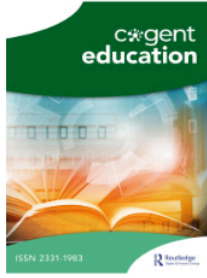


Online Islamic Knowledge Sources and Their Authority in Islamic Learning: A Case Study of Indonesian Muslim Universities

By Askar Askar



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Online Islamic knowledge sources and their authority in Islamic learning: a case study of Indonesian Muslim universities

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the emergence of new Islamic knowledge authorities in an Islamic learning context. This study used a qualitative method in which the data was gathered through field observation, in-depth interviews, and written document analysis. In-depth interviews involved sixteen students and six Islamic education teachers from two Islamic universities in Indonesia. Data was analyzed using a thematic approach. The approach allowed this study to analyze classification and present themes related to our empirical data analysis. The data analysis was iteratively begun with open coding, selective coding, and theoretical findings. This study found that Indonesian Muslim students view Islamic organizations' websites, Muslim scholars' web pages, social media, and Internet memes as new sources of Islamic knowledge. Our findings highlight an important point: online Islamic knowledge sources have become new Islamic knowledge authorities for Indonesian Muslim students. We conclude that new Islamic authorities have emerged through various platforms on the Internet, such as Islamic organization websites, Muslim scholar webpages, social media, and Internet memes. Further research should focus on the implications of online Islamic knowledge sources for Islamic teaching and learning at universities.

IMPACT STATEMENT

Previously, Muslim students learned Islamic knowledge from conventional Islamic authorities such as madrasahs, boarding schools, and traditional muftis. However, since the arrival of the Internet, Muslim students have learned Islamic knowledge from new Islamic knowledge authorities that emerged on the Internet. Such new Islamic knowledge authorities are Islamic organization websites, online preachers, personal Muslim scholars' web pages, social media, and Islamic memes that distribute Islamic teachings. The emergence of new Islamic knowledge authorities on the Internet has significantly undermined the roles of traditional Islamic knowledge authorities because Muslim students have turned to new Islamic knowledge authorities in online space. The phenomenon's impact is that Muslim students can learn Islamic teachings with less bureaucracy because of the freedom to access Islamic knowledge authorities online. In the future, the conventional Islamic knowledge authorities might need to design new methodologies and approaches in Islamic education institutions.

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1. Introduction

The arrival of new media has caused a change in knowledge creation and transfer in current learning contexts, which is facilitated by the Internet. Knowledge is understood as facts, information, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education to understand a subject (Kuhn, 2001). Before the arrival of information technology, particularly the Internet, knowledge was produced mainly at scientific institutions such as universities, schools, government institutions, and industrial research centers (Gibbons et al., 1994). Schools, for example, play an important role in knowledge creation and

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distribution throughout the whole education service (Hargreaves, 1999). Similarly, other educational institutions that transfer knowledge face-to-face are also considered important for knowledge production and distribution. In other words, such educational institutions are considered as the only knowledge authority producers and transferees before the arrival of the Internet. For example, Islamic teaching and learning are mostly practiced through direct meetings between educators and students because Muslims believe that Islamic knowledge is better transferred in face-to-face mode. Muslims believe that direct knowledge transfer from a teacher or Ulama to students is more of a blessing and glory (Huda et al., 2016).

However, since the arrival of the Internet, new media that facilitate knowledge production and dissemination have emerged as new knowledge authorities in community learning contexts. At the same time, the new media has also caused a change in information search behavior among the new generation (Taylor, 2012). Previously, people used to access knowledge directly from knowledge holders such as scholars in certain disciplines (Chapman & Schott, 2020). However, nowadays, the availability of the Internet, knowledge sources can be accessed in online space. Communities' practices in accessing knowledge and information have changed, particularly in the use of search engines and digitized resources apart from traditional sources such as books and journals (Meyer & Schroeder, 2009). For example, currently, communities begin to rely on the Internet to access health knowledge, which is known as doctor in the house (Hardey, 1999).

Similarly, new knowledge sources have also emerged in response to the young Muslim generation's Islamic knowledge search behavior within the context of Islamic production and dissemination. The young Muslim generation has intensively relied on the Internet to access Islamic knowledge and teachings since the arrival of the Internet. A study by Sisler found that European Muslim countries have used the Internet to construct Islamic knowledge and share it with wider communities. Another study conducted by an Islamic university in Indonesia also found that most of the young Indonesian Muslim generation use the Internet as the main source for Islamic knowledge acquisition and dissemination (Tohir, 2018). For example, Islamic law knowledge has been produced by Muslim scholars in online space, and it is also used to make a fatwa in online space (Rusli et al., 2020; Rusli & Nurdin, 2022). A study conducted by Qudsy et al. (2021) also found that Muslim society no longer relies on hadith experts to study hadith, but they learn hadith from the Internet instead, such as through hadith memes and websites.

Currently, more Muslim students use online resources to access Islamic knowledge for their studies (Fakhruroji, 2021, 2022). When the students use online resources, it will contribute to the pedagogy of religious studies in the digital environment (Gilliat-Ray, 2020). For example, Muslim students in the UK use Open Online Courses (MOOCs) via its Future Learn platform, which enables them to get high-quality university teaching and learning (Gilliat-Ray, 2020). By using online resources, Muslim students can learn more about Islam because of the wide range of information sources (Callaway, 2010). Furthermore, Egyptian university students prefer to use online teaching and learning methods through different internet platforms, which increases their satisfaction with learning (Basuony et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Muslim adolescents in Austria use digital media and online forums as sources of information for religious learning in their daily lives (Bunt, 2003, 2009).

As such, regarding religious issues, Muslims might not turn to their conventional imam or religious scholars but instead search online for religious knowledge, such as Islamic web portals (Tuna et al., 2023). Therefore, there is a strong tendency for Muslim students to turn to the so-called 'Google-Hodja' (Aslan et al., 2017) to learn various Islamic teachings. Even in India, Muslim students have begun to embrace or adopt the metaverse among educationists, administrators, and policymakers in Islamic learning activities (M. Azhar et al., 2024).

The phenomenon reflects the shifting in Islamic learning behavior among the young Muslim generation since the emergence of new media on the Internet. The shifting causes a change in knowledge acquisition and learning behavior from conventional to online knowledge sources, which might result in the emergence of new knowledge authorities in the online space. As such, several religious scholars share their Islamic expertise in online space to educate their followers and other Muslim communities in their daily lives. In addition, Islamic knowledge websites and social media are also mushrooming in the online space (Rafiki, 2022). The phenomenon also supports the emergence of new Islamic knowledge authorities online. In recent decades, the wide range of innovative new media learning environments

has bridged new ways of Islamic learning practices and developed new Islamic pedagogy relevant to the digital age. At the same time, the new ways of Islamic learning are considered to undermine the authority of conventional clerics or ulema (Kabba, 2016).

However, what type of new knowledge authorities and how they emerge in Islamic learning contexts has yet to be discovered. In addition, studies in this area are scarce, which hinders our understanding of the emergence of new knowledge authorities in Islamic learning contexts. This study, therefore, investigates the emergence of new knowledge authorities in the Islamic learning context to provide new insight for academia and practitioners in Islamic education institution contexts. This study might help policymakers in the Islamic education context to reshape their perspectives and policies in Islamic education development.

2. Literature review

2.1. Online knowledge sources

Knowledge sources in online space have been discussed in many studies (Oh et al., 2008; Vătămănescu et al., 2023). Vătămănescu et al. (2023) argue that a group of people or scholars can produce knowledge in online space through their engagement in a network or affiliation. They say that online network helps communities harness new expertise in their fields through the period of engagement, which resembles offline engagement in conventional educational institutions. Knowledge is also available in an educational web-based service (Oh et al., 2008). For example, people can use a web-based education to ask questions and receive answers from other users. Some religious organizations have developed knowledge-based websites to enable their members and followers to learn about specific areas related to their missions (Wirtz et al., 2013). Such a website has a significant impact on how religions represent and transfer their teachings to followers (Lawther, 2016), and the website can also be used by communities who need religious assistance in developing their religious teachings (Kawabata & Tamura, 2007).

Knowledge in online space can emerge from online community collaboration (Faraj et al., 2011). The online communities might interact individually in a virtual organization without knowing each other or intentionally collaborate to produce new knowledge. The output of such knowledge collaboration production is reflected in the participation of people in knowledge creation online through the use of online applications such as wikis, blogs, and other social media sites (Brown, 2016). Regarding collaborative knowledge production, Kai-Wai Chu and Kennedy (2011) found that university students perceived positive experiences during knowledge creation through a collaborative project. The students produce knowledge to share online to support effective learning processes during their studies. Effective learning is caused by study courses, which are informed by the online knowledge creation and production (Vartiainen et al., 2022). When an effective learning experience is perceived, the pedagogical development of learning in higher education institutions is achieved through the utilization of online knowledge sources.

Within religious contexts, online preaching and community-based religious activities have significantly contributed to the development of religious knowledge (M. Z. Azhar et al., 2024). Religious activities in online space include the sharing of religious digital content (Berger & Golan, 2024) such as videos (Azizah et al., 2021), memes (Campbell, 2020; Nurdin & Godal, 2023), blogging (Cheong et al., 2008) a significant influence on increasing religious knowledge in the digital era. Religious digital content has been spread across Internet platforms. Many religious actors, such as muftis, imams, and religious organizations, utilize online platforms to disseminate their religious knowledge (Whyte, 2022). For example, Muslim preachers build personal social media sites to preach Islamic teachings online. The sites are referred to as knowledge sources by millions of Muslims across the globe. The alteration of how Islamic knowledge is disseminated and consumed has caused the construction of online religious authority.

When religious knowledge is openly available to believers across Internet platforms, students, as the main knowledge seekers, can experience new pedagogy of religious learning in the digital world (Gilliat-Ray, 2020). This can support an increase in the adoption of new environments of Islamic learning within Islamic education institutions. In other words, Islamic learning bureaucracy can be reduced (Aktay, 2024), which is understood as the absence of physical teachers, classrooms, time schedules, and geographic

limitations. Becker (2009) argues that online knowledge production and consumption can function as a 'decentralization of knowledge production' policy in response to conventional Islamic knowledge learning and teachings.

2.2. Islamic knowledge

Scholars have defined knowledge in various ways, but no clear definition has been made so far because knowledge is an abstract concept that is very difficult to describe in a tangible world. However, some scholars have proposed some definitions of knowledge based on their studies and perspectives. For example, Davis (1999, p. 200) defines knowledge as 'information organized and processed to convey understanding, experience, accumulated learning, and expertise as they apply to a problem or activity'. Furthermore, Gamble and Blackwell (2001, p. 11) divide knowledge into two types; 'represented (explicit) and embodied (tacit) knowledge'. Explicit knowledge is objective and rational knowledge that can be expressed in words, sentences, numbers, or formulas (context-free), while tacit knowledge is subjective and experiential knowledge that cannot be expressed in words, sentences, numbers, or formulas (context-specific) (Nonaka, 2006).

In the education context, knowledge is understood as information that enables to answer the question 'know-what', which refers to the list of topics teachers define in the syllabi according to the courses created by departments to offer in their academic program (Pereira et al., 2023). Based on the definition, knowledge is a prerequisite to students' and teachers' understanding of their subject for teaching and learning (Aubrey, 2022). All subjects taught at educational institutions are intended to improve knowledge and skills. In acquiring knowledge and skills, students are involved in an active process of learning with educators, such as teachers or muftis in the context of Islamic education. Learning to improve knowledge is carried out through interactions with educators and other learning sources.

Islam also views the concept of knowledge as understood in the Western education system, but Islam also views knowledge as a bridge to create harmony between religion and science (Guessoum, 2010). In Arabic, 'knowledge' is often translated as 'ilm', which implies 'to know about something'. According to a Muslim scholar, Imam Al-Ghazali, knowledge is defined as 'attaining an actual description or representation in the heart (Ashimi, 2022). By having the knowledge or ilm, Muslim are able to understand religious teachings rationally and to make sense religious values in their life. As such, knowledge is the most important element in a Muslim life, which is obliged by God. The obligation to seek knowledge is mentioned in the Qur'an, which orders Muslims to seek knowledge regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, social status, and others (Welch, 2012). Even Muslim scholars argue that knowledge is more important than possessions and wealth.

2.3. Islamic learning

In the Islamic context, learning is not only about preparing a student to possess good knowledge and skills to get a better job in the workforce. Islam also obliges students to possess the knowledge to succeed in the world and the hereafter. As such, the main sources of knowledge in Islamic learning and teaching are the Al-Qur'an and As-Sunnah (Imamuddin et al., 2020; Robiah et al., 2022) which guide Muslim students to achieve success in the world and in the hereafter. Allah explains the position of the Al-Qur'an as the most important source of learning in the Qur'an surah An-Nahl: 64 and surah As-Shad: 29. Those main sources of Islamic learning are transformed into other learning resources such as teachers, books, libraries, and environment and so on.

Islam recognizes that all fields of knowledge are important to be studied in order to achieve success in the world and in the hereafter and to enhance personal growth and social responsibility. Islam also views learning acquisition as not merely about enhancing the standard of human quality in terms of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, but Islam also obliges humans to live with the balance of moral, spiritual, and intellectual, which is the ultimate goal of Islamic learning (Huda et al., 2020). In other words, Islam has a different perspective from the Western secular education system because it lacks tools to understand the moral and spiritual realms (Ashaari et al., 2012).

Islam recognizes all fields of knowledge studied in Western cultures, such as education, law, economics, physics, astronomy, and other sciences, because they are mentioned in the Qur'an, and Muslims are obliged to learn that knowledge. However, learning those knowledge subjects is conducted according to the Qur'an and Sunnah values (Basir et al., 2022). As such, some of those knowledge fields are unique to the Islamic context. For example, the term Fiqih reflects the law subject, and the term muamalah reflects the economic subject. In contrast, other terms of knowledge fields are accompanied by the term Islam, such as Islamic education, Islamic politics, etc.

The tasks to provide Islamic knowledge to younger Muslims rely on Islamic knowledge authorities such as madrasahs, boarding schools, Ustaz, and muftis (Whyte, 2024). However, since the internet era, Islamic knowledge sources have shifted to the online world. For example, many Muslim scholars deliver Islamic teachings through various internet platforms such as websites and social media (Rusli & Nurdin, 2022). In addition, Islamic teaching and learning sources have also been digitalized and disseminated online. As such, Muslim students can access Islamic knowledge easily and faster.

3. Methodology

A multiple qualitative case study (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2021) was used in this study. The multiple case studies design supports understanding the differences and similarities between cases, which is two universities in this study. Our method was also helpful in studying the link between social, personal, psychological, behavioral, organizational, cultural, and environmental factors (Halkias et al., 2022) in understanding the emergence of new Islamic knowledge authorities in online space from university students perspectives. In addition, our method also helped us to build explanatory patterns (Greene & David, 1984) between the two cases being studied.

This study selected two Islamic universities in Central Sulawesi Province in Indonesia. Our reasons for selecting the universities are two large Islamic universities providing Islamic and conventional study programs, all teaching Islamic subjects. However, before conducting the study within the universities, we sought research ethics approval from the Research and Community Service Centre (LP2M) of Universitas Islam Negeri Datokarama Palu. The research ethic of this study was granted and approved on 10 March 2024 with number 548/Uin.24/LPP2M/PP.00.10/03/2024. The ethics allows the conduct of the study without causing harm to humans within both universities, and all confidential data must be stored in the research center data repository.

One university belongs to the government, and another to a private organization. Our strategy supports our diverse data collection (Lim, 2024), which enables us to highlight similarities and differences across various selected case studies and to improve our contributions to theory (Ridder, 2017), as well as enable triangulation in the data analysis (Ammenwerth et al., 2003). Then both universities have about thirteen thousand students. The first Islamic university has four faculties with 31 study programs, and the second university has five faculties with 35 study programs. The university teaches Islamic study subjects such as Quran and hadith studies, Islamic law, Islamic education, Islamic economics, Islamic philosophy, and Islamic communication.

We gathered data through direct observation in the two universities and conducted in-depth interviews with 16 students and six Islamic education lecturers. We chose them because they are actors who are involved in online Islamic knowledge access for learning and teaching. In-depth interviews support us in obtaining a breadth of qualitative data and contextual information (Stokes & Bergin, 2006) from the participant's perspectives. In-depth interviews were conducted between 30 to 45 minutes. All interviews were transcribed and sent back to participants for clarification. We also analyse written documents such as students' assignments and lecturers teaching plans. However, we also collected data from online sources using netnography approach (O'Donohoe, 2010) to obtain data from Islamic organization websites and social media, which provide Islamic knowledge. In doing so, we captured data in the form of text and images.

In data analyses, we used the thematic approach from Corbin and Strauss (1990), which guided us to synthesize the data from the transcript to increase understanding and enhance clarity of the themes emerging from the analysis (Eaves, 2001). In building the themes, we applied three-level coding: open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding was begun soon after data was

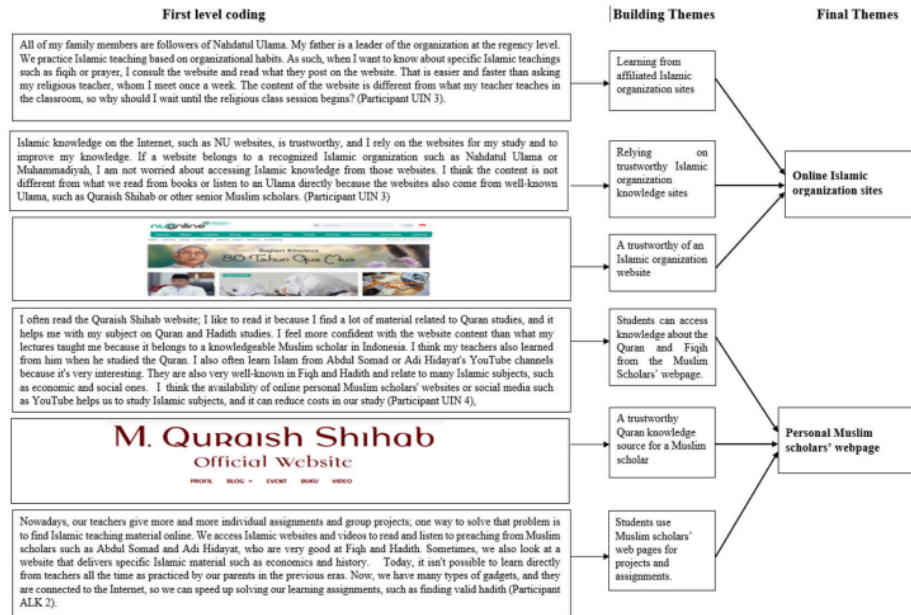


Figure 1. Data analysis mechanism.

collected to get earlier understanding on the research topic, then in the axial coding stage, we determine similar codes relating specific themes from the analysis in open coding and presented them in a matrix table as suggested by Mile and Huberman (Al-Khanbashi, 2020; Huberman & Miles, 1983). Finally, in selective coding, we aggregate all similar coding into each theme found in the data and relate them to theoretical constructs to be presented and discussed in the results section. Data analysis was finished when there were no more new themes from the data.

In building the data's correctness and reliability, we triangulated data from various sources, such as students, lectures, and websites. Then, the data were aggregated into each relevant theme, and finally, we built the final themes. The mechanism to build final themes and connect data from various sources into relevant themes is presented in Figure 1.

4. Research findings

In this section, we present the study's findings according to themes found in the data analysis from field observations, in-depth interviews, and written material analysis. The themes also reflect new Islamic knowledge authorities in online space, which is the main focus of this study. The themes are presented in the following sub-sections.

4.1. Online Islamic organization sites

Currently, there are about a hundred Islamic websites in Indonesia. However, four are owned by the largest Islamic organizations with more than 200 million followers. Those Islamic organizations include Nahdatul Ulama (NU), with 90 million members; Muhammadiyah, with 60 million followers; Darut Dakwah Islam (DDI), with 30 million followers; and Indonesia Ulama Council (MUI), which is an Islamic organization consisting of Muslim scholars from various Islamic organizations in Indonesia. The organization was founded to support the Indonesian government in maintaining religious harmony and inter-religious harmony across Islamic organizations. The organizations have a website that provides Islamic knowledge that all Muslim communities can access.

The Islamic organization websites have become the main reference for young Indonesian Muslims in Islamic learning within two universities' case studies. However, Islamic organization websites are also the

Table 1. Islamic organizations websites.

No	Organizations	Website	Members
1	Indonesia Ulama Council	https://mui.or.id/	Referred by al Indonesia Muslim
2	Nahdatul Ulama	https://www.nu.or.id/	90 million
3	Muhammadiyah	https://muhammadiyah.or.id/	60 million
4	DDI	https://ddi.or.id/	30 million
5	Dewan Mesjid Indonesia	https://dmi.or.id/	About two million
6	Muslim University Students Organization	https://www.hmidakush.com/	About 1 million
7	Tertiary Muslim Student Organization	https://pbpii.or.id/	About 1.3 million

primary reference for Islamic knowledge acquisition for wider Muslim societies in Indonesia, in particular, the followers of the organization. The websites provide various Islamic knowledge related to Islamic teachings such as Islamic education, Qur'an, fiqh, hadith, Islamic communication, history, halal foods, etc. Some of the websites are presented in the following Table 1.

Table 1 above shows that larger Islamic organizations websites have their own websites to communicate and maintain relationships with their Muslim followers. However, during our observation, we also found that all the websites provide Islamic teaching to educate their followers and the wider Indonesian Muslim societies. They also provide website question-and-answer features to help Muslims obtain new knowledge on specific Islamic topics such as fiqh and hadith. When we interviewed university students, we found that they used the websites to support their Islamic learning at universities. We also found that the students prefer to access their affiliated Islamic organization's websites, for example, a participant said as follows:

All of my family members are followers of Nahdatul Ulama. My father is a leader of the organization at the regency level. We practice Islamic teaching based on organizational habits. As such, when I want to know about specific Islamic teachings such as fiqh or prayer, I consult the website and read what they post on the website. That is very easy and faster rather than asking my religious teacher, whom I meet once a week. The content of the website is different from what my teacher teaches in the classroom, so why should I wait until the religious class session begins? (Participant UIN 3)

The participant's opinion reflects the current phenomena of young Muslim trends in online Islamic knowledge acquisition, particularly acquiring Islamic knowledge from their affiliation with Islamic organizations. Currently, most Islamic organizations in Indonesia have websites to promote the organization's vision and mission. However, they also educate their followers about Islamic teachings because they also play functions as preachers responsible for Islamic knowledge development. Nahdatul Ulama is the most prominent Islamic organization with more than ninety million followers, and most of them are traditional Muslims but have good technology literacy. Figure 2 is the image of the organization's website.

The organization's website provides an Islamic knowledge source feature that enables its followers to learn Islamic teachings. The website also has the asking and answering questions feature, which Nahdatul Ulama scholars from various Islamic knowledge backgrounds, such as Quran, fiqh, and hadith, facilitate. Each question will be answered and explained by a specific knowledge scholar. As such, the Islamic knowledge disseminated by the organization is reliable because it is trustworthy and credible. The trustworthiness and credibility of the website make university students confident to use it in their learning, as stated by the following participant.

Islamic knowledge on the Internet, such as NU websites, is trustworthy, and I rely on the websites for my study and to improve my knowledge. If a website belongs to a recognized Islamic organization such as Nahdatul Ulama or Muhammadiyah, I am not worried about accessing Islamic knowledge from those websites. I think the content is not different from what we read from books or listen to an Ulama directly because the websites also come from well-known Ulama, such as Quraish Shihab or other senior Muslim scholars. (Participant UIN 1)

Such participants' perspectives reflect the current Muslim young generation's views on using online Islamic knowledge resources in their studies. Even most teachers at Islamic universities encourage students to access learning material from online sources. Accessing Islamic learning material from online sources reduces bureaucracy in Islamic knowledge acquisition. At the same time, online knowledge access can also save time and reduce the costs of learning Islam.

4.2. Islamic knowledge provider sites

Several Islamic websites that provide Islamic teaching relating to specific areas of knowledge have been constructed. The websites owned by small organizations and individuals offer specific areas of Islamic teaching such as Islamic law or fiqh, Islamic education, hadith, Quran, history, and Sufism. Examples of the website include as shown in Table 2.

Informants involved in this study said that the social media phenomenon had penetrated rapidly into the life of Islam and its believers in the last decade. The social effects of the media are very significant in their religious lives. Muslim students learn Islam from online platforms and practice their religion based on Islamic knowledge obtained from the platform. Whenever Muslim students want to know a particular topic of Islamic teaching, they like to explore virtual resources because it is easier and more comfortable than waiting for the next learning session, which requires hard effort and time. A student said as follows:

We do not have to work hard to find learning material in this Internet era. ⁶ For example, if I want to know about Fiqh or Hadith, I just googled it, and soon I found a website about Fiqh or Hadith. Everything about Fiqh or hadith is available there. I can read everything I want to know and even ask a question on



Figure 2. The largest Islamic organization's website image.

Table 2. Examples of Islamic knowledge source websites.

No	Name of website	Area of Islamic knowledge
1	bincangsyariah.com	Islamic law
2	rumahfiqh.com	
3	madrasah.id	Islamic education
4	belajarislam.com	
5	bersamadakwah.net	Islamic communication
6	cyberdakwah.com	
7	wisatanabawi.com	Islamic history and tourism
8	https://jejakislam.net/	
9	bacaanmadani.com	Quran learning
10	onlinequranlearners.com	
11	hadits.tazkia.ac.id	Hadith learning
12	www.hadits.id	
13	www.ekonomisyariah.org	Islamic economic
14	www.shariaknowledgecentre.id/id/	
15	nuralwala.id	Sufism
16	www.jalansufi.com	
17	bincangmuslimah.com	Gender in Islam

the website, and someone will answer my question soon. I am thrilled with those online Islamic knowledge websites; I do not have to meet a cleric in boarding schools to learn about them. (Participant ALK 2)

Another ¹ participant expressed his experience regarding online knowledge source access as follows:

I usually search online when my teacher gives me an assignment about a particular topic in Islamic education. Sometimes, my teacher told me to differentiate between original and fake hadith, which is very easy; I just search online and then read it and ask a question on the Rumahfiqh.com website about various fiqh issues. I just prepare myself just in case anyone asks me about fiqh or a fatwa. They always respond sooner. If I want to answer the requests of the people who are members of my WhatsApps group, I search online. When I get a new fiqh issue, I post it on the WhatsApp group so everyone can read it. (Participant UIN 6)

Such students' reliance on online knowledge sources has become a new phenomenon of how Muslim students have changed their perspectives towards accessing Islamic knowledge in the digital era. The change in behavior from conventional to online knowledge sources indicates the ease of use and perceived usefulness of online knowledge sources. In addition, from a university student's perspective, accessing knowledge from online sources is no different from gaining knowledge from conventional Islamic education institutions and *Ulama* as long as the knowledge sources are credible or provided by Muslim scholars. For example, a student said the following:

I don't think learning from Muslim scholars in an online space or on Islamic websites is different from learning directly in an offline context. We do not meet a teacher directly, but it is not different except in looking at our teacher's attitude. Similarly, learning from an Islamic knowledge website can also be trusted because most websites are Islamic knowledge websites belonging to trusted, credible Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah and the Indonesia Ulama Council. It is no problem to learn Islamic teaching from online sources. (Participant UIN 7)

The participant's assertion reflects university students' perspective that accessing knowledge from online sources is no different from gaining knowledge from conventional Islamic education institutions and *Ulama* as long as the knowledge sources are credible or provided by Muslim scholars. This shows a new trend in university students' perspective towards the credibility of online Islamic knowledge sources for their learning.

4.3. Personal Muslim scholar webpages

Currently, more Muslim scholars go online to deliver Islamic teachings in response to information technology development and information-seeking behavior change within the young Muslim generation. Islamic university students have relied on Internet sources to search for new Islamic knowledge for their study purposes. Access to Islamic knowledge from online sources helps students accomplish various assignments when they study at universities. They access well-known Muslim scholars' websites or social media sites to read Islamic learning material. A participant said as follows:

I often read the Quraish Shihab website; I like to read it because I find a lot of material related to Quran studies, and it helps me with my subject on Quran and Hadith studies. I feel more confident with the website content than what my lectures taught me because it belongs to a knowledgeable Muslim scholar in Indonesia. I think my teachers also learned from him when he studied the Quran. I also often learn Islam from Abdul Somad or Adi Hidayat's YouTube channels because it's very interesting. They are also very well-known in Fiqh and Hadith and relate to many Islamic subjects, such as economic and social ones. I think the availability of online personal Muslim scholars' websites or social media such as YouTube helps us to study Islamic subjects, and it can reduce costs in our study. (Participant UIN 4)

Example of a Quran scholar is shown in Figure 3.

The participant's opinion reflects the changing paradigm in viewing teachers as a knowledge source. In other words, a teacher is someone who stands in the classroom and delivers knowledge in online space with new digital media. Given the change in perspective in viewing teachers, Muslim students

M. Quraish Shihab

Official Website

PROFIL BLOG ▾ EVENT BUKU VIDEO

Figure 3. A personal website of Quraish Shihab.



Figure 4. The YouTube channel of Abdul Somad, preacher.

might not worry about the source of Islamic knowledge, which conventional lecturers or *Ulama* should deliver. Online Islamic knowledge source is considered trustable because they are produced and disseminated by expert Muslims; a participant also said as follows:

Nowadays, our teachers give more and more individual assignments and group projects; one way to solve that problem is to find Islamic teaching material online. We access Islamic websites and videos to read and listen to preaching from Muslim scholars such as Abdul Somad and Adi Hidayat, who are very good at Fiqh and Hadith. Sometimes, we also look at a website that delivers specific Islamic material such as economics and history. Today, it isn't possible to learn directly from teachers all the time as practiced by our parents in the previous eras. Now, we have many types of gadgets, and they are connected to the Internet, so we can speed up solving our learning assignments, such as finding valid hadith. (Participant ALK 2)

A Muslim preacher's personal YouTube channel is shown in Figure 4.

The participant argument shows that Muslim students are more concerned with Muslim scholars' personal web pages or YouTube sites. The findings highlight that new interactive and interesting learning media from online space have replaced old learning media. Islamic knowledge from online sources has increased students' reliance on their study process. The students find it easier to access Islamic knowledge online to accomplish assignments and projects in Islamic studies at universities.

4.4. Social media platforms

All informants interviewed admit that they have more than one social media site account and access social media more than three hours every day; they access social media to access information and

entertainment. However, university students have also used social media platforms for learning purposes, such as to access and share learning material. The students use social media to access Islamic teaching material from YouTube and collaborative project sites like Wikipedia. YouTube has become a significant source of Islam for university students because it presents interesting religious speeches from popular Muslim scholars, such as Adi Hidayat, Quraish Shihab, and Dasaat Latif. They have been referred to as the main sources of Islamic learning in the area of fiqh, hadith, Quran, Islamic economics, and history. An informant said as follows:

I like to learn Islamic material from YouTube because it has many Islamic materials such as Quran, hadith, fiqh, and other social science related to Islam. Muslim scholars such as Quraish Shihab are experts in Quran studies, and Abdul Somas is an expert in fiqh pertaining to all areas of Islamic teaching. All these materials will be beneficial to my studies at university. I do not have to wait until my teachers deliver that material to the classrooms. Besides, unlike meeting in the classroom, where we have to wait for the schedule, I can access the material anytime and anywhere. (Informant Alk3)

The informant's comment above reflects students' reliance on YouTube as a new means to learn Islam, and at the same time, YouTube looks to have become a new teacher for them. YouTube is a video-sharing social media which allows users to disseminate information through interesting audio videos. Other than that, Muslim students also use content collaboration social media such as Wikipedia. Wikipedia helps students to find textual information relating to certain topics of Islamic material as shown in Figure 5: An informant said as follows:

In my experience, searching for a term related to Islamic teaching is much easier on Wikipedia because the content is written by Muslim scholars who have good knowledge of specific Islamic issues. If I want to find out about Islamic education in Egypt, I just search it on Wikipedia. It is even easier if I want to find a definition of a term on Wikipedia. My teachers often write their ideas on Wikipedia. (participant UIN 7)

University teachers also often create practice questions on social media, such as Facebook, where students are expected to answer the questions via messages in the inbox or comments under the practice questions. It is not a problem for students to copy and paste answers from other people, but at least students have read the questions. Include links to practice questions on social media that lead to learning the subject.

Various social media platforms that support students to create virtual discussion groups have helped students to engage them in an online network as practiced in conventional classroom teaching and learning contexts. We found that university students develop online groups to share learning material and assignments, such as in WhatsApp and Facebook groups. For example, Islamic learning material is often disseminated and discussed in WhatsApp groups relating to specific topic in Islam, such as praying, hajj, Fiqh, and so on, as expressed by the following participant:



Figure 5. Wikipedia that depicts an Islamic topic.

We have a WhatsApp group and Facebook to discuss various Islamic learning materials. My friends who are connected with other groups also forward Islamic learning material from different groups to our group. I am in a network with student members from different groups. Some groups specifically discuss Islamic teaching, and some groups prefer to discuss politics, but it is also related to Islamic teachings religion. (Participant ALK 2)

The participants' comments show that they prefer to share knowledge through an online network with their friends. Students might need more information on a specific Islamic knowledge area, which means they need knowledge sharing from other students. In this study, knowledge exchange was facilitated by social media networks rather than conventional mechanisms.

4.5. Internet religious memes

The use of memes containing Islamic religious messages is increasingly being done both through social media and through religious organization websites. The most common memes are short and straightforward images, so they are easy to share. Muslim individuals or religious organizations create these religious memes. The Muslim community considers these religious memes to make it easier for them to understand Islamic teachings and is also interesting so that they motivate them to learn about Islamic teachings. For example, one participant said the following:

I often study Islamic teachings in memes shared on Facebook or WA groups. The memes I usually see are knowledge about Akidah and Fiqh, such as questions about prayer, fasting, zakat, and sadakah. There are also memes about monotheism, faith in angels, the Day of Judgment, and the pilgrimage. Memes like that are beneficial in increasing my knowledge of Islam because they are presented in a more interesting and easy-to-understand way. Compare that with our teacher's explanations, which are sometimes difficult to understand and tedious. (Participant ALK 5)

An example of a meme that is shared and contains Islamic knowledge about how to pray is depicted in Figure 6.

Memes are also shared more interestingly, namely using friendlier language and mixing with animals such as cats. For example, the meme about how to read the Quran is presented in an interesting form, as in Figure 7.

In the perspective of university students, the practice of producing and sharing Islamic teachings using memes is better practiced on social media sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. By



Figure 6. A meme depicts knowledge about how to pray.



Figure 7. A meme shows learning to read the Quran.

using memes as Islamic knowledge-sharing media, users can easily be attracted because they reflect the current interest of students, especially the young generation who prefer interesting learning media. Besides, more students are now familiar with using memes to share information.

The distribution of Islamic memes among young Muslim students in their daily lives shows new ways of knowledge distribution in which popular media has been used in their lives. In addition, the use of Islamic teaching memes, for example, in daily preaching, is related to answering the issues of praying demanded by the students in their daily lives. Our study found that Muslim students use Islamic teaching memes to share Islamic teachings on social media to be read by the wider Muslim community. Islamic teaching memes shared by the students include memes related to the five pillars of Islam, which invite the Muslim community to acknowledge that God is only Allah and the prophet is Muhammad SAW. for living in tolerance and increasing spirituality, such as various prayers in everyday life.

5. Discussion

Our study found that Islamic organization websites have become the new primary reference for young Indonesian Muslims in Islamic learning within two universities' case studies. The use of Islamic organization websites as a source of Islamic learning has been addressed in previous studies (e.g: Aziz, 2020; Marler & Hargittai, 2023). These highlight that Islamic organizations go online to interact with their communities and educate them through the websites. In other words, Islamic organization websites have become a main reference for Islamic learning in wider Muslim societies in Indonesia, particularly the followers of the organizations. Accessing Islamic learning material from online sources reduces bureaucracy in Islamic knowledge learning (Aktay, 2024; Ghafar et al., 2018), because Muslim communities do not need to visit knowledge authorities within the organization to learn Islam. This means that online knowledge access from online Islamic organizations' knowledge sources can save time and reduce the costs of learning Islam.

Furthermore, the findings also show that social media has penetrated rapidly into the life of Islam and its believers, as found in previous studies (Hasyim, 2022). The social effects of the media are very significant in Islamic learning because most Muslim scholars and preachers go online on various social media platforms. This causes Muslim students to learn Islam from the scholar's social media platforms and practice their religion based on the knowledge obtained from the platforms (Fakhruroji, 2022). A study conducted by Mishra and Semaan (2010) also found that Muslim students use social media platforms to listen to religious lectures, learn about the rules regarding the recitation of the Qur'an, and correct pronunciation of Arabic words.

The intensive use of social media in learning Islam indicates the ease of use and perceived usefulness of online knowledge sources (Kazoka & Mwantimwa, 2021; Kennedy & Adetoun, 2021). The findings also show a new form of Islamic knowledge source has been shifted from conventional institutions to digital web-based knowledge content, which means the Internet has played a role as a constructor of Islamic

knowledge (Sisler, 2011; Sisler, 2007). Such online Islamic knowledge sources have become a new knowledge authority in digital space, which might support or replace traditional knowledge authorities such as traditional Islamic schools or madrasahs and ulema.

More and more Muslim scholars go online to deliver Islamic teachings in response to information technology development and information-seeking behavior change within the young Muslim generation (Alabdulwahhab et al., 2021). Muslim scholars go online to distribute Islamic teachings to keep pace with the development of information technology (Halim, 2018). As such, personal Muslim scholar's social media sites found in our study have been considered as reliable new knowledge sources for Muslim community education (Mishra & Semaan, 2010). For example, Kasri and Chaerunnisa (2022) and Usman et al. (2022) argue that trusted Islamic knowledge accessed from the Internet can influence Muslim understanding of specific topics of Islamic teachings in real life, such as knowledge about *zakat* and *waqaf*.

Learning from such online Islamic knowledge sources has been found to increase motivation and learning results (Asrori et al., 2021) and make communication among lecturers-students-lecturers and students-peers more effective (Alwi et al., 2014). The positive impact of learning Islam from the Internet might have caused more young Muslims to know Islam from the Internet, as found by a study conducted by State Islamic University of Hidayatullah Jakarta (Tohir, 2018), which means students have relied on Internet sources to search for new Islamic knowledge for their study purposes (Mahadi, 2023).

Our study also shows that Islamic teaching memes on the Internet have been widely spread and used to disseminate various Islamic religious teachings as addressed by previous studies (e.g. Campbell & Sheldon, 2021; Qudsia et al., 2021; Schmidt, 2021). Our findings align with Haden Church and Feller (2020), who argue that religious memes can be used to distribute religious teachings and beliefs by disseminating popular content about religion in the virtual world. A Meme is understood as digital lines, phrases, images, behavior, ideas, or fragments of repeated ideas that are considered to stick in the user's mind quickly and spread quickly (Regiani & Borelli, 2017). The memes are often produced in the form of pictures, videos, or other media containing cultural information which can be used to contextualize religious messages (Rajan, 2015). When the Islamic teaching memes have been used as new sources of Islamic learning, we argue that the memes have also become new Islamic knowledge authorities because they disseminate and deliver Islamic teaching to Muslim communities.

We argue that the use of memes for religious teaching distribution can make Islamic learning more interesting and relaxed because memes can undermine traditional Islamic authority, which is often associated with discipline and modesty (Richter, 2021). Memes are relevant to pop culture for the young generation because they are easier to digest and stick in the minds of people for a long time (Wagener, 2023). As such, we found that the sharing of Islamic knowledge using memes is increasing today because the characteristics of the memes is funny and easy to digest, which can increase the acquisition of Islamic teachings.

In traditional contexts, religious authorities are understood as Muslim scholars who possess high Islamic teachings knowledge, such as the ability to read classical Arabic books, ability to interpret and master Islamic law jurisprudence, hadith, good Quran knowledge, and others (Syarifuddin, 2022). However, in our study, such Islamic knowledge authorities are not limited to traditional ulema, madrasahs, and boarding schools but also other digital Islamic knowledge sources that support Islamic learning. As such, based on our findings, we define new Islamic knowledge authority as Muslim scholars and entities, such as Islamic organizations and digital platforms that are experts in Islamic knowledge and operate in online space to provide online Islamic knowledge. Our definitions of new Islamic knowledge authorities are based on a new phenomenon where Muslim students have relied on online Islamic knowledge sources from online Islamic organizations and Muslim scholar's personal web pages, social media, and distributed Islamic memes.

Furthermore, our findings can be summarized in a theoretical construct that contributes to the theory of the body of knowledge in the field of knowledge authorities in Islamic learning, as depicted in Figure 8.

We argue that Muslim university students consider the online knowledge sources in Figure 8 as new Islamic knowledge authorities in virtual space that can be relied on for their learning sources. Accessing Islamic knowledge from those new online Islamic knowledge authorities might cause an increase in

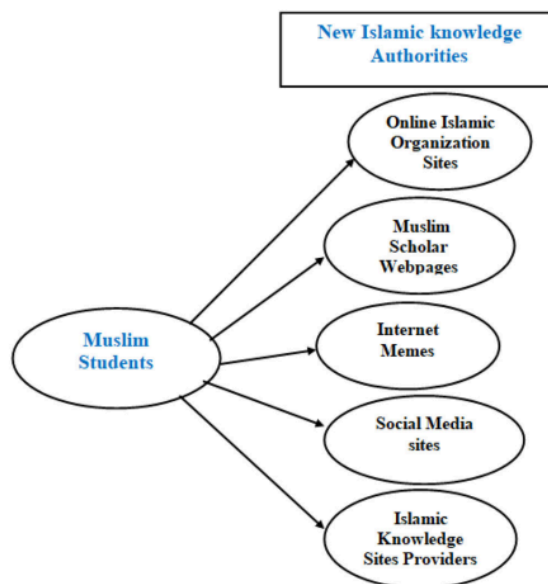


Figure 8. New Islamic knowledge authorities in the eyes of Muslim students.

online Islamic knowledge providers in the future. For example, more conventional Islamic education institutions, such as Islamic boarding schools, might go online to serve Muslim students.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, our findings show that Muslim students have gone online to access Islamic knowledge. Before accessing online knowledge sources, Indonesia's Muslim students have relied on new knowledge sources in online space such as Muslim scholars' pages, Islamic organizations' websites, Internet memes, social media, and various sites that provide Islamic knowledge. The knowledge acquired from online sources is used for their studies at universities. One important finding in this study is that the emergence of new religious knowledge authorities might cause the reduction of Islamic learning bureaucracy and reduce the role of conventional Islamic organization institutions. In addition, the roles of imam and other traditional Islamic knowledge authorities might also be reduced because Muslim students have turned to new knowledge authorities in online space. Therefore, there might be a need for Islamic education institutions and other Islamic knowledge authorities to re-vamp its knowledge delivery methodology and approach to ensure its continuous relevance and as a response to the demands of the young Muslim generation exerted by globalization and presented by modernity.

More Muslim scholars might also go online to serve Muslim communities. As a result, the roles of traditional Islamic knowledge institutions might be reduced. More importantly, our study may significantly affect the simplification of bureaucracy in Islamic knowledge learning in Islamic education institutions because new Islamic knowledge sources in online space are ubiquitously available, which is not hindered by time, geography, and culture. Finally, the source of Islamic knowledge in the future might be scattered across online platforms, not centralized within certain Islamic institutions or entities. As a result, more and more traditional Islamic knowledge authorities will go online.

This study's limitation is that it only focused on Muslim students and lectures in Islamic education institutions. Future studies should involve Muslim students and lectures from conventional education institutions. By diversifying participants from conventional universities, the findings might become more rigorous and trustworthy.

Authors' contribution

All authors contributed to this study. Dr. Askar Askar prepared the material and collected the data. Prof. Sagaf S. Pettalongi conducted the data analysis. Mr. Jumri Hi Thahang prepared the figures and tables. Dr. Adawiyah Pettalongi verified the data from the tables and figures. Prof. Nurdin Nurdin wrote the article's first draft, and all authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The data applied for the manuscript are available. They were collected at the State Islamic University of Datokarama Palu and the University of Alkhairaat Palu, Indonesia.

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