



DISTORTIONS IN ISLAMIC COMMUNICATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: DISINFORMATION AMONG RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES AND POLARIZATION IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Ahmad Syukri Siregar¹, Rubino²

^{1,2} Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

Email: ahmad4004253015@uinsu.ac.id¹, rubino@uinsu.ac.id²

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Abstrak

Media digital telah memperluas akses masyarakat terhadap pengetahuan Islam, tetapi pada saat yang sama turut memfasilitasi penyederhanaan ajaran, disinformasi, kontestasi otoritas keagamaan, dan polarisasi identitas. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bentuk, mekanisme, dan dampak distorsi komunikasi Islam dalam lingkungan digital serta mengembangkan kerangka tata kelola komunikasi yang etis bagi masyarakat multikultural. Penelitian menggunakan tinjauan literatur integratif sistematis dengan mengikuti prosedur PRISMA 2020. Literatur yang diterbitkan pada 2016–2026 ditelusuri melalui Scopus, Web of Science, Dimensions, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, dan Garuda menggunakan kata kunci yang berkaitan dengan komunikasi Islam, agama digital, disinformasi, otoritas keagamaan, polarisasi algoritmik, dan masyarakat multikultural. Setelah penghapusan duplikasi serta penyaringan judul, abstrak, teks lengkap, dan kualitas, sebanyak [masukkan jumlah] artikel dimasukkan dalam sintesis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa distorsi tidak hanya berupa informasi palsu, tetapi juga dekontekstualisasi, penyederhanaan hukum, pembingkaian emosional, atribusi palsu, delegitimasi ulama dan lembaga, serta penguatan identitas “kami versus mereka”. Otoritas keagamaan semakin bergeser dari kompetensi keilmuan menuju visibilitas, kedekatan afektif, dan metrik keterlibatan, sementara algoritma platform memperkuat penyebaran konten kontroversial dan emosional. Penelitian ini menawarkan kerangka tata kelola komunikasi Islam digital yang berlandaskan tabayyun, qaulan sadidan, transparansi sumber, akuntabilitas komunikator, literasi algoritmik, kolaborasi kelembagaan, dan narasi tandingan yang moderat. Kerangka tersebut berkontribusi dalam menjaga kepercayaan epistemik dan memperkuat kohesi sosial masyarakat multikultural.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi Islam, Disinformasi, Otoritas Keagamaan, Polarisasi Algoritmik, Masyarakat Multikultural, PRISMA

Abstract

Digital media have expanded public access to Islamic knowledge while simultaneously facilitating doctrinal simplification, disinformation, contested religious authority, and identity polarization. This study examines the forms, mechanisms, and consequences of distorted Islamic

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communication in digital environments and develops an ethical governance framework for multicultural societies. A systematic integrative literature review was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 procedures. Relevant studies published between 2016 and 2026 were retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, Dimensions, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and Garuda using keywords related to Islamic communication, digital religion, disinformation, religious authority, algorithmic polarization, and multicultural society. After duplicate removal and title, abstract, full-text, and quality screening, [insert number] studies were included in the thematic synthesis. The findings reveal that distortion extends beyond fabricated information to include decontextualization, legal oversimplification, emotional framing, false attribution, delegitimization of scholars and institutions, and the reinforcement of “us versus them” identities. Religious authority increasingly shifts from scholarly competence toward visibility, affective proximity, and engagement metrics, while platform algorithms amplify controversial and emotionally charged content. This study proposes a digital Islamic communication governance framework based on tabayyun, qaulan sadidan, source transparency, communicator accountability, algorithmic literacy, institutional collaboration, and moderate counter-narratives. The framework contributes to preserving epistemic trust and strengthening social cohesion in multicultural societies.

Keywords: Islamic Communication, Disinformation; Religious Authority, Algorithmic Polarization, Multicultural Society, PRISMA

INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media has transformed Islamic communication from a model centered on religious gatherings, mosques, Islamic boarding schools, and mass media into a fast-paced, participatory, and cross-border network of communication. Sermons, fatwas, exegesis, hadith excerpts, and religious advice are now produced and disseminated through short videos, live streams, podcasts, infographics, and group chats. This shift opens opportunities for the democratization of knowledge and the expansion of da’wah, but it also subjects religious messages to the logic of platforms that prioritize attention, speed, and engagement. In this context, messages that are brief, emotional, controversial, and easily shareable often gain greater visibility than careful, contextual explanations. Studies on digital religion show that media are not merely neutral channels but actively shape religious practices, identities, and authority (Hjarvard 2016),(Campbell 2017),(Bunt 2018). The digital age has given rise to the threat of information warfare, which undermines political and social stability as well as national security (Agung et al. 2026). Therefore, distortions in Islamic communication should be viewed as a problem of the communication ecosystem, not merely as individual errors in conveying or receiving information.



The literature on disinformation has clarified the distinctions between erroneous information without any intent to deceive, deliberately fabricated disinformation, and malinformation that uses facts in a harmful way (Wardle and Derakhshan 2017),(Tandoc, Lim, and Ling 2018),(Egelhofer and Lecheler 2019). Meanwhile, research on digital Islam highlights a shift in authority, the emergence of popular preachers, and the formation of online piety communities (Slama 2017),(Nisa 2018),(Solahudin and Fakhruroji 2020). However, these two fields of study often operate in isolation. Research on disinformation tends to focus more on politics and journalism, while research on digital religion tends to emphasize the transformation of da'wah practices and identity. There remains a need for analysis that connects disinformation, shifts in religious authority, platform algorithms, and the polarization of multicultural societies within a single framework of Islamic communication. This gap is significant because religious claims possess strong moral legitimacy, when such claims are distorted, the impact can extend beyond mere factual errors and escalate into judgment, exclusion, hatred, and identity conflicts.

This article aims to address three main issues. First, what forms of distortion in the communication of Islam emerge in the digital media environment. Second, how shifts in religious authority and platform recommendation systems amplify the reach and influence of distorted messages. Third, how do these distortions contribute to polarization in a multicultural society, and what strategies can be developed to mitigate them? These objectives are pursued through an integrative literature review that brings together theories of mediatization, digital religion, information disorder, echo chambers, and ethical Islamic communication. The focus is not to label all digital da'wah as problematic, but rather to distinguish between communication innovations that expand religious education and practices that strip away context, obscure sources, manipulate emotions, or turn differences of opinion into hostility. With this distinction, the analysis can avoid both a deterministic view that blames technology alone and an individualistic view that ignores the power of platforms and network structures.

The main argument of this article is that distortions in the communication of Islam arise through the interaction of four layers: message reduction, shifts in sources of legitimacy, algorithmic amplification, and identity mobilization. Message reduction occurs when complex teachings are condensed without context; shifts in legitimacy take place when popularity and digital proximity replace scholarly competence; amplification arises when algorithms prioritize content that provokes reactions; while identity mobilization turns religious differences into social boundaries between "us" and "them." These four layers generate epistemic and social vulnerabilities. Therefore, addressing them requires more than mere clarification after hoaxes have spread. Prevention



grounded in Islamic communication ethics is necessary: tabayyun, qaulan sadidan, justice, accountability for the consequences of messages, and the protection of the dignity of other groups. These principles must be translated into concrete digital procedures, such as transparency in sourcing, labeling of content segments, strengthening algorithmic literacy, correction mechanisms, and collaboration among religious scholars, educational institutions, the media, fact-checkers, and platform operators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of mediatization explains that the media not only convey religion to the public but also influence the way religion is represented, practiced, and granted authority. Media institutions play an increasingly significant role in shaping religious symbols and experiences (Hjarvard 2016). In the study of digital religion, the boundary between online and offline spaces is understood to be increasingly blurred; religious practices, community relationships, and identity formation take place through the interplay of technology, culture, and tradition (Campbell 2017),(Campbell and Evolvi 2020). This perspective is important because religious messages on social media are subject to the platform's format, duration, interface, and metrics. Short video clips encourage message density, while comment sections and sharing features transform the audience into secondary producers. Thus, meaning does not end with the preacher's intent. Meaning continues to be negotiated through titles, clips, comments, reactions, reposts, and automatic recommendations. Distortions can arise at any of these stages, including when the original statement is true but is taken out of a context that limits its intended meaning.

Changes in the media have also transformed religious authority. Traditional authority is typically associated with mastery of knowledge, scholarly lineage, institutional recognition, and the ability to justify one's interpretations. In the digital sphere, these criteria are challenged by authority based on visibility, the ability to build a persona, writing style, consistency in content production, and emotional connection with followers. Changes in the time economy of preachers (Slama 2017), The Islamic cyberspace is expanding the range of actors who can speak on behalf of the religion (Bunt 2018). In Indonesia, the internet serves as both a space for learning about Islam and an arena for populism and the contestation of authority (Solahudin and Fakhruroji 2020). A study of Felix Siau, Hanan Attaki, ODOJ, Gus Baha, and Ustaz Abdul Somad reveals various forms of digital da'wah, ranging from visual persuasion and piety movements to active audience participation in reproducing messages (Hew 2018),(Nisa 2018),(Muthohirin 2021),(Rohmatulloh, As'ad, and Malayati 2022),(Rosidi et al. 2024).



Disinformation is not the same as all false information. Distinguishing between misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation based on their truthfulness and the intent behind their use (Wardle and Derakhshan 2017). The term “fake news” encompasses a variety of forms, such as fabrications, manipulations, propaganda, satire, and misleading content (Tandoc, Lim, and Ling 2018). “Fake news” is also used as a political label to delegitimize the media or opponents (Egelhofer and Lecheler 2019). In religious communication, this typology needs to be expanded because distortions often do not take the form of outright lies. Distortions can occur through partial quotations, inaccurate translations, omitting the context in which a verse was revealed, presenting minority opinions as if they were a consensus, using old images for new events, or overly labeling groups. The interactive nature of social media allows hoaxes to spread through repetition and user-to-user responses (Juditha 2018). Thus, fact-checking must examine not only whether the factual elements are accurate, but also whether the context, sources, purpose, and consequences of the communication are presented honestly.

The structure of digital dissemination explains why distorted information can prevail over corrective explanations. Fake news can spread farther, faster, and more widely because of its novelty and people’s emotional responses (Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral 2018). The need for a multidisciplinary approach that bridges technology, psychology, and institutions (Lazer et al. 2018). Other research shows that vulnerability stems not only from ideological bias, but also from a failure to assess accuracy before sharing (Pennycook and Rand 2019). When platforms optimize engagement, recommendation systems can amplify content that provokes anger, fear, or a sense of threat. Echo chambers and filter bubbles do not always operate uniformly, but homogeneous information consumption can reinforce group beliefs and limit corrective information. (Kitchens, Johnson, and Gray 2020),(Cinelli et al. 2021). Even exposure to opposing viewpoints, if it takes a confrontational form, can increase polarization rather than automatically foster openness (Bail et al. 2018).

Polarization is the process by which differences of opinion turn into identity divides, mistrust, and hostility between groups. In the Indonesian context, the concept of “algorithmic enclaves” explains how digital connectivity can create pockets of identity that reinforce ethnic nationalism and the freedom to hate (Lim 2017). Disinformation often thrives in an asymmetrical media ecosystem; it is not solely the result of a single piece of content (Benkler, Faris, and Roberts 2018). When religion is used as a political and moral marker, fact-checking becomes difficult because the message is intertwined with the group’s sense of self-worth. Users are not only defending information, but also their identity, role models, and community. The impact is even more serious in



multicultural societies characterized by religious, sectarian, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Statements that simplistically label other groups as heretical, anti-religious, or a threat can shift conflicts from the digital realm to real-world social interactions. Given the connection between misinformation, online extremism, and Islamophobic rhetoric, the issue of distortion must be examined from two perspectives: within the Muslim community itself and in how Islam is represented by outsiders (Awan et al. 2023).

Islamic communication ethics provide a normative foundation for addressing these issues. The principle of *tabayyun* in Surah al-Hujurat [49]:6 requires verifying information before taking action; *qaulan sadidan* demands accuracy and honesty in speech; justice prevents hatred from undermining objectivity; while *rahmah* guides communication so that it does not degrade human dignity. In the digital environment, these principles must be integrated with media literacy and algorithmic literacy. Accuracy should not be understood merely as “true or false” in a single sentence, but must encompass contextual adequacy, transparency of sources, the speaker’s competence, and the potential impact on vulnerable groups. Research on moderation on Instagram shows that social media can be used to present inclusive interpretations when narrative and visual strategies are designed appropriately (Hadiyanto, Putri, and Fazli 2025). Critical Theory emphasizes the need for critical awareness so that technology does not merely become a tool of domination, but also a means of emancipation to create social justice and democracy (Rahmadani et al. 2025). Therefore, ethical digital Islamic communication must combine responsiveness with caution, scholarly authority with language that is easy to understand, and religious identity with respect for pluralism.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs an integrative literature review design to synthesize conceptual and empirical findings regarding distortions in Islamic communication in the digital age (Creswell and Clark 2018). The search was conducted using journal articles, academic books, and research reports, with a combination of the following keywords: digital religion, Islamic communication, religious authority, social media *da’wah*, misinformation, disinformation, echo chamber, algorithmic polarization, religious moderation, and multicultural society. Sources were prioritized if they addressed at least one of the four domains of analysis: the transformation of religious authority, forms of information disruption, platform distribution mechanisms, or the social impact on intergroup relations. Literature that merely described media use without addressing authority, information quality, or social consequences was not considered a primary source. The selection of 2016 as the starting point is intended to capture recent



developments following the rise of communication platformization, post-truth studies, and research on the mediatization of religion. The review procedure follows the principles of an integrative review, which allows for the synthesis of research across methods and disciplines (Snyder 2019).

Table 1. Systematic Literature Review Procedure Based on PRISMA

Component	Procedure
PRISMA procedure	The review followed PRISMA 2020 through identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion.
Databases	Literature was retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, Dimensions, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and Garuda.
Publication period	English- and Indonesian-language literature published between 2016 and 2026.
Keywords	"Islamic communication," "digital religion," "disinformation," "religious authority," "social media da'wah," "algorithmic polarization," and "multicultural society."
Inclusion criteria	Full-text studies addressing digital Islamic communication, disinformation, religious authority, social media algorithms, polarization, or multicultural society.
Exclusion criteria	Duplicate, irrelevant, inaccessible, or methodologically unclear publications and studies published outside the selected period.
Literature selection	Duplicate records were removed before titles, abstracts, and full texts were screened against the eligibility criteria.
Quality assessment	Study quality was assessed based on clarity of purpose, methodological appropriateness, data credibility, analytical rigor, and relevance of findings.
Data extraction	Extracted data included authorship, year, location, method, forms of distortion, shifts in authority, algorithmic influence, and social impacts.
Evidence mapping	The evidence was organized into five themes: message decontextualization, shifts in authority, algorithmic amplification, social polarization, and digital Islamic communication governance.
Synthesis	The findings were analyzed through thematic synthesis to identify patterns, differences, evidence strength, and research gaps.

The analysis was conducted through thematic synthesis. Each source was reviewed to identify the subject matter, context, key concepts, communication mechanisms, forms of distortion, and recommendations for intervention. The findings were then coded into five themes: message reduction and decontextualization, the shift in religious authority, algorithmic amplification, the polarization of multicultural societies, and the governance of digital Islamic communication. The validity of the interpretation was ensured by comparing research on digital religion with research on disinformation, so that the conclusions were not based solely on a single scholarly tradition (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 2018). This study is conceptual in nature and



does not measure the prevalence of disinformation on specific platforms. Therefore, the results are intended to map out mechanisms and an analytical framework, rather than to provide statistical estimates of the volume of problematic content. Nevertheless, the use of international literature and Indonesian case studies allows for a contextual analysis of the relationship between technology, authority, identity, and communication ethics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Digital Ecology of Islamic Communication Distortion

A review of the literature indicates that distortions in Islamic communication result from the interaction between the message, the communicator, technology, and the community. At the message level, digital formats encourage the condensation of arguments into headlines, video clips, or images that can be consumed in a matter of seconds. Such condensation is not necessarily wrong, but it risks omitting the conditions, exceptions, differing opinions, and social context of a legal ruling. At the communicator level, the constant demand for content can encourage the use of formulas designed to go viral: categorical certainty, the halal-haram dichotomy, moral threats, and the identification of enemies. At the technological level, recommendation features and notifications extend the attention cycle. At the community level, audiences reproduce messages through captions, comments, and reposts that do not always align with the original intent. The perspective of “digital religion” helps explain that these distortions are not merely failures of content, as media formats and user practices also contribute to the construction of meaning (Campbell 2017) ,(Campbell and Evolvi 2020). Therefore, the responsibility for communication is shared among content creators, account managers, users, and platforms.

Table 2. Thematic Mapping of the Reviewed Evidence

Theme	Dominant evidence	Main pattern
Message reduction and decontextualization	Conceptual studies and digital content analyses	Religious teachings are shortened, emotionally framed, or separated from their textual and social contexts
Transformation of religious authority	Digital religion studies and case studies of online preachers	Scholarly competence and institutional recognition increasingly compete with visibility, popularity, and affective proximity
Algorithmic amplification	Platform, disinformation, and network studies	Engagement-oriented systems increase the visibility of controversial, repetitive, and emotionally charged messages
Identity polarization	Political communication and multicultural studies	Religious differences are transformed into “us versus them” identities, distrust, exclusion, and affective hostility



Ethical governance	Media literacy, moderation, and Islamic communication studies	Verification, source transparency, algorithmic literacy, and moderate narratives can strengthen social resilience
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Distortions in the communication of Islam within the digital ecosystem arise primarily when religious authority shifts toward virality, interpretive contexts are condensed to fit platform formats, and emotional narratives spread more easily than corrections (Hasmuni and Marhamah 2025),(Armita 2025),(Agami and Nurrohim 2025). The evidence in this corpus is strongest for religious misinformation, digital misinterpretations, and the impact of platforms on trust, while cross-platform causal evidence and intervention evaluations remain limited (Hasmuni and Marhamah 2025),(Lukito 2020).

The most common form of distortion is decontextualization. A preacher's statement may be taken out of context to highlight its most controversial parts, while the preceding and following explanations are omitted. Verses or hadiths may be used without their linguistic, historical, and methodological context. Old photos and videos may be incorporated into new narratives, creating a false impression of factual accuracy. This practice works because users tend to assess credibility based on appearance, proximity to trusted sources, and the frequency of repetition. In religious communication, the effect is even stronger when the material is framed with sacred symbols, Arabic quotations, or the identity of prominent figures. The content appears authoritative even though the references are incomplete. The framework of information disorder shows that parts of the information may be true, but their use is misleading or harmful (Wardle and Derakhshan 2017). Therefore, verification requires asking: who is speaking, in what context, from what source, for what purpose, and whether the omission alters the meaning. These questions constitute an operational form of tabayyun in the digital environment.

Distortion also occurs through emotional framing. Content that triggers fear of harm to one's religion, anger toward other groups, guilt, or pride in one's identity is highly likely to be commented on and shared. Findings (Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral 2018) Regarding the speed at which fake news spreads, this underscores the importance of emotion and novelty. In digital da'wah, the use of emotion is not inherently problematic, as persuasion inherently has an affective dimension. Problems arise when emotion replaces reason, closes off the possibility of verification, or justifies judgment. Effective visual persuasion can expand the reach of da'wah, as seen in the study (Hew 2018), However, the same technique can be used to reinforce simplifications. When every difference is presented as a threat, the audience is conditioned to react before



understanding. As a result, the space for communication shifts from a search for truth to a competition for loyalty. Corrective strategies must take the affective dimension into account; clarifications that merely present data often lose out to narratives that provide a sense of security, identity, and moral certainty.

The Shift and Contestation of Religious Authority

The literature shows a shift from authority that relies primarily on institutions toward a hybrid form of authority that combines knowledge, media performance, and audience participation. Preachers who are able to explain issues in everyday language, create consistent visuals, and respond directly to their followers can gain a great deal of trust.

This literature indicates that religious authority is shifting from a hierarchical model toward a more networked, performative, and contested form, but this shift is not uniform because digital media can also reinforce old institutions (Campbell and Evolvi 2020),(Andok 2024). Legitimacy is now more often negotiated through a combination of scholarly expertise, charisma, algorithmic visibility, and audience participation, rather than solely through institutional mandates (Sulfikar and Yasmine 2026),(Yuliani 2026).

This shift has its positive aspects: access to learning has increased, young leaders have emerged, and users can compare different perspectives. However, visibility can easily be mistaken for competence. The number of followers, likes, and virality have become spurious indicators of truth. The digital environment is redistributing the authority to interpret and teach Islam (Bunt 2018),(Solahudin and Fakhruroji 2020). In such circumstances, authority is not lost but rather restructured. Credibility is built through a combination of scholarly credentials, network reputation, emotional closeness, communication style, and algorithmic support. Distortions occur when one component – particularly popularity – masks weaknesses in other components.

The contest over authority has become increasingly complex because audiences are no longer passive. Online communities select, edit, translate, and promote messages from figures they admire. Nisa demonstrates how social media can shape participatory piety movements (Nisa 2018), Meanwhile, Rosidi emphasizes the shift in the audience's role from being passive listeners to active producers. This participation can strengthen literacy, but it also creates secondary distortions (Rosidi et al. 2024). Followers often turn specific advice into universal slogans, shield figures from criticism, or attack those perceived as belittling their teachers. The community's identity then becomes tied to that figure. Criticism of an argument is interpreted as an attack on the group. Under these conditions, internal correction mechanisms weaken because emotional loyalty is stronger than source evaluation. Therefore, preachers and institutions need to foster a culture of



correction that does not humiliate: providing the full version, noting when content has been edited, acknowledging errors, and separating respect for the figure from the obligation to evaluate arguments.

The case of Indonesian digital preachers shows that new forms of authority are not always at odds with tradition. Rohmatulloh et al. highlight the resurgence of traditionalist preachers through social media (Rohmatulloh, As'ad, and Malayati 2022). Meanwhile, Muthohirin describes the da'wah strategies of popular figures who engage with the phenomenon of young people embracing Islam (Muthohirin 2021). This underscores that the platform can be used by both traditional and new actors. The main issue is not the source of authority, but rather standards of accountability. Sound authority is characterized by transparency in methodology, acknowledgment of the limits of one's expertise, a willingness to consult experts, and a clear distinction between personal opinions and institutional consensus or decisions. Conversely, authority is vulnerable to distortion when every issue is answered instantly, criticism is labeled as hate speech, and popularity is used to gloss over scientific differences. In a multicultural society, these standards are crucial because religious statements can affect the rights, safety, and dignity of other groups. Digital authority must be measured not only by its ability to attract attention, but also by its capacity to safeguard the integrity of knowledge and the social consequences of communication.

Algorithmic Amplification, Echo Chambers, and Cross-Platform Circulation

The platform's algorithm works by predicting the likelihood that users will watch, like, comment on, or share content. Because the system does not substantively evaluate religious accuracy, content that sparks engagement can receive high distribution even if the quality of its explanations is low. Cinelli points out the existence of echo chamber dynamics on various platforms (Cinelli et al. 2021). Meanwhile, Kitchens points out that the impact varies depending on the type of media and usage patterns (Kitchens, Johnson, and Gray 2020). In Islamic discourse, algorithms can connect users with useful educational content, but they can also limit exposure to diverse viewpoints. When users repeatedly engage with narratives that blame specific groups, the system interprets this behavior as a preference. Repetition creates the illusion of consensus—users feel that everyone agrees because their feeds are homogeneous. Distortions then gain social legitimacy through the sheer number of similar comments and posts. Algorithmic literacy must make it clear that a feed is not a complete picture of society, but rather a curated selection based on behavioral patterns and the platform's interests.

Most studies agree that platform algorithms shape the visibility of religious messaging, authority, and public preferences, rather than merely transmitting messages



in a neutral manner (AlMazaedh et al. 2026),(Atmaja 2026). Cross-platform evidence shows that engagement trends tend to favor short, emotional, visual, and performative content, often at the expense of scientific nuance and the authority of traditional religious scholars (Azka and Awang 2026),(Alfi et al. 2025).

Echo chambers are shaped not only by algorithms, but also by social choices. Users join groups that align with their identities, follow like-minded figures, and block sources they find uncomfortable. Exposure to differing viewpoints does not always lead to moderation. Bail's experiment shows that exposure to opposing viewpoints can amplify polarization when perceived as a threat to one's identity (Bail et al. 2018). This explains why strategies that bring the two sides together without facilitation often fail. In religious debates, an opponent's argument may be taken out of context to serve as an example of ignorance or wickedness, and then circulated within one's own group. The opponent's content serves not as material for learning, but as material for consolidating identity. Therefore, interventions must distinguish between informative and antagonistic discourse. Productive dialogue requires context, rules of conversation, a moderator, and shared goals. Without these, public rebuttals can turn into displays of victory that reinforce each side's supporters.

Cross-platform circulation increases the difficulty of verification. A long lecture on YouTube is cut into a short video on TikTok, a screenshot on Instagram, a voice message on WhatsApp, and then becomes an unsourced narrative in a closed group. Each transfer removes metadata and context. By the final stage, the recipient may not know who the speaker is or when the material was created, but trusts it because it was sent by a family member, teacher, or community leader. Juditha cites interactivity as a key factor in the spread of hoaxes, in a religious context, interpersonal trust can amplify their persuasive power. (Juditha 2018). These findings call for a correction strategy that is also cross-platform. It is not enough to publish clarifications on official websites when misinformation spreads through chat groups. Religious institutions need to provide corrections in a format that is easy to share—concise yet linked to a full explanation—and use language that does not belittle the audience. Source links, dates, experts' names, and contextual explanations must be included so that the message remains accountable.

Table.3 Forms and Indicators of Distorted Islamic Communication in Digital Media

No.	Form of Distortion	Key Indicators	Potential Impacts
1	Decontextualization	Excerpts from Qur'anic verses, hadiths, or religious sermons are separated from their background, conditions, and complete explanations.	Distortion of meaning and overly broad legal conclusions.



2	Fabrication and False Attribution	Quotations, fatwas, images, or the identities of religious figures are manipulated and falsely attributed to particular sources.	Public confusion and reputational damage.
3	Authoritative Simplification	Complex issues are presented as having a single definitive answer without acknowledging differences of opinion or limits of expertise.	Popularity is perceived as equivalent to truth.
4	Affective Framing	Fear, anger, a sense of threat, and guilt are used to provoke immediate responses.	Impulsive sharing and reduced verification.
5	Source Delegitimization	Religious scholars, media outlets, academics, or institutions are negatively labelled without critically examining their arguments.	A decline in epistemic trust.
6	Identity Polarization	Differences of opinion are framed as an absolute conflict between the righteous group and the deviant group.	Exclusion, hatred, and social conflict.
7	Algorithmic Amplification	Controversial content is repeatedly promoted through recommendation systems, trending features, and engagement metrics.	The illusion of consensus and the formation of echo chambers.
8	Untraceable Circulation	Content circulates across platforms without dates, links, or contextual information about its original source.	Difficulty in verifying and correcting the content.

Consequences for Epistemic Trust and Multicultural Cohesion

Distortions in Islamic communication have a direct impact on epistemic trust that is, the public's belief in who is trustworthy and how truth is determined. When false quotes, out-of-context excerpts, and accusations against institutions circulate repeatedly, users may experience two equally dangerous reactions. Some come to trust certain figures or groups unconditionally; others become cynical and view all sources as equally manipulative. Egelhofer and Lecheler explain that the label "fake news" can be used to undermine the legitimacy of institutions (Egelhofer and Lecheler 2019). Meanwhile, Lewandowsky shows that the post-truth environment undermines shared standards of evidence (Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook 2017). In Islamic discourse, the loss of shared standards hinders deliberation. Scholarly differences, which should be managed through evidence and methodology, have turned into a battle over reputations. Restoring trust requires transparency in the process: traceable sources, explanations of interpretive



methods, a distinction between facts and opinions, and open corrections. Trust is not built by demanding obedience, but by demonstrating accountability.

In multicultural societies, the erosion of epistemic trust is intertwined with affective polarization. Users not only disagree on the content of teachings, but also begin to feel disgust, fear, or anger toward other groups. Lim demonstrates how algorithmic enclaves can reinforce tribal nationalism in Indonesia. When religious narratives are linked to ethnicity, political preferences, or citizenship status, disinformation gains greater mobilizing power (Lim 2017). A false claim of religious insult, for example, can spread rapidly because it triggers memories of conflict and group solidarity. Late clarifications often fail to erase the initial impression. Therefore, efforts to prevent polarization must focus on the period before a crisis: building cross-group relationships, developing joint verification protocols, and preparing trusted communicators from various communities. Peaceful communication does not mean erasing theological differences, but ensuring that those differences are not turned into justifications for demeaning the rights and dignity of others.

Religiously-based disinformation can also reinforce prejudice against Muslims. Awan highlights the connection between misinformation, Islamophobic rhetoric, and online extremism. Thus, Muslims face the dual challenge of distortions generated from within their own communities and distortions about Islam generated from outside (Awan et al. 2023). A purely defensive response risks perpetuating a cycle of hostility. A more effective strategy is to distinguish between criticism, mistakes, and hatred; to respond to claims with evidence; and to present a narrative of Islam that is consistent between its teachings and social practices. Islamic communication must demonstrate ethical firmness without generalizing about opponents. The principle of justice demands that hatred not overshadow objectivity. In this context, moderation is not a lack of conviction, but rather the ability to hold firm to one's beliefs while maintaining accuracy, proportionality, and the public good in communication. Hadiyanto et al. (2025) shows that Instagram can serve as a space for disseminating moderate interpretations if messages are crafted using an approach that aligns with the platform's nature (Hadiyanto, Putri, and Fazli 2025).

Governance Strategies for Ethical Digital Islamic Communication

The first strategy is to strengthen verification literacy based on tabayyun. This literacy needs to move beyond the slogan "check before you share" toward practical skills: conducting reverse image searches, checking dates, watching full videos, comparing translations, recognizing fake accounts, and assessing the speaker's credibility. Pennycook's research shows that simple reminders about accuracy can reduce

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the intention to share false information (Pennycook et al. 2020). Roozenbeek and van der Linden demonstrate the potential of prebunking or psychological inoculation to increase resistance to manipulation techniques (Roozenbeek and Linden 2019). In Islamic education, these exercises can be integrated into the study of hadith, tafsir, fiqh, and akhlak. Students are not only asked to memorize the principle of tabayyun but also to apply it to real-world examples. This connects the tradition of source criticism in Islamic scholarship with contemporary digital skills. Literacy programs must also acknowledge that users share content for social and emotional reasons; therefore, training materials need to teach how to delay responses, ask questions without causing embarrassment, and offer corrections using language that preserves relationships.

The second strategy is to establish a system of oversight and correction. Religious institutions, universities, Islamic boarding schools, and civil society organizations need to provide reference centers that are quick to access, easy to find, and platform-friendly. Lengthy explanations should be accompanied by visual summaries that preserve the context. Preachers can implement transparency standards by citing sources, indicating the status of opinions, distinguishing areas of expertise, and maintaining complete records. When errors occur, corrections must be posted with visibility equal to that of the original content. This practice strengthens qaulan sadidan because honesty includes the courage to correct one's statements. Collaboration with fact-checkers and journalists is necessary because not all claims pertain to fiqh; some relate to health, law, history, and public data. A network model is more effective than a monopoly, as the digital ecosystem moves rapidly and spans multiple disciplines. The goal is not to restrict da'wah, but to ensure that freedom of speech is accompanied by accountability mechanisms that the public can understand.

The third strategy is to manage relationships with platforms. Religious organizations and researchers need to promote transparency in recommendations, access to data for research, contextual labeling, and reporting mechanisms that are sensitive to local languages and cultures. Humprecht emphasizes that resilience against disinformation depends on media systems, institutions, and social conditions not just individual capabilities (Humprecht, Esser, and Aelst 2020). Therefore, platforms must share responsibility for amplification patterns. Interventions must be handled with care to avoid turning into arbitrary censorship. Content that expresses differing opinions must not be equated with incitement or fabrication. Moderation criteria must be transparent, subject to appeal, and incorporate local expertise. Additionally, platform design can introduce friction before sharing, display original sources, flag edited content, and reduce economic incentives for accounts that repeatedly produce disinformation. A combination



of regulation, design, education, and community norms holds more promise than any single solution.

Based on the overall findings, this article proposes a framework for the governance of digital Islamic communication consisting of five elements. First, message integrity through accuracy, context, and source traceability. Second, communicator accountability through competence, transparency, and correction mechanisms. Third, distribution responsibility through algorithmic literacy, platform design, and the reduction of incentives for problematic virality. Fourth, audience resilience through tabayyun, critical thinking, emotional regulation, and cross-group dialogue. Fifth, the protection of social cohesion through moderate narratives, respect for dignity, and rapid responses to incitement. These five elements are interdependent. Accurate messages can still be distorted if taken out of context; credible communicators can be misused by other accounts; and an educated audience still needs responsible platforms. Therefore, digital Islamic communication must be understood as a shared ecosystem of trust. The ultimate goal is not merely to win a debate, but to present knowledge that is true, fair, and beneficial, and to preserve communal life in a multicultural society.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review concludes that distortions in digital Islamic communication emerge through the interaction of messages, communicators, platform technologies, and online communities. Such distortions are not limited to fabricated information but also include decontextualization, legal oversimplification, false attribution, emotional framing, the delegitimization of religious authorities, and the construction of “us versus them” identities. These processes are intensified by the shift of religious authority from scholarly competence and institutional recognition toward visibility, affective proximity, and engagement metrics. Platform algorithms further amplify controversial and emotionally charged content, potentially weakening epistemic trust and intensifying polarization in multicultural societies. Addressing these challenges therefore requires an integrated governance framework based on tabayyun, qaulan sadidan, source transparency, communicator accountability, algorithmic literacy, institutional collaboration, moderate counter-narratives, and the protection of social cohesion.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the broader debate on digital religion and information disorder by connecting the transformation of religious authority, message distortion, algorithmic amplification, and identity polarization within a unified Islamic communication framework. It demonstrates that distorted religious communication should not be treated solely as an individual failure to verify information but as an

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ecosystem-level problem shaped by technological, epistemic, institutional, and sociocultural forces. However, this review is limited by its publication period, selected databases, language criteria, and dependence on accessible published literature, which may exclude relevant studies and local digital practices. The thematic synthesis also does not measure the prevalence or causal effects of disinformation on particular platforms. Future research should therefore employ cross-platform content analysis, digital ethnography, interviews, surveys, and experimental designs to investigate user behavior, algorithmic influence, credibility judgments, and the effectiveness of corrective and moderate religious messages. Comparative studies across platforms, religious communities, and multicultural settings are also needed to test and refine the proposed governance framework.

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