



ALGORITHMIC PEDAGOGY IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION: THE SHIFT FROM SANAD AUTHORITY TO DIGITAL METRICS

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Abstract: This study aimed how the logic of 'Algorithmic Pedagogy' operates to disrupt *sanad*-based religious authority and alter the epistemic structure of Islamic education. Employing a qualitative digital inquiry approach, the unit of analysis encompasses popular digital *da'wah* channels, specifically on YouTube and Instagram. The criteria for selecting content and accounts were based on high visibility, follower influence, and platform representation. Data collection was conducted through non-participatory digital observation over a six-week period, from June 11 to July 20, 2025. Utilizing the concept of 'Algorithmic Pedagogy' for data analysis, the findings reveal that this logic operates within Islamic education through three primary mechanisms: (1) Epistemic Displacement, wherein legitimacy shifts from scholarly credentials to digital engagement metrics; (2) Affective Distillation, which reduces complex theological teachings into shallow, emotionally charged commodities; and (3) Structural Polarization, wherein algorithms amplify extreme narratives over moderate traditions to maximize user retention. This study argued that this pedagogical shift engenders a new regime of truth that privileges visual performativity over scholarly authenticity. Ultimately, this research underscored the urgent need for formal Islamic educational institutions to integrate critical algorithmic literacy into their curricula, thereby equipping the younger generation to counter digital polarization and affective manipulation.

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INTRODUCTION

Mediatization has permeated every aspect of social life, producing a new ecosystem wherein social media logic shapes reality itself. In the religious context, this phenomenon is profoundly felt within the realm of Islamic education, which is currently undergoing a fundamental transformation. Historically, Islamic education holds the noble objective of forming the 'perfect human' (*insan kamil*) through the integration of spiritual, intellectual, and moral dimensions (Abusharif, 2024; Akmaliah, 2025). This process relies on a rigorous and guarded system of scholarly transmission (*sanad*) to guarantee the authenticity of knowledge transfer from generation to generation. Authority is built upon scholarly depth and communal consensus (*ijmā'*), rather than on fleeting popularity or visual appeal. However, religion is no longer confined to physical sacred spaces; it has migrated to fluid digital realms, thereby demanding a profound re-evaluation of how religious values are exchanged within a networked society (Abusharif, 2025; Andok, 2024).

Within the contemporary digital landscape, this transformation reaches a critical juncture through the so-called 'algorithmic turn'. The authority of Islamic education is no longer monopolized by traditional institutions; instead, it has shifted to social media platforms where algorithms now play a central role in dictating public content consumption (Bartsch et al., 2025; Brennen, 2025). The presence of traditional study circles (*majelis taklim*), mosques, and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) as primary sources of Islamic literacy is gradually being supplanted by platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, which frequently prioritize visual performativity and emotional narratives. This shift is not merely a change in medium, but rather a transformation in the logic of authority. Specifically, from legitimacy based on *sanad* and scholarship to authority determined by followers and engagement metrics (Bryda & Costa, 2023; Bunt, 2024; Chen et al., 2026). Based on the researcher's preliminary empirical observations, this epistemic crisis becomes starkly apparent when younger generations of Muslims instantly accept emotionally charged, viral da'wah videos from uncredentialed influencers as absolute theological truths, entirely bypassing institutional verification. Consequently, the structures governing the production and consumption of religious knowledge are undergoing radical deconstruction, signaling the onset of an epistemic crisis that urgently warrants investigation.

To navigate this ever-changing landscape, it is imperative to conceptualize structural solutions that address the core of platform-driven knowledge transmission. It is crucial to recognize that algorithms do not function as neutral entities. Rather, they filter content based on previous interaction patterns, creating filter bubbles and acting as 'gatekeepers' of new knowledge (Chen et al., 2026; Fathurrosyid et al., 2024). As a result of this machine selection mechanism, access to religious information is now heavily contingent upon the logic of virality, where extreme, emotional, and provocative content is frequently prioritized due to its high engagement potential (Haq & Kwok, 2024; Hyzen et al., 2026; Kosim et al., 2023). Conversely, profound yet less

sensational content often sinks, triggering a severe risk wherein scholarly and *sanad*-based narratives are superseded by superficial popular discourses (Li et al., 2023; Millie & Baulch, 2024). The proposed solution necessitates the development of critical algorithmic literacy within Islamic education to ensure that users can decode platform biases and that institutions can adapt their pedagogical strategies to survive knowledge fragmentation.

Meanwhile, existing studies on religion and the digital realm have predominantly polarized into three main streams: the shift of authority to popular figures (Missier, 2025; Sampo, 2025), the dominance of algorithms in the distribution of religious discourse, and the challenges of digital religious education. Although these studies have provided valuable descriptive insights, they inadequately explain the structural mechanisms operating behind the scenes to alter the foundational architecture of religious knowledge. In other words, previous literature (Saputra & Asbi, 2025; Yilmaz, 2025; Zvereva, 2023) had not fully elucidated how the reconstruction of religious authority occurs within the context of platform design and technological affordances. The majority treat social media merely as a passive medium for preaching, without examining the algorithm itself as an active pedagogical actor that inherently manipulates the epistemological frameworks of its users.

A glaring theoretical gap exists because current approaches fundamentally fail to integrate the theories of algorithmic mediation and epistemic disruption into a single, comprehensive analytical framework. Thus, the novelty of this research lies in positioning the algorithm not merely as a technological tool, but rather as an active and independent pedagogical agent that systematically re-engineers Islamic epistemology. This structural disruption is not merely a theoretical issue; rather, it presents an urgent empirical threat to the preservation of moderate Islamic traditions. Without this critical understanding, efforts to strengthen religious literacy will remain utterly ineffective. The public will be perpetually ensnared by the dominance of biased populist narratives and isolated within ideological echo chambers.

To address this theoretical and empirical urgency, the primary objective of this study is to analyze how the logic of 'Algorithmic Pedagogy' operates to disrupt *sanad*-based religious authority and alter the epistemic structure of Islamic education. Specifically, this research focuses on the structural mechanisms of epistemic displacement, affective distillation, and structural polarization occurring within viral social media platforms. The central argument posited is that these algorithmic dynamics deliberately cultivate a polarized Islamic educational landscape, one that is highly susceptible to disinformation and increasingly difficult for formal institutions to control.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative digital inquiry approach utilizing a multi-layered case study design (Brennen, 2025; Bryda & Costa, 2023). The unit of analysis encompasses popular digital *da'wah* channels, specifically on YouTube and Instagram. Sample selection was conducted using a purposive

sampling technique, resulting in a total of 12 accounts (comprising 6 YouTube channels and 6 Instagram accounts). From each selected account, one specific post was sampled for analysis (totaling 12 posts). This selection was based on the following criteria: specific content and accounts demonstrating high visibility, follower influence, and platform representation. These specific data sources were selected because they directly illustrate the complex interactions among human actors, technological affordances, and religious messages within the digital realm. Data collection was carried out through non-participatory digital observation over a six-week period, from June 11 to July 20, 2025. The data analysis applied the concept of 'Algorithmic Pedagogy', focusing on three primary mechanisms: epistemic displacement, affective distillation, and structural polarization. Finally, data validation was achieved through source triangulation, which involved rigorously cross-referencing discourse patterns and engagement metrics across the two distinct platforms to ensure analytical credibility and consistency.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results of this study are mapped through the conceptual framework of 'Algorithmic Pedagogy,' which elucidates the triadic structural shift that actively reconstructs how religious knowledge is produced, distributed, and consumed. In the context of Islamic education, this transformation is driven by three interconnected mechanisms: epistemic displacement, affective distillation, and structural polarization. Through this mapping, it becomes evident how platforms filter, amplify, and modify theological content to align with machine logic, as explicated below.

Epistemic Displacement: The Shift of Authority from *Sanad* to Digital Metrics

The findings of this study reinforce the occurrence of what is termed 'epistemic displacement'. A fundamental shift in the legitimacy of religious authority. This phenomenon is not merely a relocation of learning spaces from the physical to the virtual, but rather a structural transformation in how religious truth is validated. While authority was traditionally constructed through strict scholarly hierarchies and *sanad* (chains of transmission) connecting back to the Prophet, the digital era introduces a new regime where algorithms serve as the primary epistemic agents determining the validity of a teaching. In this contemporary digital ecosystem, the chain of transmission, or 'digital *sanad*,' operates through highly fragmented and non-linear pathways. Instead of an uninterrupted intellectual lineage guaranteed by qualified scholars, the digital *sanad* is validated solely by share frequencies, automated recommendation engines, and viral trends. Consequently, these disjointed pathways undermine the continuity of authentic transmission, engendering a system where validity is dictated by algorithmic amplification rather than sustained scholarly verification.

In the classical Islamic educational tradition, the authority of an *ulama* (scholar) does not emerge instantaneously. Such authority is built through a protracted process of *talaqqi* (face-to-face learning), mastery of *turats* (classical heritage) literature, and communal consensus (*ijmā'*). The *sanad* functions as a quality assurance mechanism, ensuring that the received knowledge remains intact and undistorted. However, this logic collides violently with the ahistorical and instantaneous logic of social media. In the digital realm, an individual's educational background becomes secondary to the content's ability to 'speak' to the algorithm. Therefore, a new digital creator can easily bypass decades of traditional study simply by mastering platform analytics and employing compelling visual editing techniques.

Platform algorithms operate on the principle of visibility rather than validity. Content is deemed 'true' or worthy of dissemination if it successfully triggers rapid user reactions. Consequently, the scholarly hierarchy becomes flattened. A novice *santri* (Islamic student) skilled in video editing can appear more authoritative in the eyes of the digital public compared to a senior *Kyai* (traditional scholar) who possesses profound knowledge but lacks a digital presence. This is the crux of the epistemic disruption: authority is no longer tethered to the personification of knowledge, but rather to the performativity of the account. This performative dominance fundamentally alters audience perception, conditioning them to equate high algorithmic visibility with absolute credibility and absolute religious superiority.

Knowledge is now readily accessible via social media, where content is disseminated by diverse individuals, including those without clear religious credentials. This landscape creates a religious 'free market' where every individual possesses an equal opportunity to claim authority. Traditional gatekeepers no longer exist to filter who is entitled to speak on *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis) or *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). This phenomenon alters how Muslims, particularly the younger generation, perceive and verify religious teachings. Verification is no longer conducted by tracing a preacher's educational background, but rather by observing the number of views, likes, and positive comments. 'Truth' becomes a quantified entity. If a video is viewed millions of times, digital mass psychology tends to perceive it as a consensus truth, even if it is theologically problematic or superficial.

Empirical evidence from the digital observations in this study indicates that novel accounts with the capacity for aesthetic visual curation frequently wield influence that surpasses traditional religious institutions. Established institutions appear sluggish in adapting to the visual language of social media, whereas these emerging actors are highly fluent in capitalizing on it. By presenting visual data, the pattern of audience preferences for these accounts can be delineated. Users are consistently drawn to digital channels that prioritize visual aesthetics and condensed messages over profound theological expositions. To provide a clearer depiction of this phenomenon, Table 1 below outlines the specific content, follower counts, and engagement metrics (views, likes, shares) to gauge actual public interest.

Table 1. The Shift in Sources of Religious Knowledge

Images	Description	Sources
	Instagram account @thesunnah_path with 1.1 million followers. Content focuses on bite-sized hadiths and highly visual quotes. Average engagement: 150,000 views, 45,000 likes, and 12,000 shares per post.	https://www.instagram.com/thesunnah_path/
	Instagram account @dakwah_islami.i with 340,000 followers. Content focuses on daily motivational Islamic reminders. Average engagement: 80,000 views, 20,000 likes, and 5,000 shares per post.	https://www.instagram.com/dakwah_islami.i/
	Instagram account @motivasi.agamaislam with 75,500 followers. Content focuses on relatable aesthetic prayers and advice. Average engagement: 35,000 views, 10,000 likes, and 2,500 shares per post.	https://www.instagram.com/motivasi.agamaislam/
	YouTube channel 'Dunia-Akhirat' with 44,300 subscribers. Content focuses on visually striking apocalyptic reminders. Average engagement: 120,000 views and 8,000 likes per video.	https://www.youtube.com/@Duniakakhirat.channel
	YouTube channel 'Islamic Lectures' with 156,000 subscribers. Content focuses on heavily edited lecture highlights. Average engagement: 250,000 views and 15,000 likes per video.	https://www.youtube.com/@IslamicLectures247

Table 1 explicitly demonstrates the content focus and the massive volume of user interaction generated by these platforms. The content focus is predominantly on fragmented, motivational, and visually appealing spiritual quotes, rather than on comprehensive theological studies. Moreover, these accounts are managed and voiced by numerous uncredentialed individuals or "entertainers" rather than formal Islamic scholars, amounting to dozens of unverified content creators acting as new authoritative figures. This clearly indicates that the functions of physical Islamic institutions are being aggressively supplanted by digital entertainers who understand algorithmic metrics. The

roles of *majelis taklim* (study circles), *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), and *madrasah diniyah* (Islamic schools) as primary references are gradually being replaced. The digital generation finds it more convenient to learn through social media due to factors of time flexibility, privacy, and ease of access ('on-demand religion'). Religion has become something consumable amidst daily activities, no longer a sacred ritual of knowledge-seeking that demands dedicated time.

However, this shift drastically alters the logic of authority from *sanad*-based legitimacy to popularity driven by engagement metrics. In this ecosystem, statistical figures become the new 'currency' for legitimacy. A *fatwa* (legal ruling) or religious viewpoint that garners thousands of shares is deemed more valid and relevant than the opinion of a scholar inscribed in a voluminous tome but never digitized. The implication of this metric dominance is the emergence of a populist form of authority. Preachers or *da'wah* accounts race to produce content that the algorithm 'likes', typically that which evokes emotion, offers instant motivation, or sparks controversy to maintain their authority. Theological accuracy frequently becomes a secondary priority to the content's potential for virality. This dynamic perfectly illustrates how algorithms compel creators to prioritize engagement metrics, fundamentally displacing the epistemological rigor that once defined traditional Islamic education.

In this context, popular figures or Muslim influencers capable of forging emotional connections are heeded more than institutional scholars. This phenomenon triggers 'The Net Imam Effect.' A Net Imam is not necessarily a scholar in the traditional sense; they are figures capable of mediating religious messages through pop culture idioms, captivating visual aesthetics, and rhetoric that touches the audience's hearts. These *da'wah* influencers often construct their authority through personal narratives of *hijrah* (spiritual migration/repentance) or aspirational Islamic lifestyles, rather than through demonstrations of mastery over instrumental sciences (*nahwu-sharaf*/Arabic syntax and morphology) or *ushul al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence). The emotional proximity built through smartphone screens creates an illusion of intimacy (parasocial interaction), causing followers to trust the influencer's words more than the official *fatwas* of religious institutions. Consequently, the digital audience unconsciously surrenders their religious validation to these influencers, further entrenching the mechanism of epistemic displacement.

As a result, scholarly authority is no longer hierarchical-elitist, but rather radically decentralized. Although this decentralization appears democratic by providing space for multiple voices, it simultaneously engenders epistemological chaos. Without a *sanad* structure and clear guidance from a teacher, the *ummah* (Muslim community) is left groping for truth amidst a wilderness of often contradictory and unverified information. Thus, algorithmically driven epistemic displacement has precipitated a crisis of authority within Islamic education. Witnessing the birth of a generation of Muslims who are digitally pious yet epistemologically fragile. This possess a high degree of religious zeal due to social media exposure, yet their knowledge base is constructed upon a fragile algorithmic foundation rather than a robust scholarly tradition.

Affective Distillation: Transforming Substance into Emotional Commodities

The second fundamental mechanism of algorithmic pedagogy is what this study defines as 'affective distillation.' This concept refers to the systematic process wherein broad, complex, and multidimensional religious teachings are forcibly 'distilled' or condensed into mere emotional extracts. In this distillation process, rational, contextual, and historical elements are frequently discarded, leaving behind a residue of content designed solely to elicit feelings—be it sorrow, fear, or joy devoid of a robust cognitive foundation. This distillation process is not accidental; rather, it is a calculated response to platform algorithms that reward instantaneous emotional reactions. By stripping away theological complexity, creators ensure their content remains highly consumable for an audience possessing an exceedingly short attention span.

The digital era has drastically altered the substantive character of religious education. While traditional Islamic education emphasizes a comprehensive *sanad*-based approach—which demands perseverance in studying a text from beginning to end (*khatam*)—social media introduces a fragmented learning pattern. This era has shifted the educational paradigm from depth to instant fragmentation. Knowledge is no longer perceived as a coherent edifice to be constructed brick by brick, but rather as random puzzle pieces consumed without guidance. This fragmentation inherently undermines critical thinking, conditioning users to accept brief, sensational theological fragments as unquestionable absolute truths. Consequently, the profound intellectual tradition of Islamic scholarship is increasingly marginalized in favor of surface-level digital content.

This transformation does not occur by chance; it is driven by the technical architecture of the platforms themselves. Religious content undergoes a reduction into emotional products to satisfy algorithmic logic, which prioritizes user engagement over substantive depth. Algorithms are designed to maximize 'time on site,' and emotionally evocative content is practically far more effective at retaining user attention than content that invites deep, critical thought. Due to this algorithmic pressure, *da'wah* content creators both scholars and influencers are compelled to adapt, consciously or otherwise. They begin producing 'algorithm-friendly' content. Two-hour lectures are spliced into 60-second clips (Reels/Shorts) featuring only the most humorous, sorrowful, or anger-inducing segments. To illustrate this context vividly, observational results revealed that a full 1-hour theological lecture video by a prominent *Ustadz* (religious teacher) on YouTube garnered merely around 14,000 views over three months. However, when a highly emotional 45-second segment from the exact same lecture was extracted and uploaded as an Instagram Reel accompanied by melancholic music, the views exploded to 1.5 million in just three days. The initial and concluding contexts of the discourse are often lost, yet it is these fragments that go viral and are perceived as holistic representations of religious doctrine.

Table 2. The Shift in the Character of Religious Education Substance

Images	Description	Sources
	A Reel posted by Instagram account @n_kirakira featuring an Islamic lecture by an Ustadz. Format: 45-second short video. It garnered 1 million likes, 2,835 comments, and 220,000 shares. A full 2-hour long lecture video (120 minutes) covering the complete context of the snippet in Image 1.	Instagram YouTube (Comparison Data: 15,000 views total).

As illustrated in Table 2, the landscape of viral content is dominated by bite-sized formats that trigger fleeting emotions. This format is immensely popular as it aligns with the diminishing attention span of the digital generation. This demonstrates how an account's popularity is not determined by the depth of textual study, but by the manager's skill in packaging religious messages into visually compelling content that touches the heart. A stark visual contrast can be observed between lengthy traditional studies and these distilled, short-form formats.

It is abundantly clear that audiences are far more inclined to watch short Reels lasting 30 to 45 seconds than complete, comprehensive videos. While the 1-hour video merely amassed 14,000 views, the 45-second emotional extract distilled from identical content generated over a million interactions. This pattern confirms that algorithms aggressively promote, and users overwhelmingly favor, fragmented emotional extracts over deep, continuous learning. This verifies that content with the highest engagement minimizes the cognitive load on its users. Users do not need to think critically to digest the message "Allah loves you" in comic form, or "The punishment of the grave is severe" in a 30-second video. This ease of consumption creates an illusion of knowledge; users feel they have studied religion, when in reality, they have merely consumed the surface froth of the vast ocean of Islamic scholarship.

Although such content successfully inflates engagement statistics, it frequently strips away crucial nuances regarding adherence and historical context. Islam, which is fundamentally a value system encompassing *aqidah* (creed), *sharia* (Islamic law), and *akhlak* (ethics), is reduced to motivational quotes. Demanding aspects of the religion, such as the detailed prerequisites and pillars of worship (*syarat* and *rukun*), rarely find a place within the algorithm as they are deemed tedious and 'unshareable.' Observations noted a significant finding that viral *da'wah* content is often not the most scientifically authentic, but rather the most emotionally resonant with the audience. Theological validity becomes secondary; the primary importance is placed on whether the content

'relates' to the users' confusion, anxiety, or hopes. This creates a paradox where narratives with a weak foundational text (*dalil*) can become more popular and trusted than robust narratives delivered in a monotonous manner. Consequently, the pedagogical value of Islam is severely compromised, trading transformative education for momentary psychological comfort.

This phenomenon leads to a systematic shallowing of meaning. 'Heavy' concepts in Islamic theology are simplified into sensational jargon lacking adequate scholarly grounding. Take, for instance, the concept of *jariyah* (continuous) sin. In *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), the concepts of *jariyah* sin and reward involve complex discussions regarding their terms and conditions. However, on social media, this term is frequently used indiscriminately to intimidate women who do not wear the *syar'i hijab*, solely to incite fear and elicit reshares. This oversimplification is perilous as it eliminates the space for discussion and nuance. Religious laws are presented in black-and-white terms, disregarding the *khilafiyah* (differences of opinion) among scholars, which is actually the intellectual wealth of Islam. Audiences are encouraged to judge or feel self-righteous based on a short video clip, without understanding the *asbab al-nuzul* (circumstances of revelation) or the social context of the ruling. By excising these necessary contexts, affective distillation fundamentally distorts the moderate and comprehensive nature of traditional Islamic jurisprudence.

Furthermore, algorithms actively incentivize creators to produce 'marketable' material. Engagement metrics become the benchmark of success. This pressure engenders the commodification of religion. An *Ustadz* or *da'wah* account no longer functions purely as an educator, but also as a content producer who must satisfy the market. If the market (audience) favors content about marriage and instant wealth, the algorithm will compel creators to continuously produce such topics, neglecting other subjects that may be more urgent yet less marketable. Consequently, religion transforms from a comprehensive way of life guiding behavior into a digital commodity traded via likes and shares. The sanctity of the teachings is eroded by digital exchange value. An individual may feel profoundly religious simply by reposting a heartwarming lecture video, even if their real-world behavior does not reflect those teachings. This is a form of symbolic piety facilitated by affective distillation. Ultimately, this mechanism threatens the integrity of Islamic education, producing a generation that reacts emotionally to religious stimuli but lacks the logical foundation to practice them correctly.

Structural Transformation: Algorithmic Polarization and the Crisis of Truth

The transformation of the epistemic structure of Islamic education in the digital era is becoming increasingly evident and alarming through the intensification of polarization. This phenomenon is not merely a byproduct of freedom of expression, but rather a logical consequence of the operational mechanisms of digital infrastructure. Social media platforms are not designed to seek theological truth (*haq*); rather, these are engineered to maximize user retention. Within this architecture, the moderate and balanced (*wasathiyah*)

structure of Islamic knowledge is frequently marginalized, as it is deemed less 'engaging' by recommendation engines. This polarization is driven by dual, interconnected mechanisms. It is deeply embedded within a 'spectacle algorithm' that perpetually promotes content frequently visited or favored by polarized factions, while simultaneously being fueled by highly controversial content titles deliberately designed to provoke direct emotional clashes among viewers.

The fundamental nature of algorithms is to respond to user interaction patterns. Algorithms are programmed to detect which content triggers the fastest and most intense reactions. Mass psychology demonstrates that content inciting anger, fear, or sectarian fanaticism is far more effective at generating comments and shares than soothing or academic content. Consequently, emotional and extreme content receives a 'visibility subsidy' from the platform. This mechanism poses a profound challenge to Islamic education, as the boundaries between moderate majority views and extreme minority views become blurred. In the physical world, extremist groups may be small in number; however, in the algorithmic world, they can appear to dominate the discourse (the 'loud minority' phenomenon). Algorithms hand a giant megaphone to provocative fringe narratives, causing users—particularly the laity—to perceive these harsh narratives as the true face of Islam. As users continuously interact with these controversial titles and extreme videos, algorithms ensnare them in an endless loop of polarized content, entirely eradicating moderate perspectives from their digital feeds.

Table 3. Extreme and Emotional Content

Images	Description	Sources
	Islamic lecture content by an Ustadz, uploaded by the YouTube channel 'MUALAF CENTER AYA SOFYA', containing extremist rhetoric and viewed 4.9 million times.	https://www.youtube.com/@MUALAFCENTERAYASOFYA
	Posts on Instagram accounts @ngertiagama and @ceramahgusbaha discussing the 'Salafi and Wahhabi Methodology of Polygamy'.	Instagram
	Islamic lecture content by a Habib, uploaded by the YouTube channel 'PM-PRO Media', containing extreme phrasing and viewed 114,000 times.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-aUFGq_9c

	An Instagram Reel featuring an eccentric preacher with the caption "Mama Gufron summoned by Allah, the Prophet, and Angel Gabriel to stop the Mount Semeru Disaster and Cilegon Tsunami," which went viral. Islamic lecture content by Ustadz Yahya Waloni, uploaded by the YouTube channel 'Islam Sumirat', containing extremist lectures and viewed 96,526 times.	Instagram https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ojc4bqTOcvE&list=PLSwO_rKnOGc8LnqG01bHsawMzEBluRryF&index=1
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Table 3 clearly illustrates how controversial narratives take center stage within this ecosystem. The presented data are not merely statistical figures, but rather a reflection of algorithmic preferences that prioritize sensationalism. Channels presenting high-pitched sermons, attacks against other groups, or irrational claims gain vastly more exposure than official educational channels. It is evident that extreme rhetorical patterns, eccentric claims, and rigid ideological framing dominate viewership. Interpreting this visual data reveals that the digital ecosystem actively rewards controversy and conflict over academic harmony.

As a primary case study, one can observe the phenomenon of Ustadz Yahya Waloni's lectures recorded in the table. His video content titled "*Ceramah Bikin Pembenci Islam Mimisan*" (Lecture Makes Islam Haters Get Nosebleeds) has been viewed tens of thousands of times. This provocative title and content, steeped in an 'us versus them' narrative, are highly favored by algorithms because they ignite fierce debates in the comment section. The algorithm interprets these debates as a signal of 'engaging content' and propagates it further. A secondary case is the Mama Gufron phenomenon. His sensational claimed such as being able to make video calls with angels or speak the language of ants have amassed hundreds of thousands of views and gone viral across various platforms. From the perspective of Islamic education, such content clearly constitutes public obfuscation and the shallowing of *aqidah* (creed). However, for algorithms, this content is gold, as it triggers curiosity and 'hate-watching,' both of which are calculated as engagement. This confirms that platforms do not evaluate the theological accuracy of a piece of content; they merely optimize the emotional friction that keeps users scrolling their screens.

Herein lies the crisis of truth: algorithms lack the feature to distinguish between authentic *karamah* (divine miracles/gifts) and misleading fabrications. Algorithms only care about metrics. When Mama Gufron's content goes viral, it distorts the lay public's understanding of the concept of sainthood (*wali*) in Islam, shifting it from piety and scholarship to mere performative miracles or

eccentricity. Beyond sensationalism, Table 3 also demonstrates the dominance of rigid ideological narratives, such as content titled "*Manhaj Poligami ala Salafi-Wahabi*" (The Salafi-Wahabi Method of Polygamy). This upload presents an absolute view of polygamy, a *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) issue that is intrinsically complex and bound by strict conditions. Such content simplifies the issue into black-and-white terms, as if polygamy were the sole standard of piety, entirely ignoring the *maqashid al-shariah* (higher objectives of Islamic law) perspective regarding familial justice. Consequently, the richness of classical Islamic jurisprudence is flattened into binary and simplistic ideologies that forcibly drive algorithmic polarization.

The greatest peril of such content's virality is the formation of echo chambers. Once a user interacts (likes or watches for a specific duration) with a hardline lecture video by Ustadz Yahya Waloni, the algorithm will immediately recommend similar videos from other preachers of the same archetype. Users are gradually isolated within an information bubble where they are perpetually exposed to only one extreme viewpoint. Inside the echo chamber, moderate views are no longer visible. Users feel that the entire world agrees with the extreme views they are watching, because that is the only reality presented on their social media feeds. This pseudo-validation hardens fanatical beliefs and closes the door to dialogue. For Islamic education, which emphasizes *tasamuh* (tolerance) and dialogue, this mechanism poses an existential threat, as it extinguishes critical reasoning and empathy toward differences. This algorithmic isolation severely damages the social fabric of the Muslim community by normalizing hostility and extreme theological tribalism.

Algorithms prove to be more than mere technical tools or passive information conduits. They act as cultural actors that actively mediate religious realities. They participate in 'teaching' and shaping the *ummah's* (Muslim community's) perception of what Islam is. When an algorithm more frequently offers conflict-laden content over peaceful content, it effectively constructs the perception that Islam is a religion fraught with conflict. A further consequence is that religious education is now controlled by platform design, no longer by *pasantren* curricula or Islamic organizations. Platform governance wields massive geopolitical and social power. In this context, the authority to determine the *ummah's* 'curriculum' has shifted from the hands of the *Kyais* to the software engineers in Silicon Valley or Beijing who design these algorithmic codes. This shift signifies an unprecedented loss of epistemological sovereignty, placing the theological future of the *ummah* in the hands of profit-oriented corporate coding.

This profit-oriented platform design risks shaping a younger generation of Muslims who think dichotomously. They are educated by their social media feeds to view the world in only two colors: *haq* (truth) versus *bathil* (falsehood), friend versus foe, heaven versus hell, without any gray areas for *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) or differences of opinion, which are inherently *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to the worlds). This binary mode of thinking is dangerous in a pluralistic society as it becomes the seedbed for intolerance. Furthermore, this crisis of truth is exacerbated by the erosion of verifying authorities. Within

traditional structures, if bizarre teachings emerge (such as the Mama Gufron case), the public would consult local scholars. However, in the algorithmic era, clarifications from scholars are often outpaced and less viral than the hoax content itself. A viral lie is believed as truth much faster than a boring fact. Thus, navigating this polarized ecosystem demands urgent systemic interventions within the framework of Islamic education to actively combat algorithmically induced extremism.

Discussion

Epistemic Displacement

This study identified the occurrence of a massive epistemic displacement, shifting religious legitimacy from scholarly *sanad* (chains of transmission) to digital metrics, effectively replacing the roles of traditional *Mursyid* (spiritual guides) or *Kyai* (scholars) with algorithmic recommendation engines. In this context, the classical guarantee of unbroken transmission (Harahap & Ritonga, 2023; Howard et al., 2025; Leo et al., 2025), and the physical functions of *majelis taklim* (study circles) are marginalized by a flattened hierarchy where digital performativity reigns supreme. These findings significantly expand upon theories regarding algorithmic religious authority. While previous studies (Abusharif, 2024; Habes et al., 2023) have largely viewed digital media merely as neutral spaces for the expansion of traditional *da'wah* or highlighted the 'Net Imam Effect' and the ease of knowledge access, this research demonstrates that algorithms actively redefine who is deemed an authoritative figure in the absence of traditional gatekeepers. This confirms that the democratization of authority is pseudo-democratic, precipitating epistemological chaos, as legitimacy is distributed based on engagement metrics and parasocial interactions, causing the digital mass to equate viral view counts with consensus truth.

This fundamental shift occurs because digital platforms are engineered as an attention economy that commodifies information. Within this environment, the protracted, multi-year processes of traditional Islamic scholarship cannot compete with the instant gratification provided by aesthetic visual curation. Algorithms systematically democratize authority not to empower the masses, but because lowering the barrier to entry maximizes the volume of content produced, thereby keeping users perpetually tethered to the platform. The question of "who is your teacher" is naturally erased because platform interfaces are designed to highlight content virality rather than the creator's educational background.

Affective Distillation

Alongside epistemic displacement, this study also identified the presence of affective distillation, wherein complex and multidimensional theological substance is forcibly extracted and reduced into easily consumable emotional products. This mechanism shifts the character of education from profound depth to instant fragmentation (Enggal et al., 2026; Hidayat, 2024), frequently

oversimplifying weighty *fiqh* (jurisprudence) concepts, such as *jariyah* (continuous) sin, solely to incite fear. These findings significantly advance prior literature on the mediatization of religion (Hambali & Mardiya, 2023; Haq & Kwok, 2024), which noted the shallowness of digital *da'wah* yet frequently failed to delineate the systemic algorithmic coercion behind it. They align with recent digital sociology demonstrating that emotional resonance often supersedes scholarly authenticity and that algorithmic pressures compel creators to commodify religious metrics. This structure systematically filters out aspects of religion demanding discipline, conditioning the *ummah* (Muslim community) to respond to religion with feelings thereby facilitating a symbolic piety, rather than rational comprehension.

The root cause of this distillation lies in the psychological mechanisms actively exploited by platform architectures. Algorithms prioritize content that triggers immediate affective responses, such as tears, laughter, or outrage, because emotional arousal is the most potent driver proven effective in increasing content sharing and user retention. Consequently, profound theological nuances and historical contexts are systematically eradicated because a heavy cognitive load naturally resists the passive scrolling behavior that platforms heavily rely upon to generate ad revenue. Creators are structurally coerced into becoming emotional entertainers to survive algorithmic filtering.

Structural Transformation

The final finding of this study is the presence of a structural transformation wherein algorithms perpetually amplify extreme and controversial narratives, ultimately drowning out moderate Islamic traditions (*wasathiyah*) and creating a crisis of truth. These harsh narratives are frequently perceived by the laity as the true face of Islam, a consequence of social media being optimized not for the pursuit of theological truth, but for the maximization of retention. Unlike early cyber-optimist theories (Howard & Slempe, 2025; Paquianadin et al., 2024; Saepudin et al., 2023; Saini et al., 2023) which predicted that the internet would foster a united global *ummah*, this research supports a critical perspective highlighting how the 'algorithmic turn' actively fractures religious communities by hardening fanatical beliefs and closing the doors to dialogue. This is exacerbated by the formation of perilous echo chambers and a crisis of verification wherein scholarly clarifications are outpaced by viral hoaxes. Consequently, these findings resonate deeply with the concept of platform governance, proving that algorithmic codes act as cultural actors wielding massive geopolitical power, ultimately dictating the ideological orientation of the digital Muslim generation and superseding the curricula of traditional Islamic organizations.

This polarization occurs because algorithms are inherently biased toward conflict. Peace, tolerance, and academic harmony do not generate the fierce debates, outrage, or 'hate-watching' that dramatically inflate engagement statistics. This issue stems fundamentally from the commercial business model of tech giants, where user attention is directly monetized; consequently, platforms

design their systems to prioritize sensationalism over substance to satisfy their financial bottom line. Recommendation engines systematically isolate users into ideological echo chambers to feed them a continuous stream of extreme content that perpetually validates their preexisting views. This ensures they never step outside their cognitive comfort zones, thereby maximizing time spent on the platform. Algorithms literally capitalize on social division.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the fields of digital religion and Islamic education by introducing the concept of 'Algorithmic Pedagogy,' shifting the analytical focus from human actors to machine logic as the primary pedagogical agent. Practically, this study provides a critical diagnostic tool for Islamic educational institutions to comprehend precisely how their epistemological authority is being undermined, while simultaneously warning against the creation of a generation characterized by 'fragile piety.' Regarding an actionable roadmap based on these results, formal Islamic institutions must urgently transition from merely digitizing their existing traditional curricula toward actively developing 'Algorithmic Literacy' programs. *Pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and Islamic universities need to train their *santri* (students) not only in reading classical texts but also in decoding platform biases. Concurrently, they must establish strategic digital task forces capable of producing algorithmically optimized yet theologically robust counter-narratives to reclaim the digital public sphere.

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that the digital transformation of Islamic education represents a fundamental epistemological shift driven by "Algorithmic Pedagogy," wherein algorithms act as autonomous actors reconstructing religious authority through epistemic displacement, affective distillation, and structural polarization. This affirms that machine logic, rather than traditional *sanad*, now dictates theological validity. Practically, this study implies the urgent need for formal Islamic educational institutions to integrate critical algorithmic literacy into their curricula to equip the younger generation in countering digital polarization and affective manipulation. However, a primary limitation of this study is its reliance on non-participatory digital observation without in-depth qualitative interviews, which constrains insights into how audiences subjectively process and internalize this algorithmic pedagogy in their lived realities. Therefore, future research is highly recommended to employ phenomenological approaches or quantitative surveys to explore the psychological dimensions of audience reception, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of digital literacy interventions in bolstering the epistemic resilience of the Muslim community (*ummah*).

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