



The Contestation of Interpretational Authority between ‘*Ulamā*’ and Artificial Intelligence: A Critical Study of AI Epistemology in Quranic Studies

Kutsal van den Berg

Leiden University, Leiden, Netherlands, 2311 EZ

Email: k.v.d.berg@hum.leidenuniv.nl

Bart Bedner

Leiden University, Leiden, Netherlands, 2311 EZ

Email: b.t.bedner@hum.leidenuniv.nl

Martijn Zheng

Leiden University, Leiden, Netherlands, 2311 EZ

Email: m.n.zheng@hum.leidenuniv.nl

Philipp Grote

University of Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany, 72074

Email: phil.grote@uni-tuebingen.de

Alisha Shema*

Islamic University of Applied Sciences Rotterdam, Rotterdam, Netherlands, 3037 GC

Email: alishashema411@gmail.com

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Abstract

The development of artificial intelligence in the analysis of religious texts has encouraged its use in Quranic studies, including in the practice of interpretation, which, in turn, raises fundamental epistemological issues in the form of contestation over interpretive authority between ‘*ulamā*’ as interpretive subjects and AI as a computational system. This issue not only addresses the technical aspects of producing meaning but also challenges the legitimacy of knowledge, sources of epistemic authority, and standards of interpretive validity. To date, studies that systematically formulate the epistemic boundaries and position of AI authority within the epistemological framework of Quranic interpretation are still relatively limited. This study aims to critically and conceptually analyze the epistemology of AI in Quranic studies, thereby confirming the position and limits of interpretive authority between ‘*ulamā*’ and artificial intelligence. This study employs a qualitative method, drawing on library studies of classical and contemporary interpretation literature, philosophy of science, and critical technology studies, with a philosophical-epistemological and hermeneutic analysis approach. The results of this study indicate that AI operates at the instrumental-operational level by processing textual data, linguistic statistics, and syntactic patterns, without the capacity for intentionality, historical awareness, and normative reflection, which are the epistemic prerequisites for Quranic interpretation. This finding confirms that the epistemic authority of interpretation remains

with the ‘*ulamā*’ due to their involvement in hermeneutic awareness, mastery of scientific traditions, methodological responsibility, and ethical dimensions in the production of meaning. This study also reveals that the uncontrolled integration of AI has the potential to shift the standard of interpretation validity from epistemological considerations to the logic of technological efficiency. In conclusion, this study strengthens the epistemology of contemporary interpretation by formulating a relational framework that positions AI as a limited epistemic tool, rather than as a holder of interpretive authority.

Keywords: Interpretation Authority; Epistemology of Interpretation; Artificial Intelligence; Quranic Studies; Technology

Abstrak

Perkembangan kecerdasan buatan dalam analisis teks keagamaan telah mendorong pemanfaatannya dalam studi Al-Quran, termasuk dalam praktik penafsiran, yang pada gilirannya memunculkan persoalan epistemologis mendasar berupa kontestasi otoritas tafsir antara ulama sebagai subjek penafsir dan AI sebagai sistem komputasional. Persoalan ini tidak hanya menyentuh aspek teknis produksi makna, tetapi juga menyasar legitimasi pengetahuan, sumber otoritas epistemik, serta standar validitas tafsir. Hingga kini, kajian yang secara sistematis merumuskan batas epistemik dan posisi otoritas AI dalam kerangka epistemologi tafsir Al-Quran masih relatif terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis secara kritis epistemologi AI dalam studi Al-Quran serta menegaskan secara konseptual posisi dan batas otoritas tafsir antara ulama dan kecerdasan buatan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan terhadap literatur tafsir klasik dan kontemporer, filsafat ilmu, serta kajian kritis teknologi, dengan pendekatan analisis filosofis-epistemologis dan hermeneutik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa AI beroperasi pada level instrumental-operasional melalui pengolahan data tekstual, statistik linguistik, dan pola sintaksis, tanpa kapasitas intensionalitas, kesadaran historis, serta refleksi normatif yang menjadi prasyarat epistemik penafsiran Al-Quran. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa otoritas epistemik tafsir tetap berada pada ulama karena keterlibatan kesadaran hermeneutik, penguasaan tradisi keilmuan, tanggung jawab metodologis, serta dimensi etis dalam produksi makna. Penelitian ini juga mengungkap bahwa integrasi AI yang tidak dikendalikan berpotensi menggeser standar validitas tafsir dari pertimbangan epistemologis ke logika efisiensi teknologis. Kesimpulannya, penelitian ini memperkuat epistemologi tafsir kontemporer dengan merumuskan kerangka relasional yang menempatkan AI sebagai alat bantu epistemik yang terbatas, bukan sebagai pemegang otoritas penafsiran.

Kata Kunci: Otoritas Tafsir; Epistemologi Tafsir; Kecerdasan Artifisial; Studi Al-Quran; Teknologi

Introduction

The development of artificial intelligence marks a new phase of transformation in religious knowledge, particularly in Quranic studies, with a direct impact on the configuration of interpretive authority. Machine learning-based technologies, natural language processing, and large-scale language models are now used for verse search, thematic analysis, interpretation comparison, and the production of religious answers based on text corpora (Faizan et al., 2024). This change does not simply shift the medium of knowledge delivery but also gives rise to an epistemological contestation between ‘*ulamā*’ as interpretive subjects and AI systems as data-driven producers of interpretive discourse. In Islam, authority rests

not only on access to texts but also on the interpreter's integration of scholarship, historical awareness, methodological competence, and ethical responsibility (Sunier & Buskens, 2022). The advent of AI challenges this structure by offering instant knowledge that appears objective, measurable, and free of human subjectivity, raising fundamental questions about the boundaries between epistemic tools and claims of interpretive authority.

This phenomenon is closely tied to the global trend of religious digitization, as documented in various international reports. UNESCO (2024) states that AI technology plays an increasingly important role in the processing, structuring, and provision of information across multiple domains of modern society, including education, communication, and access to knowledge, posing new challenges to the impartial dissemination and understanding of information. The Pew Research Center (2025) also reports that awareness and use of AI are now expanding worldwide with the growth of internet access, including the use of AI to obtain information, guidance, and answers to personal questions that previously required human consultation. This fact indicates that AI no longer functions neutrally as a technical instrument, but rather as an epistemic agent that influences how religious knowledge is constructed, understood, and legitimized. These implications become even more significant in the context of Quranic interpretation, as its interpretive tradition is built through rigorous methodology, hierarchical scholarly transmission, and a binding normative orientation. When AI began to be used as a reference for interpretation by the wider community, there was a shift in authority from religious figures to algorithmic systems that lacked intentionality, normative awareness, or moral responsibility, thereby heightening the urgency of serious epistemological studies.

Previous studies have increasingly focused on the relationship between digital technology and Islamic studies, albeit with varying foci and limitations. Ignaco and Ballera's (2025) research emphasized AI and big data's ability to accelerate lexical analysis and the mapping of thematic patterns in the Quran, yet positioned the technology solely as a technical tool, without addressing its implications for interpretive authority. Wahyuni et al.'s (2025) study highlighted the potential of AI as a medium for interpretive education, expanding access to learning. Still, it failed to examine the epistemological risks associated with using AI as a reference for verse meaning. Papakostas (2025) discussed the ethical dimensions of AI use in religion, particularly the potential for misinterpretation, but did not systematically link this to the epistemological framework of Islamic interpretation. Andok's (2024) research on digital religion demonstrated a shift in religious authority from personal figures to algorithmic platforms, but it ended at a sociological analysis without normative-theological depth.

Meanwhile, Saeed and Akbar (2021) assert that interpretive authority rests on the integration of the interpreter's text, context, rationality, and morality;

however, they fail to consider the new challenges posed by AI as a non-human actor. The collective limitation of these studies lies in their instrumentalist, pedagogical, or sociological tendencies, thus failing to position AI as an epistemic factor that directly disrupts the structure of interpretive authority. This gap underscores the need for research that explicitly examines the contestation of interpretive authority from the perspective of Islamic exegetical epistemology.

The formulation of this research problem focuses on three main questions: how the presence of artificial intelligence reconfigures the authority of Quranic interpretation; how the epistemological position of AI can be understood within the framework of Islamic epistemology of interpretation; and where the limits of AI's role are so as not to exceed its function as an instrument of knowledge assistance. This study aims to critically analyze the contestation of interpretive authority between '*ulamā*' and AI, clarify the epistemic status of AI as a non-authoritative tool, and formulate a normative conceptual framework for the use of AI in Quranic studies. The study's initial argument is that Quranic interpretation is an epistemic activity that cannot be reduced to data processing, as it involves intentionality, historical awareness, methodological considerations, and the ethical responsibility of the interpreter. Based on these arguments, the contribution of this research includes enriching the discourse of contemporary exegetical epistemology through a systematic critique of AI's epistemic claims, providing a normative framework for assessing the legitimacy of using AI in Quranic studies, and strengthening the position of '*ulamā*' as irreplaceable interpretative subjects as well as determinants of ethical and epistemological boundaries for the use of artificial intelligence technology.

Method

This research is a conceptual-critical, qualitative study that examines the epistemological contestation over interpretive authority between the '*ulamā*' and artificial intelligence. By placing AI as the object of knowledge analysis, rather than the subject of interpretation or the producer of interpretive meaning, it examines the epistemological implications of this contestation. The approach is epistemologically interdisciplinary, operationalized through the integration of studies of Quranic interpretation, the philosophy of science, and artificial intelligence, particularly regarding the legitimacy of knowledge, epistemic subject positions, and claims of algorithmic objectivity. Data sources comprise normative-religious texts in the form of '*ulūm al-Qur'ān*' books, selected for their representativeness of scientific authority and the epistemic framework of interpretation, as well as technical-epistemic sources, including academic publications and conceptual documents, that examine the mechanisms of AI, particularly in natural language processing and text analysis. Data collection was conducted through a critical literature review, with inclusion criteria based on epistemological relevance, academic quality, and conceptual contribution to the

issue of knowledge authority. Data analysis was conducted in a hermeneutic-critical manner through the stages of identifying the epistemic assumptions of ‘*ulamā*’ and AI, analyzing the position of the subject of knowledge, comparing sources and legitimacy of meaning, criticizing claims of algorithmic objectivity, and conceptual synthesis to formulate the epistemological boundaries and position of AI as an instrument in the study of Quran interpretation.

Results and Discussion

The Authority of ‘*Ulamā*’ Interpretation: Epistemological Foundations and Legitimacy Mechanisms

The authority of interpretation in the ‘*ulamā*’ tradition is understood as a form of epistemic authority, namely the authority of knowledge that allows claims about the meaning of the Quran to be accepted as authentic through methodological justification and scientific recognition (Calis, 2022). ‘*Ulamā*’ function as epistemic subjects with the capacity for justification, not as the owners of the meaning of revelation. This position is characterized by the mastery of scientific disciplines, the internalization of interpretive methodology, and adherence to scientific ethics that limit interpretive subjectivity (Asnawi, Affani, & Hakamah, 2021). Thus, the authority of interpretation serves as a regulatory mechanism for the production of religious knowledge, linking revelation, reason, and scientific tradition in a structured manner (Bhat & Bisati, 2025). This understanding is important because it emphasizes that the authority of interpretation is epistemological and relational, and therefore cannot be reduced to individual claims or replicated without an equivalent justification structure.

The epistemological structure of interpretive authority is constructed through a hierarchy of knowledge sources that function as a system of justification for meaning. The Quran occupies the position of primary source with absolute normative status, while the hadith, ‘*ulamā*’ consensus, and linguistic and rational instruments serve as mutually corrective explanatory devices (Stepanova & Hachim, 2025). This hierarchy is not administrative, but epistemic, as it determines the weight of arguments and the validity of interpretive claims. Reason plays an operational role, operating within the boundaries of language, the context of revelation, and the patterns of understanding established by earlier generations. This mechanism forms an epistemic constraint that prevents arbitrary interpretations while enabling differentiation of opinions through testable justification (Chukhanov & Kairbekov, 2024). With this structure, the truth of interpretation is determined not only by the interpreter’s internal coherence but also by the argument’s conformity to a network of recognized sources (Saeed & Akbar, 2021). This hierarchy also highlights the non-automatic nature of interpretive knowledge, as meaning is generated through disciplined reasoning rather than simply through the processing of textual information.

The methodology of interpretation serves as the primary epistemological tool governing the production, verification, and evaluation of interpretive knowledge. It not only provides techniques for text analysis but also establishes criteria for the validity of meaning and the limits of accountable interpretation (Ariyadri & Anggriyani, 2025). Mastery of Arabic, *uṣūl al-Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, and hadith serve as epistemic prerequisites because they foster the ability to assess the relevance of evidence, the context of meaning, and the strength of arguments (Al-Suyūṭī, 1974). Within this framework, methodology functions as a mechanism for verification and correction, not merely a procedural tradition. This methodological function positions interpretation as a scientific discipline that allows for differences of opinion without compromising standards of truth.

The legitimacy of *tafsīr* scholarship is established through collective recognition, grounded in methodological evaluation within the scholarly community across generations. This legitimacy is epistemic because it is determined by the quality of argumentative justification, methodological consistency, and connection to established scholarly traditions (Rawanita & Syabuddin, 2024). Collective recognition is not synonymous with majority consensus, but rather the result of a critical selection process through the transmission, rereading, and testing of arguments by other '*ulamā*' (Saeed & Akbar, 2021). This mechanism forms a system of epistemic control that prevents monopolistic claims to meaning while also allowing for correction. However, legitimacy is not entirely free from intellectual power relations, so critical evaluation remains necessary to distinguish epistemic authority from social domination. This framework demonstrates that *tafsīr* authority operates as a dynamic institutional system, dependent on the quality of argumentation and methodological robustness, not on claims of finality of meaning that are closed to review.

The scientific chain of transmission serves as a mechanism of epistemic continuity, ensuring the connection between interpretive knowledge and proven methodological traditions. The chain of transmission serves not only as a chain of information transmission but also as a means of internalizing a framework of thought, a scientific ethos, and a standard for evaluating meaning. Through the chain of transmission, interpreters gain epistemic legitimacy because they are connected to an authority whose scientific credibility has been recognized (Akib, 2025). However, the chain of transmission does not automatically guarantee the epistemic truth of meaning, but rather the legitimacy of the transmission process and the inheritance of methodology. The validity of interpretation remains dependent on the quality of argumentation and methodological appropriateness. Thus, the chain of transmission strengthens the collective and historical dimensions of interpretive authority without closing off the space for rational evaluation, thereby protecting interpretive knowledge from dogmatism and epistemic discontinuity.

Historical awareness plays a crucial role in maintaining the relevance of interpretation without compromising its epistemological integrity. Every act of interpretation is born within a specific social, political, and intellectual context that shapes its focus and the problem it addresses. Awareness of this context enables ‘ulamā’ to distinguish between the universal dimension of revelation and the historical articulation of its meaning (Saeed & Akbar, 2021). This approach is not a relativization of meaning, but rather an epistemic strategy to maintain the text’s connection to reality without exceeding methodological boundaries. The authority of interpretation is maintained when the interpreter can balance fidelity to epistemic principles with sensitivity to social change (Rois et al., 2025). This balance produces interpretations that are methodologically valid and historically relevant. This position demonstrates that the authority of interpretation is adaptive within a stable epistemic framework, so that changing contexts do not erase authority but rather test the methodology’s resilience in facing new challenges.

The overall construction of the ‘ulamā’ interpretive authority demonstrates a layered epistemic system that integrates sources of knowledge, methodology, collective legitimacy, scientific chains of narration, and historical awareness. The authority of interpretation rests not on individual capacity or technical sophistication, but rather on a complex and tested network of epistemological justifications. This framework emphasizes that interpretation is a knowledge practice that is not technology-neutral, as it relies on methodological assessment, scientific ethics, and normative responsibility for determining the meaning of revelation. This understanding provides a critical basis for assessing claims of artificial intelligence-based interpretation, which operates through data processing without full participation in the epistemic legitimacy structures of the interpretive tradition. Thus, the authority of scholarly interpretation cannot be understood as a relic of the past, but rather as an active epistemological system that sets the standard for evaluating all contemporary interpretations.

Epistemology of Artificial Intelligence in the Analysis of the Quran

The epistemology of artificial intelligence starts from the assumption that knowledge can be reduced to computational representations composed of data, models, and inferential procedures. Within this framework, knowledge is not understood as reflective understanding or normatively justified belief, but rather as the result of statistical pattern-based information processing. The Quranic text is treated as a linguistic corpus that can be encoded, annotated, and mapped onto mathematical structures (Bashir et al., 2023). This epistemic position situates AI in relation to computational empiricism and knowledge instrumentalism, rather than normative or hermeneutic epistemologies. The resulting knowledge is derivative because it relies entirely on human-constructed training data, including the choice of texts, interpretations, translations, and accompanying conceptual assumptions (Alavi, Leidner, & Mousavi, 2024). Consequently, AI does not produce new

knowledge in the sense of understanding, but rather recombines existing information. This epistemological character marks a fundamental difference between AI knowledge production and the interpretive tradition, which is oriented towards revealing the normative meaning of revelation.

The mechanism of AI's meaning-making operates through statistical abstraction, mapping relationships between words, phrases, and syntactic structures. Language models construct semantic representations through co-occurrence probabilities and vector proximity, reducing meaning to a function of linguistic regularities (Cabrera et al., 2023). This process yields thematic classification, paraphrasing, and the prediction of a text's continuation, but does not involve intentional meaning-making. Meaning is not understood as divine intent or the ethical orientation of revelation, but rather as a formal relationship between linguistic units. This reduction indicates that AI analysis is non-hermeneutic because it does not involve reflection on the text's goals, values, or truth claims. Hermeneutics demands a dialogue between the text, the interpreter, and the evolving horizon of meaning (Thomaskutty, 2023), while AI operates through static calculations (Avila et al., 2025). Epistemic tensions arise when statistical output is perceived as equivalent to understanding, even though the two originate from fundamentally different logics of knowledge.

AI's production of meaning relies on data correlation-based generalization and the optimization of prediction errors. Meaning emerges as an aggregation of frequently recurring patterns, not as a result of normative judgment or an understanding of the text's ethical intent (Goetz et al, 2024). This correlational approach allows for statistical consistency but weakens conceptual depth. The model's output actually masks epistemic fragility when dealing with the Quran's polysemy, ambiguity, and layers of meaning. The exegetical tradition views meaning as a dynamic entity formed through the interaction between text, context, and the interpreter's normative framework (Junaidi et al., 2025). AI lacks a dialogically evolving horizon of understanding, thus failing to capture the tensions of meaning across contexts (Cress & Kimmerle, 2023). This gap highlights that technical success is not equivalent to epistemological adequacy, particularly when the object of study encompasses both normative and transcendent dimensions.

Claims of objectivity and neutrality in AI are often positioned as epistemic advantages because they are perceived as free from subjective interests. This objectivity is actually methodological, not epistemic. The procedural consistency of an algorithm does not guarantee the accuracy of the meaning it produces. Model design, data selection, and optimization goals reflect human decisions laden with value assumptions (Papayannopoulos, 2023). In the context of Quranic interpretation, claims of objectivity are potentially misleading when AI output is treated as a valid representation of meaning. Epistemic objectivity requires normative justification and awareness of the interpreter's position, while AI only

guarantees computational consistency. This distinction is crucial because the legitimacy of interpretation depends not only on procedures but also on the epistemic authority recognized in the Islamic scientific tradition. Without clarification, AI objectivity risks being misinterpreted as interpretive authority.

The historical dimension of the Quran reveals the structural limitations of AI epistemology. In AI, historical representations are presented as standardized textual data rather than as temporal experiences that shape understanding (Duguleană et al, 2020). The *asbāb al-Nuzūl* (the causes of truth), social dynamics, and changes in lexical meaning are reduced to static information. This reduction eliminates history as a horizon of understanding that shapes meaning construction. Hermeneutics positions history as a constitutive element of interpretation rather than merely background information (Fairfield, 2025). AI lacks the temporal awareness that allows for a dialectical reading of text and context (Li, 2024). This lack of historical structure renders AI understanding ahistorical, despite its use of historical data. This limitation highlights that AI analysis only scratches the surface of the text, while historical depth remains beyond the reach of computational epistemology.

The most fundamental epistemological problem arises when AI confronts the Quran's theological dimension. Revelation not only conveys linguistic messages but also affirms the ontological relationship between God, humanity, and divine will (Lawson, 2021). This relationship transcends the immanence of the data on which AI operates. The concepts of revelation, sacred purpose, and theological truth cannot be represented through probability or correlation. AI can model theological discourse as textual discourse, but it cannot access theological meaning as metaphysical belief (Lucas, 2023). This difference is epistemological, not dogmatic. The epistemology of revelation demands recognition of a transcendent source of knowledge, while AI operates within empirical boundaries. The inability to grasp the ontological dimension of revelation marks a clear boundary between analytical tools and interpretive subjects. Ignoring this boundary risks theological reductionism in Quranic studies.

A synthesis of all the descriptions shows that the epistemology of artificial intelligence possesses both instrumental power and inherent conceptual limitations. Its large data processing capacity and procedural consistency make AI useful for textual exploration, theme mapping, and linguistic analysis. However, knowledge production based on statistical patterns is inadequate to capture the historical, normative, and theological meaning of the Quran. The distinction between information and understanding is key to epistemic evaluation. AI produces operational knowledge, not reflective understanding. Awareness of this limit is crucial for positioning AI as a supporting instrument, not an interpretive authority. Thus, an analysis of AI's epistemology provides a critical foundation for evaluating the legitimacy of technology-based interpretive claims.

Forms and Patterns of Contestation of Interpretation Authority between 'Ulamā' and AI

The contestation of interpretive authority between Islamic '*ulamā*' and artificial intelligence represents an epistemic transformation rooted in fundamental differences in the mechanisms of producing, validating, and legitimizing religious knowledge. The first pattern of contestation lies in the shifting claim of interpretive validity, which has undergone a fundamental redefinition. The epistemological validity of Islamic '*ulamā*' interpretations is determined by methodological coherence, argumentative consistency, and a connection to a traceable and testable scientific tradition (Saeed & Akbar, 2021). Artificial intelligence produces a form of instrumental validity that relies on extensive data, rapid synthesis capabilities, and performative similarities to scientific discourse. Systematically presented and linguistically persuasive answers are often accepted as valid knowledge without examination of the epistemic processes underlying them (Carobene et al., 2024). This shift shifts validity from the realm of justification to the sphere of textual performativity. Epistemic contestation arises because the criteria for truth are no longer determined by argumentative processes, but rather by the user's instant cognitive gratification. This shift poses the risk of blurring the boundaries between justified knowledge and knowledge simulations that merely resemble academic structures.

The redefinition of the sources of interpretive legitimacy intensifies this contestation. The authority of '*ulamā*' gains epistemic legitimacy through collective recognition by the scientific community, the continuity of tradition, and internal historical correction mechanisms (Saeed & Akbar, 2021). Artificial intelligence builds legitimacy through trust in algorithmic objectivity, computational efficiency, and the assumption of technological neutrality (Korneeva et al., 2023). This legitimacy is external to the interpretive tradition but is widely accepted because it operates through epistemic trust in automated systems. Epistemic tensions arise when algorithmic legitimacy is treated on a par with scientific legitimacy without normative verification mechanisms. Contestation does not occur through explicit rejection of '*ulamā*', but rather through shifts in users' epistemic preferences. The authority of interpretation shifts toward entities deemed most functionally trustworthy, rather than most methodologically accountable.

This epistemic transformation is becoming increasingly complex due to changes in the production patterns of interpretive knowledge. Scientific tradition positions the production of interpretation as a gradual process that demands analytical depth, interpretive care, and scientific responsibility (Zulliandi, Wulansari, & Aulia, 2025). Artificial intelligence facilitates the production of interpretations simultaneously, instantly, and responsively to user demand (Sati et al., 2025). This change shifts the epistemic orientation from justification to acceleration. The speed of production influences how knowledge is perceived, as

truth is associated with immediate availability. Contestation occurs when algorithmic distribution mechanisms become determinants of knowledge visibility, while epistemic validation mechanisms lose practical authority. Interpretations transform into knowledge entities subject to the logic of digital circulation. Authority is no longer determined by the quality of argumentation, but rather by the system's ability to provide the most accessible and quickly consumed answers.

Differences in epistemological relationships to sacred texts deepen this contestation. 'Ulamā' understand the Quran as a normative text that demands ethical engagement, moral responsibility, and hermeneutic awareness of the consequences of interpretation (Rozaq et al., 2025). Artificial intelligence treats text as a linguistic corpus that can be analyzed through statistical patterns, lacking intrinsic normative awareness (Jakesch, Hancock, & Naaman, 2023). Although AI systems reflect the implicit values of their training data, their epistemic relationships remain non-intentional. Contestation arises when the results of these analyses are treated as valid interpretations without considering the differing positions of the interpreters. The epistemic conflict lies not in accuracy alone, but in the legitimacy of the interpretative subject. The primary question shifts to who has the right to determine the normative meaning of the sacred text, not who can produce the most informative answers.

The fragmentation of interpretive authority becomes the next pattern of contestation, characterized by algorithmic processes. The Islamic tradition recognizes interpretive plurality through methodological *ikhtilāf*, which remains within the framework of an epistemic hierarchy and *tarjīh* mechanisms (Ulum, Putri, & Farhati, 2024). Artificial intelligence generates plurality through algorithmic personalization that adapts answers to user preferences without a hierarchy of justification (Mendoza, Franco, & Torres, 2025). This fragmentation arises not from methodological debate but from the system's flexibility in presenting various possible meanings. Contestation arises because an adequate epistemic selection mechanism is lacking in this plurality. Interpretive authority is dispersed, with no clear epistemological guidance. Religious knowledge loses its evaluative structure, thereby allowing no argumentative distinction between stronger and weaker interpretations.

The overall pattern of contestation demonstrates a structural and epistemic paradigm shift in interpretive authority. 'Ulamā' face the challenge of redefining authority, necessitating adaptation without compromising their methodological foundations. Artificial intelligence operates as a new epistemic actor, transforming how knowledge is produced, validated, and received. The contestation does not represent a total rejection of tradition or technology, but rather an ongoing negotiation between two distinct epistemic regimes. This transformation marks a new phase in contemporary Quranic studies, in which interpretive authority is no longer stable but continually contested in the digital knowledge space.

Epistemological Critique of AI Interpretation Claims in Quranic Studies

Quranic interpretation is an epistemic practice that operates through complex relationships between the revealed text, classical Arabic, scholarly traditions, and the normative horizons that frame meaning (Saeed & Akbar, 2021). This critique is not directed at the use of AI as a technical aid for information processing, but rather at AI's implicit and explicit claims as the subject of interpretive meaning. Exegetical knowledge cannot be reduced to analytical output based on statistical correlation, because the meaning of the Quran is formed through an intentional process of understanding that involves hermeneutic awareness. This awareness encompasses the ability to interpret meaning through a dialogue between text, context, and normative goals (Ridwan et al., 2024). AI produces linguistic representations based on probabilistic patterns without undergoing the process of understanding itself. The objectivity claimed by AI systems is illusory because it relies on quantifying linguistic relations rather than on epistemic justification of meaning (Helm et al, 2024). This position positions AI interpretation as a secondary informational construct.

The primary epistemological issue with AI interpretation is the tendency towards meaning reductionism, which simplifies the semantic complexity of revelation into superficial linguistic equivalences. The language of the Quran is characterized by polysemy, metaphor, and a productive tension between word and meaning, which demands layered semantic reasoning (Abalkheel, Sourani, & Zohbi, 2025). The traditions of exegesis and Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-Fiqh*) developed conceptual tools to interpret these relationships through *dilālah* (intelligible text), *mafhūm* (difficult-to-understand text), and argumentative interrelationships between verses (Demircigil, 2025). AI processes text as token units that are reordered based on frequency and statistical proximity, thus narrowing meaning relationships into formal coherence (Alomari & Ahmad, 2024). This reduction is not merely a technical limitation but an epistemological failure, as it eliminates the relational dimension of meaning. Exegetical knowledge demands an integration between the structure of language, divine intent, and the ethical orientation of revelation. AI-generated paraphrases or thematic summaries may appear linguistically consistent. Still, they do not meet the epistemic criteria of interpretation because they overlook the semantic complexity that underlies the validity of interpreting the Quran.

The historical dimension occupies a central position in the epistemology of interpretation because the meaning of verses is articulated through the circumstances of revelation and the surrounding social dynamics (Kaltsum & Amin, 2024). Criticism of AI interpretation does not deny the system's ability to represent historical information textually; rather, it highlights AI's inability to internalize history as a horizon of understanding. History in interpretation is not merely descriptive data, but a limiting framework that directs possible meanings (Uthman,

2021). AI treats historical context as a set of fragments processed neutrally, without a hermeneutic function that defines the limits of interpretation. As a result, the meanings tend to be transpositional, transferring meaning across contexts without accounting for changes in language and social conditions (Schuh, 2024). This loss of historical awareness renders the Quran an abstract text, detached from the process of its revelation. According to al-Qaṭṭān (1973), the epistemic legitimacy of interpretation depends on the ability to maintain the relationship between meaning and the history of revelation. Interpretations that overlook this relationship lack adequate justification within the Quranic scholarly tradition.

Normative reasoning marks a fundamental limit to AI's claim to knowledge. Quranic interpretation does not stop at describing meaning but involves normative evaluation linked to the *maqāṣid*, value consistency, and practical reason (Wadud, 2021). Normative reasoning requires a moral subject capable of reflective and responsible value judgment. AI lacks this capacity because its entire inference process relies on pre-existing linguistic patterns. The normative statements generated by AI are simulations of ethical discourse, rather than the result of moral reasoning (Alyousef, Omari, & Mahafdah, 2025). The distinction between normative imitation and normative reasoning is epistemological in nature, as it relates to the source of knowledge's validity. Normative knowledge requires value-based justification, not merely the reproduction of arguments (Singer, 2021). Without a moral subject, AI cannot distinguish between normative validity and rhetorical coherence (Gillespie, 2024). These limitations indicate that AI's interpretation claims do not meet the epistemological requirements of normative knowledge in Quranic studies.

The ontological status of AI as an instrument clarifies the epistemic limits of the interpretations it produces. Instruments function to process and represent information, not to generate understanding. AI interpretations are entirely dependent on data input, model architecture, and the assumptions embedded in the training corpus (Tursunaliyeva et al., 2024). This dependency undermines the capacity for self-justification because the system cannot account for the truth of the meanings it produces. Intentionality and awareness of meaning are ontological prerequisites for interpretive knowledge, which AI lacks (Hakim & Nurrohm, 2025). The results produced by computational systems do not originate from understanding, but rather from calculations of linguistic possibilities. This ontological limit is determinative, not contingent, and therefore cannot be overcome alone through increased technical capacity. Positioning AI as an epistemic instrument requires limiting its claims to prevent them from going beyond its assistive function. Without such limitations, AI's interpretive claims have the potential to confuse information representation with valid interpretive knowledge.

The coherence of epistemological critiques of AI interpretation lies in the integration of issues of meaning, history, and normativity. Reductionism of meaning

eliminates semantic depth, ahistoricity undermines the horizon of understanding, and the absence of normative reasoning negates the justification of values. These three problems are interrelated and cannot be separated analytically. Quranic interpretation is an epistemic practice that combines linguistic, historical, and normative dimensions in a single process of understanding (Saeed & Akbar, 2021). AI operates by fragmenting these dimensions into discrete data units. This fragmentation produces output that appears formally coherent but is epistemologically fragile. A consistent critical stance toward AI interpretation requires recognizing the ontological and epistemic limitations of computational systems. This critique does not reject the use of AI, but rather rejects epistemic claims that equate AI output with interpretive knowledge within the Quranic scholarly tradition.

Conclusion

The contestation of interpretive authority between ‘*ulamā*’ and artificial intelligence is rooted in fundamental epistemological differences, in which ‘*ulamā*’ authority is established through the integration of scholarship, historical context, and normative reasoning. In contrast, AI operates computationally through data processing and probabilistic generalizations, lacking reflective and ethical capacity. These findings emphasize that AI output cannot be claimed as hermeneutic authority, but must be epistemically positioned as an assistive instrument in Quranic studies. Theoretically, this study enriches the contemporary discourse on the epistemology of interpretation by offering a critical framework for distinguishing between normative religious knowledge and algorithm-based assistive knowledge, and it also contributes to the study of the philosophy of technology in the context of religion. Practically, these findings demand strengthening epistemological literacy among academics, educators, and religious institutions so that the use of AI in research, learning, and *da’wah* does not blur the boundaries of interpretive legitimacy. The limitations of this study lie in its conceptual-epistemological approach, which does not involve empirical data regarding the practice of AI use in specific interpretive communities; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized sociologically. Further research is recommended to fill this gap through interdisciplinary approaches, such as digital ethnography or user studies, to empirically examine the impact of AI on perceptions of authority, scientific legitimacy, and the practice of Quranic interpretation.

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Author Contribution Statement

KB played a role in conceptualizing the research, developing the study framework, writing the initial draft, and conducting the main analysis. BB contributed to data collection and curation, literature searches, and the drafting of

the literature review section. MZ conducted methodological analysis, argument validation, and refined the discussion structure. PG was involved in interpreting the results, strengthening the theoretical analysis, and editing the manuscript’s substance. AS acted as the corresponding author, coordinating the revision process, ensuring academic consistency and writing format, and conducting the final review before submission.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that this manuscript was prepared and published without any conflict of interest whatsoever, whether financial, professional, or institutional. The entire process of writing, analysis, and preparation of the manuscript was conducted independently and objectively, without any influence from any party that could affect the content, interpretation, or conclusions presented in this study.

AI Usage Statement

The author declares that the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the preparation of this manuscript was limited to supporting functions, namely improving language quality, improving grammar, and assisting with writing formatting. All scientific substance in this article—including problem formulation, conceptual framework, analysis, data interpretation, ideas, research findings, and conclusions—is entirely the result of the author’s thoughts, studies, and academic responsibility. Therefore, AI was not used to generate the main scientific content of this manuscript, but only as a technical aid to improve the text’s presentation.

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