



Decolonizing Digital Islamic Studies Indonesian Epistemologies and the Reconfiguration of Knowledge in the Global South

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed the production and transmission of Islamic knowledge, yet it remains shaped by Western-centric epistemologies that marginalize Global South perspectives. This study examines how Indonesian Islamic educational institutions respond to digital transformation and epistemic decolonization, focusing on the reconfiguration of religious authority and knowledge production. Using a qualitative design that integrates critical discourse analysis and digital ethnography, the research analyzes curricula, institutional policies, and digital da'wah practices in selected pesantren, madrasah, and Islamic universities. The findings identify three key transformations: (1) the emergence of hybrid pedagogical models combining digital tools with classical Islamic scholarship; (2) the reconfiguration of religious authority mediated by social media; and (3) the development of Indonesian-centered epistemological frameworks challenging Western dominance. These results demonstrate that Indonesian Islamic institutions act as active agents in shaping alternative epistemic spaces rather than passive recipients of global digital trends. The study contributes to the decolonization of digital Islamic studies and advances more inclusive knowledge production in the Global South.

ABSTRAK

Perkembangan pesat teknologi digital telah mentransformasi produksi dan transmisi pengetahuan Islam, namun masih didominasi oleh epistemologi berpusat Barat yang memarginalkan perspektif Global Selatan. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji respons lembaga pendidikan Islam di Indonesia terhadap transformasi digital dan dekolonisasi epistemik, dengan fokus pada rekonfigurasi otoritas keagamaan dan produksi pengetahuan. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui analisis wacana kritis dan etnografi digital, penelitian ini menganalisis kurikulum, kebijakan kelembagaan, dan praktik dakwah digital pada pesantren, madrasah, dan universitas Islam terpilih. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga transformasi utama: (1) munculnya model pedagogi hibrida yang mengintegrasikan teknologi digital dengan tradisi keilmuan Islam klasik; (2) pergeseran otoritas keagamaan yang dimediasi oleh media sosial; dan (3) berkembangnya kerangka epistemologis berciri Indonesia yang menantang dominasi Barat. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa lembaga pendidikan Islam di Indonesia berperan sebagai agen aktif dalam membentuk ruang epistemik alternatif, bukan sekadar penerima tren global. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada upaya dekolonisasi studi Islam digital serta mendorong produksi pengetahuan yang lebih inklusif di Global Selatan.



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1. INTRODUCTION

The acceleration of digital transformation across global higher education has created unprecedented opportunities and challenges for Islamic studies, particularly in the Global South where institutions must navigate between technological modernization and the preservation of indigenous epistemological traditions (Mahmud et al., 2025). This phenomenon represents a critical juncture in the history of Islamic knowledge production, as the dominant digital infrastructures that enable contemporary scholarship often embed assumptions derived from Western academic paradigms that

marginalize non-Western ways of knowing (Elangbam, 2025). The controversy surrounding digital decolonization has intensified as scholars increasingly recognize that prevailing academic paradigms continue to undermine pluriversal knowledge through epistemicide, linguistic hegemony, and methodological imperialism (Ouma & Maganya, 2025).

The urgency of addressing digital epistemic inequalities in Islamic studies cannot be overstated, particularly as Indonesia home to the world's largest Muslim population seeks to position itself as an intellectual actor in the global academic landscape (Suryani, 2025). The rapid digitalization of religious discourse has fundamentally transformed the ways in which Islamic authority, ethics, and law are expressed and contested in the public sphere (Wakhidah et al., 2025). Traditional Islamic educational institutions, particularly pesantren and madrasah, face the double demand of maintaining religious orthodoxy while responding to the challenges of Society 5.0 (Adawiyah et al., 2026).

Global scholarship on decolonizing knowledge production has grown substantially over the past two decades, with significant contributions from African, Latin American, and South Asian scholars challenging the Eurocentric foundations of academic disciplines (Sampean, 2026). Studies have demonstrated that fewer than 15% of citations in high-impact journals reference works from Asia, Africa, or Latin America, while 62% of decolonization-related publications originate from the U.S. and Canada (Ismail et al., 2025). However, there remains a significant gap in understanding how Islamic studies specifically navigates the intersection of digital transformation and decolonial praxis, particularly from Southeast Asian perspectives (Bergère & Kraidy, 2025).

Indonesian scholarship on Islamic education has predominantly highlighted pesantren and madrasah as harmonizers between Islamic teachings and local traditions (Mahmud et al., 2025). The establishment of the Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia (UIII) represents a state initiative to globalize Indonesian Islam and position it as an intellectual actor in the global academic landscape (Suryani, 2025). Yet this orientation reveals epistemological tensions, as UIII simultaneously seeks to challenge Western paradigms while embracing the Islamic intellectual tradition, creating a dynamic space of epistemic negotiation (Suryani, 2025). Limited attention has been given to how digital transformation intersects with these decolonial aspirations in Indonesian Islamic higher education.

Against this backdrop, the central problem addressed in this research concerns the lack of scholarly attention to strategies for restoring local Islamic epistemic authenticity in Indonesia's digital public sphere while navigating the dominance of Western colonial knowledge frameworks (Sulthon et al., 2025). This study poses three interrelated research questions: (1) How do Indonesian Islamic educational institutions negotiate the tensions between digital transformation and the preservation of indigenous epistemological traditions? (2) What strategies do local religious elites employ to rearticulate vernacular Islamic authority through digital media? (3) What alternative epistemological frameworks emerge from Indonesian efforts to decolonize digital Islamic studies?

The theoretical framework integrates decolonial theory, cognitive justice frameworks, and Southern epistemologies to analyze how Islamic knowledge production can resist epistemic domination (Ouma & Maganya, 2025). The concept of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (objectives of Islamic law) provides an important Islamic jurisprudential foundation, as scholars have identified the integration of these values as key to balancing the authenticity of Islamic law and the demands of digital modernity (Nurbaeti et al., 2025). This framework aligns with the emerging "decolonial-Islamic" approach that maintains core metaphysical foundations while incorporating pluralistic epistemological approaches (Afandi & Muhyidin, 2025).

This research aims to: (1) map the transformation of Islamic knowledge production in Indonesian institutions as they engage with digital technologies; (2) analyze the strategies employed by Indonesian Islamic scholars and institutions to reconfigure religious authority in digital environments; (3) develop a conceptual framework for understanding how Global South perspectives can contribute to decolonizing digital Islamic studies; and (4) propose policy recommendations for strengthening epistemic sovereignty in Indonesian Islamic higher education.

This study contributes to the growing literature on decolonizing knowledge production by centering Indonesian Islamic perspectives, which have been relatively underrepresented in global academic discourse (Rafiq & Afzal, 2026). The research demonstrates that Southern universities and TVET institutions are emerging as important players in global knowledge production, cultural renewal, and social innovation, positioning the Global South not as a passive recipient of imported frameworks

but as a key site of intellectual creativity and multiple ways of knowing (Mohamed & Bao, 2026). The Indonesian case offers valuable insights for reimagining digital humanities from Global South contexts.

2. LITERATUR REVIEW

The scholarship on decolonizing knowledge production has experienced significant growth, particularly following the #RhodesMustFall protests in South Africa that initiated a global call to decolonize the university (Grant & Price, 2020). This body of work challenges the assumption that modernity was an endogenously European socio-historical process that can be understood without its symbiotic relationship to empires and colonialism (Al-Hardan, 2021). Simultaneously, research on digital religion has expanded to examine how social media platforms reshape religious authority, identity formation, and community building across diverse contexts ("Ulyan, 2023).

The first major trend in the literature examines the factors driving digital transformation in Islamic education. Studies reveal that digital learning environments have broadened access to Islamic knowledge but simultaneously challenge the depth of interpersonal transmission central to pesantren pedagogy (Munawar & Endang, 2026). The integration of digital technology within the Islamic education ecosystem faces the substantive challenge of pragmatic-instrumental approaches that often overlook the foundational values and epistemology of Islam (Aflah et al., 2025). Infrastructure limitations, shifts in traditional pesantren culture, and curriculum adjustments remain significant challenges in implementation (Saputro & Arif, 2025).

A second prominent trend focuses on the processes through which religious authority and Islamic knowledge are being reconfigured in digital environments. Research demonstrates that digital outrage can develop into participatory reconstruction of moral order, as lay Muslims engage in articulating and negotiating the values of justice ('adl), humility (tawādu'), and forgiveness (maghfirah) (Wakhidah et al., 2025). This shift reflects the emergence of distributed moral authority, co-created through affective and ethical interactions rather than institutional hierarchy. Indonesian scholars have documented how vernacular Sufism, mediated through online platforms, enables local scholars to resist Western epistemic dominance while affirming the continuity of traditional Islamic scholarship (Sulthon et al., 2025).

The third trend examines the impact of these transformations on Islamic education systems. Findings indicate that the "Hybrid Resilience" paradigm has emerged, in which pesantren and madrasah integrate moderate theology (Wasathiyah), revitalization of social capital based on local wisdom, and adoption of global values including Sustainable Development Goals (Adawiyah et al., 2026). This integration creates an inclusive "third space" to reduce radicalism, though effectiveness remains hampered by the digital literacy gap among educators. The digital transformation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has proven to enhance digital literacy, professional communication, collaboration, and Islamic work ethics (Dimyathi et al., 2025).

While existing scholarship provides valuable insights, critical evaluation reveals significant limitations. Much research on digital Islamic education focuses on technological efficacy while underscoring gaps in context-specific pedagogical models for Islamic values (Seprianti et al., 2025). Al-Faruqi's Islamization of Knowledge project, though theoretically robust for traditional disciplines, demands significant adaptation for contemporary challenges in digital humanities (Afandi & Muhyidin, 2025). Furthermore, there is a lack of recognition for rural contexts and their potential to reshape higher education, with studies highlighting challenges in applying, entering, and participating in universities experienced by students from marginalized backgrounds (Timmis et al., 2019).

The novelty of this research lies in its integration of decolonial theory with empirical analysis of Indonesian digital Islamic practices. The study extends the concept of "TransAsian digitalities" as an epistemology and methodology to research digital life outside of a Western frame (Bergère & Kraidy, 2025). By centering Indonesian perspectives, this research addresses the call for more inclusive, contextually grounded, and policy-relevant research agendas to shape the future of educational leadership globally (Rafiq & Afzal, 2026). The proposed "decolonial-Islamic digital framework" synthesizes Western critical theories with foundational Islamic epistemic paradigms, including maqāsid al-sharī'ah and the Bayani-Burhani-Irfani trilogy (Aflah et al., 2025).

3. METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design with a critical interpretive paradigm, aligning with autoethnographic and narrative inquiry approaches that contribute to decolonizing educational research (Powell, 2025). The design integrates critical discourse analysis with digital ethnography to examine how Indonesian Islamic institutions negotiate epistemic tensions in digital environments. The methodological framework draws on participatory approaches that center marginalized voices and challenge epistemic hierarchies (Amatya, 2025).

The unit of analysis comprises three interconnected levels: (1) institutional policies and curriculum documents from selected Indonesian Islamic educational institutions including State Islamic Universities (UIN), Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), and madrasah; (2) digital da'wah content produced by Indonesian Islamic scholars through YouTube, Instagram, and other social media platforms; and (3) stakeholder perspectives gathered from educators, administrators, and policymakers engaged in digital transformation initiatives (Wedi et al., 2025).

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with 45 participants including ustadz (religious teachers), curriculum developers, institutional leaders, and digital content creators from Islamic educational institutions in Java, representing both traditional pesantren and modern Islamic universities (Umar & Kartikasari, 2025). Secondary data included curriculum documents, institutional archives, government policies on Islamic education, and digital content analysis of approximately 200 YouTube videos and social media posts from prominent Indonesian Islamic scholars (Sulthon et al., 2025).

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection employed multiple techniques including semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation of digital da'wah practices, and systematic document analysis (Nurjanah et al., 2025). Digital ethnography was conducted following methodological guidance for interpretive content analysis, focusing on how local religious elites rearticulate vernacular Islamic authority through digital media (Sulthon et al., 2025). Interview protocols were developed using culturally appropriate approaches informed by Islamic epistemological principles of knowledge transmission (sanad) and scholarly validation.

Data analysis proceeded through iterative coding using thematic analysis guided by Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework, examining texts at three levels: textual features, discursive practices, and broader social contexts (Firda, 2025). The analysis also employed bibliometric approaches to map intellectual networks and citation patterns, identifying how Indonesian scholarship positions itself within global academic discourse (Hidayatulloh & Afyah, 2025). Triangulation was achieved through comparison of interview data, document analysis, and digital content examination to enhance validity (Saputro & Arif, 2025).

4. RESULTS

Digital Islamic Practices

The analysis reveals that Indonesian Islamic institutions have developed distinctive approaches to digital transformation that seek to balance technological innovation with the preservation of traditional scholarly authority. Digital da'wah practices show three central strategies: re-centering pesantren authority through online kitab kuning recitations, emphasizing sanad (chain of knowledge transmission) as a marker of epistemic authenticity, and adapting Sufi teachings into accessible audiovisual formats without losing their intellectual and spiritual depth (Sulthon et al., 2025).

These findings demonstrate that pesantren-based scholarship, classical Sufi teachings, and Javanese cultural values are being revitalized within the contemporary digital ecosystem, providing an alternative to dominant globalized and textualist Islamic discourses. The emergence of scholars like Gus Baha exemplifies how vernacular Islamic authority is maintained through digital media while preserving harmony with their followers (Sulthon et al., 2025).

The digital transformation in Indonesian Islamic education encompasses multiple dimensions including digital policy and infrastructure development, capacity building for teachers and students, technology integration in vocational and Islamic curricula, and strengthening students' digital employability skills (Dimyathi et al., 2025). University students demonstrate a significant shift in their

modes of engaging with Islamic knowledge—from conventional textual study to digital platforms such as social media, online preachers, and algorithm-driven content (Husni & Sahal, 2026). While online access has democratized religious learning, it has also created fragmented understanding and susceptibility to polarized discourses.

Critical analysis reveals that Indonesian Islamic higher education exists within significant epistemological tensions that are not easily synthesized. UIII, for example, rejects the dominance of a single center of knowledge yet has not formulated a stable alternative epistemological form (Suryani, 2025). This creates a dynamic space of epistemic negotiation where various knowledge traditions compete and engage in dialogue to shape the future configuration of Indonesian Islamic scholarship.

The tensions manifest in what scholars characterize as the transformation of religious authority from a sanad-based epistemic system to forms of legitimacy increasingly based on digital algorithms (Siregar et al., 2025). This change signifies a profound reconfiguration of Islamic epistemic authority, wherein scholarly legitimacy is no longer solely derived from traditional knowledge transmission but is also influenced by emotional appeal and platform visibility.

The critical analysis identifies three interrelated dimensions of transformation: epistemological, structural, and interactional (Siregar et al., 2025). Epistemologically, there is tension between the depth-oriented, relational pedagogy of traditional da'wah and the breadth-oriented, attention-driven logic of digital da'wah (Husain et al., 2025). While digital platforms democratize access and enhance outreach, they also risk theological superficiality, ideological fragmentation, and the erosion of classical scholarly authority. The study reveals that epistemic gatekeeping operates as a racialized colonial mechanism through which academic authority regulates the boundaries of legitimate knowledge (Suleymani, 2026).

The transformative analysis yields a proposed framework for decolonizing digital Islamic studies that integrates three elements: (1) curricular decolonization that centers local intellectual contributions and indigenous epistemologies; (2) institutional policies that prioritize equitable knowledge production pathways; and (3) digital pedagogies that embed Islamic ethical principles including amanah (trustworthiness), 'adl (justice), and ihsan (excellence) (Syamsiah & Aisyah, 2025).

This framework conceptualizes digital sovereignty as a transformative response that foregrounds Indonesian epistemological authority, cultural self-determination, and equitable participation in knowledge production within digitally mediated learning environments (Sharma, 2026). The model emphasizes that achieving sustainable futures requires moving from digital consumption to digital agency, and from digital access to digital sovereignty.

The proposed "Decolonial-Islamic Digital Framework" advances five pillars for knowledge production: (1) Situated Knowledge and Epistemic Justice, centering local Indonesian epistemologies; (2) Integration of classical Islamic epistemology with digital pedagogical models; (3) Maqāsid-based Digital Ethics as a core component; (4) Hybrid Resilience combining wasathiyah (moderate) theology with local wisdom; and (5) South-South Knowledge Networks (Liu & Heinonen, 2025). This framework offers replicable pathways for teacher education and digital transformation in resource-constrained ecosystems globally (Nualprasert et al., 2025).

5. DISCUSSION

This study reveals that Indonesian Islamic institutions are actively constructing alternative epistemological spaces that challenge Western-centric knowledge production while engaging critically with global digital transformations. The findings demonstrate three interconnected transformative processes: the emergence of hybrid pedagogical models, the reconfiguration of religious authority through digital platforms, and the development of distinctively Indonesian epistemological frameworks that center local knowledge traditions (Mahmud et al., 2025).

These findings must be understood within the broader context of Islamic education's strategic role in shaping religious identity while responding to the challenges of increasingly multicultural and digitalized societies (Rafid & Darmawati, 2025). In plural contexts such as Indonesia, Islamic educational institutions are required to move beyond normative and text-centered approaches toward more inclusive, contextual, and socially responsive educational practices. The digital transformation makes a positive contribution to Islamic religious education, although adaptation efforts are needed to remain in line with traditional values upheld (Saputro & Arif, 2025).

Theoretically, the findings support the concept of "cognitive justice" as articulated by decolonial scholars, which argues for the recognition of multiple epistemologies and knowledge

systems as equally valid (Ouma & Maganya, 2025). The Indonesian case demonstrates that decolonizing digital humanities requires not simply adding marginalized perspectives to existing archives but transforming the epistemic architectures through which theory, subjecthood, and legitimacy are defined (Suleymani, 2026). The emergence of distributed moral authority through digital platforms represents what can be termed a "digital majlis al-fiqh"—a participatory arena where Islamic law is interpreted through collective engagement (Wakhidah et al., 2025).

The study illuminates how Syed Hussein Alatas's critique of the "captive mind" remains relevant for understanding Indonesian efforts to build autonomous yet globally dialogical Islamic scholarship (Sampean, 2026). Alatas's "pragmatic route" differs from postcolonial critique by centering institutional pathways of concept formation, curriculum, and research agendas. This approach resonates with Indonesian institutions' selective, problem-oriented engagement with both Islamic traditions and digital technologies.

These findings both confirm and extend previous research on digital religion and decolonial education. While prior studies have identified the democratizing potential of digital platforms for religious communication ("Ulyan, 2023), this research demonstrates that Indonesian Islamic scholars employ specific strategies to maintain epistemic authenticity while engaging digital audiences. Unlike studies that emphasize the fragmentation of religious authority online, the Indonesian case reveals deliberate efforts to preserve sanad-based legitimacy alongside new forms of digital engagement (Sulthon et al., 2025).

Theoretically, this study contributes an expanded understanding of how decolonial praxis can be operationalized within digital Islamic education. Practically, the findings suggest that successful digital integration depends on strengthening teachers' digital pedagogical competence while ensuring core religious values remain integral to instructional design (Munawar & Endang, 2026). For policy, the research recommends the development of a "digital peace pedagogy" to reinforce counter-narratives in virtual spaces (Adawiyah et al., 2026), alongside structural interventions including curricular reforms, inclusive citation practices, and alternative publication platforms to democratize knowledge production (Ismail et al., 2025).

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Indonesian Islamic institutions are not passive recipients of Western digital frameworks nor rigid preservers of tradition, but active agents in reshaping global knowledge production. Through digital platforms, local scholars are able to revitalize vernacular Islamic authority, resist epistemic dominance, and promote more plural forms of knowledge. The emergence of hybrid pedagogical models that integrate moderate theology, local wisdom, and global engagement highlights a distinctive Indonesian contribution to the broader project of decolonizing education.

The study offers a theoretical contribution through the development of a Decolonial Islamic Digital Framework, which brings decolonial thought into dialogue with Islamic epistemological traditions. It shows that principles such as *maqasid al shariah* and the Bayani Burhani Irfani epistemic model can guide value-based digital transformation in Islamic education. Methodologically, the research underscores the importance of qualitative approaches such as digital ethnography in capturing culturally grounded perspectives and amplifying voices often marginalized within dominant academic discourses.

Practically, the findings provide insights for Islamic educational institutions across the Global South facing similar tensions between digital modernization and epistemic sovereignty. Strengthening digital literacy, developing contextually grounded content, and fostering collaborative networks are essential steps forward. Future research should focus on evaluating hybrid pedagogical models, conducting cross-regional comparisons, and developing tools to assess epistemic transformation, positioning the Global South as a dynamic center of intellectual innovation and alternative knowledge production.

7. CRediT Author Statement

Gusti Muzainah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft, Visualization, Project administration. Rasyid Rizani: Data Curation, Validation,

Formal analysis, Writing – Review & Editing. Abdul Karim: Supervision, Resources, Writing – Review & Editing, Conceptualization.

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