



Disrupting the Gatekeepers: Artificial Intelligence-Based Fatwas and the Reconfiguration of Religious Authority in Islamic Educational Management

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has begun to penetrate religious spheres, including in the form of digital fatwas. The presence of AI as a generator of instant religious answers challenges the traditional roles of scholars (ulama) and educators within the Islamic education system. This study aims to explore the perceptions of Islamic education actors regarding this phenomenon, analyze its epistemological and managerial impacts, and formulate strategies that educational institutions can adopt in responding to this disruption. The research utilizes an exploratory qualitative approach with a multi-case study across three Islamic educational institutions with distinct characteristics. The results indicate a shift in authority, tensions between traditional scholarly heritage and modern technology, and the emergence of a hybrid authority model. The conceptual contribution of this study is the proposal of a scholarly authority management model based on human-AI collaboration, termed hybrid authority.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Disrupting the Gatekeepers, Religious Authority.*

Introduction,

The development of artificial intelligence technology has transformed many aspects of human life. In recent years, this phenomenon has reached the religious domain, including the emergence of AI-based applications capable of answering religious questions quickly and efficiently. ChatGPT, Ask-Quran, FatwaBot, and similar applications capable of answering fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) questions in seconds create a new paradox in Islamic education and are becoming a primary choice for the young Muslim generation in seeking religious information. (Ahmad Bin Abdulaziz Alshithisri, 2024; Arifianto, 2023; Priantina & Uula, 2025; Salim & Aditya, 2025)

This raises fundamental questions regarding scholarly legitimacy and authority: who currently has the right to issue a fatwa. In the context of Islamic education, scholarly authority is not solely rooted in cognitive capacity or the ability to answer questions; rather, it must be built upon a foundation of sanad (unbroken transmission of knowledge), moral integrity (muru'ah), spiritual depth (taqwa), and the ability to transmit wisdom through exemplary behavior. (Hanik L. Tarwiyah, 2025; Imamah & Fardiansyah, 2025; Syukri, 2025; Usmonov, 2025)

A fatwa is the product of *ijtihad*, which requires an understanding of social context, moral responsibility, and sensitivity to the reality of the *ummah* (community). Conversely, AI operates on the logic of probability and pattern recognition without possessing moral consciousness or eschatological (*ukhrawi*) accountability. Nevertheless, the tendency of society—especially the digital generation—to access AI for religious matters continues to increase. This has serious implications for the role of Islamic educators in transmitting knowledge and shaping character. Furthermore, the presence of AI has the potential to shift the authority structure within Islamic educational institutions, where teachers, *Ustadz*, and *Kyais* previously served as the holders of normative truth. (Arifin et al., 2025; Saiddaeni, 2024; Sudirman et al., 2025)

Thus far, academic studies on AI in Islamic education have focused on technological and pedagogical dimensions: its use in learning, increasing learning effectiveness, and digital curriculum integration. However, very few have highlighted the epistemological aspects and the scholarly authority disrupted by the presence of AI. This is the conceptual gap that this research intends to fill. This article poses critical questions about how Islamic education practitioners perceive the phenomenon of AI-based digital fatwas, its impact on religious authority, and the managerial strategies implemented by educational institutions in responding to this disruption. The primary focus of this study is on the formation of a new conceptual model that can guide Islamic educational management practices in the era of artificial intelligence. (Mainudin et al., 2025; Salim & Aditya, 2025)

Research Methodology,

This study employs a qualitative approach with an exploratory research design. The purpose of this approach is to gain a deep understanding of the AI-based fatwa phenomenon from the perspective of Islamic education practitioners. Qualitative research allows researchers to capture meanings, interpretations, and social dynamics that cannot be measured quantitatively.

The research design used is a multi-case study. The three Islamic educational institutions selected as study locations have distinct characteristics: (1) A Salafiyah (traditional) Islamic boarding school that upholds Sanad and traditional teaching methods (Musoffa, 2024); (2) A State Islamic Higher Education Institution (UIN/IAIN) that combines modern and traditional approaches (Slamet Riyadi et al., 2024) ; and (3) A modern Pesantren that has integrated technology—including AI—into

its learning system. (Ansori et al., 2022) This approach was chosen to explore the phenomenon of AI-based fatwas in depth through the interpretive lens of Islamic education practitioners, enabling the researcher to capture social dynamics and meanings that are immeasurable quantitatively.

Research participants consisted of three main categories: educators (Ustadz, Kyai, lecturers), learners (Santri, students), and technology managers (IT teams, digital curriculum developers). Case studies were conducted at three Islamic educational institutions selected purposively to represent the spectrum of different characteristics within the Islamic education ecosystem in Indonesia. Research subjects were determined through purposive sampling techniques with inclusion criteria: having direct interaction with the religious learning process and having experience or exposure to digital technology. The total number of participants was 20 people, with a proportional composition from each institution.

Data collection techniques included interviews, digital observation, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Interviews allowed for the exploration of views, experiences, and values held by informants. Digital observation was carried out by tracking the use of AI applications by learners in their daily lives. Meanwhile, FGDs were used to explore institutional responses in a collective discussion atmosphere. The instruments used included interview guidelines, observation guides, and digital content analysis templates.

The obtained data were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques assisted by NVivo software. The analysis process included data transcription, open coding, theme categorization, and the identification of relational patterns between themes. Data validity was maintained through source and method triangulation techniques.

Findings and Discussion,

Perception of AI-Based Digital Fatwas

Perceptions regarding the existence of AI-based digital fatwas reflect complex and diverse responses from within the Islamic education community. In Salafiyah boarding schools, the majority of Kyais and senior teachers show an attitude of caution, or even rejection, toward the use of AI in religious contexts. According to them, AI only processes data and text without touching upon the spiritual aspects and wisdom that are the core of religious decision-making. In this view, AI cannot comprehend maqashid syariah (objectives of Islamic law), social contexts, and the spiritual experiences that accompany the fatwa process (Rahim et al., n.d.).

Based on interview and field observation data, it appears that perceptions of the presence of digital fatwas generated by AI vary greatly from one Islamic educational institution to another. In traditional institutions like Salafiyah boarding schools, educators generally show high skepticism toward the use of AI as a substitute or even a complement to fatwas. Field findings indicate that the entry of AI-based "digital fatwas" creates a real disruption to the established authority in Salafiyah

boarding schools. They assume that AI lacks the spiritual element and inner experience that are the main foundations in the process of *istinbath* (legal deduction).

This argument arises from the understanding that a fatwa is not merely the result of deductive logic applied to text, but also the result of contemplation, *maqashid syariah*, and contextual understanding possessed only by a faithful and knowledgeable human. For the *Kyais*, the legitimacy of a fatwa is not only sourced from textual truth (legal-rational) but also from the purity of transmission and the personal quality (charisma) of the fatwa giver, which machines do not possess.

However, there are also educators in traditional institutions who have begun to utilize AI to a limited extent, for example, to quickly find references or compare interpretations. Some respondents stated that they emphasize that the use of AI must be accompanied by a critical attitude and guidance from a teacher. They sometimes use ChatGPT or other AI platforms to verify arguments (*dalil*) or find instant *fiqh* answers. This opens space for a slow transformation in the mindset of traditional institutions toward new technology.

Conversely, in technology-based Islamic educational institutions or those more open to digital innovation, such as modern *Pesantren* and State Islamic Universities, educators and students view AI as an opportunity to expand the reach of *da'wah* (preaching) and education. They consider AI not as an authoritative source, but as an initial reference or an auxiliary tool in learning. Some lecturers even use AI to design learning scenarios and as a stimulant for critical discussion in class.

Students from various institutional backgrounds show ambivalent attitudes. They are interested in using AI because it provides ease and speed in obtaining information. However, some remain dependent on the authority of lecturers or *Kyais* to verify answers from AI. This indicates that the learning process is undergoing a pattern change: from a vertical relationship toward a more participatory and dialogical relationship.

However, concerns have also arisen regarding the possibility of excessive dependence on AI. Some lecturers expressed worry that students would lose critical thinking skills if they rely solely on instant answers from AI. Therefore, they emphasize the importance of making AI an auxiliary tool, not the main source.

Student perception of AI is heavily influenced by their educational background and digital experience. Students in urban environments who are accustomed to technology more easily accept AI as part of the learning process. Meanwhile, students from *Pesantren* backgrounds show greater caution. Nevertheless, there is a general tendency to use AI as an alternative for initial searches before requesting validation from a lecturer or *Kyai*. This phenomenon reflects a shift from a single-authority education model to a more participatory and dialogical model. AI becomes a trigger for the emergence of new discourse in the classroom, where the teacher's authority remains important but is balanced by critical discussions sparked by digital sources.

Disruption of Religious Authority Structures

The presence of AI as a producer of religious answers has triggered a shift in the authority structure within Islamic educational institutions. Authority that was previously linear and hierarchical is beginning to face challenges because AI provides information access quickly and openly. (Alhajj et al., 2024) The learning process, once centered on the teacher or Kyai, is now expanded through search engines and AI chatbots that can provide fatwas in seconds. Data from the three institutions show that the emergence of AI as a provider of digital fatwas has caused epistemological tension in the structure of religious authority.

Historically, religious authority in Islamic education was built through networks of sanad, community recognition, and deep mastery of knowledge. However, the presence of AI, capable of accessing thousands of text sources instantly, creates a kind of "alternative authority" that does not depend on such traditional legitimacy. A concrete example is found in learning practices where Santri question a Kyai's answer based on information they obtained from AI. This becomes a new challenge for teachers to maintain their authority, as well as an opportunity to strengthen their argumentative and pedagogical capacities.

This creates a new dynamic in the teaching and learning process, where the Kyai/Ustadz/teacher is no longer the sole reference of truth. Teachers who are able to elaborate on and reinterpret information from AI receive greater appreciation from students. Nevertheless, in many cases, Santri and students still refer to the teacher for final interpretation. This shows that AI has not been able to replace the pedagogical and spiritual role of the teacher.

This transformation is not homogeneous. In some institutions, traditional authority remains very strong. However, in others, authority is beginning to be distributed through collaboration between teachers, students, and technology. The teacher is no longer the sole source of truth but becomes a facilitator of technology-based critical discussions. This phenomenon shows that religious authority is not disappearing, but transforming into a new form called "hybrid authority". In this form, AI acts as a provider of data and references, while the teacher remains the primary director and interpreter. Thus, the human role remains essential in maintaining the authenticity and validity of knowledge.

This hybrid authority model becomes increasingly important in the digital era because it is able to bridge tradition and innovation. Educational institutions need to realize that maintaining traditional authority without adaptation will cause them to be left behind. Conversely, integrating AI without human control poses a risk to the deviation of Islamic meanings and values.

Managerial Strategies in Responding to Disruption

Managerial responses to AI disruption are heavily influenced by institutional vision, facilities, and human resource readiness. Institutions that reject AI generally implement policies restricting

technology use in religious contexts. They prioritize strengthening traditional methodologies such as halaqah, deliberation (musyawarah), and the deep reading of classical texts (kitab kuning). However, this resistance is not always absolute. Some Pesantren have begun to include digital literacy materials in their curriculum. They invite Santri to study AI's logical errors, compare digital fatwa results with classical fatwas, and develop text criticism skills.

Some State Islamic Universities, for example, hold workshops for lecturers and students on how to distinguish between valid and invalid AI content. They also establish new work units to monitor the use of AI in academic activities. This indicates a managerial awareness that AI cannot be avoided but needs to be managed wisely. This strategy shows that traditional education management can be adaptive without losing its identity.

Meanwhile, modern Islamic educational institutions are developing various innovative approaches. They form special teams to manage AI integration in learning, draft Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for AI use, and organize periodic training for lecturers and students. The use of AI-based Learning Management Systems (LMS) has become a leading practice. Some Islamic universities are even developing internal chatbots designed specifically to answer religious questions in accordance with the madhhab (school of thought) and values held by the institution. This is a form of creative response that not only accepts AI as an external product but also develops technology suited to local Islamic characteristics.

From a managerial perspective, these steps show that institutional leadership is a key factor. Visionary leaders will be able to read the direction of change, formulate adaptive strategies, and create an educational ecosystem that balances innovation and tradition.

Comparative Analysis Between Institutions

Comparison between institutions shows a variation in responses to AI influenced by many factors. Institutions with strong traditional roots and a thick Pesantren identity tend to keep their distance from AI. They view AI as a potential disruptor of traditional harmony, although they do not fully reject its use for administrative or non-fatwa purposes.

Semi-modern institutions take a middle path. They draft selective policies that allow AI use for certain tasks but maintain teacher control in aspects of religious interpretation. This model allows for a smoother transition in the technology adoption process.

Meanwhile, institutions with a modern vision and global orientation utilize AI extensively in learning, research, and academic services. They possess adequate digital infrastructure, competent human resources, and management systems that support innovation. Their positive response to AI does not mean they are without obstacles. Challenges remain, especially regarding maintaining the quality and authenticity of religious content.

Another influential factor is the economic and geographical background of the institution. Institutions located in urban areas have easier access to technology and digital training, whereas institutions in rural areas tend to face infrastructure barriers and limited training. This analysis demonstrates the importance of a contextual management approach. There is no "one size fits all" model. Each institution needs to formulate a strategy that suits its own characteristics and resources.

Proposed Conceptual Model: Hybrid Authority

Based on field findings, the author offers a hybrid authority model as a relevant managerial solution in the digital era. Hybrid authority is not a form of compromise, but a functional integration between human authority and the power of AI. This model aims to maintain the continuity of tradition while utilizing technological sophistication.

The main components of this model consist of: (1) AI as an instrument for rapid and broad initial searching, (2) the teacher/lecturer as the interpreter and curator of information, and (3) the educational institution as the regulator and facilitator of technology usage policies.

Implementing this model requires systemic steps. First, academic regulations regarding the ethics of AI use in Islamic education need to be drafted. Second, training must be conducted for educators to understand how AI works and its weaknesses. Third, an evaluation unit needs to be established to monitor the impact of AI on learning quality and scholarly authority. This model also implies a shift in the teacher's role. The teacher is no longer just a transmitter of knowledge, but also an interpreter, moderator, and guardian of values. This is both a challenge and an opportunity to strengthen the teacher's position in the digital ecosystem.

Implications for Islamic Educational Management

The implications of this research's findings for Islamic educational management are vast. First, educational institutions must begin integrating digital literacy into their curriculum. This includes understanding the potentials and risks of AI, as well as the ability to distinguish between valid and invalid content.

Second, institutional management must draft internal SOPs regarding AI use. These SOPs need to cover academic, ethical, and spiritual aspects. With clear guidelines, AI use can be directed positively and not disrupt the educational process.

Third, there is a need for collaboration between Islamic educational institutions to share best practices and adaptation strategies. Forums such as conferences, workshops, and scientific publications are important to enrich the discourse and accelerate collective adaptation.

Fourth, strengthening lecturer capacity is a necessity. Management needs to organize periodic training, including the development of AI-based teaching media and the integration of AI into active learning methodologies.

Fifth, there needs to be an effort to establish strategic partnerships with technology developers so that the AI used aligns with Islamic values. This cooperation can produce educational platforms that are safer, more contextual, and religiously valuable.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations. First, due to its exploratory nature, this research has not yet reached a quantitative level regarding the impact of AI on trust in authority. Second, the scope is limited to three institutions, so the generalization of findings still needs to be tested more broadly. Third, the psychological dimensions and social relations of students and teachers in interacting with AI have not been explored in depth. Moving forward, future research could take a quantitative approach with large-scale surveys to measure perceptions of AI in the context of Islamic education. Experimental studies could also be conducted to look at differences in learning outcomes between students who use and do not use AI. Additionally, a digital ethnographic approach could reveal deeper dynamics in the use of AI in virtual learning spaces.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Conclusion

The research concludes that the proliferation of AI-based digital fatwas constitutes a significant epistemological disruption rather than a mere technological addition, fundamentally challenging the traditional hierarchy of Islamic educational authority. The study identifies the emergence of a "hybrid authority" model as a critical conceptual shift, where the exclusivity of the teacher's role evolves into a collaborative dynamic involving artificial intelligence as a rapid data provider and the educator as the primary ethical curator and contextual interpreter. This transformation highlights that while machine algorithms can effectively simulate legal reasoning based on probability, they cannot replicate the spiritual integrity (*muru'ah*) and contextual wisdom required for genuine fatwa issuance, necessitating the continued, albeit redefined, centrality of human guidance to maintain knowledge authenticity. Furthermore, the variation in institutional responses—ranging from skepticism in traditional Salafiyah schools to active integration in modern entities—underscores that the reconfiguration of religious authority is heavily contingent upon institutional vision, infrastructure readiness, and the specific characteristics of the educational ecosystem.

Suggestion

In light of these findings, practical implications demand that Islamic educational management moves beyond passive observation toward active regulation by establishing clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that govern the ethical use of AI and integrating digital literacy into the core curriculum to mitigate the risks of invalid religious interpretations. It is suggested that institutions

prioritize capacity building for educators to navigate this hybrid ecosystem effectively and foster strategic partnerships with technology developers to align algorithmic outputs with Islamic values. Acknowledging the limitations of this exploratory qualitative study, which is restricted to three specific institutional cases and lacks quantitative generalizability regarding the impact of AI on trust in authority, future scholarship is encouraged to expand into quantitative inquiries to measure these variables on a larger scale. Additionally, subsequent research avenues should include experimental studies to assess differences in learning outcomes and employ digital ethnographic approaches to deeply analyze the psychological dimensions and social dynamics of student interactions within virtual learning spaces.

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