully capture private fatwa consultations conducted through messaging applications, closed groups, or personal communication with scholars. Second, platform algorithms influence what is visible, searchable, and popular, but their internal mechanisms are not fully accessible to researchers. Third, engagement indicators such as likes, shares, views, and comments cannot be treated as direct evidence of religious acceptance; they only indicate visible interaction within a specific platform environment. Fourth, the study does not claim to represent all Muslim societies, schools of law, or languages, but focuses on selected digital fatwa practices that illuminate broader patterns of authority transformation. These limitations are acknowledged to maintain methodological transparency and to ensure that the findings are interpreted within the scope of qualitative digital research.

Results and Discussion

Digital Fatwas and the Platformization of Institutional Religious Authority

The first major finding is that digital fatwas do not simply relocate classical fatwa authority into online space; they reorganize institutional religious authority through platform-based mechanisms of access, classification, retrieval, anonymity, visibility, and service management. In the digital environment, formal fatwa institutions no longer operate only as councils of scholars issuing legal opinions through face-to-face consultation, printed compilations, or bureaucratic religious offices. They increasingly function as digital service infrastructures that allow users to submit questions, search existing rulings, download fatwa documents, access thematic categories, and interact with religious authority through platform interfaces. This transformation indicates that institutional Islamic authority is being reconstructed through the operational logic of digital platforms, where credibility is no longer expressed only through scholarly status, but also through the institution's ability to make Islamic legal guidance searchable, accessible, archived, and publicly navigable.¹⁴

This finding corresponds to the broader theory of platformization. Poell, Nieborg, and van Dijck define platformization as the penetration of digital infrastructures, economic processes, and governance frameworks into different spheres of social life, together with the reorganization of cultural practices around platforms.¹⁵ Although their concept was not developed specifically for religious institutions, it is highly relevant for explaining the transformation of digital fatwa institutions because fatwa production is increasingly reorganized through databases, search functions, online forms, user interfaces, and institutional branding. In this sense, digital fatwa platforms do not merely host religious content; they reshape the procedural environment through which Muslims ask questions, encounter legal-religious answers, and recognize institutional authority.¹⁶

The documented corpus shows that Egypt's Dar al-Ifta provides a clear example of this institutional platformization. Its online fatwa service allows the

¹⁴ Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*; Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*.

¹⁵ Thomas Poell, David B Nieborg, and José van Dijck, "Platformisation," *Internet Policy Review* 8, no. 4 (2019): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1425>.

¹⁶ Hjarvard, "Mediatization and the Changing Authority of Religion."

inquirer to submit a question through the official website by providing a title, the question, and an email address. After submission, the user receives a code that identifies the question anonymously and enables access to the answer.¹⁷ The institution also states that the inquirer will receive an email after the Fatwa Council answers the question, and that the answer can be accessed using a unique code. This mechanism changes the classical relation between mufti and mustafti. In a conventional setting, the questioner seeks an answer directly from a scholar or institution through a more personal and localized interaction. In the digital setting, the relation is mediated by a structured interface, a submission system, an identification code, and an institutional database. The authority of the answer is therefore not only attached to the scholarly status of Dar al-Ifta, but also to the reliability of the platform as a confidential and retrievable channel of religious consultation.

The anonymity feature is particularly important because it introduces a new ethical and social dimension into fatwa authority. Many fatwa questions concern sensitive matters, including family relations, marital conflict, sexuality, inheritance, ritual impurity, financial transactions, illness, or personal moral anxiety. Dar al-Ifta's privacy policy states that clients' identities are protected, questions and answers are kept confidential, and all questions and answers are registered anonymously in its database for future reference.¹⁸ By providing anonymous access through a digital code, the platform reduces the social risk of asking difficult religious questions while maintaining the institutional structure of iftā'. This shows that digital fatwa authority is partly produced through trust in confidentiality. The user does not only trust the legal competence of the institution; the user also trusts the platform's capacity to protect personal identity and organize religious consultation safely. Thus, anonymity becomes an element of institutional legitimacy rather than a marginal technical feature.

The Majelis Ulama Indonesia offers another example of how institutional fatwa authority is reorganized through digital archiving and public retrievability. MUI's online fatwa page presents itself as a collection of official fatwas and displays contemporary issues such as COVID-19 vaccines, virtual Friday prayer, swab tests during fasting, halal certification standards, cosmetics, and other ritual, biomedical, technological, and social questions.¹⁹ This digital archive transforms MUI fatwas from institutional documents into searchable public legal memory. The fatwa is no longer confined to a printed compilation, a press release, or a formal organizational decision. It becomes part of an online archive that can be accessed repeatedly by scholars, journalists, students, religious teachers, policy actors, and ordinary Muslims. In this respect, the archive functions not only as a repository of legal opinions, but also as a public infrastructure of institutional Islamic authority.

The separate Komisi Fatwa MUI platform further confirms this transformation. The platform describes itself as an integrated management system of the MUI Fatwa Commission and states that users can consult directly through a consultation feature or search fatwas previously issued by MUI.²⁰ Its database page displays fatwas in a structured table containing titles, themes,

¹⁷ Dar al-Ifta al-Misriyyah, "Fatwa Services," July 9, 2026, <https://www.dar-alifta.org/en/fatwa/fatwa-services>.

¹⁸ Dar al-Ifta al-Misriyyah, "Fatwa Request," July 9, 2026, <https://www.dar-alifta.org/en/fatwa/fatwa-request>.

¹⁹ Majelis Ulama Indonesia, "Info Fatwa," July 9, 2026, <https://mui.or.id/info-fatwa>.

²⁰ Komisi Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia, "Komisi Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia," July 9, 2026, <https://www.fatwamui.com/>.

fatwa numbers, dates of issuance, and access buttons; the page shows hundreds of entries organized as a searchable database.²¹ This indicates that MUI's authority is not only expressed through the content of its rulings, but also through its ability to classify, index, and manage fatwas as a digital knowledge system. In this context, the fatwa institution becomes a platform-based religious service provider, while the archive becomes an instrument for sustaining institutional memory.

This development is significant because digital archives change the temporality of fatwa authority. A fatwa issued in response to a specific social or legal problem can remain publicly accessible long after the original moment of issuance. For example, pandemic-related fatwas on vaccination during fasting, virtual Friday prayer, and swab testing during fasting were produced in response to a specific crisis, but their online availability allows them to continue functioning as references for public religious reasoning, legal comparison, and institutional legitimacy.²² Digital archiving therefore extends the afterlife of fatwas. It allows institutional authority to persist not only through repeated scholarly citation, but also through search engines, platform navigation, and database retrieval. This supports the argument that digital religion must be studied through the interaction between religious practice, technological infrastructure, and mediated access to authority.²³

Al-Azhar Global Fatwa Center also illustrates how institutional authority is platformized through thematic classification and public pedagogy. Its digital presence organizes religious content under categories such as worship, transactions, personal status and inheritance, contemporary fatwas, women's fatwas, family awareness, training and development, anti-atheism programs, women's issues, and psychological support.²⁴ This structure shows that digital fatwa authority overlaps with broader religious education, moral formation, and public guidance. The platform does not only answer isolated legal questions; it organizes religious knowledge into thematic fields that correspond to contemporary social concerns. As a result, the digital fatwa institution becomes both a legal-religious authority and a pedagogical platform.

These cases show that digital fatwa authority is increasingly organized through four institutional mechanisms: service access, searchable archiving, thematic classification, and interface-based trust. Service access enables Muslims to submit questions without geographical proximity to a scholar. Searchable archiving turns fatwas into retrievable institutional memory. Thematic classification frames legal-religious guidance according to contemporary social issues. Interface-based trust links institutional authority with platform reliability, confidentiality, and user experience. These mechanisms demonstrate that the digitalization of fatwa is not merely a matter of publication; it is a reorganization of religious authority through infrastructural design.

This finding supports Bunt's argument that cyber-Islamic environments transform the ways Muslims relate to religious authorities in spiritual, legal, and public contexts.²⁵ However, the present analysis also extends Bunt's argument by showing that formal fatwa institutions are not only being challenged by online actors, Islamic influencers, or anonymous religious websites. They are also

²¹ Indonesia.

²² Komisi Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia, "Data Fatwa," July 9, 2026, <https://www.fatwamui.com/data-fatwa>.

²³ Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*.

²⁴ Al-Azhar Global Fatwa Center, "مركز الأزهر العالمي للفتوى الإلكترونية" (Al-Azhar, July 9, 2026), <https://azhar.eg/fatwacenter>.

²⁵ Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*.

adapting to digital media by building their own institutional infrastructures. In other words, digital media do not only fragment Islamic authority; they also provide established institutions with new tools for preserving and expanding authority. This is why digital fatwas should be understood as a hybrid form of authority: they preserve classical institutional legitimacy while adopting platform-based modes of accessibility and circulation.

The finding also refines Hjarvard's theory of mediatization. Hjarvard argues that mediatization changes the authority of religion by altering how religion is represented, communicated, and socially organized through media. Digital fatwas demonstrate a more specific Islamic legal form of this process. Mediatization does not only affect the public image of religious institutions; it reshapes the procedure of *iftā'* itself. The question, the answer, the issuer, the archive, and the user are all reorganized through digital interfaces. The fatwa is therefore no longer only a juristic response; it becomes a mediated communicative event structured by platform design.²⁶

At the same time, the platformization of institutional fatwa authority produces an important tension. On the one hand, digital platforms expand access to reliable religious guidance, especially for Muslims who live far from formal religious institutions or who need answers to sensitive questions. On the other hand, platformization may also encourage users to treat fatwas as searchable answers detached from their legal reasoning, institutional procedure, or social context. A fatwa found through a search function may be read as a universal answer even when it was originally issued for a specific case, time, place, or legal question. Thus, the same digital infrastructure that strengthens access can also risk decontextualizing Islamic legal reasoning. This tension shows that platformization is not only a technical process, but also an epistemic challenge for Islamic legal authority.²⁷

The methodological implication of this finding is that digital fatwas should not be analyzed only as texts. They must be studied as platformed legal-religious artifacts. A complete analysis should examine not only the wording of the ruling, but also the platform interface, archive structure, classification system, metadata, access procedure, institutional identity, and user pathway. This is consistent with digital religion scholarship, which emphasizes that religious life online should be studied in relation to the technological and social conditions through which religious practice becomes meaningful. Campbell and Evolvi argue that digital religion studies must examine how religious practices are adapted to digital environments and how digital culture informs offline religious life.²⁸ Digital fatwas provide a concrete example of this process because Islamic legal authority is increasingly mediated through platforms that shape how users approach, interpret, and trust religious answers.

Table 1. Digital Fatwa Infrastructures and Forms of Institutional Authority Transformation

Digital evidence from the corpus	Authority mechanism	Analytical significance
Dar al-Ifta's online service allows users to submit questions and receive an anonymous code to access answers.	Confidentiality, anonymous consultation, institutional service access	The classical mufti–mustafti relation becomes mediated through a confidential digital consultation system

²⁶ Poell, Nieborg, and van Dijck, "Platformisation."

²⁷ Hjarvard, "Mediatization and the Changing Authority of Religion."

²⁸ Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*.

MUI's official fatwa page displays contemporary fatwas on vaccines, virtual Friday prayer, swab testing during fasting, halal standards, and other issues.	Public archive, institutional legitimacy, legal retrievability	Fatwas become part of a searchable public legal memory beyond printed collections and internal institutional documents
Komisi Fatwa MUI describes itself as an integrated management system for consultation and searching previous MUI fatwas.	Institutional branding, database management, direct consultation	The fatwa institution becomes a platform-based religious service provider.
The Komisi Fatwa MUI database organizes hundreds of fatwas by title, theme, number, date, and access button.	Classification, indexing, digital legal memory	Institutional authority is strengthened through systematic organization and retrievability.
Al-Azhar Global Fatwa Center organizes content into thematic categories such as fatwas, women's issues, family and community awareness, and psychological support.	Thematic classification, public pedagogy, ethical guidance	Fatwa authority expands beyond legal response into religious education and public moral formation

Compiled from documented digital fatwa infrastructures of Dar al-Ifta, MUI, Komisi Fatwa MUI, and Al-Azhar Global Fatwa Center.

The theoretical implication is that institutional religious authority in the digital era is neither simply declining nor remaining unchanged. It is being reconstructed through platform infrastructures that combine classical Islamic legitimacy with digital mechanisms of access, archive, classification, anonymity, and visibility. Digital fatwas therefore reveal that the transformation of religious authority is simultaneously theological, institutional, technological, and communicative. The central analytical point is that institutional fatwa authority survives in the digital age not by resisting platforms, but by becoming platformized.²⁹

From the Mufti–Mustaftī Relation to Networked Muslim Publics

The second major finding is that digital fatwas transform the classical dyadic relationship between the *mufti* and the *mustaftī* into a networked public formation involving institutions, preachers, anonymous users, followers, commenters, platform administrators, search engines, and algorithmic visibility. In classical fatwa practice, the structure of authority is generally organized around a questioner who seeks legal-religious guidance and a qualified authority who provides an answer based on Islamic legal reasoning. In digital environments, however, this structure becomes more complex because the fatwa rarely remains confined to the original questioner. It can be archived, indexed, searched, copied, translated, reposted, debated in comment sections, converted into short videos, and circulated across platforms. The fatwa therefore no longer functions only as a private answer to an individual legal question; it becomes a public religious object whose authority is shaped by circulation, reception, visibility, and audience participation.³⁰

The selected corpus shows that digital fatwa platforms generate different degrees of publicness. Some institutional platforms maintain the privacy of the original questioner while transforming the answer into a reusable public resource.

²⁹ Poell, Nieborg, and van Dijck, "Platformisation."

³⁰ Ali, "Internet Fatawa: Challenging Tradition and Modernity in Women and Gender Issues."

Egypt's Dar al-Ifta, for example, explains that an online inquirer submits a title, question, and email address, receives a unique code, and later accesses the answer anonymously after the Fatwa Council has responded.³¹ Its privacy policy also states that client identities are protected, while questions and answers may be registered anonymously in the institutional database and reused or reworded for public benefit.³² This mechanism preserves the private dimension of consultation at the point of submission, yet it also allows the institutional answer to become part of a broader digital archive. The original question remains individualized, but the answer may acquire wider social relevance as a reference for other Muslims facing similar issues.

This transformation modifies the social meaning of the *mustaftī*. The questioner is no longer merely an individual who receives a religious answer; the questioner also becomes an indirect contributor to public Islamic knowledge because his or her question may generate an archived answer that later serves other users. In this sense, the digital *mustaftī* participates in the formation of a legal-religious archive, even when the person remains anonymous. This differs from the classical model, in which the social circulation of fatwas was often limited by oral transmission, local scholarly networks, manuscript circulation, printed collections, or institutional dissemination. Digital platforms intensify the afterlife of a fatwa by making individual questions searchable, reusable, and publicly accessible. Authority is therefore not produced only at the moment of issuance; it continues to be reconstructed each time users search, read, share, cite, or contest the fatwa.³³

The corpus also shows that online fatwa publics are not limited to formal state or institutional platforms. Aggregator platforms and independent Islamic question-and-answer websites create wider networked publics by connecting multiple madhhab traditions, scholarly institutions, and user communities. IslamQA, for example, presents itself as a searchable Islamic Q&A platform that organizes fatwas according to Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali categories and links users to various fatwa-producing institutions and scholarly websites.³⁴ This structure demonstrates that digital fatwa publics are not only institutionally vertical; they are also horizontally networked through search, topic classification, cross-platform aggregation, and inter-madhhab navigation. Users can compare answers across traditions without necessarily entering the traditional pathways of local consultation or formal scholarly apprenticeship.

Ask Mufti Online provides another illustration of this transformation. The platform presents itself as a free and anonymous Islamic Q&A service where users may ask an imam or mufti online, browse existing questions, and receive answers from qualified scholars.³⁵ Its public archive displays answered questions, Islamic categories, multilingual translation options, and links to social media-based community engagement.³⁶ This case shows how digital fatwa platforms combine privacy, public archiving, multilingual accessibility, and community-building features. The user is not only a recipient of religious knowledge, but also part of a

³¹ al-Misriyyah, "Fatwa Services."

³² al-Misriyyah.

³³ Rogers, *Doing Digital Methods*.

³⁴ IslamQA, "IslamQA: Search for Islamic Q&A from Four Madhhabs," July 9, 2026, <https://islamqa.org/>.

³⁵ Ask Mufti Online, "Ask Mufti Online: Free, Anonymous Islamic Q&A by Muftis," July 9, 2026, <https://askmuftionline.com/>.

³⁶ Online.

broader mediated community structured by questions, categories, browsing behavior, and social media circulation.

These findings support recent studies on digital Islamic authority. Astor, Khir-Allah, and Martínez-Cuadros show that digital Islamic authority does not always depend on named charismatic scholars. Anonymous websites, pages, and feeds can also acquire authority by presenting themselves as neutral, universal, and non-sectarian sources of Islamic knowledge.³⁷ This insight is important for understanding digital fatwas because authority may be attached to institutional reputation, platform design, religious language, topic organization, anonymity, or perceived neutrality, rather than only to the personal identity of a specific mufti (Astor et al., 2024). Digital fatwa authority is therefore distributed across persons, institutions, interfaces, archives, and publics.

The Indonesian case further clarifies the public dimension of digital fatwas. Solahudin and Fakhruroji argue that social media has become a productive arena for Islamic learning, religious populism, and the reconfiguration of authority, where established religious institutions coexist with popular preachers and digitally active Islamic agents.³⁸ Digital fatwas reflect the same dynamic, but with a more specific legal-religious consequence. When fatwa-like answers circulate through posts, short clips, captions, and comment threads, Islamic legal guidance becomes embedded in the communicative style of digital platforms. Authority is no longer received passively; it is liked, shared, defended, criticized, remixed, and sometimes detached from its original institutional or juristic context. Public reception therefore becomes part of the social life of fatwa authority.

This pattern is also consistent with Slama's study of Indonesian digital piety. Slama shows that Indonesian social media spaces have become important arenas where Muslims perform piety, share religious content, and participate in mediated Islamic practice. Digital fatwas operate within this wider ecology. They provide legal-religious answers, but they also circulate within affective publics where religious commitment, moral anxiety, identity formation, and social belonging are negotiated through digital interaction. This confirms that digital fatwa authority cannot be studied only as legal doctrine; it must also be analyzed as part of mediated Muslim public life.³⁹

From the perspective of digital religion studies, the transformation from the *mufti–mustafti* relation to networked publics demonstrates that online and offline religious authority are deeply connected. Campbell and Evolvi argue that digital religion research must examine how religious practice is shaped by emerging technologies and how digital culture informs offline religious life. Digital fatwas provide a concrete example of this interdependence.⁴⁰ A person may ask a question online because of an offline family problem, financial transaction, marital dispute, ritual uncertainty, health issue, or moral concern. The answer may then circulate online, influence offline behavior, and become a reference in sermons, study circles, family discussions, or institutional decisions. The movement of fatwa authority is therefore not one-directional; it travels between digital and non-digital contexts through repeated acts of consultation, sharing, interpretation, and application.

The mediatization perspective helps explain why this shift matters theoretically. Hjarvard argues that media alter the authority of religion by changing how religious communication is organized, represented, and socially

³⁷ Astor, Khir-Allah, and Martínez-Cuadros, "Anonymity and Digital Islamic Authority."

³⁸ Solahudin and Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority."

³⁹ Slama, "Social Media and Islamic Practice: Indonesian Ways of Being Digitally Pious."

⁴⁰ Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*.

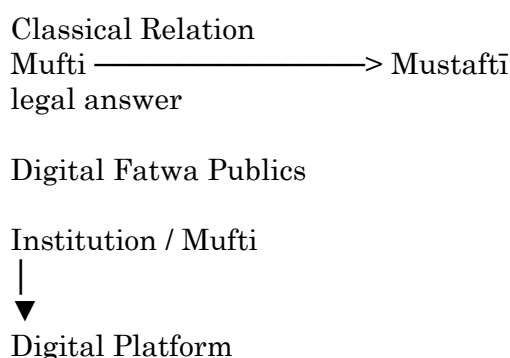
received.⁴¹ In digital fatwa contexts, mediatization affects not only the public image of religious authority but also the structure of *iftā'* itself. The question is submitted through a form, the answer is stored in a database, the archive is indexed by platform categories, and the ruling may later be circulated by users across different media spaces. The fatwa becomes a mediated event whose authority depends on the interaction between juristic reasoning and digital circulation. This extends Hjarvard's argument by showing that mediatization does not merely transform religious communication in general; it reshapes a specific Islamic legal practice.

Algorithmic visibility further complicates this process. In networked environments, users rarely encounter fatwas through neutral access. They often find them through search engines, recommendation systems, platform feeds, hashtags, trending posts, or prior browsing patterns. Algorithms do not produce fatwas in the juristic sense, but they influence which fatwas become visible, which authorities are repeatedly encountered, and which interpretations appear most accessible to users. This supports broader media studies arguments that digital platforms organize public visibility and shape cultural circulation through mechanisms that are not fully transparent to ordinary users.⁴² In the field of Islamic legal authority, this creates a new epistemic condition: the most visible fatwa is not necessarily the most contextually rigorous or institutionally authoritative one.

The selected corpus also shows that digital fatwa publics operate through different forms of audience participation. On institutional websites, participation is structured through submission forms, retrieval codes, search boxes, thematic categories, and archives. On social media platforms, participation becomes more visible through likes, comments, shares, reposts, duets, stitched videos, and public disagreement. On aggregator websites, participation occurs through browsing, cross-school comparison, and topic-based retrieval. These modes of participation transform the audience from passive recipients into active mediators of religious authority. A user who reposts a fatwa, comments on it, translates it, summarizes it in a thread, or turns it into a short video contributes to the circulation and interpretation of Islamic legal guidance.

To clarify this transformation more explicitly, Figure 1 illustrates how the fatwa moves from a relatively direct *mufti–mustaftī* relation into a broader networked structure involving institutions, digital platforms, archives, users, and algorithmic visibility.

Figure 1. Networked Transformation of the Fatwa



⁴¹ Hjarvard, "Mediatization and the Changing Authority of Religion."

⁴² Tarleton Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

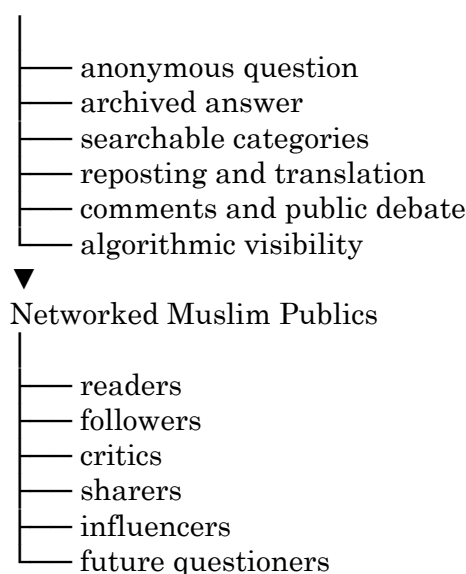


Figure 2 demonstrates that digital fatwa authority is formed through multiple layers of mediation. The mufti or institution remains important as the source of legal-religious reasoning, but the fatwa's public authority is also shaped by the platform that hosts it, the archive that preserves it, the users who circulate it, and the digital systems that make it visible. This model reinforces the argument that contemporary fatwa authority is no longer produced only through scholarly issuance, but also through networked recognition and mediated public circulation.

Theoretically, this finding challenges a purely institutional understanding of religious authority. Authority is not simply possessed by a scholar, council, or fatwa body; it is relationally constructed through recognition, trust, circulation, repetition, and public validation.⁴³ The digital *mustafti* is no longer only a questioner seeking guidance. The user may also become a distributor, interpreter, critic, translator, curator, or amplifier of fatwa content. This shift has major implications for Islamic legal authority because the reception of fatwas increasingly occurs in interactive and emotionally charged media environments. Papacharissi's concept of affective publics is useful here because networked publics are not formed only through rational exchange, but also through affective intensities, shared sentiments, and connective expression.⁴⁴ Digital fatwas often circulate precisely because they address anxiety, guilt, fear, moral certainty, religious belonging, or public controversy.

This transformation also has methodological significance. If digital fatwas are networked public objects, researchers cannot analyze them only by reading the doctrinal content of the answer. A more adequate analysis must examine the question format, anonymity mechanism, archive structure, metadata, reposting pathways, comment practices, platform categories, visible engagement, and inter-platform movement. This supports Rogers's argument that digital methods should take online objects seriously in their native environments rather than extracting them from platform contexts. In fatwa studies, this means that a fatwa should be studied as a legal-religious text and as a platformed communicative event. Its authority is formed through both Islamic legal reasoning and digital circulation.

⁴³ Astor, Burchardt, and Giera, "Digital Religion and the Reconfiguration of Religious Authority"; Solahudin and Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority."

⁴⁴ Zizi Papacharissi, *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

The implications for Islamicate Futures are substantial. Digital fatwa publics show that future Islamic authority will not be shaped only by debates over who is qualified to issue fatwas, but also by how Islamic legal knowledge is governed across platforms. Issues of privacy, anonymity, algorithmic visibility, misinformation, user participation, multilingual access, institutional accountability, and public pedagogy will become increasingly central to the future of Islamic legal guidance. If fatwa institutions ignore these developments, digital Muslim publics may become more vulnerable to decontextualized rulings, pseudo-authoritative religious pages, and emotionally persuasive but legally weak content. If institutions respond responsibly, digital fatwa platforms can become tools for public Islamic literacy, ethical consultation, minority Muslim guidance, and transnational scholarly communication.⁴⁵

The main analytical point is that digital fatwas transform the social structure of *iftā'* from a dyadic relation into a networked public process. The fatwa is no longer only an answer issued by a mufti to a questioner; it becomes a mediated object whose authority is shaped by juristic reasoning, platform design, audience participation, public circulation, and digital recognition. This transformation does not abolish classical Islamic legal authority, but it changes the social conditions under which that authority is accessed, trusted, contested, and carried into the future.

Mediatized Fatwa Reasoning: Between Juristic Complexity and Media-Friendly Simplification

The third major finding is that digital fatwas operate within a structural tension between the complexity of Islamic legal reasoning and the communicative demands of digital media. Classical fatwa reasoning is not merely a process of delivering a quick answer to a religious question; it involves the interpretation of scriptural evidence, juristic method, madhhab-based reasoning, contextual analysis, ethical consideration, and interpretive caution. In digital environments, however, fatwa communication is shaped by media formats that privilege brevity, clarity, immediacy, visual appeal, affective resonance, and shareability. This does not mean that digital fatwas are automatically weak or superficial. Rather, it shows that Islamic legal reasoning is increasingly expressed through platform-conditioned formats such as short answers, searchable archives, captions, infographics, short videos, and compressed verdict-like statements.⁴⁶

This tension is visible in the difference between institutional fatwa archives and social media-based fatwa circulation. Institutional platforms generally preserve more elements of juristic procedure because they present the question, answer, topic classification, issuing institution, date, fatwa number, and sometimes textual evidence or legal reasoning. MUI's online fatwa archive, for example, displays institutional rulings on contemporary issues such as COVID-19 vaccination during fasting, virtual Friday prayer, swab testing during fasting, halal standards, biomedical questions, and financial matters.⁴⁷ Dar al-Ifta al-Misriyyah also maintains an online fatwa service in which answers are produced through an institutional procedure and delivered through a structured digital

⁴⁵ Awass, *Fatwa and the Making and Renewal of Islamic Law: From the Classical Period to the Present*; Soleh Hasan Wahid, "Exploring the Intersection of Islam and Digital Technology: A Bibliometric Analysis," *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 10 (2024): 101085, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101085>.

⁴⁶ Awass, *Fatwa and the Making and Renewal of Islamic Law: From the Classical Period to the Present*.

⁴⁷ Indonesia, "Data Fatwa."

system.⁴⁸ These examples show that digitalization can support the preservation of institutional authority and legal documentation. However, when such fatwas circulate beyond official archives into social media feeds, video clips, and caption-based religious posts, the reasoning is often shortened into a conclusion that is easier to consume but less able to display the interpretive process behind the ruling.

The problem is not simplification itself, but the loss of juristic context. A religious-legal question may require discussion of textual evidence, legal disagreement, necessity, custom, *maqāṣid*, public interest, social condition, or institutional procedure. Yet in platform-based circulation, the same issue can appear as a single declarative statement: permissible, prohibited, valid, invalid, recommended, or disliked. This transformation changes the public form of Islamic legal knowledge. Users may receive the ruling without understanding the evidentiary hierarchy, the scope of application, the conditions attached to the answer, or the existence of legitimate scholarly disagreement. In this sense, digital fatwas create a gap between legal conclusion and legal reasoning.

Hjarvard's mediatization theory helps explain this transformation because media do not function merely as neutral channels for religious messages; they reshape the authority, organization, representation, and social reception of religion. Applied to digital fatwas, mediatization means that Islamic legal answers must compete within communicative environments designed for speed, readability, engagement, and immediate comprehension. A long and carefully qualified fatwa may be less visible than a brief answer with strong rhetorical clarity. A nuanced explanation may be less shareable than a short statement that gives moral certainty. The authority of digital fatwas is therefore mediated not only by juristic competence, but also by communicative efficiency, platform visibility, and audience engagement.⁴⁹

This finding also extends Bunt's argument that cyber-Islamic environments transform how Muslims access, evaluate, and circulate Islamic knowledge.⁵⁰ The transformation does not occur only at the level of access to religious authority; it also occurs at the level of legal genre. A fatwa becomes a media-shaped religious-legal discourse whose authority depends not only on the issuing scholar or institution, but also on how the answer is formatted, indexed, visualized, shortened, reposted, and received by digital publics. In this respect, digital fatwas should be understood as hybrid objects: they remain connected to Islamic legal normativity, yet they are increasingly shaped by platform conventions and audience practices.

This finding further refines Wahid's systematic literature review, which shows that online fatwa research has largely clustered around two themes: online fatwas and religious authority, and online fatwas as instruments of social engineering.⁵¹ The present analysis adds a third dimension: digital fatwas as mediatized legal discourse. This dimension is important because online fatwas do not only affect authority relations or social behavior; they also reshape the communicative form of Islamic legal reasoning. The fatwa becomes a platform-

⁴⁸ al-Misriyyah, "Fatwa Services."

⁴⁹ Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media*; Tarleton Gillespie, "Algorithmic Authority," *Information, Communication & Society* 17, no. 3 (2014): 357–75.

⁵⁰ Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*.

⁵¹ Wahid, "Exploring the Intersection of Islam and Digital Technology: A Bibliometric Analysis."

adapted genre that must fit searchable archives, mobile interfaces, social media feeds, short video formats, and user attention patterns.⁵²

The epistemic consequences of this transformation are ambivalent. On the one hand, digital fatwas expand access to Islamic legal guidance for Muslims who may lack direct access to scholars, live outside Muslim-majority societies, feel embarrassed to ask sensitive questions, or need immediate answers to practical problems. Ali's study of internet fatawa shows that online fatwas are especially important in sensitive gender and family-related issues because they allow users to seek guidance beyond the limitations of local consultation structures.⁵³ On the other hand, the same accessibility may detach legal answers from the interpretive conditions that make them meaningful. Users can extract a ruling from one platform, compare it with another ruling from a different madhhab or institution, and interpret disagreement as contradiction rather than as part of Islamic legal plurality.

The problem of juristic plurality becomes more complex in digital environments. Islamic legal reasoning has historically accommodated disagreement, contextual variation, school-based diversity, and case-specific judgment. Awass argues that fatwas have played a major role in the making and renewal of Islamic law because they connect legal tradition to changing social circumstances. Digital media may preserve this plurality by giving users access to multiple opinions, but they may also flatten it when different rulings appear as isolated answers without sufficient methodological explanation. A user may encounter one fatwa permitting a practice and another prohibiting it, yet the platform may not clarify the differences in legal evidence, madhhab affiliation, local context, or interpretive method. As a result, digital access may produce both legal literacy and interpretive overload.⁵⁴

The visual and audiovisual form of digital fatwas further intensifies simplification. When religious-legal answers appear as reels, YouTube shorts, TikTok clips, Instagram captions, or infographic cards, the ruling is often detached from extended juristic reasoning. These formats favor memorable phrasing, affective tone, visual authority, and rhetorical certainty. Digital religion scholarship has shown that religious communication online is shaped by platform affordances, media aesthetics, audience practices, and user engagement patterns. In fatwa contexts, these affordances can make Islamic legal guidance more accessible, but they may also encourage the performance of certainty at the expense of interpretive complexity.⁵⁵

The Indonesian case reinforces this point. Solahudin and Fakhruroji argue that social media has become a productive space for Islamic learning in Indonesia, allowing Islamic agents to communicate religious teachings in media-friendly forms while also generating religious populism and contestation of authority. Digital fatwas operate in this same media ecology. They are not only read as legal documents; they are encountered as religious content competing with sermons, motivational preaching, lifestyle advice, halal consumption discourse, political commentary, and moral reminders. Consequently, a fatwa may gain influence not because it offers the most sophisticated legal reasoning, but because it matches the

⁵² Wahid.

⁵³ Ali, "Internet Fatawa: Challenging Tradition and Modernity in Women and Gender Issues."

⁵⁴ Awass, *Fatwa and the Making and Renewal of Islamic Law: From the Classical Period to the Present*.

⁵⁵ Solahudin and Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority."

communicative style of the platform: concise, emotionally clear, visually appealing, and easily shareable.

Algorithmic visibility compounds this tension. Digital platforms often privilege content that attracts attention, produces engagement, and circulates quickly. Gillespie argues that platforms shape public discourse through moderation systems, visibility decisions, and hidden governance mechanisms that influence what users encounter online.⁵⁶ Poell, Nieborg, and van Dijck similarly argue that platformization reorganizes cultural practices around infrastructures, governance frameworks, and data-driven logics.⁵⁷ In the case of fatwas, this means that visibility is not determined only by scholarly reliability. A short and emotionally forceful fatwa-like statement may circulate more widely than a careful institutional ruling. Digital fatwa authority is therefore shaped by the tension between epistemic quality and platform visibility.

This produces several epistemic consequences. First, digital fatwas increase access to Islamic legal guidance but may reduce interpretive depth when reasoning is compressed into brief rulings. Second, they help ordinary Muslims obtain quick answers but may weaken awareness of juristic plurality if methodological differences are not explained. Third, they strengthen public attachment to Islamic norms but may encourage binary religious thinking when complex questions are framed as simple yes-or-no answers. Fourth, they expand Islamic legal literacy but may also generate confusion when different platforms present conflicting answers without clarifying evidentiary standards, madhhab positions, or contextual assumptions. These consequences show that the digitalization of fatwa reasoning is not only a communication issue; it is an epistemological issue for contemporary Islamic knowledge.

Table 2 summarizes the main tension between juristic complexity and media-friendly simplification. The table clarifies that digital fatwas should be analyzed not only through their legal conclusions, but also through the communicative formats that shape their public reception.

Table 2. Juristic Complexity and Media-Friendly Simplification in Digital Fatwas

Analytical dimension	Juristic complexity in fatwa reasoning	Media-friendly simplification in digital platforms	Epistemic consequence
Legal evidence	Qur'an, hadith, legal maxims, madhhab reasoning, scholarly precedent	Selective quotation or condensed reference to religious evidence	Users may receive the ruling without understanding the evidentiary hierarchy.
Context	Attention to circumstance, necessity, custom, public interest, and social setting	Generalized answers detached from the original case	Context-sensitive rulings may be read as universal rules.
Disagreement	Recognition of juristic plurality and legitimate difference	Preference for one clear conclusion	Legal diversity may be perceived as confusion or contradiction.

⁵⁶ Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media*.

⁵⁷ Poell, Nieborg, and van Dijck, "Platformisation."

Form of explanation	Extended reasoning, qualification, and interpretive caution	Captions, short videos, infographics, brief Q&A answers	Complex reasoning becomes easier to access but more vulnerable to reduction.
Public reception	Trust in scholarly method and institutional procedure	Trust in clarity, speed, visibility, and shareability	Authority becomes mediated by communicative efficiency.
Research implication	Requires textual and juristic analysis	Requires platform, genre, and circulation analysis	Digital fatwas must be studied as mediatized legal-religious discourse.

Table 2 demonstrates that the transformation of fatwa reasoning occurs through both epistemic and media mechanisms. The digital fatwa does not merely simplify language; it may reshape how legal evidence, context, disagreement, and authority are presented to Muslim publics. This comparison confirms that the study of digital fatwas requires attention to legal substance and communicative form at the same time. Without examining the media format, researchers may overestimate the stability of fatwa authority. Without examining juristic reasoning, they may reduce fatwas to ordinary online religious content.

The theoretical implication of this finding is that mediatization theory must be brought into closer conversation with Islamic legal studies. Media do not only change how religion is represented in public; they also reshape the communicative form of legal reasoning. Digital religion studies helps explain how platforms influence identity, community, practice, and authority, while Islamic legal studies helps preserve attention to evidentiary reasoning, juristic plurality, and institutional accountability. The contribution of this sub-section is therefore to show that digital fatwas should be studied as mediatized Islamic legal discourse: simultaneously normative, institutional, communicative, and platform-dependent.

For Islamicate Futures, this finding is important because the future of Islamic authority will depend not only on who has the right to issue fatwas, but also on how Islamic legal reasoning is communicated in compressed, visual, mobile, searchable, and algorithmically mediated environments. If institutions fail to adapt responsibly, digital publics may become more vulnerable to decontextualized rulings, pseudo-fatwas, and emotionally persuasive but legally weak religious content. If they respond carefully, digital platforms can become tools for legal literacy, ethical guidance, and wider access to trustworthy Islamic knowledge. The challenge is therefore not to reject media-friendly fatwas, but to develop digital forms of fatwa communication that remain accessible without sacrificing juristic accountability.

The main analytical point is that digital fatwas mediatize Islamic legal reasoning. They expand access to religious guidance, but they also reshape the form, speed, and public reception of Islamic legal interpretation. Their authority emerges not only from the legal competence of the issuer, but also from the ability of the digital format to preserve context, communicate reasoning, acknowledge disagreement, and prevent the reduction of Islamic law into isolated verdicts. Therefore, the transformation of fatwa reasoning in the digital age must be understood as both an opportunity for wider Islamic legal literacy and a challenge to the epistemic integrity of religious authority.

Future-Oriented Islamic Authority: Ethics, Governance, and the Emerging AI-Fatwa Question

The fourth major finding is that digital fatwas point toward a future-oriented transformation of Islamic authority, particularly in relation to ethics, institutional governance, artificial intelligence, data protection, and public trust. Digital fatwa platforms are no longer merely repositories of past legal opinions; they are increasingly becoming infrastructures through which Muslim societies manage religious uncertainty in rapidly changing social and technological contexts. Muslims now seek digital fatwas on biomedical questions, financial technology, online transactions, family relations, ritual practice, minority life, halal consumption, education, environmental responsibility, and emerging technologies. This indicates that digital fatwa systems are part of the future architecture of Islamic knowledge production, where Islamic legal authority must respond not only to new substantive problems, but also to new technological conditions of mediation, verification, circulation, and trust.

This future-oriented character is visible in the way formal fatwa institutions have begun to frame digital services as instruments of religious guidance, identity formation, institutional continuity, and public governance. The UAE Council for Fatwa, for example, presents specialized digital services for Emirati students abroad, describing them as reliable religious guidance that strengthens religious and national identity.⁵⁸ This example is important because it shows that digital fatwa services are not only designed for answering isolated legal questions. They also function as institutional mechanisms for maintaining religious belonging among mobile Muslim populations, including students, professionals, migrants, and diaspora communities who encounter religious questions outside conventional local authority structures. Digital fatwa platforms therefore become tools for transnational religious guidance, public pedagogy, and institutional presence beyond territorial boundaries.

The emerging AI-fatwa question intensifies this transformation because it raises a new level of epistemic and ethical complexity. Public reporting in 2025 noted that the UAE Council for Fatwa discussed the role of artificial intelligence in fatwa issuance at a conference on competent muftis in the age of AI, emphasizing the need to align technological innovation with legitimate Islamic principles, national considerations, and safeguards against misuse or misinterpretation.⁵⁹ Another report stated that the Council highlighted the importance of preserving legitimate religious constants, preventing the exploitation of fatwas for extremist or ideological purposes, and building secure and reliable databases for future fatwa systems.⁶⁰ These developments should not be interpreted as the replacement of human muftis by machines. Rather, they show that fatwa institutions are beginning to confront how AI may assist, filter, classify, retrieve, translate, summarize, or organize Islamic legal knowledge while raising serious questions about accountability, accuracy, context, institutional supervision, and public trust.

The International Islamic Fiqh Academy's 2025 resolution on artificial intelligence provides an important example of collective Islamic legal engagement with AI governance. Resolution No. 258, titled "Artificial Intelligence: Its Rulings,

⁵⁸ U A E Council for Fatwa, "UAE Council for Fatwa," July 9, 2026, <https://fatwauae.gov.ae/en>.

⁵⁹ TechX Media, "UAE Council Explores AI Role in Fatwa Issuance," 2025, <https://techxmedia.com/en/uae-council-explores-ai-role-in-fatwa-issuance/>.

⁶⁰ Emirates News Online, "UAE Council for Fatwa Highlights Innovative Use of AI in Fatwa Issuance," 2025, <https://emiratesnewsonline.com/uae-council-for-fatwa-highlights-innovative-use-of-ai-in-fatwa-issuance/>.

Guidelines, and Ethics,” explicitly addresses AI as a subject requiring juristic evaluation, ethical guidelines, and institutional regulation.⁶¹ This is significant because AI is no longer peripheral to Islamic law; it has become part of formal collective *ijtihād*. The resolution confirms that Muslim legal institutions are beginning to treat AI not merely as a technical tool, but as an ethical and normative object that affects rights, responsibility, knowledge production, public benefit, and social welfare. In the context of digital fatwas, this means that future Islamic authority must develop criteria for distinguishing between AI as an auxiliary instrument and AI as an inappropriate substitute for qualified juristic judgment.

The Riyadh Charter on Artificial Intelligence for the Islamic World also illustrates the broader Islamic institutional move toward technology governance. Launched by ICESCO and the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority in 2024, the Charter aims to provide a framework for AI development in line with the values and ethics of the Islamic world, while promoting inclusive and sustainable development and international cooperation.⁶² This development is relevant to digital fatwas because future fatwa systems will likely operate within broader Muslim debates on AI ethics, public values, educational transformation, and technological sovereignty. If AI is used to support fatwa search, classification, translation, summarization, or recommendation, Islamic legal institutions will need clear ethical standards that protect human dignity, prevent manipulation, preserve scholarly accountability, and maintain public trust.

Global AI governance frameworks reinforce the urgency of these concerns. UNESCO’s Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence identifies human rights, human dignity, transparency, fairness, accountability, and human oversight as central principles for responsible AI governance.⁶³ The OECD AI Principles similarly emphasize trustworthy AI that respects human rights, democratic values, transparency, robustness, safety, and accountability.⁶⁴ Although these frameworks are not Islamic legal documents, they provide a useful comparative governance vocabulary for analyzing AI-supported fatwa systems. In Islamic contexts, such principles must be translated into religious-legal categories such as *amānah* or trustworthiness, *‘adl* or justice, *maṣlahah* or public interest, *ḍarar* or harm prevention, *ḥifẓ al-dīn* or protection of religion, *ḥifẓ al-nafs* or protection of life, *ḥifẓ al-‘aql* or protection of intellect, and *ḥifẓ al-‘ird* or protection of dignity. The challenge is not simply to import global AI ethics into Islamic discourse, but to formulate a framework in which Islamic legal reasoning and contemporary AI governance can critically inform each other.

From the perspective of digital religion studies, the AI-fatwa question shows that religious authority is increasingly tied to technological governance. Campbell and Evolvi argue that digital religion research must examine how religious practices are adapted to digital environments and how digital culture reshapes offline religious life.⁶⁵ Digital fatwas provide a concrete Islamic legal case for this

⁶¹ International Islamic Fiqh Academy, “Resolution No. 258 (3/26): Artificial Intelligence: Its Rulings, Guidelines, and Ethics,” 2025, <https://iifa-aifi.org/en/56035.html>.

⁶² Scientific and Cultural Organization Islamic World Educational, “Islamic World Artificial Intelligence Charter” (Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2024), <https://cmc.icesco.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/2.5-Islamic-World-Artificial-Intelligence-Charter.pdf>.

⁶³ UNESCO, “Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence” (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381137>.

⁶⁴ OECD, “Corporate Governance and Value Creation” (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2019).

⁶⁵ Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*.

broader claim: emerging technologies do not merely change how Muslims communicate religion; they may also change how legal-religious authority is organized, verified, archived, translated, and trusted. This finding also extends Bunt's argument that cyber-Islamic environments transform access to Islamic knowledge by showing that the next phase of digital Islamic authority will not only concern online visibility, but also algorithmic assistance, data governance, and machine-mediated retrieval of legal opinions.

The ethical challenge is that AI-supported fatwa systems may produce both benefits and risks. On the positive side, AI may help institutions organize large fatwa archives, identify repeated questions, improve multilingual access, support preliminary classification, assist scholars in searching legal precedents, and make institutional fatwas more accessible to Muslims across linguistic and geographic boundaries. Such functions may strengthen public Islamic legal literacy if they remain under qualified scholarly supervision. However, the risks are substantial. AI systems may generate decontextualized answers, hallucinate sources, ignore madhhab differences, oversimplify juristic disagreement, reproduce sectarian bias, expose sensitive user data, or present probabilistic outputs as authoritative religious rulings. The danger is not simply technological error; it is the possibility that automated religious answers may imitate the form of authority without possessing the epistemic accountability of a qualified mufti.

This issue is particularly important because fatwa questions often involve personal vulnerability. A person may seek a fatwa about divorce, inheritance conflict, debt, illness, fertility treatment, marital intimacy, food permissibility, workplace ethics, or ritual anxiety. If such questions are processed through AI-supported systems, institutions must protect privacy, prevent data misuse, and ensure that users understand whether they are receiving a human-issued fatwa, an archive retrieval, an AI-generated summary, or a preliminary non-binding response. The boundary between assistance and issuance must be made explicit. Without this distinction, users may mistake a search result, chatbot answer, or AI-generated summary for a legitimate fatwa. This would weaken the epistemic integrity of *iftā'* and may undermine public confidence in Islamic legal institutions.

For this reason, future-oriented fatwa governance should be built around five interrelated principles: scholarly accountability, transparency of system function, data protection, contextual integrity, and human oversight. Scholarly accountability means that AI may assist research, classification, retrieval, and translation, but the authority to issue fatwas must remain with qualified human scholars or authorized institutions. Transparency means that users should know whether an answer comes from a human mufti, an official archive, a machine-generated summary, or an automated recommendation. Data protection is necessary because fatwa questions may contain sensitive personal, family, financial, or health-related information. Contextual integrity requires that fatwas not be detached from the circumstances, madhhab assumptions, legal conditions, or institutional procedures that shaped them. Human oversight ensures that automation supports rather than replaces juristic reasoning. These principles are consistent with broader AI ethics discussions on transparency, human oversight, fairness, privacy, and accountability, while also resonating with Islamic ethical concepts of trust, justice, harm prevention, and public benefit.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ UNESCO, "Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence"; OECD, "Recommendation of the Council on Artificial Intelligence" (OECD Legal Instruments, 2019), <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0449>; Awass, *Fatwa and the Making and Renewal of Islamic Law: From the Classical Period to the Present*.

The central issue, therefore, is not whether AI should be used in fatwa systems, but under what conditions, with what limits, and under whose authority. A responsible digital fatwa system cannot treat technical efficiency as the highest value. Efficiency must be subordinated to juristic responsibility, institutional accountability, ethical transparency, and public trust. AI may be useful for organizing knowledge, assisting retrieval, and improving access, but it cannot replace the interpretive responsibility of *iftā'*, which requires legal competence, ethical judgment, contextual awareness, and accountability before the Muslim public. In this respect, future AI-supported fatwa systems should be designed as supervised knowledge infrastructures, not autonomous religious authorities.

This finding contributes directly to *Islamicate Futures* because it positions digital fatwas as part of a broader anticipatory framework for Islamic knowledge, ethics, and governance. Future-oriented Islamic studies cannot focus only on textual inheritance or contemporary social practice; it must also examine how Muslim societies anticipate technological change, regulate new forms of authority, and protect religious knowledge from distortion in digital environments. Digital fatwas are especially important because they sit at the intersection of Islamic legal tradition, public ethics, institutional trust, platform governance, and emerging AI infrastructures. They reveal how Islamic authority is being redesigned under conditions of uncertainty, acceleration, and global technological transformation.

The theoretical implication is that classical categories such as *mufti*, *mustaftī*, *ijtihād*, *taqlīd*, *madhhab*, and *fatwa* remain indispensable, but they are no longer sufficient by themselves. These categories must now be studied alongside platform governance, algorithmic visibility, digital privacy, data ethics, AI-assisted reasoning, institutional accountability, and public pedagogy. The study of digital fatwas therefore requires a genuinely interdisciplinary approach that brings together Islamic legal theory, digital religion, media studies, AI ethics, and public policy. This does not mean replacing Islamic legal categories with technological language; it means expanding the analytical vocabulary of Islamic studies so that it can account for how religious authority is produced and governed in digital futures.

The methodological implication is equally important. Researchers should not analyze future fatwa systems only by reading their legal outputs. They must examine the whole infrastructure of digital authority: the platform interface, search mechanism, data policy, archive structure, AI assistance, human review process, correction procedure, institutional accountability, and user perception. A fatwa generated, retrieved, or summarized through a digital system is not only a text; it is an institutional, technological, ethical, and communicative event. This requires methods that combine textual analysis, platform analysis, digital ethnography, policy analysis, and Islamic legal reasoning.

The central point is that digital fatwas should be understood as a future-facing site of Islamic authority. They reveal how Muslim societies negotiate continuity with Islamic legal tradition while responding to technological change, public uncertainty, data-driven infrastructures, and the ethical demands of digital life. If governed responsibly, digital fatwa systems can expand access to trustworthy Islamic guidance, preserve institutional memory, protect questioner privacy, and strengthen public legal literacy. If left without ethical safeguards, they may intensify misinformation, decontextualized rulings, pseudo-authority, sectarian polarization, and overreliance on automated religious answers. The future of digital fatwas therefore depends not on technology alone, but on the ability of Islamic institutions to combine juristic accountability, ethical governance, and public trust.

Conclusion

This article has examined how digital fatwas transform religious authority in contemporary Muslim societies by analyzing digital fatwas as mediated forms of Islamic legal authority rather than merely as traditional fatwas published online. The study shows that the transformation of fatwa authority occurs through the interaction of Islamic legal normativity, institutional legitimacy, platform infrastructures, audience participation, media logic, and emerging technological governance. Digital fatwas therefore do not simply weaken traditional authority or democratize Islamic knowledge in a neutral way. They reconfigure religious authority by relocating fatwa practice into digital environments where access, visibility, circulation, anonymity, searchability, and public reception become integral to how authority is produced and recognized.

The findings demonstrate four interconnected patterns. First, institutional fatwa authority is increasingly platformized. Formal fatwa institutions preserve their classical legitimacy, but they now express and extend that legitimacy through searchable archives, online consultation systems, anonymous question submission, thematic classification, and digital service infrastructures. Second, digital fatwas transform the classical *mufti–mustaftī* relation into networked Muslim publics. The questioner is no longer only a private recipient of legal guidance, because the question and answer may become part of a public archive, circulate across platforms, and be interpreted, shared, criticized, or amplified by wider audiences. Third, digital fatwas mediatize Islamic legal reasoning. They expand access to legal-religious guidance, but they also compress complex juristic reasoning into formats shaped by brevity, clarity, emotional appeal, visibility, and shareability. Fourth, digital fatwas point toward a future-oriented transformation of Islamic authority, especially as AI, data governance, privacy, institutional accountability, and public trust become increasingly relevant to the management of Islamic legal knowledge.

The theoretical contribution of this article lies in its effort to connect Islamic legal studies, digital religion, and mediatization theory. It argues that contemporary fatwa authority can no longer be analyzed only through classical categories such as *mufti*, *mustaftī*, *madhhab*, *ijtihād*, *dalīl*, and institutional legitimacy. These categories remain indispensable, but they must now be examined together with platform visibility, digital archives, audience validation, algorithmic circulation, media format, data ethics, and technological governance. This integrated approach allows digital fatwas to be understood as hybrid legal-religious practices: rooted in Islamic normative traditions, yet shaped by the communicative infrastructures of digital society.

The academic significance of the study is that it positions digital fatwas as a critical site for understanding the contemporary and future transformation of Muslim religious authority. The article contributes to Islamic studies by showing that digital transformation affects not only religious communication, but also the epistemic conditions under which Islamic legal guidance is accessed, trusted, contested, and applied. It also contributes to digital religion studies by demonstrating that online religious authority must be analyzed through legal, institutional, ethical, and interpretive dimensions, not only through identity, community, or media practice.

The broader implication is that Muslim societies need more responsible models of digital fatwa governance. Digital platforms can widen access to Islamic legal guidance, preserve institutional memory, support transnational consultation, and improve public Islamic legal literacy. At the same time, they can also intensify

decontextualized rulings, pseudo-authority, fragmented publics, algorithmic visibility bias, and overreliance on simplified or automated religious answers. Future research should therefore examine how different Muslim institutions govern digital fatwa systems, how users interpret conflicting online fatwas, how AI-assisted religious guidance is supervised, and how Islamic legal reasoning can remain accountable in increasingly platformed and automated environments. The central conclusion of this article is that the future of fatwa authority depends not on resisting digital transformation, but on developing ethical, institutionally accountable, and juristically responsible forms of Islamic authority within digital life.

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