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The Digital Minbar: Repositioning Religious Authority and the Dynamics of Islamic Law in Contemporary Egypt's Virtual Landscape

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Abstract: The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the production, dissemination, and validation of religious knowledge, posing new challenges to traditional religious institutions in Egypt. This study examines how Al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifta' al-Miṣriyyah respond to the emergence of online religious actors who acquire authority through social media rather than through classical academic structures. This research is based on fieldwork and employs a descriptive qualitative design, drawing on sociological and religious-anthropological approaches. Primary data were obtained from leaders and scholars affiliated with Al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifta' al-Miṣriyyah, complemented by insights from socio-religious observers in Egypt who are members of the Special Branch of Nahdlatul Ulama (PCINU). Secondary data consist of fatwas and relevant scholarly literature. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observation and analyzed using inductive qualitative techniques. The findings indicate that the digital space has democratized access to Islamic knowledge, enabling social media influencers, preachers, and informal online scholars to serve as alternative sources of fatwas and religious guidance for Egyptian Muslims. In response, Al-Azhar has prioritized strengthening its academically grounded digital presence, while Dar al-Ifta' has pursued a more dynamic strategy by expanding online fatwa services, launching social media campaigns, and developing multilingual outreach programs. At the same time, this study reveals that state regulation and political involvement in Egypt's digital religious sphere significantly shape both the autonomy and public perception of official religious institutions. This article contributes to the broader discourse on Islamic authority by illustrating how classical institutions negotiate legitimacy amid algorithmic visibility, digital pluralism, and state control.

Keywords: Al-Azhar; Darul Ifta; Digital Age; Egypt; Religious Authority.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of information technology over the past two decades has created a new landscape in the production, transmission, and legitimization of religious knowledge in the Islamic world. Social media, as a digital medium, enables the rapid and widespread dissemination of fatwas, legal opinions, and religious discourse, while also giving rise to new figures serving as alternative religious references.[1] This phenomenon is not only occurring in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia,[2] but is also evident in various Muslim-majority countries, including Egypt, which has long been known as the center of Islamic scholarly authority.[3] The ease of access and pragmatic nature of digital information consumption make people more likely to choose religious answers that are the fastest, most concise, and most accessible, without constantly verifying their credibility or scholarly sources. This situation raises fundamental questions about how traditional Islamic authorities negotiate their position in an increasingly competitive digital ecosystem.[4]

Egypt is a country that has a long tradition as an established center of Islamic scholarship, where traditional religious authorities play a crucial role in the lives of the Muslim community. The two leading institutions that serve as official references for Egyptian Muslims are Al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifta al-Mishriyyah. Al-Azhar, with a history of more than a thousand years, functions not only as an institution of higher education but also as the primary authority on scholarly interpretation of classical Islamic law. [5] Meanwhile, Dar al-Ifta al-Mishriyyah is a government agency formally authorized to issue

[1] Ibrahim N. Abusharif, "Religious Authority, Digitality, and Islam: The Stakes and Background," *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 8, no. 1 (2023): 110, https://doi.org/10.2979/jims.00010.

[2] Moch. Khafidz Fuad Raya, "Digital Islam: New Space for Authority and Religious Commodification among Islamic Preachers in Contemporary Indonesia," *Contemporary Islam* 19, no. 1 (2025): 161, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-024-00570-z.

[3] Hilary Kalmbach, *Islamic Knowledge and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 7.

[4] Ihsan Yilmaz, "Faith in the Digital Age: How Young Muslims Use the Cyberspace for Islamic Knowledge," in *Between Clicks and Clerics: How Young Western Muslims Seek Religious Knowledge in the Digital Age* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2025), 63, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-6815-1_3.

[5] Meir Hatina, "Historical Legacy and the Challenge of Modernity in the Middle East: The Case of al-Azhar in Egypt," *The Muslim World* 93, no. 1 (2003), http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1478-1913.00014.

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fatwas on contemporary issues based on the primary sources of sharia. Fatwas issued by Dar al-Ifta carry significant social and legal weight for Muslims in Egypt and are often referred to in the judicial system and public policy.[6] The existence of these two institutions reflects the traditional structure of strong religious legitimacy integrated into Egypt's socio-political framework.

Alongside these traditional authorities, the digital age has opened new space for the emergence of non-institutional religious figures who act as mediators of Islamic knowledge, particularly through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Literature on digital religion and the phenomenon of Muslim influencers states that social media is not only a channel for disseminating information, but also a new arena for the affirmation and negotiation of religious authority. For example, Zaid's study shows that social media has provided opportunities for individuals—including those who are not graduates of formal religious institutions—to build large audiences and influence millennials' and Generation Z's religious understanding with a more "visual" and personal style of communication than traditional authorities.[7] Other research indicates the emergence of digital fatwas that do not go through the classic verification process, called "anomalous digital fatwas," which spread rapidly through social media and have an impact on the dynamics of Islamic legal legitimacy, because they do not go through traditional jurisprudential controls.[8] This situation also reflects changes in the structure of religious authority, where authority has become more mediated (by the media), interactive, and sometimes fragmented, in contrast to the traditional hierarchy, which is centralized and institutional.[9]

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[6] Frank Mullaney, review of *Review of Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dār al-Iftā*, by Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 10, no. 3 (1999): 332–335.

[7] Bouziane Zaid et al., "Digital Islam and Muslim Millennials: How Social Media Influencers Reimagine Religious Authority and Islamic Practices," *Religions* 13, no. 4 (2022), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040335.

[8] Abdelhalim Mohamed Mansour Ali and Muhammad Ahmad Ibrahim Aljahsh, "The Proliferation of Anomalous Digital Fatwas: A Critical Examination of Jurisprudential Challenges and Societal Impacts in the Digital Age," *AHKAM : Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 25, no. 1 (2025): 37–52.

[9] Ulpah Andayani et al., "Exploring the Dynamics of Online Religious Authority: A Systematic Literature Review," in *Towards Resilient Societies: The Synergy of Religion, Education, Health, Science, and Technology* (CRC Press, 2025).

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Several publications on digital Islam, religious authority, and online fatwas confirm that digital transformation has shifted the relationship between clerics and society. Zaid's study shows that social media provides space for new authorities to compete with traditional scholars through a popular language that resonates more with younger generations. A study of Egyptian influencers also shows that religious authority is now determined by the aesthetics of content presentation, post consistency, and patterns of interaction, rather than solely by formal scholarly authority.[10] On the other hand, Al-Marakeby's research on the Al-Azhar fatwa institution reveals how this traditional institution is responding to change by strengthening its digital presence through a fatwa website, a YouTube channel, and official social media accounts. Dar al-Ifta has even become one of the most active state institutions in the Middle East in producing religious content on digital platforms.[11] However, these studies have not specifically examined how these two major Egyptian institutions navigate the dynamics of new authority in the contemporary virtual landscape, particularly in terms of competition for legitimacy, digital communication strategies, and their impact on Islamic legal authority.

Most studies on the digitization of religious authority focus on global phenomena or on specific countries such as Indonesia and the Gulf states. Egypt, as a classic center of Islamic authority, has not been studied in depth in the context of competition between traditional and digital authorities. In addition, most existing studies focus only on the general shift in authority, without examining how Al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifta are reorganizing their positions, strategies, and legitimacy amid the rapid rise of new religious authorities in the digital space. Thus, this study offers a new perspective on the repositioning of Islamic religious authority in a more complex situation, namely, when historical authority must negotiate with the logic of algorithms, the speed of information, and the culture of pragmatism in the consumption of religious content.

[10] Zaid et al., "Digital Islam and Muslim Millennials."
[11] Muhammad Al-Marakeby, "Rethinking Modern Fatwa Typology: An Ethnographic Study on al-Azhar Fatwa Council," *Islamic Studies Review* 1, no. 2 (2022), https://doi.org/10.56529/isr.v1i2.85.

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This study aims to analyze how Al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifta al-Mishriyyah respond to the emergence of digital pulpits that present new authoritative figures on Egyptian social media. This study also aims to identify how these transformations affect the structure of Islamic legal authority, the practice of issuing fatwas, and the dynamics of religious legitimacy in contemporary Egyptian society. This study contributes in two ways. First, it provides a more detailed empirical understanding of the forms of adaptation and resistance of traditional religious institutions in the face of competition for authority in the digital space. Second, it contributes theoretically to the study of Islamic authority by offering an analytical framework that combines classical legitimacy theory with the dynamics of digital authority production on social media. The results of this research are expected to enrich the discourse on the transformation of religious authority in the technological era and to provide a basis for formulating more effective religious communication policies and strategies in Muslim countries. This study argues that digital transformation in Egypt has shifted the pattern of religious authority from a hierarchical structure to a more fluid landscape, alongside the emergence of new authorities on social media. This movement challenges the historical dominance of Al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifta al-Mishriyyah.

METHOD

This article is based on field research with a qualitative design. This research uses a sociological-anthropological approach to religion because it understands socio-cultural phenomena and religious developments in a particular community. This design can provide a richer, more in-depth picture, especially for explaining how the openness of information on the internet affects the religious authority of Egyptian society and the responses and adaptations of al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifta, as traditional Islamic institutions and official state institutions, in maintaining their authority. This design also allows researchers to explore data, documents, and in-depth interviews about the research object.

This study uses two types of data: primary and secondary. Primary data were obtained from leaders of the Al-Azhar and Dar Al-Ifta institutions, as well as from religious

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activists who are members of the Egyptian Branch of Nahdlatul Ulama (PCINU). The selection of informants was based on purposive sampling, with criteria including parties with the authority and capability to provide information on the production process of the fatwa, as well as activists and observers of the development of Islamic law and its authority in Egypt. Based on these criteria, the parties interviewed in this study included: 1) Dr. Mahmoud Al-Hawari, Assistant Secretary-General for Preaching and Media, Majma' al-Buhuts al-Islamiyah Al-Azhar; 2) Dr. Rabi' Saad Abdul Adzim (Official Responsible for Training Expatriates of Egypt, Dar al-Ifta Al Misriyyah); 3) K.H. Faiz Husaini (Chairman of the PCINU); and 4) K.H. Muhlashon Jalaluddin (Rois Syuriah of the PCINU). Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from Islamic legal fatwas issued by Al-Azhar and Darul Ifta Al-Mishriyyah, and supplemented with scientific literature related to the research theme.

The collected data were then analyzed using inductive qualitative methods. The stages of analysis were as follows: 1) describing the impact of the internet on the religious authority of Egyptian society; 2) tracing the responses of Al-Azhar and Dar Al-Ifta in facing the potential shift in religious authority in the digital era; 3) analyzing the state's efforts to control authoritative Islamic institutions and their implications for the religious authority of Egyptian society in the digital era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Shifting Religious Authority in Egypt: From Traditional to Digital

The appearance of the digital era has ushered in a profound and irreversible shift in the accessibility and dissemination of religious knowledge within Egypt, mirroring a broader global trend across the Muslim world. This transformation, often characterized as the "democratization of religious knowledge," marks a departure from the historical model in which access was mediated mainly and controlled by established religious institutions and their accredited scholars.[12] The internet, with its vast repositories of information and capacity to connect individuals across geographical boundaries, has effectively dismantled

[12] Jeffrey Haynes, "Religion and Democratisation: What Do We Now Know?," *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 2, no. 2 (2016): 262, https://doi.org/10.1080/20566093.2016.1181385.

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many traditional barriers to religious learning, leading to the emergence of new forms of religious authority that operate primarily in the digital sphere.[13]

Historically, acquiring in-depth religious understanding in Egypt required engagement with formal educational institutions, such as Al-Azhar University and its affiliated institutions, or close mentorship with recognized religious scholars.[14] Access to key religious texts, including the Quran and collections of Hadith, often required a degree of literacy and, at times, physical access to libraries or scholarly circles. Interpretations of these texts were shaped mainly and disseminated by the established ulama, whose authority was rooted in their formal training, scholarly credentials, and institutional affiliations.[15] This system, while fostering a degree of scholarly rigor and continuity, also inherently limited access and potentially marginalized alternative perspectives.[16]

The digital revolution has fundamentally disrupted this traditional paradigm. The internet has become an unprecedented repository of religious information, readily accessible to anyone with an internet connection. Digital libraries host electronic versions of classical and contemporary Islamic texts, translations in multiple languages, and a vast array of scholarly articles and lectures.[17] Online platforms offer diverse interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah, often presented by individuals with varying levels of formal religious training and representing a broad spectrum of theological and jurisprudential

[13] Bouziane Zaid et al., "Digital Islam and Muslim Millennials: How Social Media Influencers Reimagine Religious Authority and Islamic Practices," *Religions* 13, no. 4 (2022): 355, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040335.

[14] Amr Hamzawy, "Legislating Authoritarianism: Egypt's New Era of Repression" (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017), 9, https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2017/03/legislating-authoritarianism-egypts-new-era-of-repression?lang=en.

[15] Aria Nakissa, *The Anthropology of Islamic Law: Education, Ethics, and Legal Interpretation at Egypt's Al-Azhar* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 157.

[16] Masooda Bano and Hanane Benadi, "Regulating Religious Authority for Political Gains: Al-Sisi's Manipulation of al-Azhar in Egypt," *Third World Quarterly* 39, no. 8 (2017): 1604, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1369031.

[17] Rijal Ali and Subi Nur Isnaini, "Digitising Interpretation: Transforming Tafsir Al-Mishbah in the Context of the Living Quran," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 25, no. 1 (2024): 1, https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v25i1.5186.

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viewpoints.[18] This immediate and widespread availability of information allows Egyptian Muslims to directly engage with primary sources and explore a multitude of interpretations without necessarily relying on the filtering mechanisms of traditional authorities.[19]

This accessibility has several significant consequences for the landscape of religious authority in Egypt. Individuals seeking answers to religious questions or a deeper understanding of Islamic principles are no longer solely reliant on the fatwas, pronouncements, or sermons of Al-Azhar or Dar al-Ifta, or on those delivered in local mosques. They can now independently research various perspectives online, compare different scholarly opinions, and form their own conclusions. This direct engagement with religious material and diverse interpretations can empower individuals, but also presents challenges in discerning credible sources from unreliable ones.[20]

Moreover, the digital space has become a fertile ground for individuals who command religious authority primarily through their online presence. These "online ulama" may include formally trained scholars who have embraced digital communication, but they also encompass self-proclaimed experts, charismatic individuals with strong communication skills, activists with specific religious agendas, and even anonymous entities disseminating religious content. They build their influence by creating engaging content such as videos, podcasts, blog posts, and social media updates, often tailoring their message to resonate with specific online communities.[21] Their authority stems not necessarily from

[18] Gary R. Bunt, "The Qur'an and the Internet," in *The Routledge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. George Archer et al. (Routledge, 2021), 10, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315885360.

[19] Nareman Ehab Amin, "Revolutionary Religion: Youth and Islam in Post-2011 Egypt" (Disertasi, Princeton University, 2021), 315, http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/dsp01jh343w36w.

[20] Hanan Ezzat, "Social Media Influencers and the Online Identity of Egyptian Youth," *Catalan Journal of Communication & Cultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (2020): 119, https://doi.org/10.1386/cjcs_00017_1.

[21] Imawati Rofiqoh, "Al-Azhar, Otoritas Keagamaan Baru Dan Keislaman Indonesia: Peran Alumni Al-Azhar Mesir Di Ruang Publik" (Tesis, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, 2019), https://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/eprint/37122/.

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traditional credentials but from their perceived piety, eloquence, ability to connect with their audience, or the perceived relevance of their interpretations to contemporary issues.[22]

Based on an online search of the digital da'wah situation in Egypt, at least three figures are used as religious references on Instagram. First, Dr Omar Abdelkafi is one of the most popular da'i and preachers in Egypt. Through his account, he regularly publishes short videos that contain Qur'anic commentaries, responses to contemporary issues, and explanations of fiqh in an easy-to-understand manner.[23] Secondly, Amr Khaled is a television da'i and da'wah activist who, since the beginning of his career, has combined mass and digital media. His official Instagram account contains snippets of lectures, Islamic motivational quotes, and short question-and-answer sessions.[24] Third, Mohamed Hegazy actively uploads concise tafsir content, hadith discussions, and explanations of Islamic ethics in carousel or short-video formats.[25] With these accounts, Egyptians have instant access to religious explanations through an individualised 'digital mufti'. This shows how powerful social media is in shaping religious practices and behaviours, where the speed of access and the style of content delivery are often considered more relevant than traditional methods.

In addition, the internet exposes Egyptian Muslims to a far broader range of Islamic thought and practices than they might encounter within their immediate social or geographical environment. This includes Sufi traditions, various schools of Sunni and Shia thought (though Shia proselytization faces restrictions in Egypt), and even more progressive

[22] Peter Horsfield, "The Media and Religious Authority from Ancient to Modern," in *The Media and Religious Authority*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover (Penn State University Press, 2016), 37, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780271077956.

[23] His communicative and contemporary style of delivery has made many young worshipers rely on him for religious references outside of traditional institutions. His Instagram account name is @omarabdelkafy with 3 million followers. https://www.instagram.com/omarabdelkafy

[24] Due to his reputation as a 'tele-da'i' targeting the youth (15-35 years old), many Egyptian social media users reference him for their daily religious practices. His Instagram account name is @amrkhaled with 8 million followers. https://www.instagram.com/amrkhaled

[25] Although this profile is not directly affiliated with an official institution, its visual and concise presentation style makes it easily accessible to users who need a quick reference. His Instagram handle is @mohamedhegaziii with 200k followers. https://www.instagram.com/mohamedhegaziii

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or liberal interpretations of Islam.[26] This increased exposure can foster intellectual curiosity and a more nuanced understanding of the diversity within Islam, but it can also lead to confusion, the questioning of established norms, and potential exposure to extremist ideologies.

In the decentralized, often unregulated environment of the internet, discerning credible, authoritative religious voices from those lacking proper training or promoting biased or harmful interpretations is a significant challenge.[27] The lack of traditional gatekeeping mechanisms means that individuals must develop their own critical evaluation skills to navigate the vast sea of online religious information.[28] This necessitates a degree of digital literacy and an understanding of how to assess the credentials and motivations of online religious actors.[29]

The internet facilitates the formation of online communities centered around shared religious beliefs or interests.[30] These virtual spaces can provide support, foster a sense of belonging, and enable the collective interpretation and application of religious teachings.[31] While these online communities can be beneficial, they can also become echo

[26] Valerie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt* (University of South Carolina Press, 2023), 357.

[27] Arif Zamhari et al., "Traditional Religious Authorities in New Media: A Study of The Cariustadz.Id Platform as An Alternative Cyber Fatwa and Da'wah Media among the Middle-Class Urban Muslims," *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 21, no. 1 (2021): 65, https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v21i1.20300.

[28] Muhammad Azam et al., "Harmonizing Contemporary International Commercial Law with Sharia-Based National Legal Systems: A Comparative Study of Pakistan, Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia," *MILRev: Metro Islamic Law Review* 4, no. 2 (2025): 1074–1096, https://doi.org/10.32332/milrev.v4i2.11334.

[29] Dwi Edi Wibowo, "Consumer Protection in the Digital Era: Challenges and Solutions from an Islamic Legal Perspective," *Jurnal Ilmiah Mizani: Wacana Hukum, Ekonomi Dan Keagamaan* 11, no. 2 (2024): 473–485, https://doi.org/10.29300/mzn.v11i2.4752.

[30] Ismawati and Suud Sarim Karimullah, "Consumer Protection in the Digital Era: An Analysis of Consumer Protection in E-Commerce," *NUSANTARA: Journal Of Law Studies* 3, no. 02 (2024): 68–80, https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17376951.

[31] Sahar Khamis, "'Cyber Ummah': The Internet and Muslim Communities," in *Handbook of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Lives* (Springer, 2021), 823, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32626-5_69.

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chambers, reinforcing specific viewpoints and potentially isolating individuals from more diverse perspectives and traditional forms of religious engagement.[32]

In essence, the democratization of religious knowledge in Egypt, driven by the digital revolution, has fundamentally altered the landscape of religious authority. While it offers unprecedented access to information and empowers individuals to engage more directly with their faith, it also presents significant challenges related to discerning credible sources, navigating diverse interpretations, and understanding the evolving nature of religious leadership in a digital age. The rise of online authority alongside the continued influence of traditional institutions creates a complex and dynamic environment that shapes the religious lives of Egyptian Muslims in profound ways.

Egypt's Official Religious Institutions in the Digital Arena: Navigating the Evolving Landscape of Authority

Recognizing the transformative and increasingly dominant role of the digital sphere in shaping not only the dissemination of information but also the very fabric of social interaction and the formation of individual and collective understandings of faith, Egypt's venerable and historically influential religious institutions, most notably the esteemed Al-Azhar University and the strategically positioned Dar al-Ifta al-Missriyyah (The Egyptian House of Fatwas), have embarked on a determined and multifaceted journey to establish a robust and enduring presence within the complex ecosystem of the digital arena.[33] This strategic imperative transcends a mere desire to remain technologically current; it represents a profound and calculated effort to actively safeguard and project their historically established authority, to effectively counter the burgeoning proliferation of diverse, often dissenting, and at times extremist narratives that find fertile ground online, and to steadfastly continue their mission of providing what they firmly believe to be

[32] Umair Munir Hashmi et al., "The Representation of Islam Within Social Media: A Systematic Review," *Information, Communication & Society* 24, no. 13 (2021): 1962, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1847165.

[33] Walid Ghali, "The State of Manuscript Digitization Projects in Some Egyptian Libraries and Their Challenges," in *Library and Information Science in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Amanda B. Click et al. (De Gruyter Saur, 2016), 302, http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9783110341782-017.

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authoritative, sound, and contextually relevant religious guidance to the Egyptian populace, the wider Arab world, and the global Muslim community.[34]

Their deliberate and evolving engagement within the digital realm signifies a crucial and ongoing adaptation of deeply rooted traditional institutions to the fluid and dynamic realities of the 21st century, a transition that is simultaneously fraught with considerable opportunities for expanded reach and influence, as well as inherent and multifaceted challenges to their established modes of operation and the very nature of their authority.

Al-Azhar University's Deliberate Foray into the Digital Realm

As one of the oldest and most universally respected centers of Sunni Islamic learning in the world, Al-Azhar University carries immense historical, intellectual, and symbolic authority, not only within Egypt's borders but across the vast expanse of the Muslim world.[35] While Dar al-Ifta al-Missriyyah has the primary mandate to issue formal religious edicts (fatwas) in Egypt, the distinguished scholars and senior faculty members of Al-Azhar University often play a crucial and influential role in issuing fatwas. Many Al-Azhar scholars serve on the various committees and councils within Dar al-Ifta, contributing their deep knowledge and expertise to the formulation of religious rulings.

Consequently, the scholarly opinions and established methodologies of Al-Azhar are often reflected, either directly or indirectly, in the fatwas officially issued by Dar al-Ifta and subsequently disseminated through its extensive online channels. Furthermore, individual Al-Azhar scholars, renowned for their expertise in specific areas of Islamic jurisprudence or theology, may also maintain their own independent online presences through personal websites, academic blogs, or carefully managed social media accounts,

[34] Luisa Orelli, "Islam Institutionnel Égyptien et Modernité: Aperçu Du Débat à Travers Les Fatâwâ d'al-Azhar et de Dâr al-Iftâ'," *Studia Islamica* 95 (2002): 192, https://doi.org/10.2307/1596144.

[35] Nathan Spannaus, "History and Continuity: Al-Azhar and Egypt," in *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change*, ed. Masooda Bano (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 79, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474433242-006.

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where they share their informed perspectives on contemporary religious issues and engage in thoughtful discussions with online audiences.[36]

Acknowledging the imperative to extend its profound intellectual and religious influence into the burgeoning digital age, Al-Azhar has undertaken a deliberate, albeit perhaps more measured and academically oriented, effort to cultivate its online presence. Al-Azhar maintains official websites that serve as the primary digital repositories of its extensive scholarly output and institutional information. These platforms meticulously host a wealth of academic research papers authored by its esteemed faculty members across various disciplines of Islamic studies, in-depth articles exploring diverse theological and jurisprudential topics, detailed information about its numerous faculties, specialized departments, and affiliated research centers, as well as comprehensive documentation chronicling its rich historical significance, its pivotal role in shaping Islamic thought, and its ongoing academic and community-oriented activities.[37]

While perhaps not always characterized by the dynamic and interactive features prevalent on some other online religious platforms, these official websites function as indispensable digital archives of Al-Azhar's profound intellectual heritage, providing a central and authoritative point of reference for scholars, researchers, students, and anyone seeking reliable and academically grounded information about the institution and its well-established scholarly positions on a wide range of religious and contemporary issues.

Recognizing the immense value of its vast and historically significant library collections, Al-Azhar has embarked on initiatives to systematically digitize substantial portions of these invaluable resources, including rare historical manuscripts, early printed editions of seminal Islamic texts, and a wealth of other scholarly works. This crucial digitization effort aims to preserve these irreplaceable intellectual treasures for posterity and, more importantly, in the context of the digital age, to make them more readily

[36] Interview with K.H. Faiz Husaini, Chairman of the Special Branch of Nahdlatul Ulama (PCINU) Egypt. Sunday, May 12, 2025

[37] Al-Azhar's digital publications can be accessed through the website https://beta.sis.gov.eg/en/publications/books/

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accessible to researchers, scholars, and students across the globe, transcending geographical limitations and fostering broader scholarly engagement with Al-Azhar's enduring intellectual legacy and its profound contributions to Islamic thought over the centuries.

On another front, Al-Azhar is exploring the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the production and issuance of fatwas. Currently, the initiative is still at the stage of intensive consultation with technology experts and involves in-depth discussions with muftis. This approach is seen as strategic for facilitating information disclosure and expanding public access to fatwas in the era of globalization, thereby enabling it to meet the demands of modern society without compromising scientific validity or religious authority. The mechanism for implementing AI will be regulated so that every output is verified by scholars before issuance, preserving the values of Sharia and avoiding contextual errors. For this reason, the AI system will serve only as a tool for preparing the initial draft, while the final fatwa decision remains in the hands of competent muftis.[38]

According to Dr. Mahmoud Al-Hawari, the publication and dissemination of fatwas at Al-Azhar are carried out through two primary methods: print and digital. For the printed method, fatwas are published in notable magazines and archived for presentation at annual exhibitions, serving as a means of distribution to a broad audience. Meanwhile, digital publications are uploaded as PDFs to Al-Azhar's official website for access by people in Egypt and abroad. However, the publication of fatwas is currently limited to Arabic, which may pose a challenge for non-Arabic speakers.[39]

In addition, Al-Azhar has been influenced by the pervasive presence of social media in contemporary communication.[40] It has established a presence on carefully selected social media platforms. This is part of the strategy to attract the younger generation and users

[38] Interview with Dr. Mahmoud Al-Hawari, Assistant Secretary-General for Preaching and Media, Majma' al-Buhuts al-Islamiyah. Monday, May 12, 2025

[39] Interview with Dr. Mahmoud Al-Hawari, Assistant Secretary-General for Preaching and Media, Majma' al-Buhuts al-Islamiyah. Monday, May 12, 2025

[40] Some social media accounts owned by Al Azhar are Facebook (https://web.facebook.com/AlAzharUniversity), Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/alazharuniversity/), and Youtube (https://www.youtube.com/@al-azharuniversitychannel7395)

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accustomed to consuming entertainment-based content, so that the dissemination of fatwas can be more effective and relevant to contemporary communication dynamics. However, its approach tends to be more formal and institutionally focused than the more direct, interactive strategies often used by individual scholars or organizations such as Dar al-Ifta. Al-Azhar primarily utilizes these platforms to disseminate official news and announcements regarding the university's academic activities, highlight the significant research and publications of its faculty, commemorate important religious events, and occasionally offer carefully worded statements addressing pressing contemporary religious and social issues from a distinctly Al-Azhar perspective, emphasizing its commitment to traditional Islamic scholarship and moderate interpretations.

Dar al-Ifta al-Missriyyah's Proactive and Multifaceted Digital Strategy

In marked contrast to Al-Azhar's perhaps more academically reserved online posture, Dar al-Ifta al-Missriyyah has adopted a demonstrably more proactive, comprehensive, and strategically agile digital strategy, fully recognizing the critical and ever-increasing role of online platforms in shaping public religious discourse, providing timely and accessible religious guidance, and effectively countering the rapid spread of extremist and misinformed interpretations of Islamic teachings.

Dar al-Ifta operates a sophisticated, user-friendly online fatwa service accessible through its official website, dedicated mobile applications for various operating systems, and direct interaction via social media channels. This robust digital infrastructure enables individuals, not only in Egypt but also across the global landscape, to submit their religious queries confidentially and conveniently, typically in writing via online forms or direct messaging. These queries are then carefully reviewed and responded to by a dedicated team of qualified and trained muftis (religious scholars authorized to issue fatwas). This digital accessibility has revolutionized the process of seeking religious guidance, effectively overcoming geographical limitations, time zone differences, and the potential social barriers associated with in-person inquiries. Furthermore, the extensive, meticulously organized online archives of previously issued fatwas serve as an invaluable, readily

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searchable resource for individuals seeking answers to a wide range of standard and complex religious questions, thereby promoting greater understanding and consistency in religious rulings.[41]

Dar al-Ifta has strategically cultivated a significant and consistently active presence across a diverse range of popular social media platforms, including Facebook[42], Twitter (now X)[43], YouTube[44], Instagram[45], and even emerging platforms. It skillfully leverages the unique features and audience demographics of each platform to disseminate a variety of engaging and easily digestible religious content, including concise video messages featuring muftis addressing topical issues, visually appealing infographics summarizing key Islamic principles, short and impactful religious advice tailored to everyday life, and timely responses to trending religious debates and controversies. This multi-platform approach enables Dar al-Ifta to effectively reach diverse demographic groups, particularly younger generations who are heavily reliant on social media for information and communication, and to engage with the public in formats that are inherently shareable and conducive to online discourse.

Dar al-Ifta frequently designs and launches targeted digital campaigns and initiatives to address specific religious or pressing social issues, raise awareness of important Islamic principles, counter the persuasive narratives of extremist groups, and actively promote the values of moderation, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence in accordance with mainstream Islamic teachings.[46] These campaigns often incorporate a cohesive blend of multimedia content, including compelling videos, informative articles, visually engaging graphics, and

[41] Various features of fatwa services provided by Darul Ifta Al Mishriyyah can be accessed through the link https://www.dar-alifta.org/en/

[42] Dar Al Ifta Al Mishriyyah Facebook account can be accessed through the link https://facebook.com/Egypt.DarAlIfta

[43] Dar Al Ifta Al Mishriyyah X account can be accessed via the link https://x.com/DarAlIftaEng/

[44] Dar Al Ifta Al Mishriyyah Youtube account can be accessed through the link https://www.youtube.com/DarAlIftaaEnglish

[45] Dar Al Ifta Al Mishriyyah Instagram account can be accessed through the link https://www.instagram.com/egyptdaralifta/

[46] Jacob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dār al-Iftā* (Brill, 1997), 100.

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carefully chosen hashtags, all strategically disseminated across multiple online platforms in a coordinated manner to maximize their reach, resonance, and overall impact on public discourse.

Recognizing the ubiquity of smartphones in contemporary life, Dar al-Ifta has invested in developing and maintaining user-friendly mobile applications for both Android and iOS. These applications provide users with seamless and direct access to a wide range of Dar al-Ifta's essential services and resources, including the online fatwa submission portal, searchable archives of past fatwas, easily accessible educational materials on various aspects of Islamic belief and practice, and direct links to their active social media channels, effectively placing authoritative religious guidance directly into the hands of millions of users.

Dar al-Ifta has actively engaged in international digital outreach initiatives and collaborations with other reputable religious organizations and institutions across the globe. This includes participating in international online conferences and webinars on Islamic jurisprudence and contemporary challenges, collaborating on joint digital content to address shared concerns, and producing multilingual content to serve the needs of Muslim communities across linguistic regions.[47]

A central and critically important pillar of Dar al-Ifta's digital strategy is its dedicated, sustained effort to proactively counter the insidious and often persuasive extremist ideologies and narratives that unfortunately proliferate in online spaces.[48] This involves the meticulous production and dissemination of digital content that directly refutes the theological and ideological arguments employed by extremist groups, promotes a nuanced and historically grounded understanding of Islamic texts, champions values of tolerance, inclusivity, and peaceful coexistence, and provides compelling alternative interpretations of religious concepts that effectively undermine extremist justifications for

[47] Interview with Dr. Rabi' Saad Abdul Adzim, the Official Responsible for Training Expatriates of Egypt, Dar al-Ifta Al Misriyyah. Tuesday 13 May 2025

[48] Rohan Gunaratna and Mohamed Bin Ali, "De-Radicalization Initiatives in Egypt: A Preliminary Insight," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 4 (2009): 277, https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100902750562.

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violence, hatred, and intolerance. Furthermore, Dar al-Ifta actively monitors online spaces frequented by extremist elements, engages in informed online debates and discussions to challenge their narratives directly, and works to expose the fallacies and dangers inherent in their distorted interpretations of Islam.

Demonstrating its commitment to navigating the complexities of religious authority in the digital age, Dar al-Ifta has also taken a leading role in organizing and hosting international digital conferences, specialized workshops, and comprehensive training programs specifically focused on the challenges and emerging opportunities facing fatwa authorities, religious scholars, and other religious institutions as they operate within the evolving digital landscape. These crucial initiatives serve as vital platforms for fostering dialogue, sharing best practices in digital communication and online engagement, developing effective strategies for addressing the unique challenges of the digital sphere, and building capacity among religious leaders to navigate the complexities of providing authoritative guidance in an increasingly interconnected world.[49]

Egypt's official religious institutions, led by Dar al-Ifta, have demonstrated a significant and evolving commitment to engaging with the multifaceted digital landscape. Their proactive and increasingly sophisticated strategies are strategically designed to extend their traditional reach, effectively maintain their perceived authority within a rapidly transforming information landscape, provide accessible and timely religious guidance to a global audience, and play a crucial role in actively combating the spread of extremist ideologies that find fertile ground within the digital realm. While Al-Azhar's digital presence remains more focused on its core academic and historical functions, Dar al-Ifta has embraced a more dynamic, multifaceted, and public-facing approach, recognizing the imperative to connect directly with diverse segments of the population and to shape religious discourse in the complex, ever-evolving digital age. This ongoing digital transformation represents a critical adaptation for these deeply rooted traditional

[49] Interview with Dr. Rabi' Saad Abdul Adzim, the Official Responsible for Training Expatriates of Egypt, Dar al-Ifta Al Misriyyah. Tuesday 13 May 2025

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institutions as they navigate the intricate and often unpredictable currents of religious authority in the 21st century.

State Control and Its Implications for Religious Authority

The intricate relationship between the Egyptian state and its religious institutions has been a defining characteristic of the country's socio-political landscape for decades. This historical dynamic of close alignment and, at times, direct control continues to exert significant influence in the digital era, profoundly shaping how religious authority operates, is perceived, and navigates the opportunities and constraints of the online sphere. Understanding the nuances of this state involvement is crucial to comprehending the evolving nature of religious authority in Egypt within the digital age.

Historically, the Egyptian state has exerted considerable influence over key religious institutions, most notably Al-Azhar University and the Ministry of Awqaf (Religious Endowments), which oversees mosques and religious personnel. This influence has manifested in various ways, including the appointment of key religious leaders, the regulation of religious education curricula, and the control over the financial resources allocated to religious institutions.[50] The state has often framed the rationale for this close relationship as a means of maintaining social cohesion, promoting national unity, and safeguarding against extremist ideologies that could threaten the nation's stability. Religious institutions, in turn, have often found in this alignment a source of legitimacy, financial support, and a platform for disseminating their interpretations of Islam.[51]

The Egyptian government actively supports the online initiatives of official religious institutions such as Al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifta. This support can take various forms, including providing resources for the development and maintenance of their digital platforms, amplifying their online content through state-controlled media outlets, and publicly

[50] Tarek El-Beshry, "Relationship between State and Religion: Egypt After the Revolution," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 6, no. 3 (2013): 404, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17550912.2013.812595.

[51] el-Sayed el-Aswad, "State, Nation, And Islamism In Contemporary Egypt: An Anthropological Perspective," *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 45, no. 1 (2016): 63, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26384880.

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endorsing their pronouncements on religious matters. The underlying aim is often to promote state-approved interpretations of Islam, which tend to emphasize moderation, obedience to authority, and the rejection of political activism under the guise of religion.[52] This can lead to a situation in which the online voice of official religious institutions is significantly amplified, potentially overshadowing or marginalizing alternative or dissenting religious viewpoints expressed by independent scholars or groups.[53]

Conversely, the Egyptian state often views independent online religious figures and movements operating outside official institutions with a degree of suspicion, particularly if their narratives are perceived to challenge state policies or promote interpretations of Islam that differ from the officially sanctioned ones. This suspicion can manifest in various forms, including monitoring and surveillance of online activities and, at times, direct restrictions on their online presence. This can include blocking websites or social media accounts, imposing legal restrictions on individuals deemed to be spreading "false" or "incendiary" religious content, and fostering a climate of self-censorship among independent religious voices online. Such actions can stifle religious pluralism in the digital sphere and limit the diversity of religious discourse available to Egyptian Muslims online.[54]

Moreover, the Egyptian government has invested significantly in its cybersecurity capabilities, and these tools are often used to monitor online religious content and identify individuals or groups deemed to be promoting extremist, sectarian, or politically challenging ideologies under a religious guise. This surveillance can extend to monitoring social media activity, tracking online communications, and analyzing the spread of religious content. While the stated objective is often to combat terrorism and maintain national security, these measures can also have a chilling effect on legitimate expressions of religious

[52] Hamzawy, "Legislating Authoritarianism: Egypt's New Era of Repression," 6.
[53] Bano and Benadi, "Regulating Religious Authority for Political Gains: Al-Sisi's Manipulation of al-Azhar in Egypt," 1.
[54] Interview with K.H. Muhlashon Jalaluddin, Rois Syuriah of the Special Branch of Nahdlatul Ulama (PCINU) Egypt. Wednesday, May 14, 2025.

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belief and the free exchange of religious ideas online, potentially infringing upon digital freedoms and the right to religious expression.[55]

The state has also implemented legislative frameworks and legal restrictions that govern online content, including religious material. These laws often contain broad provisions related to blasphemy, defamation of religion, and the spread of content that could incite violence or social discord. While intended to maintain public order and respect for religious sentiments, these laws can be vaguely worded and selectively applied, potentially leading to the prosecution and silencing of individuals who express religious views deemed critical of official religious institutions or interpretations, or perceived as challenging established religious norms.[56]

The close alignment between the state and official religious institutions in the digital sphere can have complex, sometimes paradoxical, effects on their credibility and perceived autonomy. While state support can provide them with resources and amplify their reach, it can also lead to accusations of being mouthpieces for the government, potentially eroding public trust among segments of the population who desire greater independence and critical engagement with religious issues. This can create tension in which official religious authorities, while benefiting from state backing, may struggle to maintain their religious legitimacy in the eyes of those who view them as too closely tied to the political establishment.[57]

The state also plays a role in shaping digital literacy initiatives and the online content of religious education programs. This can be used as a tool to promote officially sanctioned interpretations of Islam and to equip citizens with the skills to identify and reject what the state deems to be harmful or extremist online content. However, the content

[55] Interview with K.H. Faiz Husaini, Chairman of the Special Branch of Nahdlatul Ulama (PCINU) Egypt. Sunday, May 12, 2025

[56] Malika Zeghal, "Religion and Politics in Egypt: The Ulema of al-Azhar, Radical Islam, and the State (1952-94)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31, no. 3 (1999): 371, https://www.jstor.org/stable/176217.

[57] Talal Asad, "Thinking About Tradition, Religion, and Politics in Egypt Today," *Critical Inquiry* 42, no. 1 (2015): 166, https://doi.org/10.1086/683002.

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and framing of these initiatives can also be subject to state control, potentially limiting exposure to diverse perspectives and critical thinking about religious issues in the digital sphere.

The pervasive influence of state control in Egypt extends significantly into the digital arena, shaping the landscape of religious authority in profound ways. While the state actively supports and amplifies the online presence of official religious institutions to promote its preferred narratives, it also closely monitors and, at times, restricts the activities of independent online religious actors and the dissemination of dissenting viewpoints. The use of cybersecurity measures, the implementation of legal restrictions on online content, and the close alignment between the state and official religious bodies all contribute to a complex digital environment in which state interests and priorities heavily influence the exercise of religious authority. Understanding this intricate interplay is essential for a comprehensive analysis of the evolving dynamics of religious authority in Egypt within the digital age and its broader implications for religious freedom, pluralism, and the future of religious discourse in the country.

Navigating the Complexities of Religious Authority in Digital Egypt

The digital transformation of religious authority in Egypt, while presenting numerous opportunities for outreach and engagement, is also fraught with significant challenges and inherent tensions that official religious institutions, independent online actors, and the state itself must navigate. These complexities arise from fundamental shifts in information access, the emergence of new forms of authority, and the inherent characteristics of the digital sphere.

Perhaps the most significant challenge for Al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifta is maintaining their traditional level of authority in a digital environment characterized by decentralization and fragmentation. The internet allows for a multiplicity of voices and interpretations to coexist, often without clear hierarchies or mechanisms for validation recognized by traditional institutions. Individuals can easily access and be influenced by online figures who may lack formal credentials but possess strong communication skills or resonate with

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specific concerns.[58] This creates a competitive landscape where the pronouncements of established authorities may be just one voice among many, potentially diluting their perceived authority and influence. The sheer volume of online religious content makes it difficult for official institutions to monitor and respond effectively to all dissenting or alternative viewpoints.[59]

While official institutions possess historical legitimacy and state backing, they face the ongoing challenge of maintaining the trust and credibility of a digitally savvy public, particularly younger generations who have grown up with the internet as a primary source of information. These demographics are often more critical of traditional authority structures and are more inclined to seek diverse perspectives and engage in open online discussions.[60] Perceptions of state influence over Al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifta can further complicate this issue, leading some to view their online pronouncements with skepticism or as reflecting political agendas rather than purely religious considerations. Building and maintaining trust in this environment requires transparency, responsiveness, and a willingness to engage with critical questions and diverse viewpoints in a respectful and intellectually honest manner.

The internet exposes Egyptian Muslims to a vast spectrum of Islamic interpretations, ranging from traditionalist to progressive, and even extremist.[61] Many of these interpretations may directly contradict the official positions held by Al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifta. Effectively navigating this complex landscape requires official institutions to clearly and persuasively articulate the rationale behind their interpretations in the digital sphere. This involves not only stating their positions but also engaging with alternative viewpoints,

[58] Mónika Andok, "The Impact of Online Media on Religious Authority," *Religions* 15, no. 9 (2024): 1103, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15091103.

[59] Khairil Anwar and Abdul Mujib, "Islamic Faith-Based Content and Religious Social-Media Motives," *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (2022): 20, http://dx.doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/1024.

[60] Ioana A. Coman and Mihai Coman, "Religion, Popular Culture and Social Media: The Construction of a Religious Leader Image on Facebook," *ESSACHESS - Journal for Communication Studies* 10, no. 2 (2017).

[61] Mostafa Radwan, "Effect of Social Media Usage on the Cultural Identity of Rural People: A Case Study of Bamha Village, Egypt," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 9 (2022): 2, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01268-4.

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explaining the scholarly methodologies they employ, and addressing potential areas of disagreement in a nuanced and intellectually rigorous way. Simply asserting authority may not be sufficient in an online environment where individuals can easily access counterarguments and alternative perspectives.

Traditional Islamic scholarship often involves a rigorous, time-intensive process of studying classical texts, consulting senior scholars, and carefully deliberating complex issues before issuing pronouncements.[62] The digital age, however, demands a degree of speed and immediacy in responding to contemporary issues and online debates. This creates a tension for official institutions, which must balance the need for scholarly rigor and careful deliberation with the expectation of timely responses in the fast-paced online environment.[63] Finding the right balance is crucial for maintaining both the quality and the relevance of their religious guidance in the digital age.

From the state's perspective, it is a significant tension in its efforts to regulate online religious content. While the stated goals of combating extremism and maintaining social order are legitimate concerns, overly broad or aggressively enforced regulations can stifle legitimate expressions of religious belief and limit the free exchange of religious ideas online. Finding the appropriate balance between security concerns and the protection of digital freedoms, including religious expression, is a complex and ongoing challenge.

The state's involvement in regulating online religious discourse can also raise questions about its own legitimacy in this role. Critics may argue that the state's interventions are driven by political considerations rather than purely religious ones, leading to accusations of bias and the suppression of dissenting religious voices.

[62] M. Zainal Arifin, "The Traditionalism of the Islamic Boarding School Education System in the Era of Modernization," *Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Dan Multikulturalisme* 4, no. 1 (2022): 290, https://doi.org/10.37680/scaffolding.v4i1.1367.

[63] Amat Suroso et al., "Challenges and Opportunities Towards Islamic Cultured Generation: Socio-Cultural Analysis," *Linguistics and Culture Review* 5, no. 1 (2021): 190, https://doi.org/10.21744/lingcure.v5n1.1203.

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Maintaining public trust in the state's regulatory role requires transparency, consistency, and a clear commitment to upholding fundamental rights and freedoms.

CONCLUSION

Digital transformation in Egypt has shifted the pattern of religious authority from a hierarchical structure to a more fluid landscape, allowing the emergence of new authorities on social media that challenge the historical dominance of Al-Azhar and Dar al-Ifta al-Mishriyyah. Although both institutions have expanded their digital presence, they still face demands for methodological transparency, algorithmic competition, and increasingly critical public expectations. The findings of this study confirm that the sustainability of religious authority depends on their ability to develop more interactive digital communication, strengthen scholars' digital literacy, and explain the fatwa process openly to maintain legitimacy in the virtual space. Meanwhile, the state needs to ensure that digital regulations are proportional and accountable so that religious discourse can flourish without curtailing freedom of expression. Thus, the future of religious authority in Egypt depends on all actors' ability to adapt to digital dynamics, nurture public trust, and build an inclusive and credible religious ecosystem. Future research is encouraged to explore comparative perspectives by examining how other Muslim-majority countries negotiate religious authority in digital environments, particularly in relation to differing state–religion configurations. Further studies could also investigate audience reception and trust-building processes among digital religious followers, as well as the role of platform algorithms in shaping religious visibility and authority.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Muhammad Latif Fauzi conceptualized the research and developed a theoretical framework, focusing on the role of Al-Azhar and Darul Ifta as official state institutions with the authority to issue fatwas. He conducted an extensive literature review and designed the research methodology. Meanwhile, Imam Mustofa analyzed the efforts of authoritative institutions in adopting the fatwa issuance process in the digital era. Furthermore, Ibnu Akbar Maliki played a key role in drafting, revising, and refining the manuscript to ensure clarity, coherence, and academic rigor. All three played an active role in each other's data collection conducted in Egypt.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research. This research was conducted independently, without any financial, personal, or institutional influence that could affect the objectivity or integrity of the findings. All sources and references used in this research have been properly mentioned to ensure academic transparency and ethical integrity.

AI USAGE STATEMENT

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used exclusively for language editing, grammatical refinement, and formatting. The substantive content of the manuscript—including the formulation of ideas, analytical framework, data interpretation, and research conclusions—was developed independently by the authors. All AI-assisted outputs were carefully reviewed, verified, and revised by the authors to ensure accuracy, originality, and full compliance with standards of academic integrity, ethical research conduct, and scholarly accountability.

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