

Research Article

Islamic Thought, Religious Authority, and Ethical Formation in the Age of Digital Modernity: Contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract. Objective: This study aims to examine how Islamic thought, religious authority, and ethical formation are being reshaped in the age of digital modernity and to assess their contributions to the

achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). The research focuses on the ways digital platforms, algorithm-driven religious content, and emerging forms of online authority influence ethical reasoning, civic responsibility, and moral development within contemporary Muslim societies. Theoretical framework: The theoretical framework integrates classical Islamic epistemology ('ilm, authority of the 'ulamā', adab, and maqāṣid al-sharī'ah) with critical theories of power and knowledge, digital religion theory, and ethical governance frameworks. This interdisciplinary approach enables an analysis of how digital technologies mediate religious authority and ethical norms, and how these transformations intersect with global development agendas articulated in the SDGs. Literature review: The literature review covers three main bodies of scholarship: (1) classical and contemporary discussions on Islamic religious authority and ethical formation; (2) studies on digital religion, social media, and algorithmic governance; and (3) SDG-oriented research on education, institutional trust, and ethical sustainability. While existing studies acknowledge the growing influence of digital Islam, limited attention has been given to its implications for ethical development and sustainable governance from an Islamic perspective. Methods: This study adopts a qualitative research design combining discourse analysis of digital Islamic content, document analysis of policy and educational frameworks, and semi-structured interviews with Islamic scholars, educators, and Muslim youth. Data are analyzed thematically to identify patterns in the production of religious authority, ethical narratives, and their alignment with SDG-related objectives. Results: The findings reveal that digital modernity is simultaneously democratizing and fragmenting Islamic religious authority. While digital platforms expand access to religious knowledge and ethical discourse, they also challenge traditional structures of authority and risk promoting superficial or polarizing interpretations. Nevertheless, when guided by ethical frameworks grounded in maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, digital Islamic engagement has the potential to strengthen ethical education, civic responsibility, and institutional trust. Implications: The study highlights the need for ethically grounded digital Islamic education and responsible religious leadership to support sustainable development. By aligning Islamic ethical formation with SDG 4 and SDG 16, the research offers policy-relevant insights for educators, religious institutions, and development actors seeking to harness digital religion as a resource for peace, justice, and sustainable social development. Novelty: This study provides an original contribution by explicitly linking transformations in Islamic thought and religious authority under digital modernity to the Sustainable Development Goals, offering a normative and analytical framework that positions Islamic ethics as an active contributor to global development discourse.

Keywords: Islamic thought, religious authority, digital modernity, ethical formation, Sustainable Development Goals,

INTRODUCTION

The fast growth of technologies has really changed how we make, share, and trust knowledge everywhere. For Muslims, this change has greatly affected how people think about Islam, who is in charge of religious matters, and how they learn what is right and wrong. Now people are learning about their religion on media and getting information from computers that decide what they see and systems that use artificial intelligence to help them[1]. Digital technologies are changing everything, and Muslims are using these tools to learn about Islam and figure out what is

important. People used to get guidance from mosques, madrasas, and scholars. Now they get it from the internet and social media. This is a change[2].

Islamic authority is what we are talking about. We need to think about how Muslims learn what is right and wrong. We have to figure out if the internet's a good way to learn about ethics. The old way was slower and more thoughtful. The new way is faster. It may not be as deep. Islamic authority and ethics are important to societies. We need to think about how to make sure they are sustainable. Islam has always put a lot of importance on passing down knowledge in a way being ethical and involves scholars who learn from other scholars. A long time ago, Islamic thinkers came up with good ways to make sure people in charge were responsible and that people were taught to be good and ethical, through education and community activities[3].

However, the internet and modern technology are changing things. Now, people who are not experts or leaders can spread their ideas and influence what people think about Islam and what is right and wrong[4]. This is happening because the internet allows anyone to share their thoughts and ideas, and it is not always clear who is an expert and who is not. Islam and its teachings are being shaped by different people and things, including computers and social media. The fact that Islamic knowledge is now available to everyone is a good thing because it means more people can participate and learn about Islam. However, this also means that people may not know who to turn to for guidance on knowledge. Islamic knowledge is very complicated. Some people may make it sound simpler than it really is. This can lead to people having different and strong opinions about Islam, which is not good for the Islamic community. Islamic knowledge and Islam are very important. People need to be careful about how they understand and interpret Islam[5].

These changes are not about religion or culture; they also affect how we can keep developing in a way that is good for everyone. The way we learn about what's right and wrong, how much we trust the people in charge, how well we get along with each other, and how we act as citizens. These are all important parts of what the United Nations wants to achieve with its Sustainable Development Goals. The Sustainable Development Goals are really important for our future[6].

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals include things like making sure everyone has access to an education. This is what the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 is all about. It wants to make sure everyone can get an education that is fair and includes everyone[7]. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16 is also important because it talks about the need for honesty and fairness in our leaders and for people to be able to trust each other. The Sustainable Development Goals are what the United Nations is working towards. The internet is full of content, and this is changing the way Muslims think and act. This Islamic content is seen by millions of Muslims around the world. So we must think about what this means for Muslims and for the places they live. We need to

consider what is good. What is bad about this Islamic content? This will help us make sure that Muslims can live in a world. Islamic content is something that we need to understand so that we can make life better for Muslims in all countries[8].

Research on Islam and digital media mostly looks at how people practice their religion, the communities they form on the internet, and how digital media affects the way people spread the message of Islam. These studies are useful because they show us how people's religious habits are changing. However, they do not really think about the questions, such as how people learn what is right and wrong, who has authority, and how these changes will affect society in the long run[9].

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals research also tends to leave out the role of religion in shaping people's beliefs and values. It sees religion as a part of people's culture rather than a set of principles that can help guide people to make good choices and live better lives. Islam and digital media are topics that need to be studied together to understand how they affect people's lives. This gap in what people have written about the subject makes it hard for us to understand how Islamic thought can be a source of moral guidance in talks about development that are happening now. Islamic thought is something that can really help us make decisions, and it is a shame we do not know more about how it can be used in this way. The fact that we do not have a lot of information about thought and development is a problem because it means we are missing out on a valuable resource. Islamic thought can be very helpful when we are trying to figure out how to make the world a better place. We should learn more about it so we can use it to inform our discussions about development[10].

This study is trying to fill a gap by taking a look at how Islamic thought and religious authority are changing in the age of digital modernity. It wants to see how these changes are helping to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The study is combining ideas like *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, *adab*, and being responsible for our actions with ideas about digital power and knowledge. This helps us understand Islam in a more detailed way rather than just describing what is happening. The study of Islam is important because it can show us how Islamic thought is being reconfigured in the digital age. By looking at epistemological concepts and digital power, we can get a better understanding of how digital Islam is contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Islamic ethics is not something that gets in the way of life. It is a system that helps us figure out what is right and wrong. This system can guide us on how to use the internet and technology in a way. It can also help us make schools better and improve the way organizations work. Islamic ethics is a moral system that can help us with things like digital engagement, educational reform, and institutional development. It is about making sure Islamic ethics are a part of the way we live and work in the modern world[11].

By foregrounding the ethical dimensions of digital religious authority, this research contributes to ongoing debates on sustainable development, digital

governance, and religious education. It argues that ethically grounded Islamic engagement in digital spaces can play a vital role in promoting quality education, social justice, and institutional trust, thereby advancing the objectives of SDG 4 and SDG 16. Ultimately, the study aims to reframe Islamic thought as an active partner in shaping a more just, ethical, and sustainable digital future. This study is looking into how Islamic thought and religious authority are changing in today's digital world. We want to know how these changes are helping to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals[12].

The research is trying to understand what is happening to authority on the internet and social media. We are also looking at how the things people see online about Islam are affecting the way Muslims think about right and wrong, how they behave, and how they participate in their communities as Muslims. The study examines the impact of changes on the quality of education, interpersonal relationships, and institutional trust, all of which are crucial to Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 16. The study wants to answer these questions and find out what ideas, from thought, can help people use digital technology in a responsible way when it comes to religion and support sustainable development. Sustainable Development Goal 4 and Sustainable Development Goal 16 are really important here[13].

The primary objective of this research is to critically analyze the interaction between Islamic epistemology and digital modernity, with particular attention to the ethical consequences of emerging forms of religious authority. The study aims to assess how Islamic ethical principles, including *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and *adab*, can inform quality education, ethical governance, and peacebuilding in digitally mediated environments. In doing so, it seeks to position Islamic ethics not merely as a theological concern but as a normative resource capable of contributing meaningfully to global development agendas[14].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamic scholars have always thought that being an authority is a big responsibility. This responsibility is based on having extensive knowledge of the religion and being a person who is answerable to the community. In Islam, people become authorities by learning a lot about the religion, being very careful about how they interpret things, and being part of a group of scholars. This group makes sure that the interpretations are legitimate. The Islamic terms *‘ilm*, *isnād*, *ijtihād*, and *adab* are important. These terms are not just about thinking and learning, they are also about being ethical. They help determine who can discuss issues and when they can do so. Islamic scholars use these terms to make sure that people do not just say whatever they want about the religion[15].

For example, Islamic scholars have to know a lot about the religion to be taken seriously. They have to be careful about how they interpret the texts. They also have

to be part of a community of scholars who can check their work. This is how Islamic scholars become authorities in the religion. The terms *‘ilm*, *isnād*, *ijtihād*, and *adab* are central to this process. This old way of thinking says that what a religion teaches is closely tied to how people should behave and treat others. It is really important to be fair and not do too much or too little. The people who follow this way of thinking also care about what's good for everyone in the community. They think about justice. Making sure everyone is okay. This classical framework is about being responsible and doing what is right for the community, which is why it talks about things like justice, moderation, and public welfare, and how these things are all connected, to what a religion teaches, and how people should live their lives following the ideas of this classical framework[16].

People who study authority today know that the old ways of doing things are being challenged by the changes that are happening in the world. The world is changing in ways like more people going to school, countries becoming more powerful, and everyone being connected through the internet and other media. These changes have affected who has power in communities. In the past, the people who knew the most about Islam had the power, but now that power is held by governments, schools, and big religious groups that work across many countries. This means that more people have access to information about Islam, which is a good thing. However, it also means that there are problems like people using Islam for political power and different groups having different ideas about what Islam means[17].

Islamic authority is still really important. These changes are affecting what Islamic authority looks like today. Most of the things that have been written about this topic were done before we really saw the effects of technology. So, the literature on this subject does not really think about the implications of algorithmic mediation and platform governance. The digital technologies and their impact on our lives are a part of the problem. The literature does not talk about how algorithmic mediation and platform governance are changing things[18].

The internet is changing the way people practice religion. People are looking at how websites and online platforms are affecting the way people are religious, who they are, and how they come together. When we talk about Islam, we see that social media, video websites, and phone apps are helping people be more involved in their religion, especially younger people. Digital Islam is making it easier for people to learn about their religion. Now people can get advice from leaders online and learn from them directly, which is making things more equal for everyone who wants to learn about Islam. This kind of research usually looks at how people take part and how visible they are, rather than thinking about what digital mediation really means and if it is right. The thing is, we do not really understand how computer systems decide which Islamic voices are heard, which interpretations are used, and which emotions are appealed to in studies. Islamic studies have not thought enough about

the consequences of systems on Islamic voices and Islamic interpretations[19].

People who study lots of subjects like technology and society have been looking into how algorithms affect what we think is important and what is right and wrong. They say that algorithms are like hidden decision makers that choose what to show us based on what gets the attention, even if that means we do not get the full story or consider what is really important. When we talk about religion, this is a problem because it means that people who are supposed to be experts may not be held responsible for what they say and that religious ideas are being sold like products. It also means that some people can become famous for talking about religion without thinking about what is right and wrong. The thing about algorithms is that they shape what we know and what we think is important, and this affects how we talk about religion and what we believe. Algorithms and digital governance are changing the way we think about religion. People have learned a lot about this. Islamic ethical frameworks are not often used when looking at the power of algorithms. This means there is a difference between what we think is right online and what religion teaches us. The Islamic ethical frameworks are important when we talk about power[20].

The way Muslims behave and think about what's right and wrong is a big part of studying digital Islam. Islamic ethics is about helping people become better individuals by thinking about what they do and being responsible for their actions. This is something that Muslims learn and practice over time.

On the hand, the internet and social media are very different. They make it easy for people to look at things quickly and move on without thinking about what they mean. This can make it hard for people to really think about what's right and wrong. Some people have looked at how digital religious content can make people feel and affect them. They do not often think about how it affects people's thoughts about what is right and wrong, over a long time. They also do not think about how it affects people's responsibility to their community and how they get along with others. Digital Islam and Islamic ethics are important to consider when thinking about these issues and digital Islam. This gap is really important because ethics play a part in dealing with the problems we face today, like people being misinformed people having very different views and extremism. Ethics are crucial in addressing these issues, and the gap in ethics is particularly significant when we think about how ethics can help us with problems, like misinformation, polarization, and extremism[21].

The connection between religion and making the world a better place for everyone has become really important lately, especially when we talk about the Sustainable Development Goals. Some people who study this think that what people believe in can help us make choices be fair to each other and make sure everyone has what they need to live a good life. When we look at Islam, people have found that maqāṣid al-sharī'ah and the ideas behind the Sustainable Development Goals

are actually pretty similar. They both care about things, like education, justice, making sure people are healthy and happy, and taking care of the planet so it can sustain us. A lot of this work is still just an idea, and it does not really deal with the realities of how people use digital technology for religious practice and how religious authority is formed in the digital world of digital religious practice[22].

Research that focuses on the Sustainable Development Goals, in education, and how countries are run tends to leave out the role of religion in how people think and understand things. It looks at religion as a part of the culture rather than as a system that teaches people what is right and wrong and can bring about real change. This is a problem, especially in societies where most people are Muslim, because religion plays a huge role in shaping what people think is right and wrong, how much they trust the institutions that are supposed to help them, and how active they are in their communities. The fourth Sustainable Development Goal says that everyone should have access to education, that includes everyone and the sixteenth Sustainable Development Goal talks about peace, fairness, and strong institutions that work well. However, not much attention has been paid to how what religious leaders say online affects these things like how people learn and how countries are run in a fair way. Sustainable Development Goals are very important and research on Sustainable Development Goals should really think about the role of religion, in these areas. The fact that we do not talk about religion when we discuss how to make things is a big problem that we are not seeing. This is especially important when we think about how to make sure that the way we live is sustainable. Religion is a part of many people’s lives and we need to think about how it fits into our plans, for digital development if we want to make a better future[23].

This study is trying to fill in the gaps by bringing Islamic ethical thought the idea of digital religion and the Sustainable Development Goals framework. The study looks at how people figure out what is right and wrong in spaces and how this relates to Islamic teachings. By doing this the study goes beyond looking at how people practice their religion online. It actually evaluates how Muslims use the internet and checks if what they do is in line, with principles and the goals of sustainable development. The study of ethical thought and digital religion theory is really important here and it helps us understand digital Islamic practices. In doing so, it positions Islamic thought as an active contributor to contemporary debates on digital ethics, education, and governance, rather than as a passive subject of technological change[24].

Table 1: Mapping the Literature on Islamic Authority, Digital Religion, Ethics, and Sustainable Development

Thematic Area		Key Focus in Existing Literature		Main Identified	Limitations	Contribution of the Present Study	
Classical	Islamic	Religious	authority	Often	treated as	Reinterprets	classical

Thought and Authority	grounded in <i>‘ilm, isnād</i> , scholarly ethics (<i>adab</i>), and interpretive responsibility. Authority linked to moral formation and communal accountability.	historically fixed and insufficiently connected to contemporary digital contexts.	Islamic authority within digital modernity while preserving ethical accountability and epistemological rigor.
Transformation of Islamic Authority in Modernity	Shift from localized scholarly authority to institutional and state-mediated religious structures.	Limited engagement with the impact of digital platforms and algorithmic mediation.	Extends analysis to digital and algorithm-driven forms of authority shaping contemporary Islamic discourse.
Digital Religion and Online Islamic Practices	Focus on digital da‘wah, virtual communities, online fatwas, and increased access to Islamic knowledge.	Predominantly descriptive; lacks ethical and epistemological critique.	Provides a normative ethical analysis of digital Islamic practices grounded in Islamic thought.
Algorithmic Authority and Knowledge Production	Algorithms as regulators of visibility, engagement, and influence in digital spaces.	Rarely integrated with Islamic epistemology or religious ethics.	Applies Islamic ethical frameworks to assess algorithmic mediation of religious authority.
Ethical Formation in Islam	Emphasis on character development, intentionality, and embodied ethical practice.	Underexplored in digital contexts; long-term ethical impacts rarely assessed.	Examines how digital religious content influences moral reasoning and ethical behavior.
Islam and Sustainable Development	Alignment between <i>maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah</i> and SDGs, particularly education and justice.	Mostly conceptual; lacks engagement with digital religious realities.	Connects Islamic ethics, digital authority, and SDG implementation in practice.
Religion in SDG-Oriented Research	Religion acknowledged as cultural background in development discourse.	Religious epistemologies marginalized in policy and digital governance debates.	Positions Islamic ethics as a normative resource for SDG 4 and SDG 16.

METHODOLOGY

This study looks at how Islamic thought and religious authority're changing in the modern digital world. It also examines how these changes are related to the formation of ethics and how they contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. The study uses an approach because it allows for a detailed look, at what people mean how they interpret ethics and how authority works in online religious conversations. The study is based on the idea that what people know about religion and how they make decisions are shaped by the society they live in and the digital world they interact with. The researchers want to understand how Islamic thought and religious authority work in the age.

We collected data in three ways to get a complete picture. First, we looked at what people're saying about Islam online. We checked media, video sites and religious websites. We picked things like sermons, videos about religion and advice from religious leaders that a lot of people were talking about and sharing. We chose these things because they were about ethics a lot of people were seeing them. They showed different ways of thinking about Islam. The digital Islamic content we looked at included sermons form religious videos, online fatwas and ethical commentaries, from Islamic websites and social media channels. This method allowed for the identification of dominant ethical narratives and patterns of authority formation in digital Islamic discourse.

Second, we looked at documents to see what policies and rules are in place for education how the internet is managed and how ethics are taught. We wanted to know how schools and religious groups think about doing the thing being in charge and taking care of things when it comes to using the internet. We checked to see if what these groups are doing matches up with what they're trying to achieve with the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically the parts about education and peace which are called SDG 4 and SDG 16. We also wanted to find out if there are any disagreements, between what the groups want to do and what these goals are trying to accomplish with education and digital governance.

Third we did interviews with people, including Islamic scholars, teachers and young Muslims who use digital religious content. These interviews gave us ideas about how the internet and social media affect what people learn about religion what they think is right and wrong and who they trust to teach them. We asked open questions so people could share their thoughts and feelings and we also made sure to cover the same main topics, with everyone like whether or not they think digital religious sources are believable if they have a good influence and if people trust them.

The people doing the data analysis looked at the information in a way. They wanted to find patterns and group similar things. First, they looked at the information without any ideas in mind. They found some ideas that kept coming up like authority and ethics and education and sustainability. Then they took these ideas. Made them into bigger groups that showed how ethics works in digital Islamic things. When they did the analysis, they thought about what Islam says about ethics like *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and *adab*. They also thought about the goals, for the world like making education and making people trust institutions and get along with each other, which are related to the Sustainable Development Goals indicators. This framework helped us understand how digital religious practices affect the goals for development. We looked at religious practices and how they relate to sustainable development objectives. The framework allowed us to see if digital religious practices are good or bad, for development objectives. Digital religious practices and sustainable development objectives are. This framework helped us figure that

out.

To make the results more believable and trustworthy the researcher used sources and methods to verify the information. The researcher tried to be aware of their thoughts and feelings during the entire project to avoid influencing the results. The researcher made sure that everyone who was interviewed knew what the project was, about and agreed to be a part of it. The researcher also kept all the interviews. When looking at things that people posted online the researcher was careful to respect the people who created that content and followed the rules for talking about things.

While this methodology provides rich insights into the ethical and institutional implications of digital Islamic authority, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The qualitative nature of the study prioritizes depth over generalizability, and the focus on selected digital platforms may not capture the full diversity of digital Islamic engagement globally. Nevertheless, the methodological approach offers a robust and contextually grounded framework for understanding how Islamic thought and ethics intersect with digital modernity and contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Bridging Islamic Ethics, Digital Authority, and SDGs



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Transformation of Religious Authority in Digital Spaces

The results show that the internet and modern technology have changed the way people see religious leaders. In the world people listen to Islamic religious leaders because they are popular and good at talking to people not just because they have a lot of education or work for a big organization. Islamic leaders who are good, at using the internet and talking to people in a way that makes sense to them are more likely to be heard than the Islamic scholars. This change has allowed many

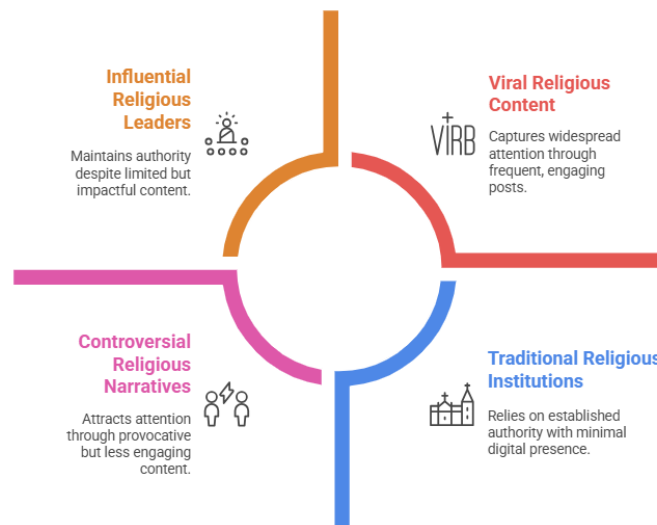
different Islamic voices to be heard and has changed the way people learn about Islam, which used to be controlled by a group of leaders. Islamic religious authority is now shaped by how people can use the internet and talk to others rather than just by their education or position[3].

The way people see authority has changed a lot with the internet. Now people do not just look at things like papers or what big institutions say. They want to know if what someone says feels real to them and if it touches their heart. They also want to know if the person talks about things that are happening in the world now. So to be seen as an authority you have to be good at connecting with people and making them feel something. You have to be able to talk to people in a way that makes sense to them and makes them feel like you understand what they are going through. This means that religious authority is not about who you are but about how you interact with people and how you make them feel. Religious authority is, about being able to perform in a way that people like and respond to. This change has really affected how people see what makes something or someone legitimate when it comes to religion. For younger people, they want things to be real and matter to them right now. They do not care much about the old ways of figuring out who is an expert on religion. The shift has changed what younger users think about legitimacy. They like things that are relevant, to their lives and that they can understand quickly.

The findings show that digital platforms help new kinds of leaders come up. These leaders combine school learning with the power of the internet. Some people who teach about religion take the teachings and make them work on the web. They use words tell stories with pictures and keep it short so people will pay attention online. This way more people can learn about religion. It also means that big ideas about right and wrong get simplified. This changes how religious leaders guide people making it more, about being clear and sure than exploring different ideas and really understanding the subject. Digital platforms and the people who use them to teach about religion are really changing things. Digital platforms are helping to create these kinds of religious leaders and this is what the findings show about digital platforms.

In addition, the decentralization of religious authority in digital spaces has intensified competition among religious voices. Algorithmic visibility mechanisms encourage continuous content production and audience engagement, often privileging controversial or emotionally charged interpretations. This competitive environment contributes to the fragmentation of authority and the coexistence of multiple, sometimes conflicting, religious narratives. The findings indicate that this fragmentation complicates efforts to establish shared ethical reference points, as authority is no longer consolidated within identifiable institutions but dispersed across fluid and rapidly shifting digital networks.

Dynamics of Religious Authority in Digital Spaces



Algorithmic Mediation of Ethical Narratives

The study shows that computer systems have a say in which stories about ethics get popular in online Islamic conversations. People are more likely to share things that make them feel strongly seem sure of what is right or wrong or make simple judgments about what is good or bad. They do not share things that're more complicated or think about the situation. So when people talk about ethics online they often only see two sides of the story. Think something is completely right or completely wrong. This does not let people really think about ethics or discuss them in a way. Digital Islamic discourse and Islamic ethical content are affected by this. The same thing happened on all the platforms that were looked at which means the internet and social media have a big influence, on what people see and talk about when it comes to Islamic ethics and digital Islamic discourse.

The results show that the way digital Islamic content is organized using algorithms has an impact on what people see when it comes to ethical messages. If an ethical story is related to what people're talking about on social media or if it makes people feel strongly like scared or really upset then people see it more often. On the hand content that talks about how things are not always clear cut or that looks at things, from different angles or that shows there are many ways to interpret Islamic law does not get seen as much. This means that people are only seeing a part of the ethical ideas that are out there and it limits the different moral views that people can see in online religious communities. Digital Islamic content is what people see. It is shaped by what the algorithms prioritize.

The analysis also shows that when we hear something times it starts to feel normal. This is because computer programs help show us the kinds of things over and over. People see the ideas about what is right and wrong and they start to think that these ideas are the only ones that matter. We do not see ways of thinking as

much because we keep seeing the same things. After a while people start to believe that some ideas about what's right and wrong are more correct than others. This happens because computer programs do not just show us things they also help make some ideas about what's right and wrong seem more important in talks about Islam, on the internet. The repetition of these ideas makes them seem legitimate, and that is what happens when we talk about Islam online and the computer programs help decide what we see.

Additionally, the findings reveal that algorithmic mediation affects the temporal nature of ethical engagement. Ethical issues are often framed as immediate and reactive responses to current events, encouraging rapid moral judgment rather than sustained ethical reflection. Short-form content formats further reinforce this immediacy by favoring concise and emotionally charged messaging. As a result, ethical engagement in digital spaces tends to prioritize instant clarity over deliberative reasoning, influencing how ethical norms are internalized and enacted by audiences.

Aspect	Observed Pattern	Effect on Ethical Discourse	Implications for Digital Islamic Ethics
Algorithmic Content Prioritization	Ethical content that evokes strong emotions, moral certainty, or simplified judgments receives higher visibility	Promotes binary moral framings (right/wrong, halal/haram)	Reduces space for nuanced ethical reasoning and contextual interpretation
Visibility of Complex Ethical Discussions	Context-sensitive, multi-perspective, or interpretive ethical discussions receive limited exposure	Narrows the range of ethical perspectives available to audiences	Marginalizes jurisprudential plurality and ethical deliberation
Repetition and Normalization	Frequently promoted ethical narratives are repeatedly encountered by users	Repetition reinforces the perceived legitimacy of certain ethical views	Establishes dominant moral narratives while sidelining alternatives
Algorithmic Shaping of Moral Legitimacy	Algorithms influence which ethical ideas appear authoritative	Visibility becomes a proxy for ethical correctness	Shifts ethical authority from scholarly processes to platform logics
Temporal Framing of Ethical Issues	Ethical discussions are framed as immediate reactions to current events	Encourages rapid moral judgment over reflection	Weakens sustained ethical formation and moral depth
Influence of Short-Form Content	Preference for concise and emotionally charged formats	Ethical messages become simplified and decontextualized	Ethical engagement prioritizes clarity and certainty over reasoning

Digital Religious Engagement and Ethical Formation

The results show that being involved with religion online has two effects on how people form their morals. Digital platforms make it easier for people to learn about teachings on ethics and they can look at religious content all the time, which is especially true for younger people.. At the same time the way people consume digital content, which is often in small pieces and very quickly can actually get in the way of really developing a strong sense of ethics and thinking deeply about moral issues. People who took part in the study said that they were more aware of issues but they did not really understand them very well which suggests that just being involved with religion online is not enough to really make ethics a part of who you are in the long run. Digital religious engagement has an impact on people and digital religious engagement can be both good and bad for how people learn about ethics and morals. Digital religious engagement is important, for ethical teachings and digital religious engagement can help people learn about Islamic ethical teachings in a new way.

The results show that the way people use media to learn about religion affects how they understand what is right and wrong. People who took part in the study said they usually look at teachings on ethics for short periods of time rather than studying them thoroughly or learning from someone who is knowledgeable. This way of learning means people get to see a lot of ideas about ethics but they do not get to really think deeply about them or learn in a systematic way. Because of this people understanding of ethics is often based on what's happening around them at the time rather than, on a clear set of principles. Islamic ethical content is learned in bits and this affects how people think about ethics. People are not always able to think about Islamic ethical content and how it applies to their lives.

The results also show that digital religious engagement tends to make people think about what's right and wrong on their own. People often look at things by themselves. Pick what they want to see choosing what they think is good or bad based on what they like and what feels right to them. This way of doing things means that people do not get to talk to each other about what's right and wrong as much as they used to when they were in places like mosques or study groups. So digital religious engagement makes it harder for people to be held accountable, for what they think is right and wrong and to talk about it with others. Digital religious engagement is changing the way people think about what's right and wrong and this is happening because people are not talking to each other about it as much as they used to.

Additionally, the findings reveal that the absence of structured pedagogical guidance in digital religious spaces affects the internalization of ethical principles. While digital platforms provide abundant ethical instruction, they rarely offer mechanisms for feedback, ethical mentoring, or practical application. Participants

noted difficulties in translating digital ethical messages into consistent moral practice, particularly in complex social situations. This suggests that without integrative educational frameworks, digital religious engagement may enhance ethical awareness without fostering sustained ethical embodiment.

Cycle of Ethical Formation in Digital Religious Engagement



Credibility, Trust, and Institutional Legitimacy

People are figuring out that what they think about religion is changing because of the internet. They trust leaders if they seem real, relatable, and consistent, not just because they have a lot of education or a big title. This is making some people question the way of doing things with religion, and it is also making new kinds of leaders popular online. These changes are important because they affect how people see religious organizations, and they raise questions about how to make sure things are fair and honest, especially when people, on the internet, are acting like religious leaders without following the usual rules.

The thing is, when we look at how people see credibility, it is often built when someone has a strong online presence and talks to their audience a lot. Religious figures who do this, like talking to their followers and answering comments, and who seem nice and easy to talk to, tend to make people trust them more. This way of building trust is about being close to people and making an emotional connection with them, which changes how we see who is in charge, in online religious communities. Digital credibility is what people are looking for. It is built when religious figures are present online and interact with their audience.

The results also show that being part of an organization does not always make people think you are credible when you are online. Sometimes people thought that being connected to a known religious group made them seem out of touch with the things that really matter to people in their daily lives, especially the younger people. This is why a lot of people like religious leaders who are not part of a big organization because they seem to understand what is going on in the world today. So people are starting to care about whether a religious organization is good, at

using the internet and responding to people online rather than just caring about how old the organization is or how official it is. Institutional affiliation and digital religious actors are being looked at in a way and institutional authority is being evaluated based on its digital responsiveness, not just its formal status or historical legitimacy and this is changing the way people think about institutional affiliation and digital religious actors.

Additionally, the findings indicate that the fragmentation of trust across multiple digital authorities complicates efforts to establish shared ethical standards. With no centralized mechanism for regulating credibility, users encounter competing ethical claims presented with similar levels of confidence and visibility. This environment makes it difficult to distinguish between ethically grounded guidance and opinion-based assertions, thereby affecting institutional legitimacy and the coherence of ethical governance in digital religious discourse.

Table 2: Patterns of Trust Formation and Institutional Legitimacy in Digital Religious Authority

Dimension	Observed Pattern	Basis of Trust Formation	Impact on Institutional Legitimacy
Changing Criteria of Credibility	Trust is increasingly based on authenticity, relatability, and consistency	Perceived sincerity and alignment with everyday concerns	Weakens reliance on formal titles and scholarly credentials
Digital Presence and Interaction	Active engagement through posts, comments, and audience interaction	Relational proximity and emotional connection	Establishes alternative authority structures outside institutions
Role of Institutional Affiliation	Organizational affiliation does not guarantee digital credibility	Digital responsiveness valued over formal status	Traditional institutions perceived as distant or less relevant
Emergence of Independent Digital Leaders	Non-institutional religious actors gain influence	Ability to address contemporary issues in accessible ways	Challenges centralized religious authority and regulation
Fragmentation	Multiple digital	Lack of clear	Complicates

of Trust	authorities coexist with similar visibility	credibility markers	formation of shared ethical standards
Ethical Governance Implications	No centralized mechanism to regulate digital authority	Competing ethical claims circulate widely	Affects coherence of ethical guidance and institutional legitimacy

Implications for Quality Education (SDG 4)

When we think about education, we see that digital Islamic education has bad points. The internet and other digital tools make it possible for people to learn about their religion from anywhere, which is really helpful. This means that people who live away or do not have access to certain institutions can still learn.

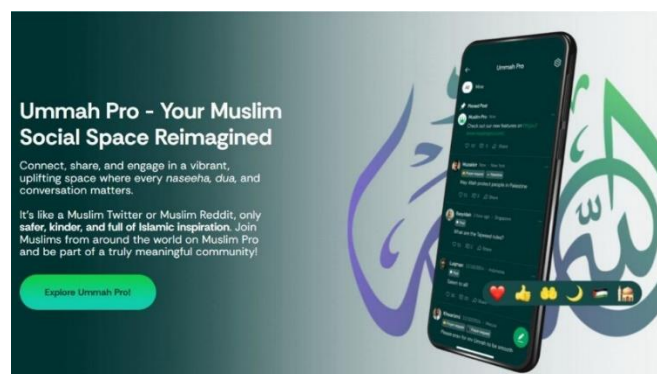
However, there is a problem because there are no rules to make sure that the people who make these tools are teaching things in a good way. If we do not make sure that these tools are used to teach people how to think and be good citizens, then digital Islamic education will not be very useful. Digital Islamic education will just be about giving people information rather than teaching them how to think for themselves and be responsible. This is important for the United Nations goal of making sure everyone has an education, which is called SDG 4. Digital Islamic education needs to be done in a way that helps people learn how to think and be good citizens, and this is what digital Islamic education should focus on.

The results show that digital Islamic education helps more people take part in learning. It does not always provide a deep understanding of the subject or make sure that people keep learning. When people learn on platforms, they usually do it on their own, and it is not well organized, so they do not have a clear plan of what to study or a way to know how well they are doing, or someone to guide them all the time. Because of this, people who learn on platforms may get some information about what is right and wrong, but they may not learn how to think critically about difficult decisions or how to apply what they have learned to real-life situations. This means that digital Islamic education is not able to help people learn in a way that is what is wanted under the Sustainable Development Goal 4 or SDG 4 for short, which is about making sure everyone gets a good education. Digital Islamic education has this problem. It is limited in what it can do to help people learn.

The results show that people who are good at using computers and the internet have better results in school. Students who are good at figuring out what is real and what is not on the internet can look at ideas about what is right and wrong and decide if something they see online about religion is true or not. On the one hand, people who are not good at using the internet are more likely to believe things that are too simple or that make them feel a certain way. This means that not

everyone has the chance to learn, and it shows that we need programs that teach Muslims about the internet and how to think critically, so everyone can have a fair chance to get a good education. Digital Islamic education is important so that people can learn how to think about things in a way and make good decisions about what they see online. This is in line with the idea of making sure everyone has access to education, which is what SDG 4 is all about.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of institutional involvement in strengthening the educational value of digital Islamic platforms. When educational institutions engage proactively in digital spaces—by offering curated content, pedagogically grounded ethical instruction, and interactive learning environments—they enhance the quality and coherence of ethical education. Such institutional engagement can help bridge the gap between accessibility and educational rigor, ensuring that digital Islamic education supports lifelong learning, ethical formation, and civic competence as envisioned by SDG 4.



CONCLUSION

This study shows that the internet and modern technology have really changed the way Muslims think about their faith, who they listen to for guidance and how they make decisions about what's right and wrong. The internet has made it easier for people to learn about Islam. It has also made it harder for traditional leaders to be in charge. When old Islamic ideas are combined with technology and rules for being a good person the results can be bad if people are not careful. Digital

Islamic spaces can make Muslims less sure about what's right and wrong and less likely to trust their leaders.. If these online spaces are guided by Islamic principles and responsible scholars they can actually help Muslims make better decisions be more involved, in their communities and have better leaders. Digital modernity and Islamic thought are connected in ways. The study looks at how digital modernity affects thought and religious authority. It also looks at how Muslims can use the internet and other technologies to learn about their faith and make choices. Islamic thought and digital modernity are topics that need to be studied carefully. Importantly, the study demonstrates that ethically grounded digital Islamic education has significant potential to contribute to the achievement of SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by promoting inclusive learning, ethical governance, and social cohesion. Overall, the research positions Islamic ethics not merely as a cultural or spiritual tradition but as a normative framework capable of engaging constructively with digital realities and global sustainable development agendas.

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Author Contribution

All authors contributed substantially to the research. The first author conceptualized the study and drafted the framework. The second author conducted a comparative legal analysis. The third author collected field data in Indonesia and Egypt. The fourth author reviewed literature, refined arguments, and ensured consistency with SDG 16 objectives. All authors approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no known financial or non-financial conflicts of interest in conducting this research. The study was carried out solely for academic purposes, with independence in data interpretation and analysis. Institutional affiliations supported the process without influencing findings, ensuring impartiality in addressing comparative perspectives of Indonesia and Egypt.

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