



Sacred Symbols, Synthetic Lies: The Hijacking of Religious Authority in AI-Generated Religious Disinformation in Indonesia

This study examines how generative artificial intelligence (AI) reshapes religious disinformation by disrupting the epistemological foundations of religious authority. Focusing on Indonesia and employing qualitative content analysis, the research analyzes AI-generated artifacts that simulate clerical voices, fabricate sacred symbols, and construct emotionally resonant narratives about the *umma*. Drawing on the framework of the epistemology of religious authority, the study explores how these artifacts challenge traditional mechanisms of verification, particularly within Islamic epistemology. This study contributes to the existing literature by demonstrating that AI not only disseminates misleading content but also reconfigures the ways in which religious truth is recognized. It does so by separating technical precision from moral accountability, producing *sanad*-less knowledge, and transforming sacred symbols into self-contained representations. While religious traditions possess epistemological tools such as *isnād* and *tabayyun*, their application becomes increasingly complex in AI-mediated environments where authority is no longer easily traceable. The study suggests that these tools remain relevant but require reinterpretation and adaptation. However, epistemological responses alone may be insufficient to address the affective dimension of AI-generated content, particularly regarding synthetic comfort.

Keywords: Generative AI, religious authority, religious disinformation.

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana akal imitasi (AI) generatif mengubah lanskap disinformasi agama dengan mendisrupsi landasan epistemologis otoritas keagamaan. Dengan fokus pada konteks Indonesia dan menggunakan metode analisis konten kualitatif, studi ini membedah artefak berbasis AI yang menirukan suara otoritas agama, memalsukan simbol-simbol sakral, serta mengonstruksi narasi keumatan yang menggugah emosi. Melalui kerangka epistemologi otoritas agama, penelitian ini menunjukkan bagaimana artefak-artefak tersebut menantang mekanisme verifikasi tradisional, khususnya dalam epistemologi Islam. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada literatur yang ada dengan menunjukkan bahwa AI tidak sekadar menyebarkan informasi menyesatkan, tetapi juga merekonfigurasi cara kebenaran agama dikenali dengan memisahkan presisi teknis dari akuntabilitas moral, menghasilkan pengetahuan tanpa sanad, serta mentransformasikan simbol-simbol sakral menjadi representasi tanpa rujukan aktual. Meskipun tradisi keagamaan memiliki instrumen epistemologis seperti *isnād* dan *tabayyun*, penerapannya menjadi jauh lebih kompleks dalam ekosistem digital yang dimediasi AI, di mana jejak otoritas tidak mudah dilacak. Studi ini menggarisbawahi bahwa perangkat-perangkat tersebut tetap relevan, tetapi memerlukan reinterpretasi dan adaptasi. Namun demikian, pendekatan epistemologis saja belum cukup untuk menjawab dimensi afektif dari konten berbasis AI, terutama dalam konteks kenyamanan sintesis (*synthetic comfort*).

Kata kunci: AI generatif, otoritas agama, disinformasi agama.

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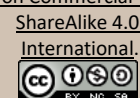
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Introduction

The rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has not only accelerated the circulation of information but also transformed the conditions under which information is produced, perceived, and trusted. Unlike earlier digital disruptions that primarily affected speed and access, generative AI blurs the boundary between creation and fabrication, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish what is real, manipulated, or entirely synthetic. In this context, information is no longer simply consumed but experienced as if it were authentic, even when it is not. This shift introduces a deeper epistemic challenge that goes beyond disinformation as mere content and instead concerns how truth itself is constructed and recognized.

This transformation becomes especially critical in the context of religious information. Unlike other domains, religious knowledge is evaluated not only based on factual accuracy but also on perceived authority, moral credibility, and spiritual resonance. Consequently, the disruption caused by AI is both informational and theological, as it challenges how believers recognize, trust, and internalize religious truth in an environment where markers of piety, such as voices, images, and symbols, can be artificially generated.

Religious disinformation has long been recognized as a powerful driver of social tension, both globally and in Indonesia. From sectarian conflict to moral panic, false religious narratives often mobilize emotions more effectively than factual information. In Indonesia, where religion plays a central role in public life, such disinformation can shape political behavior,

reinforce group boundaries, and trigger collective anxiety. A study of 177 countries finds that disinformation and hate speech are key drivers of polarization, pushing societies toward sharper divisions; censorship and monitoring help but can also fuel grievances.¹ Global research on hate speech and misinformation shows that online hate, including on religious grounds, is a major driver of social conflict, prompting international countermeasures and automated detection efforts.²

In some cases, religious disinformation becomes a significant barrier to the implementation of public health policies, as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, where religious sentiments contributed substantially to vaccine hesitancy.³ A national mapping of vaccination-related misinformation revealed sharp spikes around the January 2021 vaccine rollout, with themes including halal/haram concerns, conspiracy theories, and stories about death and side effects. These narratives erode trust in vaccines and authorities, thereby increasing hesitancy.⁴ The introduction of AI into this landscape further amplifies these risks by enabling the rapid production of highly persuasive and emotionally charged religious content.

While current cases already demonstrate the persuasive power of religious disinformation, the long-term implications of AI-generated content may be even more profound. As generative models become more accessible and sophisticated, the capacity to simulate religious authority, fabricate miracles, and manipulate theological narratives will likely expand. This raises an urgent concern: future religious

¹ Pramukh Nanjundaswamy Vasist, Debashis Chatterjee, and Satish Krishnan, 'The Polarizing Impact of Political Disinformation and Hate Speech: A Cross-Country Configurational Narrative', *Information Systems Frontiers* 26, no. 2 (April 17, 2024): 663–688.

² Ullrich K. H. Ecker et al., 'The Psychological Drivers of Misinformation Belief and Its Resistance to Correction', *Nature Reviews Psychology* 1, no. 1 (January 12, 2022): 13–29.

³ Ayokunle A. Olagoke, Olakanmi O. Olagoke, and Ashley M. Hughes, 'Intention to Vaccinate Against the Novel 2019 Coronavirus Disease: The Role of Health Locus of Control and Religiosity', *Journal of Religion and Health* 60, no. 1 (February 2021): 65–80.

⁴ Santi Indra Astuti, Nuril Hidayah, and Cahya Suryani, 'Vaccination-Theme-Misinformation: A Pollution of Information During Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia', in *International Conference on Emerging Media & Communication*, 2022, 28–39.





disinformation may not only involve misleading content but also fully immersive synthetic realities that reshape how faith itself is experienced.

Previous digital technologies have already facilitated the spread of religious disinformation, but generative AI introduces a qualitatively different level of disruption. It not only distributes misleading information but also actively produces synthetic religious realities. In this sense, AI deceives not only at the level of content but also at the level of experience. It constructs what this study refers to as *synthetic comfort*, a condition in which audiences are not only misled but also emotionally gratified by narratives that reinforce their beliefs, fears, and hopes.⁵ Rather than encouraging critical reflection, these synthetic narratives provide immediate affective validation, merging faith with digitally staged moral or geopolitical dramas.⁶

Existing studies on the intersection of AI and religion have begun to explore these transformations, particularly through concepts such as algorithmic religion and AI-generated fatwas.⁷ These works provide important insights

into how technology mediates religious knowledge. However, much of this scholarship remains focused on functional or philosophical dimensions, rather than examining how AI reshapes religious authority through disinformation.

In the Indonesian context, research on digital religious disinformation remains relatively fragmented. Existing studies tend to examine political hoaxes, financial scams, and religious disinformation as separate phenomena, often through sociological, psychological, or media literacy frameworks.⁸ While these approaches are valuable for explaining audience reactions, they often overlook how the structure of religious authority is being transformed. The issue, therefore, is not only how people respond to false information but also how authority is simulated, displaced, and reconfigured in digital environments.

This reveals a critical gap in the literature. While previous studies explain how disinformation spreads and how audiences engage with it, the challenge posed by generative AI to the epistemological foundations of religious authority has not yet been fully

⁵ Mahsa Alimardani and Mona Elswah, 'Online Temptations: COVID-19 and Religious Misinformation in the MENA Region', *Social Media + Society* 6, no. 3 (July 30, 2020): 1–4; Costas Laoutides, 'Ethnoreligious Conflict and Populism: Emotive Political Response in the Rohingya Conflict', *Religions* 12, no. 10 (September 28, 2021): 816; Dmytro Garaschuk and Oleh Sokolovskyi, 'Digital Orthodoxy and Political Populism in Eastern Europe: How Orthodox Media Facilitate Political Mobilization', *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 45, no. 7 (January 1, 2025): 74–101; Rebecca Marigliano, Lynnette Hui Xian Ng, and Kathleen M. Carley, 'Analyzing Digital Propaganda and Conflict Rhetoric: A Study on Russia's Bot-Driven Campaigns and Counter-Narratives during the Ukraine Crisis', *Social Network Analysis and Mining* 14, no. 1 (August 23, 2024): 170.

⁶ Lalu Rifki Rahman Rifki, 'Political of Religion in Digital Era', *Jurnal Penelitian Keislaman* 21, no. 1 (July 14, 2025): 66–80; Javier Serrano-Puche, 'Digital Disinformation and Emotions: Exploring the Social Risks of Affective Polarization', *International Review of Sociology* 31, no. 2 (May 4, 2021): 231–245.

⁷ Eziuddin Elmahjub, 'Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Islamic Ethics: Towards Pluralist Ethical Benchmarking for AI', *Philosophy & Technology* 36, no. 4 (December 1, 2023): 73; Amana Raquib et al., 'Islamic Virtue-Based Ethics for Artificial Intelligence', *Discover Artificial Intelligence* 2, no. 1 (June 20, 2022): 11; Wafiq Nafisa Nafisabee, 'Otoritas Guru Dalam Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Analitis Urgensi Sanad Di Era Disrupsi Digital Dan Era Society 5.0', *Mujalalat: Multidisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies* 4, no. 1 (2026): 39–46; Choirur Rois and Gholamreza Yazdani, 'Digital Schism: The Reconstruction of Religious Authority and the Emergence of Islamic Knowledge Elite in the AI Era', *Surau Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 3, 2026): 96–118.

⁸ Priska Nur Safitri et al., 'When Politics and Religion Become Disaster: An Annual Mapping of Hoax in Indonesia', *Ultimacomm: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 13, no. 2 (February 25, 2022): 343–357; Putri Aisyiyah Rachma Dewi et al., 'Mapping Hoaxes, Disinformation, and Hate Speeches in Indonesia', *Technium Social Sciences Journal* 50 (November 1, 2023): 559–565; Astuti, Hidayah, and Suryani, 'Vaccination-Theme-Misinformation: A Pollution of Information During Covid-19 Pandemic in Indonesia', 28–39.





addressed. In other words, the issue is no longer limited to distinguishing truth from falsehood but extends to understanding how truth is authenticated when the very markers of authority can be artificially reproduced.⁹

To address this gap, this study adopts the framework of the epistemology of religious authority. In Islamic tradition, the epistemology of religious authority is founded on a hierarchy and interplay of sources (revelation, reason, consensus, analogy, and spirituality) and on experts who legitimately interpret these sources through disciplined methods and transmitted lineages.¹⁰ Contemporary debates focus on how to preserve this structured, multi-source epistemology while responding to modern science, pluralistic societies, and digital disruption, without losing normative roots in the Qur'an and Sunnah.¹¹ Simply put, the epistemology of religious authority asks: Who is trusted to declare what is true about religion, on what basis, and within what limits? In Islamic

tradition, this links sources of truth (Qur'an, Sunnah, *ijmā'*, *qiyās*, and reason) with the people and institutions authorized to interpret them.

This approach examines how authority in religion is constructed, recognized, and validated through mechanisms such as transmission, verification, and moral credibility. Within the Islamic theological tradition (*uṣūl al-dīn*), truth is historically grounded in the balance between *naql* (transmitted revelation) and *'aql* (human reason), as well as in the integrity of *isnād* (chains of transmission).¹² However, in the era of generative AI, these mechanisms face unprecedented challenges. AI functions as an artificial *'aql* that produces hyper-realistic outputs while remaining ontologically detached from any moral or spiritual accountability.¹³

Using the epistemology of religious authority highlights that AI-based religious disinformation is not merely incorrect content but represents a restructuring of who is recognized as an authority and how truth is established. By

⁹ Budi Nurhamidin et al., 'Transformasi Otoritas Keagamaan Di Era Digital, Analisis Sosiologis Terhadap Pergeseran Pola Otoritas Ulama Di Media Sosial', *Al-Muqaddimah* 1, no. 1 (2025): 39–48; Jeff Clyde Guillermo Corpuz, 'Faith and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Catholic Education: A Theological Virtue Ethics Perspective', *Religions* 16, no. 8 (August 21, 2025): 1083; Mirismoil Usmonov, 'From Human Scholars to AI Fatwas: Media, Ethics, and the Limits of AI in Islamic Religious Communication', *Al-i'lam - Journal of Contemporary Islamic Communication and Media* 5, no. 1 (June 30, 2025): 61–79; Muhammad Andryan Fitriyansyah and Fatimah Nur Fauziah, 'Bridging Traditions and Technology: AI in The Interpretation of Nusantara Religious Manuscripts', *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 22, no. 2 (December 31, 2024): 317–346.

¹⁰ Hana Malihatul Azizah and Ahmad Khudori Soleh, 'Bayani Epistemology as The Basis for The Development of Islamic Religious Education Learning Materials', *Al-Ulum Jurnal Pemikiran dan Penelitian ke-Islaman* 12, no. 4 (September 25, 2025): 322–332; Muhtar Solihin, Alfin Maulana Haryadi, and Rohanda Rohanda, 'Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh Science) in an Epistemological Perspective', *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research* 7, no. 12 (December 31, 2024): 9614–9618; Rijal Sabri, Mhd. Syahnan, and M. Amar Adly, 'Ijma and Qiyas: Methodological Reconstruction and Contemporary Application as Sources of Islamic Law', *Almufida: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 10, no. 2 (January 26, 2026): 140–146;

Safiyah Sabreen Syeed and Ahmad El-Muhammady, 'Reconciliation and Islamisation: A Roadmap for An Islamic Intellectual Revival', *Al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)* (December 2, 2024): 141–166; Ibnu Abbas et al., 'The Qur'an, Sunnah, and Science: Reactualization of Islamic Values in the Era of the Digital Revolution', *Bulletin of Science Education* 5, no. 1 (April 30, 2025): 53–68.

¹¹ Mohamed Fouz Mohamed Zacky and Md Moniruzzaman, "'Islamic Epistemology" in a Modern Context: Anatomy of an Evolving Debate', *Social Epistemology* 38, no. 4 (July 3, 2024): 511–525.

¹² Corpuz, 'Faith and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Catholic Education: A Theological Virtue Ethics Perspective', 1083; Rendi Syahrinal Harahap, 'Validitas Rantai Peristiwa Hadis Di Era Digital: Analisis Otentisitas Melalui Pendekatan Digital Isnād Mapping', *Hamidah: Jurnal Ilmu Hadis* 1, no. 1 (2025): 1–14; Naurah Adelia et al., 'Digital Takhrij Hadith as Islamic Digital Humanities', *Digital Muslim Review* 3, no. 1 (October 14, 2025): 83–96.

¹³ Wafiq Nafisa Nafisabee, 'Otoritas Guru Dalam Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Analitis Urgensi Sanad Di Era Disrupsi Digital Dan Era Society 5.0', 39–46; Nurhayati Nurhayati et al., 'Transformasi Dakwah Diera Digital: Analisis Penyampaian Hadis Dalam Konten Media Sosial', *Jurnal Syiar-Syiar* 5, no. 1 (May 18, 2025): 43–56.





reaffirming *sanaad*, verification, and *maqāṣid* as essential criteria for any digital or AI-generated religious output, this approach provides conceptual tools to diagnose algorithmic misguidance and to develop supervision, literacy, and regulation that safeguard Islamic religious life.

This study argues that generative AI not only spreads religious disinformation but also hijacks the internal epistemological mechanisms that govern religious authority. By simulating clerical voices, fabricating miracles, and manipulating sacred symbols, AI bypasses traditional systems of verification such as *isnād*, *ilm al-rijāl*, and *jarh wa ta'dīl*.¹⁴ Consequently, sacred symbols become detached from their referents, as discussed in the classical debate of *al-asmā' wa al-musammā*,¹⁵ and religious authority is increasingly shaped by technological capability rather than scholarly legitimacy.

Furthermore, while this study is primarily grounded in Islamic epistemology, it adopts a comparative theological perspective to demonstrate that this disruption is not confined to a single tradition. Similar dynamics can be observed in other religious contexts, such as the distortion of Catholic iconography and the circumvention of institutional authority structures like the Magisterium and Apostolic Succession.¹⁶

By analyzing verified AI-generated religious disinformation artifacts circulating in Indonesia between late 2023 and 2025, this study aims to address two interrelated questions. First, how does the simulation of sacred symbols and religious figures through generative AI challenge

the formal structures of theological authority and the authentication of truth? Second, to what extent do existing religious epistemological frameworks offer sufficient tools to recognize, respond to, and counter AI-driven religious disinformation?

The dataset comprises 23 AI-generated religious disinformation artifacts collected from verified fact-checking platforms (see Table 1 and Appendix). This study employs a qualitative content analysis of a pre-verified corpus of disinformation, prioritizing forensic validity over quantity. Instead of scraping raw social media data—which risks amplifying unverified content—we utilized archives from Indonesia's leading fact-checking repositories, primarily turnbackhoax.id and IFCN-signatory networks. We applied a purposive search strategy that intersected religious keywords (e.g., “ulama,” “paus,” “masjid,” “nabi”) with technical indicators of synthetic media (e.g., “deepfake,” “AI,” “kecerdasan buatan”). An artifact was included only if it met explicit verification criteria: the fact-checking agency must have provided forensic consensus attributing the media to generative AI (e.g., via audio analysis tools or AI-image detection software), ensuring the artifact is a confirmed synthetic fabrication rather than a conventional miscontextualized video.

Table 1. AI-generated religious disinformation cases in Indonesia

Data ID	AI Modality	Key Feature
1	Image	Lunar imagery framed as divine sign

¹⁴ Adelia et al., ‘Digital Takhrij Hadith as Islamic Digital Humanities’, 83–96; Harahap, ‘Validitas Rantai Peristiwa Hadis Di Era Digital: Analisis Otentisitas Melalui Pendekatan Digital Isnād Mapping’, 1–14.

¹⁵ Rois and Yazdani, ‘Digital Schism: The Reconstruction of Religious Authority and the Emergence of Islamic Knowledge Elite in the AI Era’, 96–118; Marta Kawka, ‘Theological Imaginal Reflections with AI Artworks: Revealing and Obscuring Divine Knowledge in Aesthetic Experience’, *Practical Theology* 18, no. 2 (March 4, 2025): 152–167.

¹⁶ Saif Ahmed, Ayesha Akter Sumi, and Norzalita Abd Aziz, ‘Exploring Multi-Religious Perspective of Artificial Intelligence’, *Theology and Science* 23, no. 1 (January 2, 2025): 104–128; Ruth Tsuria and Yossi Tsuria, ‘Artificial Intelligence’s Understanding of Religion: Investigating the Moralistic Approaches Presented by Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools’, *Religions* 15, no. 3 (March 21, 2024): 375; Corpuz, ‘Faith and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Catholic Education: A Theological Virtue Ethics Perspective’, 1038.





2	Video	Fake statement by political leader (Netanyahu)
3	Image	Fabricated illness of political figure
4	Image	False prestige narrative (Khamenei–Forbes)
5	Video	Religious incompetence narrative (Gibran)
6	Audio	Voice cloning scam (Mamah Dedeh)
7	Video	Missile attack narrative (Tel Aviv)
8	Image	Cloud forming “Allah”
9	Image	Child marriage framed as religious practice
10	Image	Prophet’s tomb in Great Wall
11	Audio	Voice cloning (Ustadh Abdul Somad)
12	Image	Golden statue of Pope
13	Video	Borobudur prophetic discovery
14	Image	Religious symbol in sports imagery
15	Video	Iranian nuclear narrative
16	Video	Lombok as Israeli target
17	Video	Fake Iranian military message
18	Image	Israeli aircraft crash in Indonesia
19	Video	Israel–Papua narrative
20	Audio	Voice cloning (Buya Yahya)
21	Video	Fake government aid program
22	Audio	Voice cloning (Ustadh Adi Hidayat)
23	Image	Qur’an desecration in Ganges

Moving beyond theoretical assumptions, our coding framework was developed through an iterative analysis of verified artifacts. During the coding process, it became evident that the artifacts naturally clustered around four distinct vectors of theological disruption. Consequently, we categorized the dataset into the Disruption of *Isnād* (voice cloning and bypassed transmission), the Fabrication of *I’jāz* (synthetic miracles), the

Simulacra of Sacrality (ontological distortion of symbols), and the Weaponization of Umma (eschatological and geopolitical manipulation).

The Evolution of Algorithmic Authority

The emergence of the digital age has gradually transformed how religious authority is accessed and negotiated. Earlier phases of the internet introduced a degree of decentralization, enabling believers to search for scriptures, compare interpretations, and, in some cases, bypass traditional scholarly networks. This phenomenon, often described as the rise of “Sheikh Google,” marked a significant shift in which authority was no longer exclusively mediated by embodied scholars but was increasingly filtered through search engines and digital platforms.¹⁷

However, what we are witnessing today seems to extend beyond mere decentralization. The shift from the distribution of information to the automated generation of knowledge represents a fundamentally different kind of disruption. With the rise of generative AI, religious content is no longer simply retrieved but also created, often instantaneously and frequently without clear epistemic grounding. This development has led some scholars to describe phenomena such as algorithmic religion or the emergence of AI muftis: systems capable of producing fatwas, sermons, or theological explanations on a large scale.¹⁸

At the same time, there remains a noticeable hesitation among scholars to fully accept these systems as legitimate sources of religious authority. A recurring concern is that generative AI, despite its technical sophistication, lacks key elements traditionally associated with religious reasoning, such as *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), *niyya* (intentionality), and the moral

¹⁷ Nurhayati et al., ‘Transformasi Dakwah Diera Digital: Analisis Penyampaian Hadis Dalam Konten Media Sosial’, 43–56.

¹⁸ Pauline Hope Cheong and Liming Liu, ‘Faithful Innovation: Negotiating Institutional Logics for AI Value

Alignment Among Christian Churches in America’, *Religions* 16, no. 3 (February 27, 2025): 302; Usmonov, ‘From Human Scholars to AI Fatwas: Media, Ethics, and the Limits of AI in Islamic Religious Communication’, 61–79.





discernment often attributed to the *qalb* (heart).¹⁹ In this sense, AI may replicate the form of religious discourse but not its ethical or spiritual foundation.

What emerges, then, is not a simple replacement of human authority but a gradual shift in how authority is perceived and negotiated. Religious credibility is increasingly shaped not only by scholarly lineage or institutional recognition but also by digital visibility, accessibility, and algorithmic performance.²⁰ This creates a subtle yet significant tension between authority as something cultivated through tradition and authority as something produced and circulated through technological systems.

Before examining specific cases, it is helpful to closely analyze how these AI-generated artifacts function in practice. Across the dataset, the emerging patterns are not random; rather, they follow recurring strategies in constructing, simulating, and convincingly presenting authority to audiences.

One way to understand these patterns is to revisit a key concept in Islamic epistemology: the idea that the reliability of knowledge is closely linked to the reliability of its transmitter. Traditionally, this involves two interrelated dimensions, *‘adālah* (moral integrity) and *ḍabt* (precision or accuracy).²¹ What becomes striking in the case of generative AI is how these two dimensions begin to diverge. On the one hand, AI systems can produce outputs with a high

degree of technical precision. Voice, tone, visual detail, and stylistic elements can be reproduced with remarkable accuracy. On the other hand, these systems lack moral agency and accountability. This creates a peculiar situation in which something can appear highly reliable in form while remaining fundamentally ungrounded in meaning. This tension becomes more apparent in the empirical cases discussed below.

The Disruption of *Isnād*, Voice Cloning, and the Crisis of Digital Transmitters

The disruption of *isnād* is perhaps one of the most immediate ways in which this tension manifests. However, rather than viewing it solely as a technical problem, it may be more helpful to understand it as a shift in the construction of trust within digital environments.

Within Islamic theology, the authenticity of knowledge has long been closely linked to the integrity of its transmission. *Isnād* is central to hadith authentication, ensuring the traceability of knowledge and moral accountability. Early Muslim scholars evaluated narrators based on their reliability, memory, piety, and character, thereby embedding ethics into epistemology. *Isnād* functions as a moral-epistemic safeguard, connecting the legitimacy of knowledge with the integrity of its transmitters. This system not only preserves chains of narration but also establishes a moral and epistemic framework through which knowledge is assessed.²² Within this framework,

¹⁹ Mohammed Gamal Abdelnour, 'Artificial Intelligence and the Islamic Theology of Technology: From "Means" to "Meanings" and from "Minds" to "Hearts"', *Religions* 16, no. 6 (June 18, 2025): 796; Lukman Hakim and Muhamad Risqil Azizi, 'Otoritas Fatwa Keagamaan Dalam Konteks Era Kecerdasan Buatan (Artificial Intelligence/AI)', *Ar-Risalah Media Keislaman Pendidikan dan Hukum Islam* 21, no. 2 (October 1, 2023): 164–174; Elmahjub, 'Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Islamic Ethics: Towards Pluralist Ethical Benchmarking for AI', 73.

²⁰ Rois and Yazdani, 'Digital Schism: The Reconstruction of Religious Authority and the Emergence of Islamic Knowledge Elite in the AI Era', 96–118; Kombang Tua Siregar, Ilyas Zhakypkazy, and Badrah Uyuni, 'Indonesian Muballigh and Religious Authority: From

Sanad to Algorithmic Transformation of Islamic Knowledge Transmission in the Digital Era', *Jurnal Indo-Islamika* 15, no. 2 (December 26, 2025): 298–314, <https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/indo-islamika/article/view/47052>.

²¹ Harahap, 'Validitas Rantai Peristiwa Hadis Di Era Digital: Analisis Otentisitas Melalui Pendekatan Digital Isnād Mapping', 1–14; Rois and Yazdani, 'Digital Schism: The Reconstruction of Religious Authority and the Emergence of Islamic Knowledge Elite in the AI Era', 96–118.

²² Amaal Mohammad Khalil Alshaar, 'Knowledge Lineage from Isnad to AI: Reframing Authorship and Responsibility in the Generative AI Era', *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 15, no. 9 (September 20, 2025): 1131–1154.





a transmitter's reliability depends on two interrelated dimensions: *'adālah* and *ḍabṭ*.²³ What is transmitted cannot be separated from who transmits it or the ethical conditions under which it is transmitted.

What becomes striking in the context of generative AI is how these two dimensions begin to diverge. On one hand, AI systems can reproduce *ḍabṭ* with remarkable precision. Through voice cloning and audiovisual synthesis, they can mimic the tone, cadence, and stylistic features associated with well-known religious figures. On the other hand, these systems are entirely detached from *'adālah*. They lack intention, accountability, and moral agency. This creates a situation in which something may appear epistemically reliable in form while remaining fundamentally ungrounded in meaning.²⁴

This tension becomes more tangible when examining how voice cloning is employed in specific cases. In several artifacts within the dataset, the voices of prominent Indonesian preachers, such as Ustadh Abdul Somad (Data 11) and Ustadh Adi Hidayat (Data 22), are synthetically reproduced to deliver messages that seem both familiar and authoritative. One example involves a cloned voice attributed to Ustadh Adi Hidayat, stating: "I want to share aid funds amounting to 1 billion for the 10 fastest Indonesian workers... please inbox your name and which country you are working in." At first glance, the message carries recognizable markers of credibility, the tone, the phrasing, and the persona of the speaker. Yet, upon closer examination, the entire communicative act is detached from any accountable source.

In this context, what is being exploited is not only the content of the message but also the accumulated trust associated with the figure being imitated. The algorithm does not need to

build credibility from scratch; it borrows it. By replicating the sensory markers of authority, it effectively short-circuits the verification process that would normally accompany religious communication.

A similar pattern can be observed in artifacts that simulate institutional authority. For example, in Data 21, an AI-generated news-style presentation announces the distribution of aid funds by a Directorate General for Christian Community Guidance. Here, the authority being mimicked is not an individual cleric but the visual and auditory aesthetics of the state. Once again, what appears to be a legitimate transmission is, in fact, a constructed output with no verifiable provenance.

From a sociological perspective, these cases may be seen as variations of digital fraud or misinformation. However, when examined through the lens of Islamic epistemology, the implications extend further. The classical sciences of *'ilm al-rijāl* and *jarḥ wa ta'dīl* were developed specifically to address uncertainties in transmission by scrutinizing the character and reliability of human transmitters.²⁵ Generative AI introduces a different kind of uncertainty, one in which the transmitter is no longer a human subject but a synthetic construct.

One way to understand this is to consider these AI-generated voices as a form of digital *majhūl*, an unknown transmitter whose identity and reliability cannot be verified. Although the voice sounds familiar, its epistemic status remains uncertain. Consequently, the process of verification shifts from assessing human chains of transmission to navigating algorithmic opacity.

This shift also influences perceptions of authority. In traditional frameworks, authority is closely linked to scholarly lineage, training, and moral discipline. However, in digital environments, authority increasingly depends

²³ Adelia et al., 'Digital Takhrij Hadith as Islamic Digital Humanities', 83–96.

²⁴ Wafiq Nafisa Nafisabee, 'Otoritas Guru Dalam Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Analitis Urgensi Sanad Di Era Disrupsi Digital Dan Era Society 5.0', 39–46.

²⁵ Rois and Yazdani, 'Digital Schism: The Reconstruction of Religious Authority and the Emergence of Islamic Knowledge Elite in the AI Era', 96–118.





on visibility, recognizability, and technical realism. The more convincing the simulation, the more likely it is to be trusted, regardless of its source.²⁶

At this point, it becomes less clear whether the challenge lies in the loss of the *isnād* itself or in the emergence of a parallel system operating under different rules. Rather than replacing traditional authority, generative AI appears to create an alternative pathway—one that mimics the structure of transmission while bypassing its ethical and epistemological foundations.

When examined through a comparative theological lens, this vulnerability appears unevenly distributed. In Islamic traditions, where authority is deeply rooted in textual transmission and oral continuity, the disruption of *isnād* directly undermines the core mechanism by which knowledge is authenticated.²⁷ In contrast, traditions such as Catholicism rely more heavily on embodied institutional continuity, including the Magisterium and Apostolic Succession. While these traditions are not immune to digital manipulation, the necessity of physical and institutional mediation provides an additional layer of resistance against purely synthetic substitution.²⁸

This comparison does not imply that one tradition is more resilient than another; rather, it highlights how AI exploits specific epistemological structures. In the case of Islam, the ability to replicate voice and textual authority renders the disruption of *isnād* particularly consequential. Here, the question of verification (*tabayyun*) becomes more complex, as the object being verified is no longer a human transmitter but an algorithmically generated representation.

The Fabrication of *I'jāz*: Synthetic Miracles and the Industrialization of Awe

Beyond the disruption of transmission, the dataset also reveals a different, perhaps less immediately visible, form of transformation. Here, generative AI is used not only to imitate religious figures but also to produce what appear to be signs, proofs, or manifestations of the sacred. Instead of focusing on who speaks, the emphasis shifts to what is shown.

In Islamic thought, the concept of *i'jāz* refers to the inimitability and miraculous nature of divine revelation. It is not merely about spectacle but represents a form of truth that surpasses human capacity and invites contemplation rather than immediate consumption. In classical Islamic scholarship, miracles (*mu'jiza*) are understood as extraordinary events performed by a claimant of prophethood, serving as proof of that claim and as a challenge to skeptics, one that cannot be replicated.²⁹ What becomes particularly interesting in the context of generative AI is how this concept begins to be reinterpreted, or perhaps reappropriated, through technological means.

Generative AI enables the creation of visually compelling representations of phenomena that resemble what are traditionally understood as signs (*āyāt*). Images such as clouds forming the word "Allah," celestial events, or symbolic alignments in nature can now be generated, edited, and disseminated with relative ease. At first glance, these artifacts may seem harmless or even spiritually uplifting, evoking familiar responses such as wonder, affirmation, and a sense of closeness to the divine.

However, upon closer examination, a different pattern emerges. These representations are not discovered but produced. They do not arise from engagement with the natural world;

²⁶ Rifki, 'Political of Religion in Digital Era', 66–80.

²⁷ Abdul Majit and Miski Miski, 'Pembelajaran Al-Qur'an Secara Digital: Pergeseran Sistem Isnad Dan Peneguhan Otoritas Baru', *Jurnal SMART (Studi Masyarakat, Religi, dan Tradisi)* 9, no. 1 (June 30, 2023): 133–146.

²⁸ Corpuz, 'Faith and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Catholic Education: A Theological Virtue Ethics

Perspective', 1083; Tsuria and Tsuria, 'Artificial Intelligence's Understanding of Religion: Investigating the Moralistic Approaches Presented by Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools', 375.

²⁹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Mukjizat Al-Qur'an* (Bandung: Mizan, 2003), 23.





rather, they result from algorithmic processes trained to generate visually convincing outputs. In this sense, the relationship between sign and meaning becomes less stable. What appears as a sign may no longer point beyond itself but instead circulate as a self-contained image.

This becomes more concrete through specific examples from the dataset. One widely circulated artifact (Data 8) depicts clouds forming the word “Allah,” accompanied by the narrative that thousands of residents in Los Angeles converted to Islam after witnessing the event. This fabricates a celestial phenomenon, paired with the viral caption: “America is in an uproar again! Thousands of Los Angeles residents embraced Islam after witnessing a phenomenon in the sky [clouds forming the word Allah].” Another example (Data 1) presents an image of the moon’s surface, captioned as evidence of divine greatness following the Chandrayaan-3 mission: “Our world lives in a vacuum. Images of Chandrayaan-3 from the surface of the moon. Allah is the Greatest.” In both cases, the visual element is combined with a narrative that amplifies its perceived significance.

What is notable here is not only the content of these claims but also how they function. The images invite immediate emotional engagement, often evoking awe (*mā shā` Allāh*) or affirmation, while the accompanying narratives provide a ready-made interpretation. The space for doubt, reflection, or contextualization becomes increasingly narrow. Rather than encouraging contemplation, the artifact delivers a definitive conclusion.

In this context, it may be helpful to consider these cases as a form of industrialization of awe. The experience of wonder, which in classical theological understanding is often associated with reflection and inner transformation, becomes something that can be produced, replicated, and distributed on a large scale. The

role of the believer subtly shifts from that of an interpreter of signs to a consumer of them. A similar pattern can be observed in artifacts that extend beyond natural phenomena into historical or archaeological narratives. For instance, Data 13 presents a hyper-realistic video of a purported archaeological discovery within Borobudur Temple, framed as uncovering hidden religious truths. Data 10 connects the Great Wall of China to Islamic prophetic history through synthesized visual storytelling. These cases not only fabricate images but also reconfigure historical narratives, blending fragments of fact, imagination, and visual persuasion.

From a theological perspective, this raises questions about how evidentiary claims are constructed. In classical discourse, signs of truth are evaluated not only based on appearance but also through coherence, transmission, and interpretive tradition. What generative AI introduces is a different mode of evidence that relies heavily on visual plausibility and narrative appeal rather than epistemic traceability.³⁰

At this point, the issue may not be whether these artifacts are believed in a literal sense, but how they shape the conditions under which belief is formed. Even when approached with some degree of skepticism, repeated exposure to such representations can influence what feels plausible, meaningful, or spiritually significant.

This is where the concept of *synthetic comfort* becomes relevant. These artifacts not only attempt to persuade but also provide a form of emotional reassurance. By presenting visually convincing evidence of faith, they diminish the need for uncertainty, struggle, or interpretive effort. In doing so, they risk shifting religious experience away from a process of engagement

³⁰ Kawka, ‘Theological Imaginal Reflections with AI Artworks: Revealing and Obscuring Divine Knowledge in Aesthetic Experience’, 152–167; Willem Th. van Peursen and Samuel E. Entsua-Mensah, ‘Mimesis, Poiesis, and

Imagination: Exploring Text-to-Image Generation of Biblical Narratives’, *arXiv preprint arXiv:2507.02973* (2025): 1–45.





toward a more immediate and potentially superficial sense of validation.³¹

Rather than suggesting that all such representations are inherently harmful, it may be more productive to view them as indicators of a broader transformation. Generative AI does not simply fabricate miracles; it alters how the concept of a miracle can be imagined, produced, and disseminated. The boundary between divine signs and human-made representations becomes less distinct—not because one entirely replaces the other, but because the distinction itself becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

The Simulacra of Sacrality: Distorting the Ontology of Sacred Symbols

Previous studies on digital religious disinformation have often focused on textual manipulation, factual inaccuracies, or the emotional dynamics of polarization.³² While these approaches remain relevant, the artifacts observed in this study suggest a somewhat different layer of transformation. In this context, the issue is not only what is being said but also how the sacred is visually constructed and experienced.

To make sense of this shift, the concept of simulacra, as introduced by Jean Baudrillard, can be useful, though it must be applied with caution. Not all digitally manipulated images function as simulacra. In many cases, images still refer, albeit imperfectly, to an underlying reality. Simulacra, in a stricter sense, arise when a representation no longer points to any original referent but instead exists independently as a self-contained reality.³³

The dataset reveals not only the presence of manipulated images but also instances where

sacred symbols are reconstructed in ways that detach them from their theological foundations. These images do more than distort reality; they begin to supplant it.

In Islamic epistemology, the relationship between symbol and meaning is closely linked to the concept of *al-asmā' wa al-musammā*, which denotes the connection between a name (or sign) and its referent.³⁴ When this relationship is disrupted, the symbol risks losing its grounding within a broader theological framework. Generative AI introduces the possibility of producing symbols that maintain their visual familiarity but are no longer connected to any verifiable spiritual or historical context.

This is evident in several artifacts within the dataset. One example (Data 23) depicts Hindu priests allegedly desecrating the Qur'an by throwing it into the Ganges River, accompanied by the caption, "Thousands of [Hindu] priests throw the Qur'an into the Ganges River." Although this event never occurred, the visual presentation is crafted to make it appear plausible. The image does not misrepresent an actual incident; rather, it fabricates one. In doing so, it generates not only misinformation but also a new object of emotional response, one that can provoke anger, outrage, or a sense of threat.

Data 9 presents a different configuration, featuring an AI-generated image of a child marriage framed as a reflection of Islamic practice, accompanied by the caption: "Do we have the heart to hand over our young children to adults to be married off? My conscience rebels." In this case, the image functions less as a claim to be verified and more as a provocation. It invites moral judgment, often reinforcing existing

³¹ Abdelnour, 'Artificial Intelligence and the Islamic Theology of Technology: From "Means" to "Meanings" and from "Minds" to "Hearts"', 796; Corpuz, 'Faith and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Catholic Education: A Theological Virtue Ethics Perspective', 1083.

³² Serrano-Puche, 'Digital Disinformation and Emotions: Exploring the Social Risks of Affective Polarization'; Hasmuni Hasmuni and Marhamah Marhamah, 'Islamic Communication Strategies in Addressing Religious Hoaxes on Social Media', *Jurnal*

Hurriah: Jurnal Evaluasi Pendidikan dan Penelitian 6, no. 4 (December 27, 2025): 1282–1298.

³³ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Lauren Langman, 'Simulation and Simulacra', in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Urban and Regional Studies* (Wiley, 2019), 1–6.

³⁴ Rois and Yazdani, 'Digital Schism: The Reconstruction of Religious Authority and the Emergence of Islamic Knowledge Elite in the AI Era', 96–118.





stereotypes or anxieties. Once again, what is being circulated is not a distorted version of a real event but a constructed scenario designed to evoke a specific response.

At the other end of the spectrum, some artifacts present positive or affirming representations. For example, Data 14 depicts a well-known cricket player reciting the shahada on the field, suggesting a moment of religious conversion. Although the tone differs from the previous examples, the underlying mechanism is similar. The event is not documented; it is fabricated. Yet, once circulated, it can still evoke feelings of pride, validation, or collective belonging.

Across these examples, it becomes evident that visual artifacts function as self-sufficient units of meaning. They do not necessarily require verification because their impact is immediate and affective. Viewers are not always prompted to question whether the event actually occurred; instead, they are invited to respond to what the image appears to represent.

This is where the notion of simulacra becomes relevant, not as a sweeping diagnosis, but as a means to describe a particular tendency. Some of these images do not merely represent reality; they participate in creating a parallel layer of reality that is emotionally compelling, visually coherent, yet epistemically unstable.

This dynamic also helps explain the formation of what some scholars describe as *affective publics*, in which individuals become connected through shared emotional responses to mediated content.³⁵ In these contexts, religious identity and geopolitical narratives can be experienced collectively through images that are not anchored in verifiable events but still feel meaningful.

The concept of *synthetic comfort* is also relevant here. These visual artifacts not only provoke reactions but also offer a form of emotional alignment. Whether through outrage, fear, or affirmation, they provide a sense of clarity in situations that might otherwise be complex or ambiguous. In doing so, they may reduce the need for further inquiry, as the image itself seems to settle the question.

A comparative perspective further contextualizes this phenomenon. In Islamic contexts, the disruption of symbolic meaning is closely linked to concerns about the integrity of signs and their referents. Similarly, in Catholic traditions, a parallel issue arises in the manipulation of iconography. For example, the AI-generated image of Pope Francis adorned in exaggerated golden regalia (Data 12) presents a version of authority that emphasizes visual grandeur over theological significance. Although it resembles religious imagery, it does not function like a traditional icon, which is intended to direct attention beyond the image itself.³⁶

The disinformation may also be interpreted as an attempt to undermine the Pope's image of humility, which was reflected in various aspects of his life. Rather than residing in the Apostolic Palace, he chose to live in the Vatican guesthouse, Casa Santa Marta. His modest lifestyle was further demonstrated through personal choices during a series of visits in 2024, including his rejection of the traditional papal red shoes and silver crucifix, as well as his preference for an inexpensive watch—all of which became emblematic of his austere and humble character.

In this case, the image risks becoming an endpoint rather than a medium, drawing attention to its aesthetic qualities instead of pointing toward a transcendent referent. The concern here is not only misrepresentation but

³⁵ Garaschuk and Sokolovskyi, 'Digital Orthodoxy and Political Populism in Eastern Europe: How Orthodox Media Facilitate Political Mobilization'; Ruth Tsuria, 'Digital Media: When God Becomes Everybody—The Blurring of Sacred and Profane', *Religions* 12, no. 2 (February 8, 2021): 110.

³⁶ Kawka, 'Theological Imaginal Reflections with AI Artworks: Revealing and Obscuring Divine Knowledge in Aesthetic Experience', 152–167; Noreen Herzfeld, 'Is an AI-Generated Icon an Icon? A Case Study in Artificial Intelligence and Christian Spirituality', *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 24, no. 2 (September 2024): 281–294.





also a subtle shift in how images are engaged: from windows to meaning to objects of consumption.

Taken together, these cases suggest that generative AI does not merely produce misleading images but introduces a new way of relating to religious symbols. The boundary between representation and reality becomes less distinct, not because one fully replaces the other, but because the distinction itself becomes increasingly difficult to maintain in everyday digital experiences.

The Weaponization of *Umma*: Geopolitics, Eschatology, and Synthetic Comfort

A different pattern that emerges from the dataset relates to how generative AI is used to construct and circulate narratives about the *umma*, particularly in relation to geopolitical tensions and existential threats. Unlike previous categories, the artifacts in this group emphasize collective identity rather than individual figures or symbolic representations.

At first glance, many of these artifacts resemble familiar forms of political disinformation. They depict conflict, threat, or victory, often involving international actors. However, what distinguishes them in this context is how these narratives are framed in explicitly religious terms, positioning the *umma* as both the subject and the stake of the story.

Several examples illustrate this pattern. In Data 16 and Data 18, AI-generated videos depict Indonesian locations such as Tanjung Balai or Lombok being targeted by Israeli military attacks. Data 16 employs synthetic narratives to assert, "Indonesia supports Iran... Lombok is Israel's main target because Lombok is famously known as the 'Island of 1,000 Mosques'." These narratives are often accompanied by explanations emphasizing religious identity, thereby framing the imagined attack as not only geopolitical but also symbolic.

In another example (Data 17), an AI-dubbed video features a supposed Iranian military official addressing the Indonesian public,

expressing gratitude for their prayers and predicting the disappearance of Israel from the world map. The video includes the official declaring, "A surprising statement from the Iranian military... To the Indonesian people, thank you for your prayers. I assure you Israel will disappear from the world map." The message is crafted to blend geopolitical conflict with eschatological undertones, suggesting not only a political outcome but also a form of moral or even divine resolution.

What becomes noticeable across these cases is how the boundary between information, interpretation, and imagination begins to blur. The artifacts do not simply report events, nor do they clearly present themselves as fiction. Instead, they occupy an ambiguous space where imagined scenarios are presented with the visual and narrative conventions of news or official statements.

This ambiguity allows them to function in multiple ways at once. On one level, they may be interpreted as warnings or alerts, signaling potential threats to the community. On another level, they can also serve as affirmations, portraying the *umma* as resilient, protected, or ultimately victorious. The same mechanism that generates fear can also provide reassurance.

From a theological perspective, this raises questions about how authority over collective narratives is exercised. Traditionally, issues related to geopolitical conflict, existential threats, or eschatological interpretation fall within the domain of *fiqh al-siyāsah* and broader scholarly deliberation. Such interpretations are typically mediated through institutional processes and require a degree of consensus or caution.

In the cases observed here, however, these interpretive functions appear to be increasingly decentralized. Anonymous or unverified creators can produce and circulate narratives that resemble authoritative interpretations without undergoing the processes that would





normally confer legitimacy.³⁷ As a result, the distinction between informed interpretation and speculative projection becomes less clear.

At the same time, it may be overly simplistic to view these artifacts solely as attempts at deception. Their impact lies not only in whether they are believed as factual claims but also in how they resonate emotionally. By presenting scenarios of threat or victory in visually compelling ways, they invite audiences to engage, whether through fear, solidarity, or hope.

This is where the notion of *synthetic comfort* becomes particularly relevant. In contexts marked by uncertainty or anxiety, these artifacts offer a form of emotional orientation. A video depicting an attack may intensify a sense of vulnerability, while another showing the defeat of an adversary may provide a sense of relief or affirmation. In both cases, the experience is immediate and affective, even if the underlying scenario is entirely fabricated.

Engaging with such content, whether sharing it, commenting on it, or reacting to it, can also take on a quasi-religious dimension. It may be experienced as a way to express concern for the umma, participate in collective awareness, or even contributing to a shared moral stance. In this sense, the boundary between information consumption and forms of digital piety becomes less distinct.

Rather than suggesting that these dynamics lead directly to radicalization or manipulation, it may be more accurate to see them as part of a broader shift in how collective identity is mediated. Generative AI does not create concern for the umma, but it provides new ways of shaping, amplifying, and circulating it.

Taken together, these cases indicate that the challenge posed by AI is not limited to individual deception or symbolic distortion. It also extends to the level of collective imagination—how communities perceive threat, interpret events,

and situate themselves within larger narratives. In this context, authority is no longer only about who speaks, but also about who is able to frame the story in ways that feel meaningful and compelling.

Toward an Epistemological Response to AI-Driven Religious Disinformation

The analysis presented thus far suggests that the challenge posed by AI-driven religious disinformation cannot be understood solely at the level of content or distribution. Rather, it points to a deeper disruption in the epistemological foundations through which religious knowledge is recognized and trusted. From this perspective, the question of response becomes less about correcting individual pieces of misinformation, and more about how existing religious frameworks might be re-engaged to address these shifting conditions. The findings of this study raise a broader question: To what extent do existing religious traditions possess the resources to respond effectively to AI-driven disinformation?

At one level, it would be difficult to argue that such resources are entirely absent. Within Islamic epistemology, for instance, mechanisms such as *isnād*, *tabayyun*, and the ethical evaluation of transmitters were developed precisely to address uncertainties in the circulation of knowledge. These frameworks emphasize not only the content of a message, but also its source, context, and moral grounding. In principle, they offer a robust foundation for distinguishing between trustworthy and unreliable information.

However, what becomes apparent in the context of generative AI is that these mechanisms were designed for a different epistemic environment. They presuppose the presence of human transmitters, identifiable chains of communication, and the possibility of tracing authority through recognizable forms. When

³⁷ Mohammed Qasim Khan, 'Digital Eschatology in Islamicate Traditions: A Comparative Study of Inter-Religious Prophecies', *Journal of Digital Islamicate Research* 3, no. 2 (December 11, 2025): 396–432; V. Yu. Lebedev and A.

M. Prilutskii, 'Visualization of Eschatological Semiotics in Informational Discourses of Modern Marginal Orthodoxy', *Journal of Visual Theology* 7, no. 1 (2025): 136–150.





these assumptions no longer fully apply, as in the case of synthetic voices, fabricated visuals, or algorithmically generated narratives, the process of verification becomes less straightforward.

This does not necessarily mean that religious epistemological tools are obsolete. Rather, it suggests that their application may require reinterpretation. Concepts such as *tabayyun*, for example, may need to extend beyond evaluating individuals to engaging with systems, platforms, and modes of production that were not previously part of the epistemic landscape.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that not all challenges posed by AI can be addressed through epistemology alone. As the analysis of synthetic comfort indicates, the persuasive force of AI-generated disinformation often lies not only in its plausibility but also in its ability to resonate emotionally. In such cases, the issue is not simply whether a claim is true or false, but how it feels meaningful to those who encounter it.

This suggests that the response to AI-driven religious disinformation may need to operate on multiple levels. Epistemological frameworks remain important, particularly in providing criteria for verification and critical reflection. Yet, they may need to be complemented by broader efforts (educational, social, and even pastoral) that address how individuals engage with information in practice.

From this perspective, the question is perhaps not whether religion has sufficient tools, but how these tools are mobilized, interpreted, and adapted within changing technological conditions. The challenge, therefore, lies less in replacing existing traditions and more in reactivating their underlying principles in ways that remain responsive to new forms of mediation.

One possible direction for extending these epistemological responses can be seen in emerging efforts to develop what is sometimes referred to as digital *isnād*. Rather than replacing classical verification mechanisms, this approach seeks to reinterpret them within digital infrastructures, allowing religious knowledge to remain traceable and accountable in environments shaped by generative AI.³⁹ As also highlighted by Alshaar, preserving knowledge lineage is not merely a technical challenge but a moral and cultural imperative.⁴⁰ By embedding transparency, traceability, and accountability into both technical systems and institutional policies, the integrity of scholarly communication can be sustained in an AI-saturated future.

Although still in its early stages, such initiatives illustrate how traditional concepts, such as transmission continuity, credibility, and provenance, might be translated into technological forms. These include institutional verification platforms, metadata-based traceability, and computational methods for analyzing transmission networks. However, their effectiveness remains contingent on broader questions of authority, adoption, and trust, which extend beyond technical implementation alone.

Conclusion

This study has examined how generative AI reshapes religious disinformation by simulating key elements of religious authority while detaching them from their epistemic foundations. Across the cases analyzed, the disruption lies not only in the spread of misleading content but also in the reconfiguration of how religious truth is recognized and trusted in digitally mediated environments.

³⁹ Adelia et al., 'Digital Takhrij Hadith as Islamic Digital Humanities', 83–96; Zahrotus Saidah, 'Urgensi Pengamalan Kembali Kaidah Isnad Dalam Meminimalisir Penyebaran Hoaks', *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Education Studies (IJIES)* 2, no. 2 (December 27, 2019): 115–132.

⁴⁰ Alshaar, 'Knowledge Lineage from Isnad to AI: Reframing Authorship and Responsibility in the Generative AI Era', 1131–1154.





The findings show that generative AI enables the production of sanad-less knowledge, wherein authority is performed through technical precision without moral accountability. At the same time, the fabrication of *i'jāz*-like representations and the circulation of simulacra suggest a growing instability in the relationship between symbol and referent, as sacred signs become increasingly reproducible and self-contained. At the level of collective identity, AI-mediated narratives further shape how the umma is imagined, particularly in relation to threat, solidarity, and belonging.

These dynamics indicate that AI-driven religious disinformation operates not only at the informational level but also at the epistemological level. It challenges the processes through which authority is established, meaning is interpreted, and belief is formed. In this sense, the issue extends beyond distinguishing between true and false claims to understanding how religious knowledge itself is authenticated under conditions of technological mediation.

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The authors declare no competing interests or affiliations that could have influenced the outcomes of this study.

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Disclaimer

The views and assumptions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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15	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/27712
16	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/27854
17	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/27855
18	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/27861
19	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/27877
20	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/27976
21	https://www.liputan6.com/cek-fakta/read/6157482/cek-fakta-hoaks-pendaftaran-bantuan-non-muslim-rp-250-juta-hingga-rp-1-miliar-dari-bimas-kristen-kemenag-dengan-daftar-melalui-whatsapp
22	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/29741
23	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/30100

Appendix

The AI-driven religious disinformation in Indonesia

Data ID	Source Link
1	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/13745
2	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/14048
3	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/14087
4	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/19329
5	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/23011
6	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/23505
7	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/24937
8	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/25280
9	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/26459
10	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/26696
11	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/27152
12	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/27196
13	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/27451
14	https://turnbackhoax.id/articles/21214

