Digital Transformation of Fatwa Authorities: Comparative Analysis of MUI, Bahtsul Masail, and Muhammadiyah Tarjih

Nurbaeti[1*], Muammar Bakry[2], Abdul Syatar[3]

[1]Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, Indonesia. E-mail: 80100224011@uin-alauddin.ac.id
[2]Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, Indonesia. E-mail: muammar.bakry@uin-alauddin.ac.id
[3] Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, Indonesia. E-mail: abdul.syatar@uin-alauddin.ac.id

[*]Corresponding Author

Abstract: This study examines the transformation of the fatwa methodology of three major Islamic institutions in Indonesia, namely the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Bahtsul Masā'il Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and the Tarjih and Tajdid Council of Muhammadiyah in responding to digital transformation through the maqāṣid al-sharī'ah approach. This study uses a qualitative method based on a literature review of fatwas, institutional documents, and the latest academic literature on the epistemology of Islamic law in the digital era. The results of the analysis show that the three have different but complementary epistemological characteristics. The MUI presents an institutional maqāṣidī approach with a regulatory orientation, while NU maintains a model of ijtihād jamā'ī based on classical scientific traditions with a communitarian character. while Muhammadiyah develops an integrative rational framework through the bayānī, burhānī, 'irfānī model that is adaptive to developments in science and technology. In the context of digitalization, all three face the same challenge, namely maintaining scientific authority and the credibility of fatwas amid the proliferation of algorithms and religious content. However, this study emphasizes that the integration of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah values is key to balancing the authenticity of Islamic law and the demands of digital modernity. Therefore, the future direction of fatwa development should not only focus on the digitization of information systems, but also on the reconstruction of epistemological ijtihad towards a responsive digital maqāṣidī fiqh.

Introduction

The phenomenon of digitization in the religious context has changed the pattern of Islamic scientific authority, including in Indonesia. Whereas previously fatwas could only be accessed through official forums of scholars, fiqh books, or printed documents, now fatwas and religious opinions are easily disseminated through various digital platforms, ranging from the official websites of fatwa institutions to social media and smartphone-based applications. This change has serious implications. Fatwas that should be based on rigorous methodology are often overshadowed by instant fatwas that go viral in the digital public sphere, shifting

religious authority from a centralized model to one based on digital popularity (Randy and Herianti 2025). In Indonesia, three major religious authorities, namely the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Bahtsul Masail NU, and the Tarjih Council of Muhammadiyah, play a strategic role in determining Islamic law for the community. All three adhere to the classical methodology of uṣūl al-fiqh, collective deliberation, and the tradition of baḥth al-masā'il. However, the effectiveness of these methods is questionable because people now more often consume popular fatwas in cyberspace than official fatwas from religious institutions (Asmar, Kasman, and Muhammad 2023), indicating a shift from traditional authority based on methodology to digital authority based on popularity.

The issue of fatwas in the digital age has sparked diverse views among experts. Some scholars and academics believe that digitization opens up opportunities for the democratization of Islamic knowledge, accelerates public access to Islamic law, and expands the reach of da'wah. For example, according to Mohammad Hashim Kamali, digital fatwas can be an important instrument for presenting Islamic law that is responsive to the needs of the global community if they remain based on maqāṣid al-sharī'ah (Ardiyah and Nursobah 2025). However, on the other hand, a number of experts speculate that instant fatwas circulating on social media are prone to methodological reduction, thereby causing fragmentation of authority and confusion among the people (Arianto 2025). Ibrahim Hosen emphasizes that authoritative fatwas are only valid if they are born from the mechanism of istinbāṭ law, not merely popular opinions that have not gone through a rigorous verification process (Menchik 2022). In Indonesia, this pro-con debate is clearly visible, with some supporting the application of MUI fatwas and the NU fatwa portal as innovations (Halomoan and Syaf 2025), but others consider this to erode the depth of the baḥth al-masā' and manhaj tarjīḥ, which should be carried out with great care (Wirianisa and Zen 2023).

Many studies on fatwas in Indonesia have been conducted by researchers, although their focus remains diverse. Prasetio and Bakri's research highlights the authority of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in the public sphere as a social stabilizer in the context of Indonesia's diversity (Prasetio and Bakri 2022), while Daud and Hambali discuss the dynamics of baḥth al-masā'il NU as a collective forum in responding to contemporary legal issues (Daud and Hambali 2022). Shadiq's research conducts a systematic comparative study of the methodology of istinbath law and the fiqh style developed by the three main fatwa institutions in Indonesia (Shadiq et al. 2024). However, most of these studies emphasize the methodological differences between institutions in relation to the context of digitalization. Meanwhile, studies on digital fatwas are more often presented in the form of sociological-media analysis rather than fiqh methodology analysis (Supriatna 2024). Therefore, there is a significant research gap, namely the need for a more in-depth comparative study of how the fatwa methodologies of the three major Islamic institutions in Indonesia are adapting or facing challenges in the era of digitalization.

This study has both academic and practical significance. Academically, this study is expected to enrich the body of contemporary Fiqh by analyzing the dynamics of fatwa authority in the digital age. By conducting a comparative study of the methodologies of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Muhammadiyah, this study provides a clearer picture of the strengths, weaknesses, and relevance of each in the modern context. Practically, this research is very important because it can provide guidance for Indonesian Muslims in responding to fatwas in the digital space, so that they do not get caught up in popular fatwas that lack methodological basis.

This study is based on the framework of maqāṣid al-syarī'ah as formulated by al-Shāṭibī in al-Muwāfaqāt, emphasizing that the main objective of Islamic law is to protect human welfare (Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn Mūsā al-Shāṭibī 2000). In the contemporary context, this idea was further developed by Jasser Auda, who emphasized the importance of maqāṣid in facing modern challenges, including digitalization (Anam and Susantin 2025). Therefore, digital fatwas can only be considered authentic if they remain based on the principle of maqāṣid, rather than simply adapting to popular trends developing in the digital public sphere. Iskandar states that the authority of scholars is dynamic and always undergoes a process of negotiation in accordance with the surrounding social and cultural context (Iskandar, Arzam, and Ahmad 2021). This study hypothesizes that the fatwa methodologies developed by the MUI, Bahtsul Masail NU, and the Tarjih Council of Muhammadiyah face serious challenges in maintaining the authenticity of their authority in the digital era. However, if these methodologies are recontextualized through the maqāṣid al-sharī'ah approach, then these three institutions can remain relevant and function as official guarantors of valid Islamic law in Indonesia.

Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with descriptive-analytical characteristics (Pandiangan & Albina, 2025). The type of research is a literature study with an emphasis on comparative analysis of fatwas and the methodology for their determination at the MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah. Primary data were sourced from official MUI fatwa documents, NU Bahtsul Masā'il decisions, and Muhammadiyah Tarjih Council decisions, both in print and digital formats, which were selectively chosen based on their relevance to contemporary issues in the digital era, such as the sharia economy and finance, public health, and the dynamics of socio-religious practices in the digital space. Secondary data was obtained from classical academic literature, including fiqh, uṣūl al-fiqh, and maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, as well as contemporary studies in the form of scientific journals, books, and previous research results. Data collection techniques were carried out through documentation and text analysis, while data analysis used comparative methods to reveal the similarities, differences, and methodological patterns of the three fatwa institutions in responding to Islamic legal resistance in the digital context.

Result and Discussion

The Phenomenon of Fatwa Digitalization in Indonesia

Fatwa digitalization is one of the most significant phenomena in the development of Islamic law in the 21st century. The emergence of digital space means that religious authority is no longer confined to certain institutions or scholars, but is widely disseminated through social media, religious portals, and Islamic applications (Supriatna 2024). This phenomenon is not merely a transformation of media, but also a paradigm shift in re ligious authority from a hierarchical model to a more participatory and communicative model, where religious authority is now negotiated in the digital public sphere. Achmad Muhibin Zuhri, Moderate Islamic Theology in Contemporary Indonesia: The Contest Between Islamic Populism and Religious Authority on Social Media, Winarto Ek (Lamongan: Nawa Litera Publishing, 2022).

In Indonesia, the digitization of fatwas is developing through various official channels, such as Fatwa MUI Online, Bahtsul Masail Online Nahdlatul Ulama, and Digital Tarjih Muhammadiyah. However, this phenomenon raises serious issues regarding the authenticity and epistemological validity of fatwas. Fatwas, which previously underwent a lengthy istinbāṭ process, are now often consumed by the public in the form of summaries, video clips, or social media posts without any explanation of the legal context and underlying maqāṣid al-sharīʿah (Asmar et al. 2023).

Changes in fatwa consumption patterns have caused society to rely more on speed of access than depth of understanding. This condition poses the risk of fragmentation of religious authority, where individuals feel capable of producing and disseminating fatwas without having sufficient scientific competence. This phenomenon is consistent with the concept of "algorithmic authority" proposed by Gary Bunt, which is a new form of authority that is no longer determined by scientific sanad, but by digital media algorithms that regulate the visibility of religious content (Bunt 2018).

The digitization of fatwas not only represents technological innovation, but also shifts the epistemological structure and authority of Islamic law. The digital space has given rise to new competition between scientific authorities based on sanad and istinbāṭ methodology and authorities based on popularity driven by algorithms, creating a gap between the acceleration of information distribution and the depth of legal validity. The main challenge lies in the lack of epistemic transparency, as fatwas are often circulated without any explanation of the arguments and maqāṣid al-sharīʾah as their scientific basis, thereby potentially reducing ijtihad to nothing more than instant legal products that lose their educational function.

Methodological Analysis of Fatwas Issued by Three Islamic Institutions

    a. Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI)

Since its establishment in 1975, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) has been one of the most influential religious institutions in determining the direction of Islamic fatwas in Indonesia (Rosyid et al. 2021). Methodologically, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) has established four main principles in the fatwa determination process. First, the MUI carefully examines the opinions of the imams of the madhhabs and their arguments before issuing a fatwa, so that the resulting fatwa is consistent with classical scholarly tradition and demonstrates the MUI's position as the successor to the scholarly authority of previous scholars (Bahren & Mustofa, 2024). Second, for matters whose ruling is certain (al-aḥkām al-qaṭ'iyyah), the MUI determines the ruling based on naṣṣ qaṭ'ī with the support of the qawlī and manhājī approaches. Third, in matters of khilafiyah, the MUI seeks to harmonize between madhhabs through the al-jam' wa al-tawfīq method, and if this is not achieved, tarjīḥ is carried out through muqāranah al-maẓāhib with the rules of uṣūl al-fiqh. Fourth, in cases where there is no precedent in the madhhab, fatwas are determined through ijtihad jamā'ī using the bayānī, ta'līlī, istiṣlāḥī, and sad al-żarī'ah approaches (Jamaluddin & BN, 2024). This principle demonstrates the MUI's commitment to avoiding legal vacuums and responding to the needs of the people in a contextual manner.

In addition to these four principles, the MUI emphasizes that fatwa rulings must be oriented toward the public interest and be in harmony with maqāṣid al-syarī'ah as the main objective of sharia law. In line with the views of Ibn Rushd, when sharia texts are confronted with reason, rational interpretation is necessary in order to maintain the value of public interest. Methodologically, the MUI uses three main approaches: naṣṣ qaṭ'ī, which refers directly to the Qur'an and Hadith; qawlī, which relies on the opinions of scholars in kutub mu'tabarah; and manhājī, which utilizes the principles of uṣūl al-fiqh and ijtihad when classical opinions are no longer contextual. This combination demonstrates the methodological character of MUI fatwas, which are established in classical tradition while remaining adaptive to contemporary social dynamics (Pelu and Tarantang 2020).

One concrete example of the application of this methodology can be seen in MUI Fatwa No. 14 of 2021 concerning COVID-19 Vaccination. This fatwa marks an important shift in the MUI's thinking, from a textual approach that tends to be conservative to a more contextual paradigm of maslahat (Syatar et al., 2021) (Hakim & Bustomi, 2021). In this fatwa, the MUI permits the use of vaccines containing non-halal ingredients in emergency situations, based on the principle of ḥifẓ al-nafs as the main objective of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah (Dewi et al., 2025). This argument reflects the application of takhayyur and istiṣlāḥ as an effort to adapt the law to the reality of the pandemic, while revitalizing the principle of darʾ al-mafāsid muqaddam 'alā jalb al-maṣāliḥ, which places the prevention of harm above the pursuit of benefits (Wachyudi, n.d.). Methodologically, the maqāṣidī approach used by the MUI in this case represents ijtihād taṭbīqī, which is an effort to translate Sharia principles into a dynamic social context. This marks a shift from literal ijtihād bayānī towards the maqāṣid al-nuṣūṣ

paradigm, which understands religious texts through their moral, humanitarian, and social objectives (Rahmatullah, 2025).

In the field of economics, DSN-MUI fatwa No. 116/DSN-MUI/IX/2017 concerning electronic money (Fahriyadi et al., 2023) and fatwa No. 140/DSN-MUI/VIII/2021 on crypto assets (Masykur et al., 2025) are important milestones in demonstrating the MUI's response to the complexity of digital transformation in the modern era. The second fatwa shows the MUI's efforts to balance Islamic law principles with the dynamics of the digital economy. The DSN-MUI allows electronic money as long as it meets the clarity of the contract, such as bayʿ al-ṣarf and wakālah (Aulia, 2021), but rejects crypto assets as a medium of exchange because they are considered to contain elements of gharar and maisir (Abdillah, 2023). However, there are internal views that begin to see crypto as a commodity that can be justified as long as it meets the principles of transparency and transaction security (amān al-muʿāmalah) (Rehan, 2025), reflecting the MUI's adaptive stance towards financial innovation without abandoning basic sharia values.

Behind the high productivity of MUI fatwas, there are epistemological issues related to authenticity and digital transparency. The public generally only accesses the final results of fatwas without knowing the istinbāṭ al-ḥukm process that underlies them (Al Munawar, 2025), even though in Islamic epistemology, legal argumentation and reasoning are important elements of fatwa validity (Sulaiman, 2024). The absence of an online deliberative space, such as the publication of ijtihad treatises or argumentative documentation, has the potential to reduce fatwas to mere normative products, rather than the results of a reflective and dialogical scientific process. The digitization of MUI fatwas through official portals such as fatwa.mui.or.id is still informative in nature and does not yet provide adequate epistemic interactivity. This platform functions more as a public archive than a space for scientific dialogue, thus failing to reflect the spirit of ijtihād jamā'ī, which demands methodological transparency and collaboration. As a result, a fundamental question arises about digital authenticity: do fatwas accessed through social media still have the same epistemic authority as fatwas produced through traditional scientific forums (Fail, 2022) With the shift of authority from the council of scholars to the digital realm, the position of the MUI has become relatively ambivalent. On the one hand, the MUI continues to play a role as an official religious institution with state legitimacy, but at the same time it is challenged by the emergence of informal religious authorities on social media that are faster, more popular, and more accessible to the public (Asmar et al., 2023).

Overall, the MUI displays a progressive methodological tendency through the application of the maqāṣidī and ijtihād jamā'ī approaches in responding to various contemporary issues. However, amid the rapid flow and disruption of digital technology, the MUI still faces significant challenges in maintaining the authenticity of epistemic information and the legitimacy of its scholarship. Therefore, the revitalization of fatwa digitization needs

to be directed not only at the dissemination of legal products, but also at transparency that allows the public to understand the foundations of Islamic law openly, critically, and contextually.

b. Bahtsul Masail Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)

Bahtsul Masail Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is a forum of scholars that represents traditional Islamic legal epistemology based on turāth (classical heritage), using three main methods in its legal ijtihad process, namely qaulī, ilhaqī, and manhājī. The qaulī method is carried out by NU by referring to the opinions of scholars in the fiqh books of the four madhhabs; issues are studied and explanations are sought in the kutub al-fiqh al-mu'tabarah, and relevant opinions are used as the basis for law. This approach affirms NU's role as the guardian of madhhab tradition, reflected in explicit references to the imams of the madhhab in Bahtsul Masail decisions. If no suitable text is found, the ilḥāqī method is used by equating the new case (mulḥaq bih) with a case that already has a ruling (mulḥaq 'alaih) based on similarities (wajh al-ilḥāq) (Mahfudin, 2021).

When the qaulī and ilḥāqī methods are insufficient, NU applies the manhājī approach, which is to determine the law based on the istinbāṭ rules of the imams of the madhhab. This method is an innovation in Bahtsul Masail because it allows for the contextual application of classical fiqh, without conducting absolute ijtihad directly from the Qur'an and hadith, but rather through a dynamic reading of the texts of the fuqaha in accordance with the context of the issues at hand (al af Ghoni & Yusuf, 2025). KH. Sahal Mahfudz explains that absolute ijtihad is difficult to carry out because it requires a very high level of knowledge, while ijtihad within the scope of a school of thought is still possible for scholars who have a good understanding of fiqh methodology (Prasetia et al., 2023). This manhājī method also reinforces the moderate, balanced, tolerant, and socially oriented epistemic character of NU.

In the last two decades, NU has begun to utilize digital platforms such as NU Online and Bahtsul Masail Online to document religious decisions. This step marks the initial modernization of fatwa documentation, although digitization is still informative in nature and has not yet reached a participatory and interactive epistemic form (Hidayat, 2024). The Bahtsul Masail forum still relies on physical deliberations such as halaqah and muktamar and has not been fully integrated into the digital deliberation ecosystem, so that scientific interaction and public access to fiqh arguments (istidlāl fiqhī) are still limited (KH Zulfa Mustofa, 2024), and the general public only accepts the final results without understanding the basis of the reasoning (M. Adib, 2022).

The strength of NU's Bahtsul Masail lies in its community-based turāthī epistemology, which combines scientific (ʿilmī) and social (ijtimaʿī) dimensions, ensuring that Islamic law remains sensitive to the context of Indonesian society (KH Zulfa Mustofa, 2024). NU epistemology is interconnective between text, context, and community, with maṣlaḥah understood as social rationality, not merely abstract norms (M. A. Adib, 2022). The maqāṣidī

approach is growing stronger, as seen in the Family Planning fatwa, which emphasizes ḥifẓ al-nasl and ḥifẓ al-ʿaql as the basis for the permissibility of birth control programs (Supardiyono et al., 2025). This marks a shift from the qawliyah approach to a more contextual maqāṣidiyyah approach, without severing NU's connection to turāth, sanad authority, and scientific legitimacy. This process, as Abdurrahman Wahid called it, is a "living tradition," namely a reinterpretation of classical knowledge so that it remains relevant to modern social demands (Supardiyono et al., 2025).

NU's adaptation to digital issues, such as the phenomenon of cryptocurrency, still shows a strong attitude of iḥtiyāṭ (caution). In the 2025 Bahtsul Masail fatwa, NU rejects the use of crypto assets as a legal medium of exchange because they are considered to contain elements of gharar (uncertainty) and have a high level of volatility, which has the potential to cause instability in value. This approach reflects the principle of sadd al-dharāʾiʿ (closing loopholes) which aims to prevent potential economic losses and protect the public from speculative practices. This stance demonstrates NU's epistemic caution in responding to developments in the digital economy, while continuing to prioritize the protection of public welfare (ḥifẓ al-māl) within the framework of maqāṣid al-sharīʿah.

In the digital age, NU's main challenge is not in the substance of its legal methodology, but in transforming the traditional turāthī deliberation into a digital deliberation system that remains authentic. The structure of Islamic boarding schools and the NU network of scholars are considered to have great potential to be developed into a community-based digital epistemology through interactive platforms that enable Bahtsul Masail to function as digital communal ijtihad, not only disseminating fatwa results but also opening up the legal argumentation process to the public (KH Zulfa Mustofa, 2024). To support this, the epistemic modernization of NU requires institutional policies that encourage a transparency-based digital fatwa system. Azhari emphasizes the importance of digital documentation of fatwas accompanied by the publication of ijtihad treatises, qiyās and istislāḥ arguments, as well as the scientific track records of the participants in the deliberations, so that the public can assess the methodological validity of legal decisions (Rahmawati, 2022). This step not only strengthens the authenticity of digital fatwas, but also affirms NU's position as an adaptive, credible, and relevant scientific authority amid the flow of modern information.

Thus, NU's Bahtsul Masail represents a model of Islamic legal epistemology that is unique to Indonesia, combining the continuity of turāth tradition with the dynamics of digital modernity. Although the digital adaptation is still limited to the documentation of fatwas, NU has great potential to develop a digital deliberative system based on collective values and the spirit of maqāṣidī.

c. Muhammadiyah Tarjih Council

Muhammadiyah is one of the largest Islamic social organizations in Indonesia that has played an important role in the Islamic reform movement since the early 20th century.

Founded by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan on November 18, 1912 (8 Dhu al-Hijjah 1330 AH) in Yogyakarta, this organization was born with the spirit of reforming the understanding and religious practices of Muslims to be more rational, pure, and in accordance with the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah (Telaumbanua et al., 2025).

The Muhammadiyah Tarjih Council bases its ijtihad on three epistemological approaches, namely bayānī, burhānī, and 'irfānī, which were developed by Amin Abdullah (a Muslim scholar and Chairman of the Tarjih Council) as an integrative scientific framework. The bayānī approach relies on the texts of the Qur'an and Sunnah using the tafsīr bi al-ma'tsūr method, especially in matters of ibadah mahdhah, and affirms the principle of al-rujūʿ ilā al-Qurʾān wa al-Sunnah al-maqbūlah as the basis for the legitimacy of Muhammadiyah's ijtihad (Fikri et al., 2022). The burhānī approach emphasizes rationality through logical reasoning and tracing the ʿillah of the law so that the text is understood contextually and historically. Meanwhile, the 'irfani approach relies on spiritual experience and inner intuition through tazkiyyah al-nafs and spiritual discipline. Although subjective and controversial, the 'irfani approach complements the Muhammadiyah ijtihad framework by presenting a spiritual dimension in the search for the whole truth of Islam (Kholidah et al., 2021).

The integrative ijtihad paradigm developed by Muhammadiyah through the bayānī, burhānī, and ʿirfānī approaches is clearly evident in various fatwas issued by the Tarjih Council in recent years, particularly those related to sharia fintech, artificial intelligence (AI) in Islamic education, and digital ethics in social media. These fatwas use a pattern of istinbāṭ law based on maqāṣid al-sharīʿah, with a focus on the principles of ḥifẓ al-dīn, ḥifẓ al-ʿaql, and ḥifẓ al-māl that are relevant to digital life. In the issue of sharia fintech, for example, the Tarjih Council emphasized that digital economic innovation is acceptable if it complies with the principles of justice and transparency and is free from elements of gharar and riba (Subkhan 2023). This approach reflects the adaptive nature of Islamic law towards modern economic changes without losing sight of Islamic ethics and normative values.

Muhammadiyah's epistemological strength is also evident in its ability to transform the way legal knowledge is produced through a more open digital system. Through platforms such as Tarjih.or.id, the Tarjih Digital Library, and the Tanya Tarjih App, Muhammadiyah implements the digitization of fatwas that emphasize transparency, accountability, and public accessibility. The processes of ijtihad and legal deliberation are no longer closed, but can be tracked by the public, including the sources of arguments, the methodology of istinbāṭ, and the arguments of the scholars involved. This transformation marks a shift from a model of fatwa authority based on closed deliberation to open-source epistemology, which bridges traditional authority and the demands of the digital society (Sholihul Huda & Fil, 2022).

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Although relatively progressive, Muhammadiyah still faces challenges in the form of an epistemic gap between tarjih academics and the digital community. The deep conceptual language of fatwas is often difficult for the public to understand, so that people are more interested in simple but not necessarily authoritative popular religious content (Fahrudin et al., 2025). In response to this, Muhammadiyah encourages digital epistemic reform through transparency in istinbāṭ methodology, openness in tarjih treatises, and cross-disciplinary collaboration, in order to reaffirm ijtihad as a reflective scientific process oriented towards the benefit of the ummah (Muhammadiyah, 2025). Thus, the Tarjih and Tajdid Council of Muhammadiyah presents a new face of Islamic law that is able to adapt to technological disruption without losing its scientific integrity and spirituality.

1. **Comparative Analysis and Synthesis**

   a. The Position of Each Institution

   Institutionally, MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah occupy different positions in Indonesia's social and legal structure, so the fatwas they issue have different implications. The MUI occupies a semi-official position as a strategic partner of the state, although it does not have constitutional status. In practice, MUI fatwas are often used as references in the formulation of public policy, particularly in the fields of health, sharia economics, and religious life. This can be seen in the fatwa on the COVID-19 vaccine and the fatwa on the digital economy, which serve as normative legitimacy and an ethical basis for state administrative policies. Therefore, MUI fatwas have quasi-legal authority, namely influencing regulations, public policy, and positive legal practice (Ansori & Ulumuddin, 2020).

   In contrast, NU and Muhammadiyah act as Islamic mass organization fatwa authorities that are independent from state structures but have strong social legitimacy among the people. NU's Bahtsul Masā'il fatwas and Muhammadiyah's Tarjih Council decisions are not legally binding, but serve as normative-communal guidelines that shape the religious attitudes, social ethics, and worship practices of the community. The social impact of the fatwas of these two organizations tends to be more profound and long-term because they work through the internalization of values, religious education, and civil society networks, rather than through coercive state mechanisms (Sofiana, 2022). This difference in institutional position shows that fatwas in Indonesia operate within a range of layered religious authorities, from regulatory authorities that intersect with the state, such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), to moral-social authorities exercised by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and

Muhammadiyah. In the digital era, this spectrum of authority has become increasingly complex because fatwas not only influence public policy and religious practices offline, but also shape public discourse, religious opinion, and scientific legitimacy in the digital space.

Fatwas not only serve as the result of religious ijtihad, but also act as normative references and instruments for guiding social behavior. Fatwas do not have formal binding legal force, but they function as persuasive norms that bridge positive law with the religious values that exist in society. The legal implications are apparent when fatwas, particularly those issued by the DSN-MUI, are explicitly adopted in sharia financial sector regulations by the OJK and Bank Indonesia, thereby acquiring semi-legal normative status. Socially, the fatwas of NU and Muhammadiyah strengthen public acceptance of state policies through moral authority and extensive community networks.

b. Comparative and Synthesis

Three major religious institutions in Indonesia, namely MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah, demonstrate different yet complementary epistemological configurations of Islamic law in responding to the challenges of digitalization. MUI represents a maqāṣidī–regulatory approach, which is a legal approach oriented towards the objectives of sharia (maqāṣid al-sharī'ah) with an emphasis on regulatory and authoritative functions in maintaining the welfare of society. NU displays a turāthī–communal character, which is based on classical scientific heritage (turāth) through collective forums such as Bahtsul Masā'il, which emphasizes deliberation and participation of the pesantren community in formulating fatwas. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah carries a burhānī–innovative approach, which is a rational and integrative model of thinking that combines text, context, and modern science to answer religious issues in the digital age. Although they originate from different epistemic traditions, all three have the same orientation within the framework of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, namely to maintain the welfare of society and the authenticity of Islamic law amid the tide of digital transformation.

The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) prioritizes the ijtihād jamā'ī method, which balances textual authority and public interest through the bayānī, ta'līlī, and istiṣlāḥī approaches. In practical terms, the regulatory role of MUI fatwas is clearly evident in MUI Fatwa No. 14 of 2021 concerning the use of COVID-19 vaccines (Syatar et al., 2021). This fatwa not only serves as a religious guideline, but also as the basis for the legitimacy of public health policies used by the state to support the national vaccination program. Through the bayānī, ta'līlī, and istiṣlāḥī approaches, the MUI places the principle of ḥifẓ al-nafs as the basis for permitting the use of vaccines containing non-halal elements in emergency conditions. A similar role is also evident in the DSN-MUI fatwa regarding electronic money and crypto assets, where the MUI functions as a normative authority that influences the governance of the sharia digital economy, both at the industry and public policy levels. The main strength of the MUI lies in its institutional legitimacy and regulatory capacity in issuing fatwas. However,

despite its strong social regulatory power, the digitization of MUI fatwas is still limited to documentation functions and has not opened up a participatory epistemic space. This raises issues related to methodological transparency and digital authenticity in the law enforcement process.

Unlike the MUI, NU's Bahtsul Masā'il positions fatwas primarily as a means of maintaining the continuity of scientific tradition and socio-religious stability. This stance is evident in NU's response to issues of family planning and crypto assets, which are examined through qaulī, ilḥāqī, and manhājī approaches with careful consideration of the public interest. In its decision regarding cryptocurrency, NU considers the high element of gharar and the absence of underlying assets as the main reasons for caution, not merely technical economic issues, but rather an effort to maintain order in muʿāmalah and protect reason (ḥifẓ al-ʿaql). Therefore, NU fatwas are not intended as instruments of state policy, but rather as moral-communal guidelines for the Nahdlatul Ulama community. Digitalization through Bahtsul Masā'il Online has indeed expanded access to fatwa archives, but it has not fully transformed the tradition of collective deliberation into a participatory digital space. Thus, NU's main challenge lies in methodological transformation, not in the legitimacy of the substance of its fatwas.

On the contrary, Bahtsul Masā'il Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) continues to use the turāth mazhabi approach, which is a method of determining law based on the classical scholarly heritage of the mazhab scholars. Through the qaulī, ilḥāqī, and manhājī approaches, NU strives to maintain the continuity of scientific sanad while opening up space for maqāṣidī interpretation of various contemporary issues, such as family planning programs, digital asset management, and other contemporary issues. Digitalization efforts have indeed been carried out through the Bahtsul Masail Online platform, but these innovations are still documentary in nature and have not yet fully provided an interactive digital forum for deliberation. NU's main strength lies in its solid social base and the collective authority of pesantren scholars, which makes it more resilient in maintaining the stability and credibility of religious authority amid the challenges of the digital era.

Meanwhile, the Tarjih and Tajdid Council of Muhammadiyah presents the most progressive approach in positioning fatwas as a means of social ethics and Islamic legal reform in the digital age. Through an integrative epistemology of bayānī, burhānī, and ʿirfānī, Muhammadiyah responds to contemporary issues such as sharia fintech, artificial intelligence (AI), and digital ethics with rational and open maqāṣidī ijtihad. The tarjih decisions presented through Tarjih.or.id and the Tanya Tarjih application not only contain legal conclusions but also transparent explanations of arguments, reasoning, and ethical considerations, thereby serving an educational and normative function for the community. Although there is still a gap between the academic language of tarjih and the understanding of the general public, as well as the more practical needs of the digital public, Muhammadiyah has been relatively

successful in building a model of digital ijtihad that is adaptive, collaborative, and relevant to the times.

Comparatively, these three fatwa institutions reflect the development of Islamic legal epistemology in Indonesia, which has moved from a textual approach to a more contextual, rational, and digitally transparent framework. From the perspective of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, each has a different emphasis but complements the others: MUI focuses on the protection of life and property (ḥifẓ al-nafs and ḥifẓ al-māl) through the regulatory role of fatwas; NU emphasizes the maintenance of social, moral, and intellectual stability through ḥifẓ al-nasl and ḥifẓ al-'aql; while Muhammadiyah strengthens the dimensions of religion and science (ḥifẓ al-dīn and ḥifẓ al-'ilm) through rationality and digital openness. The synergy of the three can be synthesized in the framework of digital ijtihād maqāṣidī, namely a fatwa system that emphasizes transparency, collaboration, and public interest by connecting religious authority and digital community participation. Thus, the direction of new fatwa authority in the digital era does not only focus on the rapid reproduction of Islamic law, but also on the reconstruction of the epistemology of Islamic law that is able to balance tradition, rationality, and technology within the framework of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah.

Several studies have been conducted previously, for example, Shadiq mapped the methodological characteristics of fatwa institutions in Indonesia and showed that the MUI tends to use the naṣṣ qaṭ'ī, qawlī, and manhājī approaches; NU relies on the qaulī, ilḥāqī, and manhājī methods based on turāth mazhabī; while Muhammadiyah prioritizes bayānī, qiyāsī, and istislāḥī in istinbāṭ law (Shadiq et al., 2024). Despite emphasizing epistemological continuity with classical traditions and adaptation to the modern context, this study has not highlighted the shift in religious authority due to digitalization. In line with this, Wahyuningrum also compares the ijtihad model of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), the fiqh of NU Islamic boarding schools, and the rationality of Muhammadiyah tarjih as three complementary legal styles in dealing with contemporary issues. but her study is still normative and does not discuss the digital transformation that is now influencing epistemic legitimacy, the position of scholars, and the pattern of fatwa dissemination in the digital space (Wahyuningrum, 2024). Thus, the second study focuses more on the methodological aspects of law, while the digital space as a new arena for religious authority has not been explored.

Unlike the two previous studies, this research offers a more comprehensive approach by examining the transformation of fatwa authority in the digital age through the framework of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah and contemporary Islamic legal epistemology. The focus of this study is not only to compare istinbāṭ methodologies, but also to explain how three institutions, namely MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah, respond to digital changes in maintaining their authenticity, credibility, and scientific legitimacy. From this study, the concept of maqāṣidī digital fiqh emerged, which is the integration of classical methodology and digital governance based on maqāṣid values such as ḥifẓ al-dīn, ḥifẓ al-'aql, ḥifẓ al-māl, and ḥifẓ al-nafs. This

concept makes a significant scientific contribution by emphasizing the need to reconstruct the epistemology of fatwa from a hierarchical model to a collaborative, transparent, and participatory ijtihad network. Through this approach, the study is expected to broaden the scope of contemporary fiqh in Indonesia towards the formation of a digital collective ijtihad that is relevant to the needs of the people and the challenges of technological globalization.

Conclusion

The digitization of fatwas has shifted the pattern of Islamic legal authority from a traditional model based on scholarly sanad to a new form of authority influenced by algorithms, access range, and popularity in the digital space. On the one hand, this development expands opportunities for the public to obtain religious knowledge in a more inclusive manner; however, on the other hand, fatwas are often shared without adequate methodological explanations. This situation has the potential to reduce the educational function of fatwas and cause fragmentation of religious authority within society.

The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Muhammadiyah have different approaches to contemporary issues, but all three remain committed to maqāṣid al-sharī'ah as a basis for safeguarding the interests of the people in the digital age. MUI asserts itself as a religious authority connected to state policy through ijtihad jamā'ī, which is increasingly oriented towards maqāṣidī; NU maintains its authority of turāth and scientific sanad with adjustments to the social context facing its congregation; while Muhammadiyah moves progressively with a bayānī–burhānī–'irfānī epistemology that is more open to digital technology. However, all three still face challenges in maintaining the epistemic power of fatwas, because the digital community often finds it easier to accept instant information than in-depth scientific arguments.

The three fatwa institutions demonstrate complementary developments in Islamic legal epistemology in response to digital disruption. MUI has strength in regulatory legitimacy, NU in communal authority based on turāth, and Muhammadiyah in integrative and innovative rationality. When placed within the framework of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, their collaboration has the potential to give rise to a collaborative digital ijtihād model that not only quickly reaches the public but also maintains the validity and transparency of legal methodology. Thus, the future of fatwa authority in Indonesia is largely determined by the ability of these three organizations to combine Islamic scholarly traditions with credible, inclusive, and public-interest oriented digital governance.

This article makes an important contribution to strengthening contemporary fatwa studies by positioning fatwas as social legal instruments that actively function in the digital space and within the framework of the national legal system. Through a comparative analysis of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Muhammadiyah, this article reconstructs the authority of fatwas in the digital era by emphasizing the role of formal

fatwa institutions in maintaining the continuity of scientific traditions, actualizing maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, and responding to modern regulatory demands. This study also develops an institutional-based maqāṣidī fiqh approach by showing that maqāṣid not only functions as a normative foundation, but also as operational rationality in the formation of social legitimacy and the formulation of public policy. With this framework, this article is in line with Parewa Saraq's mission to understand Islamic law as a living, dynamic, and contextual social legal practice in Indonesian Muslim society.

As a follow-up, this study recommends an empirical study that directly examines the dynamics of fatwa digitization in three major Islamic institutions in Indonesia, namely the Indonesian Ulema Council through fatwa.mui.or.id, Bahtsul Masail Nahdlatul Ulama through nu.or.id and bahtsulmasail.nu.or.id, and the Tarjih Council of Muhammadiyah through tarjih.or.id. This study is important not only to assess the methodology of fatwas, but also to observe the writing style, argumentation patterns, current themes, and the level of openness of each institution. Analysis of digital public responses, such as comments, interactions, and the dissemination of fatwas on social media, is also necessary to understand how religious authority is recognized, negotiated, or debated in the digital space. This empirical approach incorporates the study of Islamic law with a communicative dimension, emphasizing that fatwas are now part of a vibrant and dynamic religious discourse ecosystem in the digital age.

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