

# BENCHMARKING

JURNAL MANAJEMEN PENDIDIKAN ISLAM

## EPISTEMIC AUTHORITY IN THE AGE OF ALGORITHMS: RECONFIGURING KNOWLEDGE LEGITIMACY IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION

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### Abstract

The rapid expansion of algorithmic systems in education has begun to reshape not only how knowledge is accessed but how it is authorised. While existing scholarship examines artificial intelligence primarily in terms of pedagogy, efficiency, and governance, limited attention has been given to its impact on epistemic authority, particularly within religious educational traditions. This study investigates how algorithmic mediation reconfigures knowledge legitimacy in Islamic education. Employing a qualitative library-based methodology, the research engages interdisciplinary scholarship in sociology of knowledge, digital governance, and Islamic intellectual history to analyse the structural transformation of epistemic authority from relational transmission to computational visibility. The findings indicate that algorithmic systems function as epistemic intermediaries that influence credibility through ranking, optimisation, and generative synthesis. However, this shift does not displace traditional forms of authority grounded in textual continuity, moral exemplarity, and scholarly lineage. Instead, Islamic education now operates within a layered epistemic configuration in which relational, institutional, and algorithmic modalities of legitimacy coexist. The study proposes a layered epistemic model to conceptualise this coexistence and argues that epistemic authority in the age of algorithms must be understood as composite rather than singular. By extending debates on algorithmic governance into the domain of sacred knowledge traditions, this article contributes to broader discussions on educational legitimacy, digital transformation, and the future of epistemic authority in technologically mediated societies.

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## INTRODUCTION

The expansion of algorithmic systems in contemporary education has transformed not only modes of access to information but the very architecture of epistemic authority. Search engines, recommender systems, and generative artificial intelligence increasingly function as intermediaries that filter, rank, summarise, and produce knowledge claims (Ashraf et al. 2024). In doing so, they participate in shaping what is visible, credible, and authoritative. Scholars of algorithmic governance have argued that computational systems do not merely execute neutral procedures; they structure decision-making environments and embed normative assumptions within technical infrastructures (Amer and Elboghdady 2024). As algorithmic mediation becomes central to knowledge circulation, the question of who—or what—counts as an epistemic authority demands renewed scrutiny.

Within sociology of knowledge, authority has long been understood as socially constructed and institutionally stabilized (Swidler and Ardit 1994). Organisational scholarship further demonstrates how legitimacy emerges through regulatory endorsement, normative alignment, and cultural-cognitive internalisation (Martin and Christie 2009). In educational contexts, knowledge authority is often secured through institutional accreditation, professional recognition, and curricular standardization (Ayemowa et al. 2024; Bruce Hall 2007). Yet the growing reliance on algorithmic systems introduces a qualitatively different configuration. Algorithms rank content based on proprietary metrics, optimise visibility through engagement data, and generate synthetic responses detached from identifiable authorship. Authority becomes correlated with computational prominence rather than embodied expertise.

Recent research in digital sociology and AI studies suggests that algorithms increasingly function as epistemic gatekeepers (Abusharif 2024). Their outputs are frequently perceived as objective, efficient, and comprehensive, reinforcing what has been described as “algorithmic authority” (Samudra et al. 2024). In educational settings, students consult search engines and AI systems before consulting teachers; automated summaries compete with scholarly exposition; machine-generated responses shape interpretive frameworks (Fadden et al. 2024). This shift does not simply expand access to knowledge; it reconfigures the conditions under which knowledge is legitimised.

Despite the growing literature on artificial intelligence in education, much of the discussion focuses on pedagogical innovation, data analytics, or ethical concerns such as bias and transparency (Selwyn and Facer 2014). Less attention has been devoted to the transformation of epistemic legitimacy itself—particularly within religious educational traditions where authority has historically been grounded in moral character, relational transmission, and continuity with sacred sources (Prokazina and Васильевна 2024). The intersection between algorithmic mediation and transcendence-oriented epistemology remains under-theorised.

This gap becomes especially salient in the context of Islamic education. Classical Islamic intellectual tradition developed a sophisticated epistemic architecture centred on *sanad*, the chain of transmission that authenticated scholarly authority through relational continuity (Davies et al. 2021). Knowledge was not merely informational but ethical and spiritual in orientation. The legitimacy of a scholar derived from mastery of texts, moral integrity, and recognised lineage within a community of learning. Authority was embodied and relational, sustained through face-to-face pedagogy and ethical formation. In Weberian terms, such authority combined elements of traditional and charismatic legitimacy rooted in religious authenticity (Weber 2013).

Algorithmic systems operate according to fundamentally different principles. They privilege scale, speed, pattern recognition, and engagement metrics. Their authority is inferred from systemic performance rather than personal credibility. When knowledge is mediated by algorithmic infrastructures, legitimacy may become associated with visibility rankings, optimisation patterns, or data coherence rather than with epistemic lineage or moral exemplarity. As a result, the transition from scholar-centred to system-mediated knowledge environments raises critical questions about how epistemic authority is reconstituted.

Institutional and organisational theories offer partial insight into these dynamics by explaining how educational institutions adapt to external pressures and technological shifts (Powell 2022). However, such frameworks primarily address structural conformity and regulatory legitimacy. They do not fully theorise how technological infrastructures themselves become actors in the production and validation of knowledge. Nor do they adequately account for contexts in which legitimacy is understood as simultaneously social and transcendent.

Islamic education today increasingly operates within digitally mediated environments. Online platforms disseminate religious instruction; digital fatwas circulate globally; AI systems generate theological explanations (A'la and Makhshun 2022). While Islamic intellectual tradition has historically adapted to new media—from manuscript to print to broadcast—the algorithmic turn differs in its capacity to evaluate, rank, and generate knowledge autonomously. Algorithms are not merely channels of transmission; they are epistemic participants (Abidin 2020). This development introduces tension between embodied scholarly authority and data-driven legitimacy.

The problem, therefore, is not technological adoption per se but epistemic reconfiguration. If authority becomes anchored primarily in algorithmic visibility, relational chains of transmission may weaken (Anthony 2018). Conversely, if traditional institutions reject algorithmic mediation entirely, they risk marginalisation within digitally structured knowledge economies. The challenge lies in understanding how epistemic legitimacy is reconstructed when sacred knowledge traditions intersect with computational infrastructures.

This study addresses that challenge by examining how epistemic authority is reconfigured in the age of algorithms within Islamic educational contexts. Employing a library-based conceptual methodology, it engages interdisciplinary scholarship in sociology of knowledge, philosophy of education, AI governance, and Islamic intellectual history. Through systematic mapping and critical synthesis, the analysis investigates two interrelated questions: first, how algorithmic systems reshape structures of knowledge legitimacy; and second, how Islamic educational traditions can conceptualise authority within a layered epistemic environment.

The central argument advanced here is that algorithmic mediation introduces a new modality of epistemic legitimacy grounded in computational validation, optimisation, and systemic visibility. However, this modality does not necessarily displace traditional forms of authority. Instead, it produces a layered epistemic configuration in which textual continuity, moral exemplarity, institutional recognition, and algorithmic mediation coexist in dynamic interaction. Recognising this layered structure is essential for understanding the future of Islamic education in digitally saturated environments.

By reframing the transformation of epistemic authority as a structural rather than merely technological issue, this study contributes to broader debates on algorithmic governance, educational legitimacy, and religious authority. It demonstrates that the age of algorithms does not simply accelerate information flows; it redefines the criteria through which knowledge is trusted, validated, and institutionalised. In doing so, it invites a re-examination of how sacred epistemologies can engage emerging technological systems without relinquishing their foundational commitments to ethical integrity and transcendence-oriented legitimacy.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative library-based research design aimed at conceptual reconstruction rather than empirical measurement. The objective is not to test causal relationships but to interrogate and extend theoretical understandings of epistemic authority in the context of algorithmic mediation and Islamic education. As a form of theory-building inquiry, the methodology draws upon systematic literature mapping, comparative conceptual analysis, and interdisciplinary synthesis (Powers 2004).

The primary sources consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, foundational theoretical texts, and classical as well as contemporary scholarship relevant to three interrelated domains: epistemic authority, algorithmic governance, and Islamic intellectual

tradition. Literature on epistemic authority and sociology of knowledge was engaged to clarify how legitimacy and credibility are socially constructed and institutionally stabilised (Garcia et al. 2019). Scholarship on algorithmic systems and digital governance was examined to understand how computational infrastructures function as epistemic intermediaries that shape visibility, relevance, and authority (Cronin 2007). In parallel, classical and modern works on Islamic epistemology were analysed to reconstruct traditional models of knowledge transmission, including *sanad*, embodied scholarship, and moral credibility (Iftikhar et al. 2024).

The analytical procedure unfolded in three stages. First, a systematic mapping of epistemic authority theory was conducted to identify dominant conceptual assumptions regarding legitimacy, credibility, and knowledge validation. Particular attention was given to the distinction between socially constructed authority and institutionalised recognition, as well as to critiques of epistemic injustice and testimonial credibility (Powers 2004). This stage clarified the prevailing theoretical boundaries within which authority is typically understood in modern educational and technological contexts.

Second, literature on algorithmic mediation was analysed to determine how computational systems function as epistemic actors. Rather than treating algorithms as neutral tools, the analysis conceptualised them as infrastructures that embed normative hierarchies within ranking systems, optimisation logics, and data-driven visibility regimes (Fouz Mohamed Zacky and Moniruzzaman 2024). This stage identified a shift from person-centred to system-mediated validation, where epistemic prominence is frequently determined by algorithmic metrics rather than embodied expertise.

Third, Islamic intellectual sources were examined through hermeneutic interpretation to reconstruct traditional models of epistemic legitimacy. Concepts such as *sanad*, scholarly lineage, and moral exemplarity were analysed not as theological claims but as sociologically operative categories that structure recognition and trust (Rashid 2024). Through comparative synthesis, the study identified tensions and convergences between transcendence-oriented authority and algorithmic mediation. This stage culminated in the formulation of a layered epistemic model capable of integrating textual continuity, moral authority, institutional recognition, and algorithmic visibility within a single analytical framework.

Throughout the research process, analytical rigour was maintained through transparent criteria of source selection, engagement with highly cited foundational works, and avoidance of selective confirmation. Cross-disciplinary dialogue between sociology of knowledge, philosophy of education, digital governance studies, and Islamic intellectual history was employed to minimise conceptual reductionism (Adiyono et al. 2024). Reflexive scrutiny was applied to prevent technological determinism and romanticisation of traditional authority alike. Algorithmic systems were neither portrayed as inherently corrosive nor uncritically emancipatory; rather, they were analysed as structurally transformative epistemic infrastructures (Mårtensson and Vongraven Eriksen 2018).

As a non-empirical library-based inquiry, this study did not involve human participants and therefore did not require ethical clearance for fieldwork. Ethical integrity was upheld through accurate citation, faithful representation of primary arguments, and critical engagement with diverse perspectives. By combining systematic literature mapping, hermeneutic reconstruction, and theory elaboration, the study develops a conceptually grounded framework for analysing the reconfiguration of epistemic authority in Islamic education under conditions of algorithmic mediation.

## RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Research Results

#### **The Transformation of Epistemic Authority: From *Sanad* to Algorithmic Mediation**

The analysis undertaken in this study reveals a structural transformation in the architecture of epistemic authority. Historically, Islamic education developed a model of knowledge legitimacy grounded in relational transmission, moral integrity, and textual continuity (Istiqomah et al. 2024). In contrast, the contemporary algorithmic environment privileges visibility, optimisation, and computational coherence. The shift is not merely technological; it is epistemological.

Classical Islamic epistemology anchored authority in *sanad*, the documented chain of transmission linking a scholar to earlier teachers and ultimately to prophetic knowledge (Fouz Mohamed Zacky and Moniruzzaman 2024). This chain functioned as both an intellectual and moral infrastructure. Knowledge was authenticated through relational continuity, and the credibility of a claim depended upon the integrity of its transmitters. Authority was therefore embodied. The scholar's character, ethical comportment, and recognised lineage were integral to epistemic legitimacy. Learning was not simply the acquisition of information but participation in a moral-intellectual community structured through trust (Manik et al. 2024).

From a sociological perspective, this configuration represents a form of relational epistemic validation. Authority was conferred through communal recognition embedded within networks of transmission (Ekasari et al. 2021). Trust was not abstract but anchored in identifiable persons and verifiable scholarly trajectories. In Weberian terms, such authority combined traditional legitimacy—rooted in continuity with established lineage—and charismatic elements derived from perceived moral and spiritual integrity (Weber 2013). The epistemic structure was inseparable from ethical formation.

Algorithmic mediation introduces a distinct configuration. Contemporary digital infrastructures curate knowledge through ranking algorithms, engagement metrics, and machine learning models trained on vast datasets (Ateeq et al. 2024). These systems determine which sources are most visible, which answers are prioritised, and which narratives achieve prominence. In generative AI systems, responses are synthesised probabilistically rather than transmitted through identifiable scholarly chains. Authority becomes inferred from systemic output rather than relational lineage.

This transformation reflects a broader shift identified in digital sociology: the emergence of algorithmic authority, whereby computational systems are treated as credible decision-makers because of their perceived objectivity, efficiency, and scale. Algorithms do not merely distribute knowledge; they structure epistemic hierarchies (Wadi et al. 2023). What appears at the top of a search result acquires implicit legitimacy. Visibility becomes a proxy for credibility. Optimisation substitutes for recognition.

The epistemic logic underlying algorithmic systems differs fundamentally from that of *sanad*-based transmission (Zakiyyah et al. 2024). Whereas *sanad* foregrounds continuity and personal accountability, algorithmic systems operate through abstraction and statistical correlation. The authority of a search engine result is not derived from the moral character of its source but from relevance calculations embedded within code (Santosa and Jazuli 2022). In generative models, the authorial origin of knowledge claims may be opaque or indeterminate. The epistemic actor shifts from scholar to system.

This shift reconfigures trust. In classical Islamic education, trust was cultivated through proximity—students studied directly under recognised teachers, whose authority was publicly verifiable. In algorithmic environments, trust often emerges from perceived technical sophistication (Elihami et al. 2024). The opacity of algorithms does not necessarily diminish confidence; paradoxically, complexity may enhance it. The system is trusted precisely because it appears advanced and comprehensive. This reflects what has

been described as infrastructural invisibility, where technical systems shape social reality while remaining largely unquestioned (Zamroni et al. 2023).

Importantly, algorithmic authority is not neutral. Ranking systems prioritise certain types of content, languages, formats, and engagement patterns. Traditions dependent upon nuanced commentary, contextual interpretation, and embodied pedagogy may not align easily with logics of optimisation and virality (Hendawi and Qadhi 2024). Islamic scholarship, historically oriented toward depth and continuity, may encounter structural disadvantage within visibility-driven ecosystems. The epistemic field is thus reshaped by technological infrastructures that privilege scalability over lineage.

Yet the transformation is not absolute. Islamic educational institutions increasingly integrate digital tools while attempting to preserve traditional authority structures. Online lectures, digital archives of classical texts, and AI-assisted platforms coexist with established pedagogical models. The result is not immediate displacement but epistemic layering (Buchori et al. 2023). However, even within such layering, the gravitational pull of algorithmic visibility is significant. Students frequently consult digital systems prior to engaging teachers. Fatwas circulate through social media detached from identifiable scholarly chains. Knowledge becomes mobile, searchable, and fragmentable.

From the standpoint of institutional analysis, this development represents a shift from person-centred to system-mediated legitimacy. Authority is no longer solely anchored in recognised scholars or institutional accreditation but is partially redistributed to algorithmic infrastructures (Zamroni et al. 2023). These infrastructures operate as epistemic gatekeepers, structuring the boundaries of what is encountered, remembered, and reproduced. The chain of transmission is supplemented—sometimes overshadowed—by the chain of computation.

The implications for Islamic education are profound. When epistemic validation becomes associated with algorithmic prominence, relational continuity risks erosion. The embodied dimension of knowledge transmission may weaken if learners prioritise speed and convenience over sustained mentorship (Santosa and Jazuli 2022). At the same time, algorithmic mediation can expand access to classical texts and scholarly resources, enabling broader dissemination than ever before. The transformation is therefore ambivalent: simultaneously democratising and destabilizing (Zakiyyah et al. 2024).

The central finding of this section is that epistemic authority in Islamic education is undergoing structural reconfiguration. The transition from *sanad*-based validation to algorithmically mediated visibility does not signify the disappearance of traditional authority, but it does alter the criteria through which knowledge is recognised as legitimate (Zakiyyah et al. 2024). Authority increasingly operates across dual logics: relational-moral continuity and computational optimisation. Understanding this duality is essential for analysing how Islamic education navigates digitally mediated environments.

In sum, the age of algorithms introduces a new epistemic actor into the educational landscape. Authority is no longer exclusively embodied in scholars or institutions; it is partially embedded in technical systems that rank, generate, and circulate knowledge. This transformation necessitates theoretical reconsideration of how legitimacy is constituted when sacred epistemologies intersect with computational infrastructures. The next section develops this insight further by proposing a layered model capable of integrating traditional and algorithmic modalities of epistemic legitimacy.

### **Reconfiguring Knowledge Legitimacy in Islamic Education: Toward a Layered Epistemic Model**

If the previous section identified a structural transformation in epistemic authority—from embodied scholarly transmission to algorithmically mediated visibility—

this section develops a constructive response (Juhairiah et al. 2024). The central argument advanced here is that the encounter between Islamic epistemology and algorithmic systems does not necessitate epistemic displacement. Instead, it requires conceptual reconfiguration. Legitimacy in Islamic education is increasingly constituted through layered modalities of validation rather than through a singular authority structure (Restalia and Khasanah 2024).

Classical Islamic epistemology operated through a relatively integrated architecture of authority. Textual legitimacy, moral credibility, and relational transmission were mutually reinforcing. A scholar's authority derived from recognised mastery of canonical texts, authenticated through *sanad*, and embodied in ethical comportment. Epistemic recognition was inseparable from moral formation. The unity of text, transmitter, and community generated a coherent structure of trust (Hussain 2025).

Algorithmic mediation introduces a structurally distinct logic. Authority is inferred from optimisation metrics, engagement patterns, and computational outputs (Mahsusi, n.d.). In such systems, credibility may be detached from identifiable lineage or moral character. Visibility becomes an index of relevance, and probabilistic synthesis substitutes for relational transmission. Yet the persistence of Islamic educational institutions suggests that algorithmic authority does not simply override traditional legitimacy. Instead, multiple validation systems now coexist.

The analysis conducted in this study indicates that epistemic legitimacy in Islamic education can be conceptualised through a layered model consisting of at least four interacting dimensions: textual continuity, moral-authoritative credibility, institutional recognition, and algorithmic mediation (Elihami et al. 2024).

First, textual continuity remains foundational. Classical sources, canonical commentaries, and recognised interpretive traditions continue to structure curricula and scholarly discourse. Even in digital environments, authoritative texts retain normative centrality (Hendawi and Qadhi 2024). Digital access does not eliminate textual hierarchy; rather, it re-mediate it. The enduring role of canonical texts suggests that epistemic legitimacy remains anchored in recognised intellectual traditions (Elihami et al. 2024).

Second, moral-authoritative credibility persists as a core dimension. Islamic epistemology historically integrates ethical formation into knowledge acquisition. The credibility of a scholar is inseparable from perceived integrity, humility, and fidelity to sacred sources (Abdullah et al. 2025). This moral dimension does not easily translate into algorithmic metrics. However, its persistence indicates that relational trust remains operative even within digitally mediated contexts. Students and communities continue to evaluate authority based on perceived ethical alignment, not solely informational accuracy.

Third, institutional recognition functions as a stabilising mechanism. Modern Islamic educational institutions operate within accreditation frameworks and regulatory systems (Clegg 2010). Certification, academic degrees, and organisational legitimacy contribute to epistemic authority in contemporary settings. Institutional endorsement supplements relational lineage, particularly in transnational and digitally dispersed environments. This dimension reflects adaptation to modern governance structures while retaining religious identity.

Fourth, algorithmic mediation now constitutes an unavoidable layer of epistemic visibility. Search engines, online platforms, and AI systems influence which voices are amplified and which remain marginal. Algorithmic prominence can enhance or undermine traditional authority structures (Davies et al. 2021). A scholar with limited digital presence may be epistemically overshadowed by content optimised for visibility. Conversely, digital platforms may expand access to previously localised scholarship. Algorithmic mediation therefore acts as an amplifier and filter rather than as an autonomous replacement for authority (Fadden et al. 2024).

The layered model does not treat these dimensions as hierarchically ordered. Instead, they operate in dynamic interaction. In some contexts, textual continuity and moral credibility dominate evaluative criteria. In others, institutional recognition and digital visibility exert stronger influence. Epistemic legitimacy emerges from the interplay among these layers rather than from any single source.

This configuration can be understood as epistemic hybridity. Similar to the coexistence of multiple institutional logics within organisations (Wæraas 2022), Islamic education now navigates intersecting epistemic logics: sacred-traditional and computational-technological (Hendawi and Qadhi 2024). The sacred-traditional logic emphasises continuity, ethical embodiment, and relational trust. The computational logic emphasises optimisation, accessibility, and systemic output. Rather than mutually exclusive, these logics intersect in complex ways.

Importantly, the layered model challenges both technological determinism and romantic traditionalism. It rejects the assumption that algorithmic systems inevitably erode sacred authority (Herlina et al. 2024). At the same time, it resists idealising pre-digital epistemic structures as immune to transformation. Islamic intellectual history demonstrates adaptability to previous media shifts, including print and mass dissemination. The algorithmic turn represents a new phase in this adaptive trajectory, albeit one with distinctive epistemic implications.

The normative question emerging from this analysis concerns epistemic calibration. How can Islamic educational institutions engage algorithmic systems without allowing computational visibility to become the primary index of legitimacy? The layered model suggests that algorithmic mediation should be integrated as a supplementary layer rather than as a foundational criterion. Digital tools may enhance access and dissemination, but they should not replace relational mentorship, textual rigour, or ethical formation as primary sources of authority.

From a broader theoretical perspective, this reconstruction expands prevailing accounts of epistemic authority. Much of contemporary theory conceptualises authority as either socially constructed or technologically mediated. The present analysis demonstrates that in religious educational contexts, legitimacy may be simultaneously relational, institutional, textual, and algorithmic. Authority is not singular but composite (Syafuruddin et al. 2025). The transformation identified in Section 1 thus culminates not in epistemic rupture but in structural pluralisation. Islamic education now operates within a layered epistemic environment where multiple modalities of validation coexist and interact. Recognising this layered configuration provides a conceptual framework for analysing how sacred knowledge traditions negotiate algorithmic infrastructures without relinquishing foundational commitments.

In sum, the age of algorithms does not abolish traditional epistemic authority in Islamic education. It redistributes and refracts it across new infrastructures of visibility and mediation. By conceptualising legitimacy as layered rather than displaced, this study offers a framework capable of explaining how Islamic education may sustain epistemic integrity while engaging computational systems that increasingly shape the contemporary landscape of knowledge.

## **Discussion**

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that the encounter between Islamic epistemology and algorithmic mediation constitutes not merely a technological shift but a structural transformation in the architecture of epistemic authority. This discussion situates that finding within broader theoretical debates and clarifies the implications of the proposed layered epistemic model (Anthony 2018).

Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognises that algorithms operate as epistemic actors rather than neutral tools. Search engines and AI systems shape what is visible, retrievable, and credible, embedding normative hierarchies within technical infrastructures (Davies et al. 2021). In doing so, they participate in what may be termed the infrastructuralisation of knowledge: authority becomes partially embedded in computational systems whose ranking and generative capacities structure epistemic environments. The concept of algorithmic authority captures this phenomenon, describing the tendency of individuals to defer to computational outputs perceived as objective and efficient (Grealish 2022).

However, most discussions of algorithmic authority assume secular knowledge systems in which legitimacy is grounded primarily in institutional recognition or professional expertise (Abrar et al. 2025). The findings of this study extend that debate by introducing a religious educational context in which authority has historically been grounded in relational transmission, moral credibility, and transcendence-oriented validation. The layered model proposed here suggests that algorithmic mediation does not simply override traditional epistemic structures; rather, it intersects with them in complex and uneven ways.

From the perspective of sociology of knowledge, legitimacy is constructed through socially stabilised processes of recognition (Berger 2020). Yet Islamic epistemology introduces an additional dimension: legitimacy is understood as simultaneously social and sacred. The authority of knowledge derives not only from communal validation but from perceived fidelity to divine revelation. This dual grounding complicates dominant theoretical frameworks that treat legitimacy as entirely immanent to social systems. The layered epistemic model demonstrates that algorithmic mediation interacts with both dimensions—social and sacred—without fully subsuming them (Abdelaal et al. 2019).

The findings also resonate with debates on epistemic injustice. When credibility is unevenly distributed across social actors, certain voices are systematically marginalised (Hussain 2025). Algorithmic systems may intensify such asymmetries by privileging content that aligns with optimisation logics, engagement metrics, or dominant languages. Within Islamic education, scholars whose authority is locally recognised through relational networks may remain digitally invisible (Hendawi and Qadhi 2024). Conversely, digitally prominent figures may gain disproportionate epistemic influence without equivalent scholarly credentials. The algorithmic redistribution of visibility therefore reshapes credibility hierarchies.

Yet the analysis cautions against deterministic narratives. The transformation of epistemic authority is not a zero-sum process in which algorithmic systems simply replace scholarly transmission. Instead, Islamic educational institutions exhibit adaptive layering. Textual continuity persists through digital archives; moral-authoritative credibility continues to shape communal trust; institutional recognition remains relevant within regulatory frameworks. Algorithmic mediation adds an additional layer of epistemic validation rather than eliminating pre-existing ones.

This layered configuration parallels scholarship on multiple institutional logics, which argues that organisations frequently navigate coexisting normative frameworks (Juhairiah et al. 2024). Islamic education now operates within at least two intersecting epistemic logics: a sacred-traditional logic grounded in relational lineage and moral exemplarity, and a computational-technological logic grounded in optimisation and systemic output. Tensions between these logics are not inherently pathological; they may generate reflexive negotiation and adaptive innovation. However, unmanaged dominance of one logic over the other may destabilise epistemic coherence.

The broader implications for educational theory are significant. If epistemic authority becomes increasingly associated with algorithmic prominence, educational

institutions risk conflating accessibility with credibility (Juhairiah et al. 2024). The immediacy and convenience of AI-generated responses may privilege speed over deliberation and synthesis over interpretive nuance. In religious educational contexts, where hermeneutical depth and ethical formation are central, such shifts may alter pedagogical priorities (Hendawi and Qadhi 2024). The challenge lies not in rejecting algorithmic tools but in critically integrating them without allowing computational visibility to become the primary criterion of legitimacy.

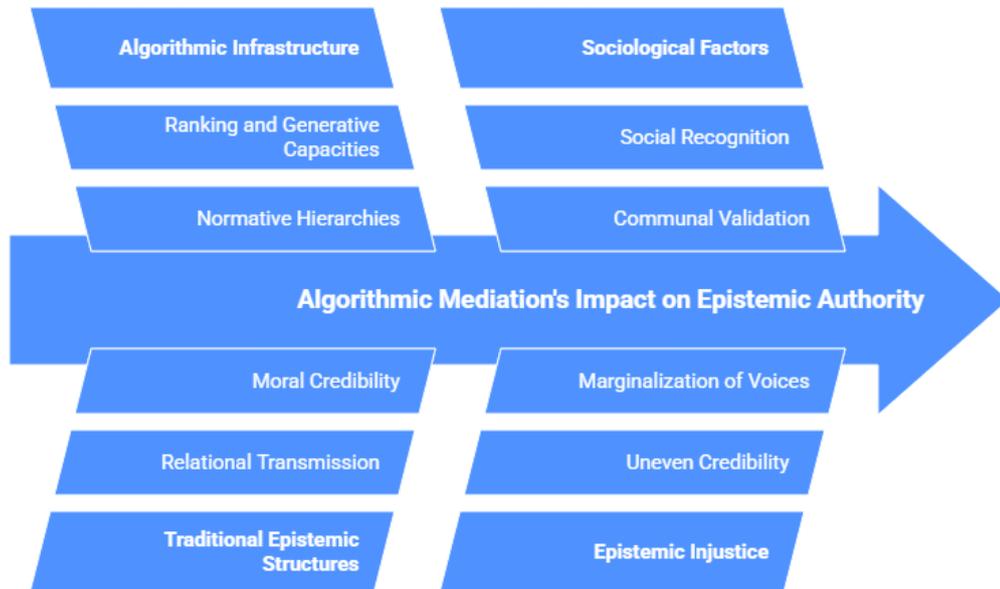
The discussion also contributes to debates on digital modernity and rationalisation. Classical accounts of rationalisation suggest that modern bureaucratic and technical systems displace traditional and charismatic forms of authority (Weber 2013). The findings here complicate that narrative. Algorithmic mediation does not eradicate traditional epistemic structures in Islamic education; it refracts them through new infrastructures. Sacred authority persists, albeit within digitally saturated environments. Rationalisation is therefore not synonymous with secularisation but with reconfiguration.

Furthermore, the layered model underscores the importance of epistemic reflexivity. Islamic educational institutions must actively articulate the criteria through which knowledge is evaluated in digitally mediated contexts (Juhairiah et al. 2024). Without explicit reflection, algorithmic prominence may gradually assume the role of default authority. Reflexive calibration allows institutions to harness technological benefits—expanded access, archival preservation, global dissemination—while safeguarding relational mentorship and textual rigour as foundational dimensions of legitimacy (Yeung 2018).

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in expanding the concept of epistemic authority beyond binary oppositions of traditional versus technological. Authority is conceptualised here as composite and layered, constituted through the interaction of textual, moral, institutional, and algorithmic dimensions. This framework enables a more nuanced analysis of how religious knowledge traditions engage computational infrastructures without collapsing into technological determinism or nostalgic idealization (Anthony 2018).

Future research may build upon this conceptual model through empirical investigation. Ethnographic studies of Islamic classrooms integrating AI tools could illuminate how students negotiate layered authority structures. Comparative analyses across religious traditions may reveal whether similar epistemic layering occurs in other faith-based educational systems (Chiu et al. 2023). Quantitative studies might examine correlations between digital visibility and perceived scholarly credibility (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik 2021). Such research would deepen understanding of how layered epistemic legitimacy operates in practice.

*Figure 1 Reconfiguring Epistemic Authority in Islamic Education*



In conclusion, the age of algorithms reconfigures the landscape of epistemic authority but does not render traditional structures obsolete. Islamic education illustrates that legitimacy may be simultaneously relational, institutional, sacred, and computational. Recognising this layered configuration allows for a more comprehensive account of how knowledge is authorised in digitally mediated societies. The challenge ahead is not to choose between scholar and system, but to theorise—and practice—their interaction in ways that preserve epistemic integrity while engaging the transformative potential of algorithmic infrastructures.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has examined how the rise of algorithmic mediation reshapes the structure of epistemic authority within Islamic education. It has argued that the transformation currently unfolding is not merely technological but epistemological. The shift from scholar-centred transmission to system-mediated visibility alters the criteria through which knowledge is recognised, trusted, and legitimised. Yet this transformation does not entail the disappearance of traditional authority. Rather, it produces a layered configuration in which relational transmission, moral credibility, institutional recognition, and algorithmic mediation coexist in dynamic interaction.

Historically, Islamic epistemology grounded authority in continuity of transmission and ethical embodiment. Knowledge was authenticated through relational lineage and sustained by communal trust. In contrast, algorithmic systems operate through optimisation, ranking, and probabilistic generation. Their authority derives from systemic performance rather than personal credibility. The encounter between these two epistemic logics generates tension, but also possibility. The age of algorithms does not abolish sacred authority; it refracts it through new infrastructures of mediation.

The layered epistemic model proposed in this study offers a framework for understanding this coexistence. Legitimacy in Islamic education is no longer singularly anchored in textual mastery or institutional endorsement. It is distributed across multiple modalities of validation. Textual continuity remains foundational; moral-authoritative credibility continues to shape communal recognition; institutional structures provide regulatory stability; and algorithmic systems influence visibility and access. Authority emerges through the interaction of these layers rather than from any single source.

The theoretical implication is significant. Epistemic authority in religious educational contexts cannot be adequately explained through either technological determinism or traditionalist preservationism. Instead, it must be analysed as a composite structure shaped by historical continuity and computational infrastructures alike. Recognising this layered configuration expands contemporary debates on algorithmic governance by demonstrating that technological systems intersect with, rather than simply replace, sacred knowledge traditions.

Practically, the findings suggest that Islamic educational institutions must engage algorithmic systems with epistemic intentionality. Digital tools can enhance dissemination and accessibility, but they should not redefine credibility solely in terms of visibility or efficiency. The preservation of epistemic integrity requires sustained attention to relational mentorship, interpretive depth, and ethical formation as core components of legitimacy. Algorithmic mediation may amplify knowledge, but it should not become its ultimate arbiter.

Ultimately, the age of algorithms compels a rethinking of how authority is constituted in digitally saturated societies. Islamic education provides a revealing case in which sacred epistemology encounters computational modernity. The challenge is not to retreat from technological infrastructures, nor to surrender to them, but to articulate forms of epistemic coexistence that safeguard moral coherence while embracing adaptive transformation. In doing so, Islamic education demonstrates that the future of knowledge legitimacy lies not in displacement, but in deliberate reconfiguration.

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