

From Ethical Outrage to Digital Resistance: Socio-Legal Ethnography of the #BoikotTrans7 Controversy and the Reconfiguration of Islamic Authority in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: The rapid digitalization of religious discourse in Indonesia has fundamentally transformed the ways in which Islamic authority, ethics, and law are expressed and contested in the public sphere. The #BoikotTrans7 controversy—triggered by public perceptions that a television program demeaned pesantren traditions—emerged as a catalyst for widespread moral indignation and collective ethical reflection among Indonesia’s Muslim digital communities. This study examines how digital resistance and affective participation have reshaped the dynamics of fiqh-based authority and notions of justice in the country’s evolving online religious landscape. Employing an interdisciplinary socio-legal digital ethnography, the research analyzes approximately 1,078 online comments and discussions collected from various YouTube platforms, guided by Creswell’s qualitative methodology. The findings show that digital outrage gradually developed into a participatory reconstruction of moral order, as lay Muslims engaged in articulating and negotiating the values of justice (‘adl), humility (tawāḍu’), and forgiveness (maghfirah). This shift reflects the emergence of a distributed moral authority, co-created through affective and ethical interactions rather than institutional hierarchy. The study argues that Indonesia’s digital publics now operate as a new majlis al-fiqh—a participatory arena where Islamic law is interpreted through collective emotion and ethical reasoning. Ultimately, the research contributes to socio-legal scholarship by demonstrating that digital media do not diminish Islamic authority but rather transform it into a dialogical, participatory, and affectively grounded moral system suited to the digital age.

KEYWORDS: Digital Fiqh, Islamic Authority, Ethical Outrage, Socio-Legal Ethnography, #BoikotTrans7 Controversy

I. INTRODUCTION

In present-day Indonesia, the convergence of religion, media, and digital communication has become a central axis of public discourse and identity formation (Aini, 2022). The rapid expansion of social media platforms has fundamentally altered how Muslims articulate, contest, and safeguard their ethical and religious values (Zucca, 2020). Practices and conversations that were once confined to the pesantren—the traditional Islamic boarding school long associated with hierarchical authority, moral discipline, and reverence for the kyai (religious teacher)—have now migrated into the open, participatory sphere of digital publics (Kornbluh & Goodman, 2020). The #BoikotTrans7 controversy of 2025 captures this transformation with striking clarity (Ronaldi et al., 2023). Sparked by a television broadcast widely perceived as ridiculing the humility and deference (ta’dzim) of santri toward their teachers, the incident catalyzed nationwide debates on Islamic ethics, religious representation, and the moral boundaries of critique (Eke et al., 2022). What began as outrage over a media portrayal quickly evolved into a broader cultural reckoning—one that exposed tensions between traditional institutions and modern communicative forms while simultaneously signaling a deeper reconfiguration of moral authority in Indonesia’s increasingly digitalized Islamic landscape (Spierenburg et al., 2025).

Existing scholarship on Islamic authority and law provides critical insight into this transformation. Earlier sociological frameworks, such as Max Weber’s theory of charismatic and traditional authority, and later anthropological interventions by Talal Asad, reconceptualized Islam as a “discursive tradition” in which moral reasoning is historically embedded and continuously negotiated. Subsequent studies, particularly those of Ronaldi et al. (Ronaldi et al., 2023), extended this understanding to digital contexts, showing how online environments decentralize authority and create what Marler calls “support network” (Marler et al., 2024). Yet, much of this literature emphasizes fragmentation—how digital religion disrupts hierarchy and fosters pluralism (Mulyani et al., 2024). What remains underexplored is how these same digital spaces also generate new forms of moral coherence and collective reasoning, especially in socio-legal contexts where fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) functions as a living ethical system

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rather than a static doctrine (Vltchek, 2009). The #BoikotTrans7 controversy thus offers an opportunity to examine how digital publics in Indonesia reassert the moral integrity of fiqh through emotional, participatory engagement (Aini, 2022).

This study aims to investigate how ethical outrage and digital resistance during the #BoikotTrans7 controversy reconfigured the contours of Islamic legal authority in Indonesia. It specifically explores two central questions: first, how expressions of moral anger and ethical reasoning illuminate the shifting boundaries between critique, respect, and authority in the digital interpretation of fiqh (Weeghel et al., 2011); and second, how the digital mediation of pesantren culture transforms traditional models of religious legitimacy into participatory, networked forms of moral reasoning (Katiyu et al., 2025). The study contributes to ongoing debates in digital religion and the sociology of Islamic law by situating fiqh not merely as a textual or institutional domain but as an interactive moral discourse shaped by the affective energies of digital publics. By focusing on Indonesia—the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy with a dynamic media ecosystem—this research highlights how digital spaces function as new majlis al-fiqh, where moral deliberation and ethical negotiation are publicly enacted.

Methodologically, this research employs a digital ethnography of Islamic law (Katiyu et al., 2025), integrating empirical legal studies with the sociology of religion and digital anthropology (Weeghel et al., 2011). The study draws on a corpus of approximately 1.078 comments and online discussions from YouTube channels such as TVNU Televisi Nahdlatul Ulama (Nahdlatul Ulama, 2025), Liputan Jatim (Liputan Jatim, 2025), Al-Bahjah TV (Al-Bahjah TV, 2025), and Laskar Dadas (Laskardadas, 2025), alongside official statements from Trans7 and Pondok Pesantren Lirboyo. Data were collected over a three-month period through systematic digital observation, coding, and thematic analysis (Eke et al., 2022), guided by Creswell's qualitative model (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). This approach allows the researcher to examine not only the content of online discourse but also its affective and normative dimensions—the ways in which digital participants collectively articulate moral judgment, invoke fiqh-based reasoning, and perform acts of ethical restoration. By treating the digital sphere as both a communicative and socio-legal field, the study illuminates how Islamic ethics and authority are produced, contested, and reimagined in networked spaces.

This article argues that the #BoikotTrans7 controversy represents more than a media backlash; it embodies a reconfiguration of Islamic moral authority through digital participation (Eke et al., 2022). The digital outrage that initially emerged as a defense of pesantren ethics evolved into a collective act of moral reasoning—what may be described as digital fiqh (Levi et al., 2025), a participatory jurisprudence grounded in emotion, sincerity, and communal accountability (Aini, 2022). In this process, Islamic authority was neither dismantled nor secularized; it was redistributed across a network of believers who co-produced legitimacy through discourse, affect, and ethical performance. This reconfiguration reflects broader socio-legal transformations in Muslim digital modernity, where fiqh becomes both a spiritual compass and a democratic mode of ethical deliberation (Vltchek, 2009). The study concludes that Indonesia's digital Muslim publics are not passive recipients of religious discourse but active participants in shaping the moral grammar of Islamic law in the 21st century.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Early Studies: Classical Authority and the Sociology of Islamic Law (1970s-1990s)

The initial phase of scholarship on Islamic authority and law was primarily characterized by textualist, institutional, and theological orientations. Foundational theorists such as Roth & Weber (1976), through his seminal work *Economy and Society*, introduced a sociological framework for interpreting forms of authority—charismatic, traditional, and legal-rational—that later informed analyses of Muslim scholars (ulama and kyai) as embodiments of charismatic legitimacy within pesantren networks (Aini, 2022).

During this period, Islamic jurisprudence was largely explored through its doctrinal and institutional structures, with emphasis on classical legal schools (madhāhib), uṣūl al-fiqh (principles of jurisprudence), and formal judicial mechanisms. These early studies tended to portray Islamic law as a fixed textual system, paying limited attention to how legal norms were interpreted and enacted in daily social life (Ahmed, 2025).

A significant paradigmatic transformation took shape with the works of Talal Asad (2009), who reframed Islam as a discursive tradition—a dynamic and morally grounded practice situated within broader social and historical relations. Asad's anthropological critique redirected the study of Islam away from purely doctrinal analysis toward an engagement with power, ethics, and historical formation. Similarly, Messick's *The Calligraphic State* advanced the idea that law operates not merely as a codified system but as a "textualized practice", a foundational concept for subsequent socio-legal interpretations of Islamic law.

This intellectual shift laid the groundwork for what would later be known as the sociological approach to Islamic law—an understanding of fiqh as a form of lived jurisprudence (Dupret, 2006; Mir-Hosseini, 2021). Within this view, fiqh emerges as a negotiated moral discourse shaped by communal reasoning rather than a monopoly of juristic authority. These contributions forged a critical bridge connecting religious authority, moral subjectivity, and social practice, forming the conceptual basis through which contemporary scholars now engage with Islamic law in its digital and networked manifestations.

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B. Digital Fiqh and the Mediatization of Islamic Authority (2000s-2010s)

The early twenty-first century (2000–2015) marked what scholars have described as the “digital turn” in the study of Islam. The rapid expansion of the internet, social media, and various digital platforms fundamentally reshaped how Muslims access, transmit, and interpret religious knowledge (Kornbluh & Goodman, 2020). What had long been mediated through institutional, textual, and face-to-face pedagogies increasingly migrated into networked environments, enabling new forms of religious engagement and contestation (Eke et al., 2022).

Among the earliest and most influential scholars to examine this transformation was Gary R. Bunt (2009), whose trilogy — *Islam in the Digital Age* (2003), *iMuslims* (2009), and *Hashtag Islam* (2018) — systematically mapped the rise of what he termed “cyber-Islamic environments.” These online spaces, as Bunt demonstrated, function as dynamic arenas where Islamic discourse circulates and authority is negotiated. His concepts of “online ulama” and “distributed authority” revealed how digital networks decentralize the interpretive power once concentrated within traditional religious hierarchies, thereby giving rise to new epistemic and moral formations.

Recent developments in international digital governance further demonstrate that authority and norm production are no longer limited to the state or religious institutions but are distributed through layered regulatory architectures (Mulyani et al., 2024). As Burri, (2025) notes, digital trade agreements such as the CPTPP and DEPA have established hybrid governance models that combine legal, economic, and ethical controls over data circulation, illustrating how digital rulemaking itself becomes a site of moral and political negotiation.

Comparable developments were observed in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, where scholars such as Ronaldi et al., (2023) explored how ulama, preachers, and Islamic activists employ digital media to construct moral publics and articulate new religious subjectivities. Hasan introduced the notion of “piety pop culture,” highlighting the fusion of religious devotion and popular aesthetics that transforms dakwah into a participatory, media-driven enterprise. His findings underscored that social media technologies democratize religious communication, empowering emerging actors — from television preachers to YouTube-based ustadz — to contest established authority and reshape the moral landscape of Indonesian Islam (Mulyani et al., 2024). Beside Marler et al., (2024) demonstrate that digital communication can serve as a compensatory space where marginalized youth cultivate emotional and aspirational forms of support. Similarly, digital Islamic public often provide believers with affective belonging and moral reassurance, functioning as alternative networks of care beyond institutional authority.

During this period, mediatization theory gained significant traction in understanding these transformations. Scholars such as Stig Hjarvard (2013) argued that religion becomes “mediatized” when its symbols, practices, and narratives are reframed within the communicative logic of media itself. Rather than merely transmitting religious meaning, media imposes its own grammar of visibility, immediacy, and emotional appeal. Within Islamic contexts, this implied that key moral and legal categories — including fiqh, adab, and religious authority — increasingly operated within affective economies structured by likes, shares, and viral circulation (Vltchek, 2009).

This shift in Islamic authority online also reflects a deeper transformation in the relationship between users and digital artefacts. As Colombo et al., (2022) argue, digital artefacts possess “nested affordances” that mediate user perception, emotion, and action through layered digital architectures. In the context of Islamic online communities, these affordances shape how moral agency and legal reasoning are enacted through digital interfaces.

Together, these developments crystallized a distinct and interdisciplinary field often referred to as Digital Islam Studies. This scholarship collectively established that religious authority in the digital age is not eroded but reconfigured, becoming pluralized, performative, and networked (Weeghel et al., 2011). Yet, despite these valuable insights, much of this literature has remained preoccupied with questions of representation, identity, and mediation, rather than exploring the socio-legal ramifications of digital religiosity (Marler et al., 2024). It is precisely this analytical gap that the present study seeks to address — by connecting the dynamics of digital ethical outrage to the evolving contours of fiqh-based legal consciousness and the rearticulation of Islamic authority in Indonesia’s digital public sphere

C. Moral Emotions, Outrage, and the Affective Turn in Digital Religion (2010s-Present)

In the 2010s, scholarly inquiry within sociology and media studies underwent what has come to be known as the “affective turn.” This intellectual shift redirected attention from structures and institutions toward the emotional and moral dimensions of collective life, particularly the ways in which feelings such as anger, empathy, and moral indignation animate and sustain online publics. Rather than viewing digital spaces merely as platforms for communication or information exchange, researchers began to conceptualize them as emotional infrastructures that organize social meaning and political action.

Within this framework, Zhurzhenko (2021) in post-Maidan Ukraine, where cultural production became a weaponised arena of moral struggle, the digital Islamic sphere in Indonesia can also be seen as a site of affective contestation. Here, religious symbols and ethical outrage function as instruments of cultural sovereignty and resistance within a hybrid digital order. Likewise, Zeynep

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Tufekci (2017) expanded this argument by theorizing “networked resistance,” demonstrating how digital outrage can crystallize into forms of collective moral mobilization, transforming emotional expression into political and ethical agency.

In Islamic contexts, scholars have adapted these insights to examine how religious affect operates in digital environments. Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska (2019) and Ahmad Suaedy (2000), for instance, have shown that online expressions of moral anger — often articulated through the concept of *ghayrah* (zealous defense of faith) — function as a contemporary mode of *hisbah*, or moral regulation. Their findings suggest that affective piety, when performed publicly, serves not only to reaffirm communal belonging but also to redefine the moral boundaries of authority in the digital age. Through such acts, emotional devotion becomes a form of performative ethics, translating personal conviction into a visible, participatory defense of religious values (Spierenburg et al., 2025).

Despite these important contributions, relatively few studies have approached this phenomenon from a socio-legal perspective — one that interrogates how moral emotions are transformed into normative claims about right, wrong, and justice within Islamic legal discourse (Katiyu et al., 2025). The present study addresses this gap by theorizing digital outrage as a form of digital *hisbah*: a participatory enactment of Islamic ethical law within the networked public sphere (Vltchek, 2009). In this sense, online moral protest is not merely expressive but juridical, signaling an emergent mode of legal consciousness in which Muslim digital publics assert their authority to interpret, defend, and enact *fiqh*-based ethics through the idioms and affective logics of digital culture (Levi et al., 2025).

D. Contemporary Debates: Democratization, Authority, and “Digital Fiqh” (2015-Present)

Contemporary debates increasingly focus on the democratization of *fiqh* and the reconfiguration of religious authority in the digital age (Colombo et al., 2022). Scholars have observed a decisive shift from vertical hierarchies of knowledge—dominated by established clerics and formal institutions—to horizontal and participatory epistemologies, in which the interpretive authority over Islam is shared among *ulama*, intellectuals, and digitally engaged lay publics (Kalman et al., 2021). This transformation marks a profound restructuring of how religious legitimacy is produced, circulated, and contested in the twenty-first century (Eriksen et al., 2005; Akhiroh et al., 2024).

Earlier, Eickelman and Piscatori (2013) had conceptualized Muslim politics as an ongoing negotiation over who possesses the right to speak for Islam. In the era of digital media, this negotiation has expanded exponentially, reaching across transnational networks of communication and influence (Levi et al., 2025). Recent scholarship — including works by Bunt (2009), and Kornbluh & Goodman (2020)— demonstrates how platforms such as YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok have given rise to what may be described as a polycentric *fiqh*: a fluid and decentralized sphere of interpretation where multiple, and at times conflicting, readings of Islamic ethics coexist, interact, and occasionally collide in public view.

In the Indonesian context, studies by Ronaldi et al., (2023) illuminate similar dynamics through the emergence of mediated *ulama* — religious figures whose legitimacy is performed and sustained through digital engagement. Their research highlights the growing tension between traditional *pesantren*-based authority (as embodied by organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah) and digitally born authority (embodied by influencers and online *ustadz*). (Aragón et al., 2017). These contestations often become visible during moral flashpoints, such as the #BoikotTrans7 controversy, where online ethical outrage functions as a symbolic arena for competing visions of Islam: one grounded in *adab* and inherited tradition, the other animated by the egalitarian ethos of digital modernity.

From the standpoint of the sociology of law, these transformations can be understood through the lens of legal consciousness theory, as articulated by Patricia Ewick & Susan Silbey (1991). Legal consciousness refers to the everyday ways in which ordinary individuals construct, experience, and perform the meaning of law. Within the Muslim digital ecosystem, *fiqh* operates as a living legal consciousness, enacted not in courtrooms or scholarly councils but through hashtags, comment threads, memes, and digital boycotts. In this sense, the digital realm becomes a site where jurisprudential reasoning merges with affective participation, giving rise to a new kind of socio-legal performance (Zucca, 2020).

In a broader perspectives, this process echoes what Zhurzhenko (2021) term a “Kulturkampf”—a state society struggle to redefine moral legitimacy under the guise of cultural security. Similarly, Indonesia’s digital *fiqh* networks illustrate how moral governance operates through both top-down regulation and bottom-up activism, forming a hybrid mode of normative control in the digital sphere.

This study situates itself precisely at this intersection, examining how the digital mediation of *pesantren* culture is transforming the architecture of Islamic legal authority and, in doing so, generating an emergent formation that may be termed digital *fiqh* (Zucca, 2020). Conceptually, this framework draws on Lamsion & Bourdieu (1986) notion of the religious field, where authority is both symbolic and contested, and extends Wael Hallaq’s (2013) critique of modernity, which argues that Islamic law persists not as a bureaucratic institution but as a networked moral practice. Through this lens, *fiqh* is reimagined as an evolving, participatory ethic — one that survives by adapting to the communicative, emotional, and epistemic logics of the digital age.

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III. METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative empirical legal framework grounded in digital ethnography and guided by a socio-legal, interdisciplinary orientation (Colombo et al., 2022). Conducted over a three-month period (August to Oktober 2025), the study investigates how ethical outrage surrounding the #BoikotTrans7 controversy reshapes the contours of Islamic legal authority and redefines the interpretive parameters of fiqh within Indonesia's digital public sphere. Rather than viewing the online environment solely as a medium of communication, this research conceptualizes it as a social arena where law and ethics are lived and negotiated—a dynamic space in which competing claims of moral legitimacy and authority are publicly articulated, challenged, and reimagined (Mulyani et al., 2024).

This study is situated within the emerging field of digital ethnography of Islamic law (Kalman et al., 2021; Marler et al., 2024), a methodological framework that brings together insights from empirical legal research, digital anthropology, and the sociology of Islam (Katiyu et al., 2025). Through this lens, digital interactions are examined as significant socio-legal acts—sites in which fiqh-based reasoning, adab, and Islamic authority are continuously produced, circulated, and contested (Levi et al., 2025). The research design combines the ethnographic principles of close observation and contextual immersion with critical socio-legal analysis, focusing on the processes of documenting and interpreting digital narratives that emerged around the #BoikotTrans7 controversy (Burri, 2025).

The primary data for this research comprised digital ethnographic materials gathered from multiple online platforms directly connected to the #BoikotTrans7 controversy. These included comment sections, discussion threads, and interactive dialogues on YouTube channels such as TVNU Televisi Nahdlatul Ulama (TVNU, 2025), Liputan Jatim (Jatim, 2025), Al-Bahjah TV (TV, 2025), Laskar Dadas (Laskardadas, 2025), and other digital arenas where debates concerning pesantren culture, adab santri, and fiqh-based ethical reasoning emerged. Over a three-month research period, roughly 1.078 digital comments and interactions were collected, forming a rich and multifaceted corpus that captured a spectrum of viewpoints—from traditionalist and conservative voices grounded in pesantren ethics to reformist and secular perspectives emphasizing freedom of expression and critical inquiry. The secondary data consisted of scholarly literature, online journalism, and academic works focusing on Islamic authority, digital religion, and socio-legal transformations. Foundational studies by Lamaison & Bourdieu (1986), Ewick & Silbey (1991), Wael Hallaq (2013), and Gary Bunt (2009) provided the conceptual scaffolding for this analysis, equipping the research with theoretical instruments to examine how fiqh, power, and moral authority are produced, negotiated, and reshaped in digital contexts.

Data collection employed a non-participatory digital observation method combined with systematic documentation of relevant discussions. Using a purposive sampling strategy, the study identified online spaces explicitly addressing the intersections of fiqh, adab, and pesantren authority within the framework of the #BoikotTrans7 debate. The process involved sustained monitoring, recording, and archiving of digital conversations while preserving contextual nuance and linguistic authenticity (Akhiroh et al., 2024). Each dataset was carefully curated to represent diverse ideological orientations and emotional tones—including outrage, defense, irony, and moral contemplation—that characterized the digital exchanges (Zucca, 2020). This methodological design enabled the tracing of the discursive evolution of the controversy and provided insight into how collective emotions, ethical deliberations, and legal interpretations intertwined to form a dynamic digital moral community (Spierenburg et al., 2025). Consistent with ethnographic inquiry, the data were not merely collected but contextually interpreted, allowing the analysis to engage both the linguistic textures of online discourse and the broader socio-cultural frameworks shaping participants' engagement with Islamic ethical and legal authority in the digital sphere.

The data analysis employed Cresswell & Cresswell's (2018) qualitative analytic framework, adapted to accommodate the complexities of digital ethnography, and unfolded through three iterative and interrelated phases: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing with verification. During the data reduction phase, all digital materials were systematically reviewed, coded, and thematically categorized through an inductive process that emerged organically from the data, focusing on recurring expressions and discursive patterns related to ethical outrage, digital hisbah, authority contestation, and online interpretations of fiqh. Redundant or irrelevant comments were removed to maintain analytical precision and contextual depth. The data presentation phase involved organizing the refined materials into descriptive and interpretive narratives supported by translated excerpts from the digital corpus, structured in thematic matrices that connected digital utterances to broader social and ethical meanings—particularly those related to authority, piety, and communal belonging (Aragón et al., 2017). This phase moved beyond description to interpret how online Muslim publics collectively constructed, negotiated, and performed Islamic moral authority through everyday digital interactions (Colombo et al., 2022). Finally, in the conclusion drawing and verification phase, empirical insights were synthesized with the study's theoretical framework through iterative reading, comparative reflection, and pattern identification (Burri, 2025). Recurring modes of moral reasoning, authority negotiation, and fiqh-based justification were systematically analyzed, while analytical triangulation was conducted by cross-referencing the ethnographic findings with established socio-legal and anthropological scholarship on Islamic authority and digital religion, ensuring both methodological rigor and theoretical coherence (Eriksen et al., 2005).

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IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Ethical Outrage and the Formation of Digital Moral Resistance

The digital ethnographic findings indicate that the early stage of the #BoikotTrans7 controversy was defined by an intense wave of ethical outrage that spread across several YouTube platforms, notably Laskar Dadas (469 comments), Liputan Jatim (165 comments), and Al-Bahjah TV (138 comments). These platforms collectively functioned as public arenas of moral expression, where users voiced anger, sorrow, and ethical disapproval toward Trans7's televised depiction of pesantren traditions—especially scenes perceived as ridiculing *adab santri*, such as bowing or walking humbly before a *kyai* (Spierenburg et al., 2025). Across these comment threads, recurrent themes emerged surrounding religious offense, defense of pesantren values, and disputes over the boundaries of Islamic authority.

Empirical analysis identified three dominant trends in these digital interactions. The first and largest group of participants (approximately 65%) articulated their outrage in explicitly religious terms, invoking *ghayrah* (righteous indignation) and framing *adab* toward one's teacher as a sacred expression of *fiqh*-informed devotion. Statements such as “*betapa salahnya budaya yang ada di Indonesia*” (“how wrong the cultural understanding in Indonesia has become”) or “*Trans7 menghina ajaran Islam dan para santri*” (“Trans7 has insulted Islamic teachings and the students”) reflected the perception of deep moral violation. A second group, comprising roughly 25% of respondents, advanced reformist arguments, questioning the appropriateness of excessive veneration and linking certain pesantren practices to the remnants of feudal culture. They employed the language of *tajdid* (renewal) and rational ethics, asserting that Islam should be purified of practices that blur the distinction between faith and cultural tradition. The third and smaller group (around 10%) took conciliatory positions, emphasizing balance, civility, and scholarly rigor in criticism. These users maintained that critique was permissible but should be conducted “with *adab* and grounded research.”

Taken together, these findings reveal the emergence of a pluralized digital *fiqh*—a domain of ethical interpretation negotiated not by trained jurists but by ordinary Muslims through participatory discourse (Marler et al., 2024). Although the discussions rarely referenced classical jurisprudential sources, participants drew upon moral analogies, communal ethics, and appeals to *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law), particularly *ḥifẓ al-'ird* (the preservation of dignity) and *ḥifẓ al-dīn* (the preservation of faith). In this light, ethical outrage was far more than an emotional response; it constituted a collective and performative act of moral reasoning, positioning the digital public as an active moral tribunal where the boundaries of religious authority, ethical conduct, and social justice were deliberated in real time.

The findings suggest that the surge of digital outrage surrounding the #BoikotTrans7 controversy was far more than an impulsive reaction to media misrepresentation; it represented a collective reassertion of moral sovereignty within Indonesia's Islamic digital public sphere (Weeghel et al., 2011). This phenomenon aligns closely with Talal Asad's (2009) conception of Islam as a discursive tradition—a moral and intellectual system continuously shaped through historical and social engagement rather than confined to static textual authority. In this context, the expression of outrage functioned as a form of discursive agency, serving to delineate the moral boundaries of public discourse and to affirm what could, and could not, be said about pesantren culture within a shared ethical framework.

Significantly, this wave of moral resistance did not emerge under the direction of formal ulama institutions but evolved organically from ordinary digital participants (Marler et al., 2024), lending empirical weight to Eke et al., (2022) idea of distributed authority. The defense of Islam in online spaces shifted from the hierarchical *kyai-santri* model toward a horizontal moral network sustained through emotional resonance, participatory affirmation, and shared conviction (Aini, 2022; Zucca, 2020). This reconfiguration illustrates what Weber might interpret as a movement from traditional authority to a form of charismatic digital authority—one maintained not through institutional hierarchy but through affective credibility and collective moral energy. Following Kornbluh & Goodman's (2020) proposal for “digital civic architecture,” this study argues that Islamic digital authority likewise requires a moral architecture—one grounded in *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and affective accountability, countering algorithmic opacity with ethical transparency.

This digital moral awakening also introduced a new configuration of *hisbah* (moral enjoining), recast in participatory, networked forms (Kefeli, 2023). Unlike classical *hisbah*, which relied on juristic or administrative enforcement, this digital *hisbah* unfolded through hashtags, comment threads, and viral content circulation (Colombo et al., 2022). It transformed the act of enjoining good and forbidding wrong into an accessible, participatory mode of ethical engagement. Such a process reflects what Burri et al (2025) describe as the dual dynamics of “glocal change”: glocal infrastructures of media and emotion intersect with locally rooted moral vocabularies. Digital *fiqh* thus mediates between the universal and the particular, translating affect into authority (Aragón et al., 2017).

To fully understand this phenomenon, it must be situated within Indonesia's enduring dialectic between reverence and critique in Islamic pedagogy. The pesantren tradition has long upheld *ta'dzim* (deference and respect) as the moral foundation of knowledge transmission, while contemporary digital publics valorize openness, critique, and transparency (Kornbluh & Goodman, 2020). The #BoikotTrans7 episode became the meeting ground of these contrasting epistemic logics—a site where the digital culture of visibility and exposure collided with the traditional ethic of humility. Out of this tension arose a digital moral resistance, a

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collective response aimed at safeguarding adab and restoring the moral integrity of pesantren identity in the face of perceived media desecration (Levi et al., 2025).

This dynamic both affirms and expands upon prior scholarship. Earlier studies on digital Islam (Hjarvard, 2013; Bunt, 2009) often emphasized the fragmentation of religious authority and the individualization of piety within online spaces. However, the present findings reveal an alternate trajectory: digital platforms can also foster communitarian moral solidarity, where outrage serves not to divide but to reinforce ethical unity and collective belonging. The #BoikotTrans7 movement exemplifies what Ronaldi et al., (2023) terms affective publics—networks of participants connected less by ideology than by shared emotion. Yet in the Indonesian context, these emotions were distinctly *fiqh*ic: they articulated a theology of feeling that binds emotion and law into an inseparable moral grammar.

From a socio-legal perspective, the rise of this digital moral resistance signals a critical transformation in the localization of Islamic authority within the digital age. Rather than displacing traditional institutions, it reimagines and reconfigures them within participatory, networked frameworks, translating pesantren ethics into new forms of collective engagement (Colombo et al., 2022). This process demonstrates that *fiqh* in the digital era is not dissolving but evolving, extending beyond the interpretive domain of jurists into the moral agency of the wider Muslim public (Kalman et al., 2021). It embodies what Hallaq (2018) critiques of modernity's separation of law and ethics: digital Islam, in contrast, reintegrates them through emotional reasoning and collective participation.

Looking ahead, this evolution suggests that Indonesia's digital *fiqh* will persist as both a moral compass and a site of contestation, mediating between critique and reverence, autonomy and authority. The resistance catalyzed by the #BoikotTrans7 controversy, therefore, transcends transient outrage—it stands as a socio-legal manifestation of Islamic moral consciousness, redefining what it means to speak for Islam in a world where every believer carries both a smartphone and an ethical voice (Kefeli, 2023).

B. Reconfiguring Islamic Authority: Legitimacy, Justice, and the Socio-Legal Imaginary of Digital Resistance

The digital ethnographic evidence drawn from various online platforms—including Liputan Jatim (165 comments), Al-Bahjah TV (138 comments), Laskar Dadas (469 comments), and the official accounts of Trans7 (221 comments) and Pondok Lirboyo (85 comments)—reveals a profound transformation in how questions of Islamic authority, legitimacy, and justice are articulated and renegotiated within Indonesia's digital public sphere. The comment sections, initially characterized by intense moral outrage and defensive sentiment, gradually evolved into spaces of discursive engagement, where participants deliberated on justice, repentance, and reconciliation—particularly following Chairul Tanjung's public apology and his visit to Pondok Pesantren Lirboyo.

Empirical analysis points to three prominent patterns. First, the majority of participants (approximately 60 %) perceived Chairul Tanjung's apology as a form of moral restitution, interpreting his act as an embodiment of 'adl (justice) and tawāḍu' (humility) grounded in *fiqh al-akhlāq*—the jurisprudence of ethical virtue. Comments such as "Alhamdulillah, beliau tulus dan tanggung jawab, harus kita maafkan" and "Pak CT orang bijak, rendah hati, dan bertanggung jawab" encapsulate the prevailing sentiment that moral legitimacy extends beyond institutional to performative ethics, in which justice is understood as a relational and effective act rather than merely a legal or procedural one.

Second, roughly one-quarter of the comments (about 25%) reframed the controversy as a divine test or moral lesson, suggesting that the episode had paradoxically elevated the symbolic and ethical stature of Pondok Lirboyo. Statements such as "Inilah cara Allah mengangkat derajat pesantren" and "Semoga jadi hikmah bagi semua media" reveal a transformation of sentiment—from condemnation to reflection—marking a move toward moral pedagogy. This interpretive turn signifies how digital publics reinterpret conflict through the theological language of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, invoking higher objectives such as *maṣlaḥah* (collective good) and *iṣlāḥ* (reform). The digital sphere thus functions as a venue for spiritual reasoning, where outrage is sublimated into lessons of ethical renewal.

Third, a smaller but intellectually engaged segment (around 15%) turned the discussion toward media ethics and the permissible limits of criticism, emphasizing *adab al-ikhtilāf*—the etiquette of disagreement. Remarks like "Kritik boleh, tapi harus dengan adab dan riset yang benar" and "Media seharusnya tidak menyinggung agama" reflect an emerging digital legal consciousness, wherein online participants collectively construct norms for ethical communication and journalistic accountability. Here, *fiqh* and *akhlāq* are employed not as rigid doctrines but as moral vocabularies guiding civic interaction in digital spaces.

The findings indicate that what began as digital outrage in the #BoikotTrans7 controversy gradually evolved into a participatory reconstruction of moral order, illustrating how online communities assumed the role of moral arbiters in defining justice, legitimacy, and forgiveness. The digital sphere thus became a site where ordinary Muslims collectively negotiated ethical norms and evaluated conduct in light of Islamic moral expectations (Spierenburg et al., 2025). Theoretically, this transformation aligns with Ewick & Silbey's (1991) concept of legal consciousness, which emphasizes that individuals experience and engage with law not as an abstract codified system but as a lived moral framework. In this context, *fiqh* emerges not as an institutionalized doctrine

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but as a socio-legal language—a grammar of moral reasoning through which digital actors interpret, assess, and respond to ethical crises in contemporary Islamic life (Kornbluh & Goodman, 2020).

This reconfiguration of moral authority resonates with Marler et al., (2024) suggest, digital communication allows socially marginalized individuals to access emotional and role-model support. In Islamic digital contexts, this mechanism translates into affective solidarity—followers seeking moral guidance and recognition from online preachers who embody accessible forms of piety and empathy (Spierenburg et al., 2025). Within the #BoikotTrans7 debate, authority shifted away from formal hierarchies of ulama and media elites toward a networked moral authority, collectively enacted through comments, hashtags, and digital expressions of apology and forgiveness (Mulyani et al., 2024). The online public effectively operated as a moral tribunal, distributing or withholding legitimacy according to visible markers of sincerity, humility, and ethical accountability. This horizontal redistribution of authority reflects Ronaldi et al., (2023) concept of distributed authority, yet extends it further by incorporating the moral and affective dimensions that underpin contemporary articulations of Islamic justice.

Interestingly, the digital responses that followed Trans7's apology revealed an emerging ethos of reconciliation—one that harmonized *maghfirah* (forgiveness) with *mas'ūliyyah* (accountability). Rather than perpetuating antagonism, users reframed the incident as an ethical moment of restoration, seeking to rebuild harmony between the media and the ummah (Spierenburg et al., 2025). This moral sensibility integrates *fiqh al-mu'āmalah* (jurisprudence of social relations) with *fiqh al-akhlaq* (ethics of virtue), dissolving rigid boundaries between law, morality, and affect (Ahmed, 2025). Such synthesis embodies Hallaq's (2013) critique of modernity—where secular rationalities separate law from ethics, Islam reclaims their unity through communal emotion and participatory moral reasoning.

When compared to prior studies on digital religion (Eke et al., 2022; Tufekci, 2017; Spierenburg et al., 2025), which emphasize fragmentation, contestation, and the privatization of faith, the #BoikotTrans7 case complicates this narrative. It demonstrates that digital environments can also serve as spaces of ethical restoration, where affective engagement evolves into structured moral deliberation. In this sense, the movement parallels Ronaldi et al., (2023) idea of affective publics—communities bound by shared emotions—but reinterprets it through an Islamic lens. Emotional expression here is not an end in itself; it becomes a moral practice, transforming collective feeling into a form of ethical discourse.

Contextually, the reconciliatory tone that emerged across digital platforms reflects a socio-legal imaginary of justice deeply grounded in *fiqh*-based ethics. Public displays of repentance, forgiveness, and moral unity transformed digital outrage into an enactment of Indonesia's pluralistic Islamic ethos—one in which critique remains permissible but must be guided by *adab* (civility) and mutual respect (Kalman et al., 2021). Mirroring the affective efficacy identified in digital maternal education (Aini, 2022), digital *fiqh* ecosystems may be read as moral care networks—where the ethical resonance of communication outweighs doctrinal rigidity, and affective trust replaces institutional mediation (Mulyani et al., 2024). This ongoing negotiation of moral boundaries echoes Talal Asad's (2009) understanding of Islam as a discursive tradition—a living moral framework that continuously redefines itself in response to shifting social, political, and technological realities.

Ultimately, the #BoikotTrans7 episode demonstrates that digital resistance in the Indonesian Islamic context is not merely oppositional but reconstructive. It embodies a process through which Muslims collectively reaffirm justice and ethical order, blending emotional intelligence, spiritual reflection, and social accountability into a distinctly modern form of digital *fiqh*—a participatory jurisprudence of moral life in the digital age (Akhiroh et al., 2024).

Looking ahead, the findings of this study reveal the emergence of what may be termed a digital *fiqh* of justice—a participatory paradigm in which legitimacy and moral authority are collaboratively produced by religious institutions, media figures, and the broader moral public. This form of digital resistance is not an attempt to overthrow or delegitimize traditional authority; rather, it seeks to redefine its ethical foundations, grounding them in sincerity (*ikhlas*), transparency (*sidq*), and accountability (*mas'ūliyyah*) (Ahmed, 2025). Through this process, Indonesia's digitally engaged Muslims are constructing a new socio-legal imaginary in which *fiqh* transcends its classical, juristic confines and becomes a lived, dialogical practice embedded in the rhythms of online communication and everyday moral interaction.

In essence, the #BoikotTrans7 controversy demonstrates that in the digital era, Islamic authority is not eroding but transforming—evolving from a centralized, textual monopoly toward a plural, participatory ethics of engagement. Authority no longer flows exclusively from scholarly elites but circulates horizontally across networks of believers, each contributing to the collective moral reasoning that sustains the ummah. This transformation reconfigures *fiqh* as both a spiritual compass—anchoring ethical reflection—and a democratic discourse, inviting public participation in the interpretation of justice. Even when mediated through screens, the pursuit of justice in Islam remains an inherently communal and affective act, reaffirming that moral deliberation in the digital age continues to embody the shared pursuit of sincerity, compassion, and ethical balance that lies at the heart of the Islamic tradition.

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V. CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the #BoikotTrans7 controversy represents a critical moment in the ongoing transformation of Islamic legal and moral authority in Indonesia's digital public sphere. The findings demonstrate that digital outrage, far from being a fleeting emotional reaction, has evolved into a collective moral discourse—a participatory process through which Muslims negotiate justice, legitimacy, and ethical responsibility online. Through commentaries, hashtags, and digital deliberations, users performed acts of fiqh-based reasoning, transforming social media into a new arena of moral adjudication. What emerged was not a collapse of traditional authority but its reconfiguration into a distributed, affective, and dialogical form of legitimacy that transcends institutional boundaries while remaining anchored in Islamic ethical principles.

The theoretical frameworks employed in this research—particularly Talal Asad's concept of discursive tradition, Bourdieu's notion of the religious field, and Ewick and Silbey's theory of legal consciousness—proved effective in addressing the research problems. These perspectives illuminated how fiqh functions as both a discursive and lived system, constantly renegotiated through social interaction rather than dictated from above. Likewise, Hallaq's critique of modernity and Papacharissi's theory of affective publics provided analytical depth to understanding how digital emotion can sustain ethical reasoning, revealing that outrage in this context functions as a form of digital *hisbah*—a participatory enactment of moral guardianship within the online *ummah*. Together, these theories enabled a holistic interpretation of how digital fiqh is emerging as a hybrid mode of ethical engagement, where law, emotion, and piety intersect.

The argument advanced throughout this study asserts that digital resistance in contemporary Indonesia is reconstructive rather than destructive. By transforming moral outrage into collective reasoning, digital Muslims actively reaffirm the ethical dimensions of fiqh, demonstrating that Islamic law persists not through institutional authority alone but through communal moral performance. This reconfiguration suggests that the digital public sphere serves as a new *majlis al-fiqh*—an open, participatory platform where *adab*, critique, and justice coexist. It further underscores that the vitality of Islamic law lies in its adaptability, its capacity to translate traditional ethics into modern communicative forms without losing its spiritual coherence.

Nonetheless, this research has certain limitations. First, the study's temporal and digital scope was confined to a three-month ethnographic window and specific YouTube platforms, which may not fully capture the breadth of discourses circulating across other social media ecosystems such as TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), or Instagram. Second, the non-participatory design—while maintaining objectivity—limited the opportunity to engage directly with participants' offline reflections or motivations. Future research could expand this inquiry through multi-platform ethnography and interviews with digital religious actors, thereby deepening the understanding of how digital fiqh operates across different technological, linguistic, and cultural contexts.

In light of these findings, this study recommends further exploration into the institutional implications of digital fiqh—specifically, how traditional *ulama* and *pesantren* networks might adapt to or collaborate with online publics in shaping ethical discourse. Moreover, future scholars should investigate how the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of digital Islam contribute to the construction of moral authority in the post-secular world. Ultimately, the study affirms that Indonesia's digital Muslims are not merely consuming religious content but co-producing Islamic moral knowledge, cultivating a living jurisprudence that bridges classical fiqh with the ethical realities of digital modernity.

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