

Digitalizing Female Religious Authority: KUPI's Gender-Responsive Fatwas and the Reconfiguration of Islamic Discourse in Indonesia

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Received: 20/11/2025

Revised: 01/06/2026

Accepted: 24/06/2026

Abstract

The digitization of Indonesia's Islamic religious sphere has created a complex competition for authority. The Indonesian Congress of Women Ulama (KUPI) aims to reshape religious authority by producing and sharing gender-responsive fatwas through digital platforms. This study looks at KUPI's digital methods for spreading these fatwas and how these methods influence a more inclusive Islamic conversation. Using a qualitative, case-study approach within KUPI's digital ecosystem, particularly KUPIPedia and its social media channels, data was collected through systematic content analysis of digital outputs from 2017 to 2025. The analytical framework combines Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to explore how claims of authority are created through discourse and shaped by networks of people and non-human elements. The findings show that KUPI builds a model of shared and participatory authority through the ideas of *ma'ruf*, *mubadalah*, and true justice, supported by a network of 15 partner institutions. However, digitalization does not lead to a straightforward growth of influence. Social media algorithms often favor conservative content, and KUPI's reach mainly focuses on the educated urban audience. Theoretically, this study reveals that digital religious authority is subject to debate and relational, rather than merely a product of technological democratization and methodologically offers a replicable CDA-ANT framework for analyzing the production of fatwas in the digital age.

Abstrak

Digitalisasi ruang keagamaan Islam Indonesia telah menciptakan arena perebutan otoritas yang kompleks, di mana Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) berupaya merekonfigurasi otoritas keagamaan melalui produksi dan penyebaran fatwa responsif gender via platform digital. Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi digital KUPI dalam menyebarkan fatwa tersebut dan sejauh mana strategi itu membentuk wacana Islam yang lebih inklusif. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kasus pada ekosistem digital KUPI — khususnya KUPIPedia dan kanal media sosial afiliasinya — data dikumpulkan melalui analisis konten sistematis terhadap output digital periode 2017–2025. Kerangka analisis mengintegrasikan *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) Fairclough dan *Actor-Network Theory* (ANT) Latour untuk mengkaji bagaimana klaim otoritas diproduksi secara diskursif sekaligus dirakit melalui jaringan aktor manusia dan non-manusia. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa KUPI membangun model otoritas terdistribusi dan partisipatif melalui trilogi epistemologis *ma'ruf*, *mubadalah*, dan keadilan hakiki, yang didukung jaringan 15 institusi mitra. Namun, digitalisasi tidak menghasilkan perluasan pengaruh yang linier: algoritma media sosial cenderung mengamplifikasi konten konservatif, dan jangkauan KUPI masih terkonsentrasi pada kalangan urban terdidik. Secara teoretis, studi ini menunjukkan bahwa



otoritas keagamaan digital bersifat kontestif dan relasional, bukan hasil demokratisasi teknologi secara otomatis, serta secara metodologis menawarkan kerangka CDA-ANT yang replikabel untuk menganalisis produksi fatwa di era digital.

Keywords Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI), Gender Responsive Fatwa; Digital Strategy; Inclusive Islam; Islamic Feminism

Introduction

Inclusive Islam, the defining characteristic of Indonesian Muslim religious practice across generations, has faced mounting challenges since the Reformasi era. While the post-1998 opening democratized the public sphere and enabled diverse religious voices, including through digital platforms,¹ it simultaneously gave rise to intolerance, radicalism, and conservatism.² Exclusive religious groups promoting literal, decontextualized textual readings gained unprecedented reach,³ and this dynamic intensified with digitalization. As Eickelman and Anderson identified, new media decentralize Islamic authority while intensifying competition among divergent religious voices,⁴ and Bunt demonstrates how social media algorithms create "cyber-Islamic environments" that actively reshape religious authority by amplifying certain Islamic narratives while marginalizing others.⁵

In Indonesia, this digital religious sphere is characterized by a contested coexistence of pluralist, moderate, conservative, and gender-biased narratives.⁶ Digital technology holds immense potential to promote moderate Islamic values as a counterforce to extremism,⁷ yet the fluidity of online authority enables actors lacking scholarly credentials to shape public religious consciousness, opening space for "digital ulama" who often promote conservative and patriarchal views.

The scale of this challenge is significant. With 212 million internet users (74.6% penetration) as of 2025,⁸ Indonesia's digital religious transformation is unavoidable. A PPIM UIN Jakarta study analyzing Twitter and YouTube data (2009–2019) found conservative narratives dominating at 67.2%, with the most prevalent content limiting women's roles to

¹ Martin van Bruinessen, *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the "Conservative Turn"* (New York: ISEAS-Yusuf Ishak Institute, 2015).

² Robert W Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*, ed. Princeton and London (Princeton University Press, 2011).

³ Azyumardi Azra, *Konteks Berteologi Di Indonesia: Pengalaman Islam* (Jakarta: Paramadina, n.d.).

⁴ Mukhlis, Doki Wardiman, and Amelia Yetri, "Indonesian Muslim Societies in the Digital Age: Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Prospect," *Digital Muslim Review* 2, no. 2 (2024): 194–216.

⁵ Alessandra Campbell, Heidi A; Vitullo, "Assesing Changes in The Study of Religious in Digital Religion Studies," *Churh, Communication and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2016): 73–89.

⁶ John W Eicklman, Dale F & Anderson, *New Media in The Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

⁷ Gary R Bunt, *Hastag Islam; How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority* (California: Chapel Hilt University Of Nort Caroline Press, 2018).

⁸ Andi Dwi Riyanto, "'Hootsuite (We Are Social): Data Digital Indonesia 2025,' February 28, 2025," accessed March 7, 2025, <https://andi.link/hootsuite-we-are-social-data-digital-indonesia-2025/>.

domestic spheres.⁹ The BNPT reported blocking 180,954 social media posts containing radicalism and extremism in 2024,¹⁰ while the SETARA Institute documented 477 intolerance incidents and 731 acts across 2023–2024.¹¹ Gender bias is a central axis of this digital religious landscape. Research documents gender-biased fatwas on YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram that portray women as entirely subservient to husbands' commands,¹² with further studies by Falah,¹³ Abidin,¹⁴ and Akmaliah¹⁵ documenting the reproduction of patriarchal values across platforms. Platform algorithms favoring high-engagement content amplify polarizing and normatively conservative religious messages, narrowing discursive space for gender-sensitive interpretations¹⁶ and contributing to structural injustice against women in legal, educational, and sociocultural domains. Women are frequently objectified for men's visual gratification, with their intellectual capacity and contributions overlooked in various aspects of life¹⁷

The Indonesian Women Ulama Congress (KUPI), inaugurated in 2017, emerged as a direct response to this wave of gender-biased Islamic teaching. KUPI not only produces gender-perspective fatwas but actively disseminates them through digital platforms.¹⁸ This article addresses two interrelated questions: first, through what discursive strategies and sociotechnical mechanisms does KUPI produce, disseminate, and seek to legitimize its gender-responsive fatwas? Second, to what extent do these strategies contribute to — or encounter resistance in — the reconfiguration of Islamic discourse toward more gender-just and inclusive frameworks?

⁹ Iim Halimatusa'diyah, "Beragama Di Dunia Maya: Media Merit Indonesia," *MERIT Indonesia* 1, no. 1 (2020): 1–96.

¹⁰ BNPT, "Pernyataan Pers Akhir Tahun BNPT 2024: BNPT - Kemkomdigi Blokir 180 Ribu Konten Bermuatan Terorisme Sepanjang 2024," 2024.

¹¹ Setara Institute, "Laporan Kebebasan Beragama Dan Berkeyakinan 2024." (Jakarta, 2024).

¹² Achmad Rifai, "The Discourse of Women'S Piety and Gender Bias Construction on Muslimah Websites in Indonesia," *Al-Balagh: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 6, no. 2 (2021): 303–28, <https://doi.org/10.22515/al-balagh.v6i2.3402>.

¹³ Mohammad Bachrul Falah and Riyanta Riyanta, "Digital Patriarchy: How Indonesian Islamic Preachers Construct Gender Asymmetry through YouTube Fatwas," *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 18, no. 1 (2025): 103–22, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ahwal.2025.18106>.

¹⁴ Achmad Azis Abidin et al., "REPRODUCING PATRIARCHY IN DIGITAL ISLAM: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Women's Leadership Narratives on Muslimahnews.Net," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 15, no. 2 (2025): 530–54, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2025.15.2.530-554>.

¹⁵ Wahyudi Akmaliah, "The Demise of Moderate Islam: New Media, Contestation, and Reclaiming Religious Authorities," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 1 (2020): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v10i1.1-24>.

¹⁶ Ulyan Nasri and Abdul Malik Salim Rahmatullah, "Female Islamic Scholars in the Digital Space," *Digital Muslim Review* 2, no. 2 (2025): 176–93, <https://doi.org/10.32678/dmr.v2i2.16>.

¹⁷ Isa Anshori, Zainal Mukhlis, and Almi Novita, "Identity, Cult, and Charisma: The Contestation of Online Da'wah on @halimahalaydrus's Instagram Account," *Al-Tahrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 25, no. 1 (2025): 206–22, <https://doi.org/10.21154/altahrir.v25i1.9977>.

¹⁸ Aidatul Fitriyah and Gohar Rahman, "Reinterpreting Gender in the Qur'an: Realizing Inclusive Interpretation in the Modern Era," *An-Nisa Jurnal Kajian Perempuan Dan Keislaman* 17, no. 2 (2024): 117–32, <https://doi.org/10.35719/annisa.v17i2.303>.

Previous scholarship on KUPI clusters into three themes: its institutional history and contestation of patriarchal discourse (Farida and Kasdi;¹⁹ Ma'ruf et al.;²⁰ Kloos and Ismah²¹); the authority of women ulama (Rohmaniyah et al.;²² Mun'im et al.;²³ Junaidi;²⁴ Nadia et al.;²⁵ Hidayatulloh and Syifa;²⁶ Muflihah and Mursyid²⁷); and KUPI's online presence and public reception (Nisa; Arwani and Hannase²⁸). No prior study has systematically applied a combined CDA-ANT framework to examine how KUPI's fatwas are constructed and circulated as sociotechnical objects within heterogeneous digital networks, nor has the dynamics of contestation been adequately theorized. This is the gap the present study addresses.

This research employs a qualitative case study design focused on KUPI's digital ecosystem, principally KUPIpedia (kupipedia.id) and affiliated social media channels (Instagram, YouTube, Facebook); drawing on systematic content analysis of digital outputs produced between 2017 and 2025, including fatwa documents, institutional declarations, educational videos, and social media posts related to KUPI's three focal fatwa areas: sexual violence, child marriage, and environmental protection. The analytical framework integrates two complementary theoretical approaches. Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines how texts, discursive practices, and social structures interact within KUPI's digital outputs, attending to lexical choices, rhetorical strategies, intertextuality, and

¹⁹ Umma Farida et al., "THE 2017 KUPI CONGRESS AND INDONESIAN FEMALE 'ULAMA,'" *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.15642/jiis.2018.12.2.135-158>.

²⁰ Amrin Ma'ruf, Wilodati Wilodati, and Tuti Aryanti, "Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia Dalam Wacana Merebut Tafsir Gender Pasca Reformasi: Sebuah Tinjauan Genealogi," *Musāwa Jurnal Studi Gender Dan Islam*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.14421/musawa.2021.202.127-146>.

²¹ David Kloos and Nor Ismah, "Siting Islamic Feminism: The Indonesian Congress of Women Islamic Scholars and the Challenge of Challenging Patriarchal Authority," *History of Anthropology*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2023.2249495>.

²² Inayah Rohmaniyah et al., "Reclaiming an Authority: Women's Ulama Congress Network (KUPI) and a New Trend of Religious Discourse in Indonesia," *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2022-0068>.

²³ Zainul Mun'im et al., "Revisioning Official Islam in Indonesia: The Role of Women Ulama Congress in Reproducing Female Authority in Islamic Law," *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v24i1.34744>.

²⁴ Akhmad Arif Junaidi, "Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) and Mubādalāh Approach in Interpreting the Gender Biased-Qur'anic Verses," *Sawwa Jurnal Studi Gender*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.21580/sa.v18i1.17269>.

²⁵ Zunly Nadia and Nur Faizah, "Female Ulamā and Religious Moderation in Indonesia," *ESENSIA Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v26i1.5907>.

²⁶ Taufik Hidayatulloh and Bahro Syifa, "ANALYSIS STUDY OF THE MOVEMENT OF THE INDONESIAN WOMEN'S ULAMA CONGRESS (KUPI) IN AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND CHILD MARRIAGE," *SMART: Journal of Sharia, Traditon, and Modernity*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.24042/smart.v2i2.16044>.

²⁷ Anisa Muflihah et al., "Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Kekerasan Seksual: Analisis Metodologis Terhadap Penafsiran Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI)," *MISYKAT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Quran, Hadist, Syari'ah Dan Tarbiyah*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.33511/misykat.v6n2.1-40>.

²⁸ Salsabila Arwani and M Hannase, "Kupi II Congress and Results of Religious Views on Contemporary Women's Issues in the Perspective of Islamic Anthropology," *Journal La Sociale*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.37899/journal-la-sociale.v5i4.1223>.

embedded social ideologies.²⁹ Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT) maps the heterogeneous network of human actors (women ulama, partner institutions, audiences), non-human actors (algorithms, platforms, fatwa documents), and their translations and negotiations as KUPI's authority is assembled and contested.³⁰

This study makes three contributions. Theoretically, it advances scholarship on digital religious authority by demonstrating how a women's Islamic movement constructs distributed, dialogic, and institutionally networked authority in a context shaped by competing patriarchal and algorithmic forces—extending Eickelman and Anderson's³¹ Empirically, it provides the first systematic discourse-analytical account of KUPIpedia as a knowledge infrastructure, contributing to the growing literature on Islamic feminism, digital Islam, and women's religious authority in Southeast Asia.³²

Discussion

KUPI and The Women Ulama Movement

KUPI held its first congress in 2017 at the Kebon Jambu Al-Islami Islamic boarding school in Cirebon, West Java, and its second in 2022 at Hasyim Asy'ari Islamic boarding school in Bangsri, Jepara. What demands analytical scrutiny is not the congress itself but the discursive strategies KUPI deploys to construct and legitimate a new form of religious authority, what Foucault calls the "politics of truth," the process by which particular discourses gain authoritative status within a field of power relations.³³ In the digital era, religious authority has shifted significantly toward digital content, opening space for anyone to replace the fatwa-issuing authority of traditional scholars.³⁴ Epistemologically, this differs from the conventional meaning of *ulama* as an individual possessing deep religious authority and serving as the Prophet's successor.³⁵ KUPI draws a distinction between *perempuan ulama* (women possessing religious scholarly capacity who serve as references) and *ulama perempuan* (individuals and institutions sharing a vision of gender justice).³⁶ It challenges Talal Asad's model of religious authority as produced through disciplined practice within authoritative institutions, *madrasas*, chains of transmission (*isnad*), and communal recognition³⁷, by

²⁹ Fairclough Nourman, *Critical Discourse Analysis The Critical Study of Language Second Edition* Norman Fairclough, 2013, file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/10.4324_9781315834368_previewpdf.pdf.

³⁰ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³¹ Eickelman, Dale F & Anderson, *New Media in The Muslim World : The Emerging Public Sphere*.

³² Kloos and Ismah, "Siting Islamic Feminism: The Indonesian Congress of Women Islamic Scholars and the Challenge of Challenging Patriarchal Authority."

³³ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

³⁴ Nick Couldry, *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

³⁵ Arief Rachman, Theguh Saumantri, and Taufik Hidayatulloh, "Transformation of Religious Authority in the Digital Era: A Post-Normal Times Analysis by Ziauddin Sardar on the Phenomenon of Social Media Da'wah," *Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 45, no. 1 (2025): 107–22, <https://doi.org/10.21580/jid.v45.1.25644>.

³⁶ KUPI, "KUPI," KUPIpedia, accessed November 6, 2025, <https://kupipedia.id/index.php/KUPI>.

³⁷ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

proposing a collectivized and experiential model in which women's lived realities function as epistemological resources.

Analyzing KUPI through Fairclough's CDA reveals how its language constructs and legitimates a particular configuration of Islamic authority across three dimensions.³⁸ At the *textual* level, KUPI consistently employs a humanitarian-theological register — *rahmatan lil-‘ālamīn*, *keadilan* (justice), *kemaslahatan* (public welfare), and *mubādalah* (reciprocity) — recontextualizing classical Islamic vocabulary for a transformative, gender-inclusive agenda (intertextual appropriation).³⁹ At the *discourse practice* level, KUPI's congresses, *halaqah* deliberations, and formal fatwas mimic traditional Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), borrowing legitimacy from the very forms it seeks to transform; the KUPI II fatwas on forced marriage, pregnancies from rape, and female genital cutting simultaneously challenge patriarchal *fiqh* from within its discursive terrain while risking domesticating more radical gender critiques.

At the *sociocultural practice* dimension, KUPI's terminological distinction between *perempuan ulama* and *ulama perempuan* devalues traditional authority (institutional credentials, classical texts, male scholarly lineage) while elevating experiential knowledge, claims contested by MUI and traditionalist wings of Nahdlatul Ulama. Mahmood's caution⁴⁰ against assuming Islamic women's movements are either straightforwardly resistant or complicit in patriarchy is instructive: KUPI's insistence on women's lived experience as an epistemological foundation carries its own normative assumptions about what counts as legitimate experience.

Applying Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to KUPI's digital presence requires tracing actual associations between heterogeneous actors; algorithms, platforms, fatwa texts, audiences, competing Islamic organizations, and state institutions. A fatwa disseminated via KUPIpedia, Instagram, or YouTube does not automatically achieve authority; it must be assembled through a network of platform algorithms, endorsing scholars, amplifying media, and engaging audiences. Conservative Islamic accounts on the same platforms contest KUPI's gender-justice discourse, making the digital space a contested field rather than a neutral medium; claims of discursive reconfiguration require measurable evidence, shifts in public acceptance, state policy, or religious education curricula that remains to be demonstrated.

Relationally, KUPI occupies a liminal position within the broader field of Indonesian Islamic authority vis-à-vis MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah. It can be read, in Foucauldian terms, as counter-conduct against official Islamic governmentality, yet its strategic partnership with the Ministry of Religious Affairs complicates this reading. NU's relationship is particularly complex, many KUPI participants are NU-affiliated and its methodology overlaps with NU's contextual *fiqh*, yet NU's internal structures remain male-dominated. Whether KUPI's gender-justice framework has meaningfully penetrated NU's institutional practices, or whether its digital reach extends beyond urban, educated audiences to *pesantren* communities,

³⁸ Fairclough Nourman, *Critical Discourse Analysis The Critical Study of Language Second Edition* Norman Fairclough.

³⁹ KUPI, "Trilogi Fatwa KUPI," KUPIpedia., accessed November 6, 2025, <https://kupipedia.id/index.php/KUPI>.

⁴⁰ Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Agency, and the Liberatory Subject: Some Reflections on the Islamic Revival in Egypt," *The Finnish Society for the Study of Religion* 42, no. 1 (2006): 31–71.

remains empirically open. Demonstrating genuine reconfiguration of Islamic discourse requires showing not only that KUPI produces new discourses, but that these have displaced or altered previously dominant ones through citations, legal reforms, educational materials, or religious counseling questions that require future empirical work.⁴¹

The Objectives of the KUPI Movement

The KUPI movement emerged from the collective awareness of women ulema to affirm women's role in religious discourse and practice. KUPI views women as possessing the same scholarly potential as men in terms of knowledge, leadership, and moral responsibility. The central objective, as affirmed in the KUPI I Declaration (2017) and the KUPI II Declaration (2022), is to realize justice and public welfare for all human beings through a gender-just perspective of women's religious scholarship.⁴² KUPI is committed to presenting an Islamic interpretation that liberates, upholds human dignity, and rejects all forms of violence and discrimination committed in the name of religion

According to KUPI, the term “women” carries two possible meanings: biological and ideological. The biological meaning, refers to a person who has female genitalia, experiences menstruation, becomes pregnant, gives birth, and breastfeeds. Ideologically, “women” may refer to a perspective, consciousness, and movement that advocates for women's rights to achieve just relations with men, both in family life and in the broader social sphere. With this second, ideological definition, anyone can be involved in efforts that support the well-being of women and strive to create a dignified and equitable life in the relations between men and women.⁴³

The term “female ulama” reclaims the meaning of *ulama*, which is inherently gender-neutral but has been culturally monopolized by male figures. Historical evidence—from Rabiah al-Adawiyah as Sufi Master to 'Aisyah's narration of thousands of hadith—demonstrates that female ulama have always existed.⁴⁴ KUPI's goal is thus to establish a new paradigm for gender-just Islam, serving as a platform for interpretations and fatwas grounded in welfare ethics and the values of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*

KUPI Fatwa Trilogy: Women's Experiences as the Basis

KUPI has developed a new paradigm in religious authority through the fatwa trilogy: *ma'ruf*, reciprocity, and true justice. *Ma'ruf* denotes what is morally recognized as good and just by Islamic reasoning and social consensus; reciprocity is a hermeneutical method of reciprocal, gender-equal Qur'anic reading; and *true justice* refers to substantive justice accounting for women's specific biological and social realities. Together these constitute an

⁴¹ Mahmood.

⁴² KUPI, “KUPI.”

⁴³ KUPI, “‘Ulama Perempuan,’” KUPIpedia, n.d., https://kupipedia.id/index.php/Ulama_Perempuan.

⁴⁴ Moh Rivaldi Abdul, “‘Bulan Kebangkitan: Menegaskan Realitas Sejarah Ulama Perempuan Indonesia,’ Publik, Keadilan Dan Kesetaraan Gender - Mubadalah,” Mubadalah, accessed May 24, 2025, <https://mubadalah.id/bulan-kebangkitan-menegaskan-realitas-sejarah-ulama-perempuan-indonesia/>.

epistemological framework positioning women's experiences as a source of Islamic legal reasoning (*istinbāt al-ḥukm*).⁴⁵

This repositioning resonates with the Islamic feminist frameworks of Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas. Wadud's argument that women's perspectives must be integrated into Qur'anic hermeneutics provides the theoretical precedent for KUPI's insistence on lived experience as valid *ijtihad*.⁴⁶ Barlas similarly argues that patriarchal readings of the Qur'an are historically contingent rather than divinely mandated.⁴⁷ However, as Saba Mahmood cautions, assumptions of progressive agency can obscure the internal diversity of Muslim women's commitments, and some constituencies within Indonesian Islam have challenged whether KUPI's experiential epistemology constitutes legitimate *fiqh* at all.⁴⁸

The *istinbāt al-ḥukm* process at KUPI connects four foundational legal sources—the Qur'an, hadith, scholarly opinions, and the Indonesian constitution—with social conditions faced by women, yielding fatwas grounded in reality and oriented toward the protection of human dignity, guided by *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. Public responses are generally positive in progressive communities, though resistance from conservative groups persists.⁴⁹

KUPI's fatwas focus on three areas with direct impact on women's lives: sexual violence, child marriage, and ecological degradation. In the context of sexual violence, KUPI emphasizes that all forms of violence are *haram* as they contradict principles of humanity and public welfare (*maṣlahah*). Regarding child marriage, KUPI considers the practice a violation of the principles of protecting life and intellect. On environmental issues, KUPI views waste management and ecosystem sustainability as moral and religious responsibility.⁵⁰

The KUPI fatwa trilogy consists of the following three pillars:

- *Ma'ruf*: Initiated by Badriah Fayumi, *ma'ruf* is defined as "anything that contains values of goodness, truth, and the propriety of something according to Shari'ah, common sense, and the general perspective of a society." In the Qur'an, *ma'ruf* functions as a principle of social relations alongside principles of justice, reciprocity, and cooperation, encompassing interactions among individuals, marital relations, familial relations, and broader communal relations.⁵¹

⁴⁵ KUPI, "Trilogi Fatwa KUPI."

⁴⁶ Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁴⁷ Asma Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, 2002 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

⁴⁸ Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Agency, and the Liberatory Subject: Some Reflections on the Islamic Revival in Egypt."

⁴⁹ "Musyawarah Keagamaan," KUPIpedia, accessed November 7, 2025, https://kupipedia.id/index.php/Musyawarah_Keagamaan.

⁵⁰ "Fatwa KUPI II: Hukum Pembiaran Kerusakan Lingkungan Hidup Akibat Sampah Adalah Haram," KUPIpedia, accessed November 7, 2025, https://kupipedia.id/index.php/Fatwa_KUPI_II:_Hukum_Pembiaran_Kerusakan_Lingkungan_Hidup_Akibat_Sampah_adalah_Haram.

⁵¹ KUPI, "Trilogi Fatwa KUPI."

- Reciprocity; Introduced by Faqihuddin Abdul Qodir, Reciprocity positions men and women as legal subjects with equal moral and spiritual capacity before religious texts. Its three premises are: Islam was revealed for both men and women; their relationship is governed by cooperation and reciprocity rather than hegemony; and all source texts are open to reinterpretation on contextual matters.⁵² Through this approach, KUPI seeks to dismantle interpretations that normalize domination, replacing them with reciprocal relations promoting collective welfare.
- *True Justice*; Articulated by Nur Rofi'ah, *true justice* is understood not as uniform treatment, but as the fulfillment of human rights and needs according to contextual circumstances, recognizing biological, social, and cultural differences without allowing these to produce structural inequalities. KUPI fatwas thereby become instruments of social transformation addressing violence against women, economic injustice, and ecological crises.⁵³

Through this trilogy, KUPI affirms the position of women's experiences as an epistemological source in Islamic knowledge production, expanding religious authority toward a model that is inclusive, participatory, and gender-just—a form of social *ijtihad* that reconstructs the relationships among religion, knowledge, and humanity.

Issues in KUPI Fatwas

KUPI asserts its religious epistemology through fatwas grounded in women's concrete experiences. At its first Congress in 2017 in Cirebon, KUPI identified three main issues: the prevention of sexual violence, the prevention of child marriage, and environmental protection.⁵⁴ The fatwa on sexual violence frames all forms of bodily harm as a violation of *ḥifẓ al-nafs* and *ḥifẓ al-'irdh* within *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, positioning women's bodies as a moral trust rather than a source of *fitnah*. The fatwa on child marriage holds that early marriage undermines women's rights to education, health, and well-being, and contravenes shari'ah principles on the protection of offspring. The fatwa on environmental degradation develops an ecofeminist approach that treats women's ecological knowledge—accumulated through direct exposure to environmental crises—as a legitimate basis for religious reasoning.⁵⁵

At the second Congress in 2022, held across Semarang, Jepara, and Demak, KUPI expanded the scope of its fatwas to address five key themes: (1) protection of women's lives from violence in the name of religion; (2) waste management for environmental sustainability and women's safety; (3) protection of women from forced marriage; (4) protection of women's lives from the risks of pregnancy resulting from rape; and (5) protection of women from genital mutilation without medical justification.⁵⁶

⁵² Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, *Qira'ah Mubadalah* (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2021).

⁵³ "Keadilan Hakiki https://KUIPedia.Id/Index.Php/Keadilan_Hakiki," KUIPedia, n.d.

⁵⁴ KUPI, "KUPI."

⁵⁵ "Fatwa KUPI II: Hukum Pembiaran Kerusakan Lingkungan Hidup Akibat Sampah Adalah Haram."

⁵⁶ Zalikho Su'ada, "Pandangan Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia Terhadap Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online Di Media Sosial Twitter," *Az-Zahra: Journal of Gender and Family Studies*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.15575/azzahra.v3i2.20596>.

These issues demonstrate KUPI's epistemological consistency in positioning women's experiences as a source of legal and public moral guidance. Each fatwa is produced through a participatory deliberation mechanism, where women are not merely objects of the law but empowered subjects of religious knowledge. In this context, KUPI fatwas function as ethical instruments to uphold social justice and strengthen women's human rights, while also serving as tools of social transformation linking religious authority with the aspirations of civil society.

KUPIPedia, KUPI's official digital platform, shapes and disseminates discourse on female ulama, gender justice, and Islamic values grounded in humanity. Applying Fairclough's CDA framework, the analysis proceeds across three dimensions: text, discursive practice, and social practice.

1. Text Dimension

KUPIPedia's language exhibits three consistent characteristics: egalitarianism, empathy, and dialogism. The platform systematically employs terms denoting horizontality and collectivity—"non-partisan, inclusive, participatory, and cross-organizational"—with the absence of hierarchical diction constructing religious deliberation as a shared social process rather than an institutional pronouncement.⁵⁷ At the level of modality, KUPIPedia's discourse is predominantly epistemic-affirmative rather than deontic-obligatory, asserting what *is* just and good rather than what one *must* do, thereby creating space for reader agency while naturalizing KUPI's interpretive framework as common sense.⁵⁸

At the level of intertextuality, KUPIPedia consistently invokes classical Qur'anic and fiqh terminology (*maqāṣid*, *masalah*, *ma'ruf*) while embedding it within contemporary gender-justice discourse—a form of authority borrowing that derives credibility from classical tradition while simultaneously reorienting it. The dialogic aspect, expressed in formulations like "a new perspective on female ulama" and "problem formulation conducted participatorily," signals that KUPI's discourse is positioned as open negotiation rather than closed doctrine.⁵⁹ Through this combination of egalitarian, empathetic, and dialogic language, KUPIPedia constructs a model of religious relations that positions women as full subjects within the contemporary Islamic discursive space.

2. Discursive Practice Dimension

The discourse circulating on KUPIPedia is shaped through a production system involving 15 partner institutions, including Rahima, Fahmina, Alimat, Mubadalah.id, AMAN Indonesia, GUSDURian, and networks of Islamic boarding schools—demonstrating that religious authority is realized through inter-institutional dialogue rather than individual claims.⁶⁰ In ANT terms, each institution functions as a network node that enrolls its own

⁵⁷KUPI, "KUPI," KUPIPedia, accessed November 6, 2025, <https://kupipedia.id/index.php/KUPI>.

⁵⁸ KUPI, "KUPI."

⁵⁹ Siti Zaida and Baidawi Hanum, "Transformasi Dakwah Komunitas Muslimah," *Pawarta: Journal of Communication and Da'wah* 3, no. 1 (2025): 41–54.

⁶⁰ "Jaringan," KUPIPedia, accessed November 6, 2025, <https://kupipedia.id/index.php/Jaringan>.

constituencies and credibility into the broader KUPI network, thereby multiplying the reach and legitimacy of its discourse.

Thematic analysis of KUPIPedia's content distribution reveals a consistent epistemic strategy. Out of 3,953 identified entries, *mubadalah* content (854 entries, 22%) is dominant, followed by family (693 entries, 18%) and women's roles (666 entries, 17%). This quantitative distribution is itself a discursive act: by foregrounding *mubadalah* as the most visible framework, KUPIPedia normalizes reciprocal reading as the default Islamic hermeneutic. The mid-level cluster comprises content on the environment, household, women's protection, and sexual violence (9–11% each), while child marriage appears in 201 contents (5%) and religious moderation in 35 contents. This numerical distribution reinforces gender justice, women's protection, and reciprocity-based interpretation as the central gravitational points of knowledge.⁶¹ This thematic distribution is visualized in the following diagram.

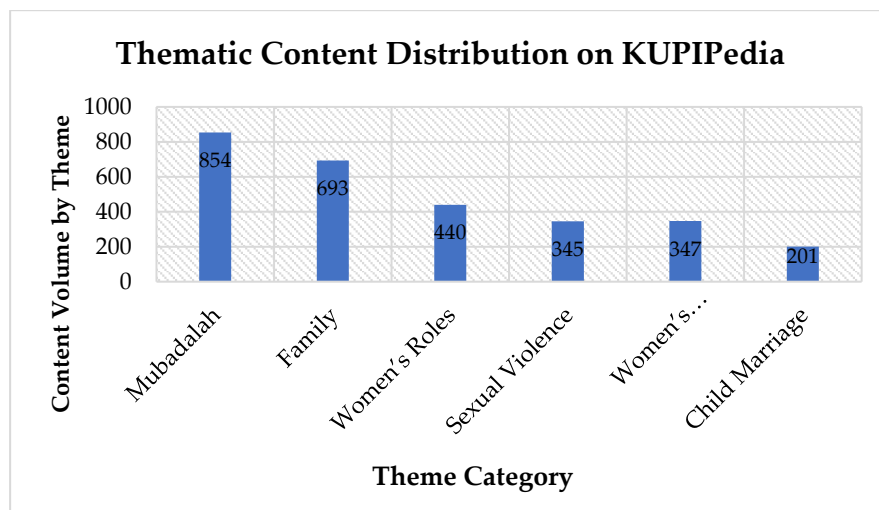


Diagram 1. Content Distribution on KUPIPedia. The data was processed and analyzed by researchers from <https://kupipedia.id>

The diagram illustrates the quantitative distribution of thematic content on KUPIPedia based on keyword searches. Out of a total of 3,953 identified entries, the theme of reciprocity occupies the largest share with 854 contents, equivalent to approximately 22% of the total distribution, highlighting reciprocity as the dominant epistemic framework within KUPIPedia's discourse ecosystem. The family theme accounts for 693 contents (18%), while women's roles reach 666 contents (17%). These themes form the major issue cluster that defines the direction of the site's knowledge curation. Thematic analysis of KUPIPedia's content distribution reveals a consistent epistemic strategy. Out of 3,953 identified entries, reciprocity content (854 entries, 22%) is dominant, followed by family (693 entries, 18%) and women's roles (666 entries, 17%). The relative marginality of "religious moderation" content (35 entries) is equally significant: it suggests that KUPI's digital strategy prioritizes affirmative gender-justice content over defensive moderation discourse.

⁶¹ KUPI, "KUPI."

The mid-level cluster comprises content on the environment, household, women's protection, and sexual violence, each accounting for 9–11% of the total, indicating that everyday issues, domestic relations, and women's safety receive strong visibility. The theme of child marriage appears in 201 contents (5%), whereas religious moderation remains at a lower level (35 contents) but still serves as an indicator of KUPIPedia's commitment to inclusive Islamic discourse. This numerical distribution reveals a consistent structure of discourse emphasis, namely the reinforcement of gender justice values, women's protection, and reciprocity-based interpretation as the central gravitational points of knowledge.

Within this distribution flow, a counter-discourse to patriarchal religious narratives becomes apparent. Content addressing sexual violence, child marriage, family relations, or women's household roles often provides religious interpretations emphasizing justice—for example, interpreting hadith on husband-wife relations through the reciprocity approach, shifting the moral focus from hierarchical obedience to reciprocity and respect for human dignity. Discourse consumption occurs through reader interaction across multiple channels, with articles, lecture videos, and academic texts engaging readers in an active reasoning process through intertextuality.⁶²

3. Social Practice Dimension

KUPIPedia's discourse directly connects religious reasoning to advocacy, policy, and grassroots social work. The article "Fiqh of Abortion: An Alternative for Strengthening Reproductive Health Rights" places fiqh in dialogue with women's social vulnerability, functioning as a legitimating discourse for policy advocacy.⁶³ Discussions of sexual violence in educational institutions highlight the need for protection systems, including advocacy for the Sexual Violence Eradication Law (UU TPKS), demonstrating that KUPIPedia's discourse operates within and contributes to national legislative processes.⁶⁴

Through the lens of CDA, the interconnection of text, discursive practices, and social practices within KUPI's digital space forms a counter-narrative to patriarchal structures through an articulation of Islam that is empathetic, peaceful, and justice-sensitive. This shift—from a centralized, male-dominated authority model to a distributed, participatory epistemic community—constitutes the core discursive achievement of KUPI's digital strategy.

From the perspective of Actor-Network Theory, KUPI's female ulama authority is realized as the outcome of relations within a heterogeneous network: female ulama as producers of authority, digital media as mediating apparatuses, gender-responsive fatwas as discursive artefacts, online audiences as interpreting communities, and platform algorithms

⁶² Inayah Rohmaniyah et al., "Female Ulama's Authority: Deconstructing Masculine Domination in Islamic Norms and Practices," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 6 (2022): 54–61, <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.21.2022.225>.

⁶³ "Fikih Aborsi Alternatif Untuk Penguatan Hak Kesehatan Reproduksi," Kupipedia, accessed November 16, 2025, https://kupipedia.id/index.php/Fikih_Aborsi_Alternatif_Untuk_Penguatan_Hak_Kesehatan_Reproduksi.

⁶⁴ "Halaqah Paralel Tentang Peran Ulama Dalam Pencegahan Dan Penanganan Kekerasan Seksual Di Pendidikan Non Formal," Kupipedia, accessed November 16, 2025, https://kupipedia.id/index.php/Halaqah_Paralel_tentang_Peran_Ulama_dalam_Pencegahan_dan_Penanganan_Kekerasan_Seksual_di_Pendidikan_Non_Formal.

determining visibility and circulation. Critically, a fatwa disseminated through KUIPedia, Instagram, or YouTube does not automatically achieve authority. Its authority must be assembled through a network of actors, including platform algorithms, credentialed scholars, and engaged audiences. Social media algorithms in the Indonesian context may disadvantage KUPI's content, as platform mechanisms tend to privilege sensationalist or conservative voices over nuanced gender-justice discourse.

Digitalization of KUPI's Fatwas: Implications for the Dissemination of Inclusive Islam in Indonesia

The digitalization of KUPI's fatwas through KUIPedia, Instagram, and partner networks represents a significant intervention in Indonesian Islamic discourse across three domains: (1) the deconstruction of religious patriarchy, (2) the redistribution of epistemic authority, and (3) the formation of an inclusive, welfare-oriented theology.⁶⁵

KUPI's fatwas challenge patriarchal constructions by reaffirming principles of justice, humanity, and public good through scriptural reasoning. Digital dissemination accelerates this counter-discourse into Islamic boarding schools, universities, and local media.⁶⁶ As Wadud argues, reinterpretation grounded in women's experiences is an essential step toward intellectual liberation from patriarchal exegesis.⁶⁷ However, the empirical question of whether this digital counter-discourse has actually displaced patriarchal readings in institutional settings—as opposed to creating a parallel progressive discourse ecosystem—remains open.

KUPI's women ulama become active subjects of interpretation in line with the Islamic feminist frameworks of Wadud and Barlas, applied contextually through the lived experiences of women. KUIPedia functions as an open archive presenting *mubadalah* exegesis, substantive justice, and *ma'ruf* as publicly accessible and reproducible knowledge. As Barlas argues, Qur'anic interpretation must liberate human beings from patriarchal domination by constituting women as active exegetical participants.⁶⁸ KUPI's digital archive instantiates this argument institutionally, though its reach is currently concentrated among urban, educated constituencies. Whether it achieves penetration into rural and *pesantren* communities represents a critical empirical question for future research.

Digitalization enables an inclusive, welfare-based theology to reach diverse social layers. Programs such as the "KUPI Fatwa Methodology Short Course" and the Fahmina Institute's DKUP training translate theological values into concrete advocacy capacities. The collaboration between KUPI and local governments—for instance in Jepara, where fatwa-based recommendations on sexual violence prevention have informed public policy—

⁶⁵ Ahmad Suaedy et al., "Language, Authority, and Digital Media: The Impact on the Legitimacy of Fatwas," *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 23, no. 1 (2023): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v23i1.28875>.

⁶⁶ Ma'ruf, Wilodati, and Aryanti, "Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia Dalam Wacana Merebut Tafsir Gender Pasca Reformasi: Sebuah Tinjauan Genealogi."

⁶⁷ Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁶⁸ Barlas, "Believing Women" in Islam: *Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, 2002.

demonstrates the potential for digital religious discourse to achieve tangible institutional effects.⁶⁹

The digitalization of KUPI's fatwas reflects a paradigmatic shift in Islamic theology toward a more inclusive orientation that is responsive to social realities. By integrating a vision of gender justice and the value of *rahmah*, KUPI presents an Islamic discourse that upholds human dignity in all its diversity. This transformation underscores that technology does not diminish spirituality; instead, it expands the reach of ethical religious engagement in society. Amid the constantly evolving digital landscape, KUPI stands as a concrete example of how Islam can manifest in an inclusive, liberating, and human-affirming form within contemporary change, carrying significant implications for the dissemination of inclusive Islam in Indonesia

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that KUPI plays a central role in promoting inclusive Islam in Indonesia through well-planned and networked digital strategies. KUPI's fatwas function as living texts that are produced and reproduced through online interactions, comments, and cross-platform distribution, so that their meanings are continually negotiated in dialogue with the recipient community. The digitization of fatwas shifts the center of religious authority: digital credibility, social resonance, and collaborative networks become the primary sources of legitimacy for female scholars. Theoretically, this article offers three contributions. First, the KUPI fatwa trilogy represents a new model of distributed Islamic authority—religious legitimacy no longer rests on individual scholars or state institutions, but on a participatory network of human and non-human actors gathered around the principle of gender justice. Second, this article enriches the study of Islamic feminism by demonstrating how KUPI operationalizes Wadud and Barlas's theoretical frameworks in institutional practice, bridging feminist hermeneutics as academic theory with feminist hermeneutics as a method of jurisprudence—a pragmatics of Islamic feminism. Third, the combination of CDA and ANT offers a methodological contribution: CDA maps the discursive architecture of claims to authority, while ANT traces the relational infrastructure where such claims are constructed, circulated, and contested.

This analysis has several limitations. The study relies heavily on KUPIpedia as its primary source, which reflects KUPI's self-representation rather than independent documentation. The findings are contextual and may not be generalizable beyond the Indonesian context. The lack of longitudinal data limits claims regarding the resilience and institutional depth of KUPI's influence.

Future research should pursue three directions. First, comparative studies of digital Islamic feminist movements—such as Musawah, Sisters in Islam, and Baobab for Women's Human Rights—to map the distinctiveness and commonalities of their respective strategies. Second, platform-based analysis to examine how Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok algorithms differently shape the visibility of KUPI's content. Third, a study of reception within rural, non-

⁶⁹ KUPI, "KUPI."

urban, and pesantren communities to assess whether KUPI's digital strategies produce tangible discursive transformation or merely reinforce the echo chamber of urban-progressive religious narratives.

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