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Waqr and Algorithmic Epistemic Closure: A Qur'anic Framework for Religious Cognition in Social Media Echo Chambers

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Abstract

Religious information exposure on social media does not necessarily produce openness to truth, especially when algorithms reinforce existing preferences, identities, and trusted authorities. This article aims to reconstruct the Qur'anic concept of waqr as a theory of epistemic closure and to examine its relevance for understanding religious cognition in algorithmically mediated digital environments. The study employs a qualitative-conceptual approach by combining thematic interpretation of the nine Qur'anic occurrences of the w-q-r root with interdisciplinary analysis of cognitive resistance, selective exposure, echo chambers, misinformation, and fragmented digital religious authority. The findings show that waqr is neither identical to physical deafness nor reducible to mere ignorance. Rather, it describes a recursive process of closure in which prior commitments, identity-protective motives, social imitation, arrogance, and repeated rejection reshape how evidence is heard, trusted, and interpreted. Recommendation systems may intensify this condition through repeated exposure to identity-congruent content while weakening trust in sources outside one's group. The article's main novelty is the concept of algorithmic waqr, defined as a socio-technical form of epistemic closure emerging from interaction between human dispositions and platform architectures across individual, relational, and infrastructural layers. This model emphasizes that algorithms are not the sole cause of closure but amplifiers of epistemic conditions already shaped by users' choices, affiliations, habits, and reception patterns. The study is urgent because digital religiosity increasingly confronts polarization, misinformation, and fragmented authority. It contributes the framework of Qur'anic Epistemic Receptivity, emphasizing reflective listening, source pluralization, epistemic humility, verification, and dialogical correction for contemporary digital religious life.

Keywords: *waqr; algorithmic waqr; epistemic closure; digital religion; Qur'anic Epistemic Receptivity.*

Abstrak

Fenomena keterpaparan informasi keagamaan di media sosial tidak selalu menghasilkan keterbukaan terhadap kebenaran, terutama ketika algoritma memperkuat preferensi, identitas, dan otoritas yang telah dipercaya. Artikel ini bertujuan merekonstruksi konsep Qur'ani waqr sebagai teori ketertutupan epistemik serta menguji relevansinya untuk memahami kognisi keagamaan dalam lingkungan digital berbasis algoritma. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif-konseptual dengan menggabungkan tafsir tematik terhadap sembilan kemunculan akar w-q-r dalam Al-Qur'an dan analisis interdisipliner atas resistensi kognitif, selective exposure, echo chamber, misinformasi, serta fragmentasi otoritas keagamaan digital. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa waqr tidak identik dengan ketulian fisik maupun sekadar

ketidaktahuan, tetapi menggambarkan proses penutupan berulang ketika komitmen awal, perlindungan identitas, imitasi sosial, kesombongan, dan penolakan terus-menerus mengubah cara bukti didengar, dipercaya, dan ditafsirkan. Sistem rekomendasi dapat memperkuat kondisi tersebut melalui paparan berulang terhadap konten yang selaras dengan identitas pengguna serta pelemahan kepercayaan terhadap sumber di luar kelompok. Kebaruan utama artikel ini adalah konsep algorithmic waqr sebagai bentuk ketertutupan epistemik sosio-teknis yang terbentuk melalui interaksi disposisi manusia dan arsitektur platform pada lapisan individual, relasional, dan infrastruktural. Model ini menegaskan bahwa algoritma bukan penyebab tunggal ketertutupan, melainkan penguat kondisi epistemik yang telah terbentuk melalui pilihan, afiliasi, kebiasaan, dan pola penerimaan pengguna. Urgensi penelitian terletak pada kebutuhan membangun kerangka Qur'ani untuk menghadapi polarisasi, misinformasi, dan fragmentasi otoritas keagamaan digital. Artikel ini menawarkan Qur'anic Epistemic Receptivity sebagai kontribusi teoritis yang menekankan pendengaran reflektif, pluralisasi sumber, kerendahan hati epistemik, verifikasi, dan koreksi dialogis, sekaligus memperluas percakapan antara studi Al-Qur'an, agama digital, epistemologi sosial, dan riset misinformasi kontemporer dalam membaca dinamika keberagamaan masyarakat digital kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: waqr; waqr algoritmik; ketertutupan epistemik; agama digital; reseptivitas epistemik Qur'ani.

INTRODUCTION

Religious communication has entered an environment in which access to information is abundant while receptivity to correction is increasingly uncertain. Social media platforms do not merely distribute sermons, fatwas, Qur'anic explanations, and devotional advice; they also rank, personalize, and recirculate them through engagement-driven infrastructures. Research on digital religion has long shown that new media redistribute religious authority, allowing institutional scholars, charismatic preachers, micro-celebrities, and ordinary users to compete for attention and credibility.[1] Recent studies of Indonesian Muslim social media further demonstrate that visual performance, influencer culture, and networked legitimacy increasingly shape who is recognized as an authoritative religious voice.[2] The resulting condition creates a paradox: Muslims may encounter more religious content than previous generations while simultaneously becoming less exposed to epistemically challenging interpretations.

This paradox resembles a problem already described by the Qur'an through the metaphor of waqr. The uploaded thesis on Waqr Perspektif Al-Qur'an identifies nine occurrences of the w-q-r root and shows that, when associated with the ear, waqr signifies a burden, obstruction, or blockage that prevents listeners from benefiting from divine guidance even when they physically hear the recitation.[3] Its central finding is therefore not sensory disability but failed receptivity: the message is present, hearing occurs, yet guidance does not become cognitively or morally effective. The thesis also identifies refusal of truth, blind imitation, arrogance, and forgetfulness of prior wrongdoing as major causes of waqr, while its

[1]Heidi A. Campbell, "Who's Got the Power? Religious Authority and the Internet," Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 12, no. 3 (2007): 1043–1062, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00362.x; Bryan S. Turner, "Religious Authority and the New Media," Theory, Culture & Society 24, no. 2 (2007), https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407075001.

[2]Harry Febrian, "Visualizing Authority: Rise of the Religious Influencers on Instagram," Social Media + Society (2024), https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241286850; Niki Alma Febriana Fauzi, "Zulkarnain EL Madury and the Micro-Celebrity Ustaz Phenomenon," Indonesia and the Malay World 51, no. 151 (2023/2024): 304–329, https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2023.2274708.

[3]Faikar Muhammad al-Baqir, Waqr Perspektif Al-Qur'an (Kajian Tafsir Mauḍū'ī) (master's thesis, UIN Alauddin Makassar, 2025).

implications explicitly connect the concept with cognitive and emotional resistance in contemporary communication.[4]

The problem is theoretically important because the dominant vocabulary of digital communication—filter bubbles, echo chambers, selective exposure, motivated reasoning, confirmation bias, and misinformation—often describes similar outcomes without a normative anthropology of receptivity. Nguyen distinguishes epistemic bubbles, where relevant voices are omitted, from echo chambers, where outsiders are actively discredited and distrust is systematically cultivated.[5] Empirical studies similarly show that homophily, selective exposure, automated amplification, and platform-specific interaction patterns can produce highly segregated information environments.[6] Yet these models usually begin with information structures or cognitive mechanisms, whereas waqr begins with the moral-epistemic condition of the hearer and the consequences of repeated refusal.

The reverse gap also exists in Qur'anic studies. Classical and contemporary tafsir richly explain waqr in relation to the Makkan opponents of revelation, but the concept is rarely developed as a portable analytical category for contemporary mediated epistemology. Studies of Islamic social media tend to focus on authority, piety, moderation, visual persuasion, or sectarian contestation, while studies of misinformation and echo chambers generally operate without engagement with Islamic epistemic concepts.[7] The absence of dialogue between these bodies of scholarship leaves an important conceptual space unexplored: how might a Qur'anic theory of blocked hearing illuminate environments in which individuals are exposed to enormous quantities of religious speech but learn to distrust, ignore, or reinterpret anything that challenges identity-confirming commitments?

This article addresses that gap by proposing the concept of algorithmic waqr. The term does not claim that algorithms literally cause the Qur'anic condition, nor does it equate platform design with divine judgment. It names a contemporary socio-technical configuration in which pre-existing dispositions toward selective hearing interact with recommender systems, influencer networks, peer reinforcement, and repeated exposure. The argument is that waqr can be reconstructed as a layered theory of epistemic closure: individual dispositions shape what is welcomed; social networks shape whom one trusts; and platforms shape what repeatedly becomes visible. This three-level model is intended to avoid both moral reductionism, which blames users alone, and technological determinism, which blames algorithms alone.

The article asks three questions. First, what epistemic mechanism can be reconstructed from the Qur'anic semantics and narrative contexts of waqr? Second, how does that mechanism compare with contemporary findings on selective exposure, echo chambers, misinformation, and digitally fragmented religious authority? Third, what counter-principles can be derived for religious communication in algorithmically mediated environments? The contribution is

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[4]al-Baqir, Waqr Perspektif Al-Qur'an, sections on causes, impacts, and implications of waqr; see also M. Quraish Shihab, Tafsir al-Misbah (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2011).

[5]C. Thi Nguyen, "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles," Episteme 17, no. 2 (2020): 141–161, https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2018.32.

[6]Michela Del Vicario et al., "The Spreading of Misinformation Online," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 113, no. 3 (2016): 554–559, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1517441113; Matteo Cinelli et al., "The Echo Chamber Effect on Social Media," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 118, no. 9 (2021): e2023301118, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2023301118.

[7]Martin Slama, "Practising Islam through Social Media in Indonesia," Indonesia and the Malay World 46, no. 134 (2018): 1–4, https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416798; Fatimah Husein and Martin Slama, "Online Piety and Its Discontent," Indonesia and the Malay World 46, no. 134 (2018): 80–93, https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1415056.

therefore conceptual rather than empirical: it transforms a thematic-tafsir finding into an interdisciplinary framework and offers Qur'anic Epistemic Receptivity as a constructive model for digital religious literacy.

METHOD

This research employs qualitative library research through an integrative conceptual-hermeneutical design. Its primary Qur'anic corpus consists of the nine occurrences of the w-q-r root identified in the source thesis: QS al-An'ām 6: 25, al-Isrā' 17: 46, al-Kahf 18: 57, Luqmān 31: 7, Fuṣṣilat 41: 5 and 41: 44, al-Fatḥ 48: 9, al-Dhāriyāt 51: 2, and Nūḥ 71: 13.[8] The analysis focuses especially on the cluster in which waqr denotes obstruction of hearing, while the semantic extensions of wiqr, waqār, and tuwaqqirū are retained to clarify the underlying root meaning of weight, gravity, and burden. Classical lexical and exegetical works are used to stabilize the semantic field before any contemporary comparison is made.[9]

The study proceeds in four stages. First, semantic reconstruction examines root meaning, morphology, collocation, and narrative function. The analysis distinguishes physical hearing from epistemic reception and asks what conditions transform auditory exposure into non-understanding. Second, intertextual reading relates waqr to Qur'anic terms such as akinnah (coverings) and ṣumm (deafness), thereby identifying a broader Qur'anic grammar of blocked cognition. Third, conceptual comparison places this grammar in dialogue with research on motivated reasoning, selective exposure, information avoidance, echo chambers, misinformation diffusion, and digital religious authority.[10] The purpose is not to prove that modern cognitive-science categories are hidden in the Qur'an, but to test whether each discourse clarifies dimensions that the other leaves underdeveloped.

Fourth, the study performs a critical synthesis by separating three causal levels: dispositional, relational, and infrastructural. Dispositional closure includes arrogance, identity-protective reasoning, prior commitment, and deliberate avoidance. Relational closure concerns imitation, charismatic trust, group belonging, and active discrediting of outsiders. Infrastructural closure concerns ranking systems, engagement optimization, virality, bots, and recommender loops. This level distinction is methodologically necessary because research warns against exaggerated claims that all social media use creates uniform echo chambers; audience diversity, political interest, cross-cutting exposure, and platform affordances can moderate such effects.[11]

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[8]Al-Baqir, Waqr Perspektif Al-Qur'an, methodology and conclusions; Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li-Alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah), 757.

[9]Aḥmad ibn Fāris, Mu'jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah, vol. 6 (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, 1979), 132; al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī, al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1412 H), 880; al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1964).

[10]William Hart et al., "Feeling Validated versus Being Correct: A Meta-Analysis of Selective Exposure to Information," Psychological Bulletin 135, no. 4 (2009): 555–588, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015701; Ullrich K. H. Ecker et al., "The Psychological Drivers of Misinformation Belief and Its Resistance to Correction," Nature Reviews Psychology 1 (2022): 13–29, https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-021-00006-y.

[11]Elizabeth Dubois and Grant Blank, "The Echo Chamber Is Overstated: The Moderating Effect of Political Interest and Diverse Media," Information, Communication & Society 21, no. 5 (2018): 729–745, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1428656.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From Auditory Obstruction to Epistemic Closure

The first result is that waqr is best understood as a failure of epistemic uptake rather than the mere absence of sensory input. In QS al-An'ām 6: 25, the opponents are described as listening to the Prophet while coverings are upon their hearts and waqr is in their ears. The tension is deliberate: they hear and yet do not hear in the normatively relevant sense. The source thesis captures this distinction by defining waqr as an obstruction that prevents the Qur'anic message from yielding guidance and benefit.[12] Classical lexical sources connect the root w-q-r with heaviness and burden, while exegetes use this image to explain why exposure does not result in understanding. The metaphor therefore concerns the conditions under which evidence becomes receivable.

This distinction permits a stronger conceptual formulation. Epistemic closure is not simply lack of information. A person may be informationally saturated and epistemically closed at the same time. Contemporary misinformation research repeatedly demonstrates that correction depends on more than access to accurate content. Prior beliefs, trust, emotion, source identity, and reasoning style influence whether corrective evidence is processed or rejected.[13] This is precisely why the Qur'anic pairing of blocked hearing and covered hearts is analytically valuable: it refuses to isolate cognition from moral-affective orientation. The hearing organ is not portrayed as operating alone; reception is distributed across perception, understanding, commitment, and willingness.

QS Fuṣṣilat 41:5 sharpens this mechanism because the opponents verbalize their own closure: their hearts are under coverings, their ears contain waqr, and a barrier stands between them and the Prophet. The verse maps a complete epistemic architecture—internal closure, impaired reception, and relational separation. Nguyen's distinction between epistemic bubbles and echo chambers is useful here. An epistemic bubble is characterized primarily by omission, but an echo chamber is stabilized by active distrust of outside voices.[14] The Qur'anic scene is closer to the latter: the issue is not merely that alternative evidence is unavailable; the prophetic source itself has been normatively downgraded before its content can be evaluated.

The source thesis identifies arrogance and blind imitation as causes of waqr. These factors can be reformulated as mechanisms of identity-protective cognition. Motivated reasoning literature has shown that individuals often scrutinize uncongenial evidence more critically than congenial evidence, especially when political or group identities are implicated.[15] Selective-exposure research likewise finds a systematic preference for attitude-consistent

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[12]Al-Baqir, Waqr Perspektif Al-Qur'an, conclusions on waqr as obstruction of benefit and guidance; Shihab, Tafsir al-Misbah, commentary on QS al-Isrā' 17:46.

[13]Stephan Lewandowsky et al., "Misinformation and Its Correction: Continued Influence and Successful Debiasing," Psychological Science in the Public Interest 13, no. 3 (2012): 106–131, https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100612451018; Ecker et al., "Psychological Drivers of Misinformation Belief," https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-021-00006-y.

[14]Nguyen, "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles," https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2018.32; Cody Turner, "Online Echo Chambers, Online Epistemic Bubbles, and Open-Mindedness," Episteme 22, no. 1 (2025): 232–257, https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2023.52.

[15]Charles S. Taber and Milton Lodge, "Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs," American Journal of Political Science 50, no. 3 (2006): 755–769, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2006.00214.x; Jay J. Van Bavel and Andrea Pereira, "The Partisan Brain," Trends in Cognitive Sciences 22, no. 3 (2018): 213–224, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2018.01.004.

information, although the effect is probabilistic rather than absolute.[16] Waqr adds a crucial normative dimension: repeated rejection can become characterological. What begins as a choice not to listen may develop into a condition in which listening itself is filtered through distrust, pride, and loyalty.

This recursive quality explains why waqr should not be translated conceptually as ignorance. Ignorance can often be repaired by supplying information. Waqr, by contrast, describes a damaged relation to information. In this respect it resembles contemporary accounts of information avoidance and echo-chamber entrenchment, where exposure alone can fail to change belief and may even trigger defensive processing.[17] The Qur'anic metaphor thus points to a second-order problem: not what a person knows, but what governs the admission of claims into the space of serious consideration.

A further implication emerges from the semantic relation between waqr as heaviness and waqār as gravity or dignity. The same root can indicate both obstructive weight and valued gravitas. This semantic polarity suggests that 'weight' is not intrinsically negative; what matters is where weight is assigned. Epistemic life requires giving weight to trustworthy testimony, but closure occurs when inherited status, charismatic identity, or group loyalty becomes heavier than evidence. This insight becomes particularly important in digital religion, where follower counts, visual polish, virality, and parasocial intimacy may function as proxy signals of authority.[18]

Algorithmic Waqr: Human Dispositions inside Platform Infrastructures

The second result is the article's central novelty: waqr can illuminate a socio-technical form of closure produced by the interaction of human dispositions and algorithmic environments. The phrase algorithmic waqr names this interaction. It does not imply that code directly implants unbelief or that every recommendation system generates polarization. Rather, recommender systems can provide infrastructural reinforcement for tendencies already described in the Qur'anic account—selective attention, identity-congruent listening, imitation of prestigious figures, and avoidance of dissonant voices.

Evidence from computational social science shows that online information diffusion is strongly shaped by homophily and engagement dynamics. Del Vicario and colleagues found that users interacting with scientific and conspiracy content formed polarized communities in which selective exposure affected information cascades.[19] Cinelli and colleagues later compared multiple platforms and found measurable echo-chamber patterns, while also showing that the

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[16]Hart et al., "Feeling Validated versus Being Correct," https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015701; Natalie Jomini Stroud, "Polarization and Partisan Selective Exposure," Journal of Communication 60, no. 3 (2010): 556–576, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2010.01497.x.

[17]Nguyen, "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles," https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2018.32; R. Kelly Garrett, "Echo Chambers Online? Politically Motivated Selective Exposure among Internet News Users," Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 14, no. 2 (2009): 265–285, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2009.01440.x.

[18] Febrian, "Visualizing Authority," https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241286850; Heidi A. Campbell, "Religious Authority and the Blogosphere," Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 15, no. 2 (2010): 251–276, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2010.01519.x.

[19] Del Vicario et al., "The Spreading of Misinformation Online," https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1517441113; Alessandro Bessi et al., "Science vs Conspiracy: Collective Narratives in the Age of Misinformation," PLOS ONE 10, no. 2 (2015): e0118093, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0118093.

magnitude varies by platform architecture.[20] These studies do not establish inevitable closure, but they demonstrate that digital environments can systematically organize who encounters whom and which claims receive repeated social validation.

Virality compounds this problem because high-arousal or novel content can travel faster than careful correction. The large-scale study by Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral found that false news diffused farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than truth on Twitter, with human sharing behavior playing a substantial role.[21] Social bots can further amplify low-credibility sources at early stages of diffusion, increasing the probability that users encounter misleading claims as socially validated information.[22] From the perspective developed here, such mechanisms constitute infrastructural 'weight': repeated visibility and apparent consensus can make a claim feel epistemically heavy even before its evidentiary quality is assessed.

Personalization introduces another layer. Facebook research showed that both algorithmic ranking and individual choices shape exposure to ideologically cross-cutting content.[23] This finding is important because it prevents a simplistic narrative in which algorithms alone trap passive users. Algorithmic waqr is co-produced. Users choose whom to follow, communities reward certain styles of speech, influencers learn which content maximizes engagement, and platforms optimize what is likely to keep users active. The resulting feedback loop can convert dispositional preference into relational homophily and then into infrastructural repetition.

Religious communication is especially susceptible to this loop because authority is inseparable from trust. Digital-religion scholarship has documented how the internet destabilizes older hierarchies of expertise and enables new figures to construct legitimacy outside conventional institutions.[24] In Indonesia, Islamic influencers use visual aesthetics and platform-native performance to project authority at massive scale, while micro-celebrity preachers can challenge organizational forms of scholarly legitimacy.[25] These transformations are not inherently harmful; they can democratize access and widen participation. Yet they also allow epistemic trust to be anchored in familiarity, relatability, and visibility rather than training, accountability, or interpretive competence.

This is where the Qur'anic motif of taqlid-like imitation becomes contemporary. The source thesis notes that blind imitation is a cause of waqr and explicitly extends the pattern to majority opinion and influencer culture.[26] Algorithmic media intensify this possibility because

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[20] Cinelli et al., "The Echo Chamber Effect on Social Media," https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2023301118.

[21] Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral, "The Spread of True and False News Online," Science 359, no. 6380 (2018): 1146–1151, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559.

[22] Chengcheng Shao et al., "The Spread of Low-Credibility Content by Social Bots," Nature Communications 9 (2018): 4787, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-018-06930-7.

[23] Eytan Bakshy, Solomon Messing, and Lada A. Adamic, "Exposure to Ideologically Diverse News and Opinion on Facebook," Science 348, no. 6239 (2015): 1130–1132, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aaa1160.

[24] Campbell, "Who's Got the Power?," https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00362.x; Turner, "Religious Authority and the New Media," https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407075001.

[25] Febrian, "Visualizing Authority," https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241286850; Fauzi, "Zulkarnain EL Madury and the Micro-Celebrity Ustaz Phenomenon," https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2023.2274708.

[26] Al-Baqir, Waqr Perspektif Al-Qur'an, discussion of blind imitation and contemporary influencer culture.

imitation is quantified: likes, shares, views, and follower counts publicly display popularity. Social proof can therefore become part of religious reasoning. When a user repeatedly receives similar clips from mutually endorsing preachers, the network can create a perception that one interpretive position is self-evidently dominant while dissenters appear fringe, hostile, or deviant.

The concept of echo chamber is nevertheless contested, and a Scopus-oriented model must incorporate that critique. Dubois and Blank argue that the echo-chamber thesis is often overstated because politically interested users can encounter diverse media sources.[27] Other philosophical work also cautions that not every bounded epistemic community is defective. Therefore, algorithmic waqr should be treated as a risk configuration rather than a universal diagnosis. Its strongest form requires four conditions: repeated identity-congruent exposure, systematic downgrading of external testimony, social penalties for reconsideration, and diminished willingness to verify claims outside the network.

These four conditions explain why exposure to opposing content does not necessarily dissolve closure. Bail and colleagues found that exposing political partisans to opposing views on social media could increase rather than reduce polarization.[28] Corrective information can also be undermined when it threatens identity or when audiences distrust the correcting source. Contemporary misinformation research therefore increasingly emphasizes accuracy prompts, inoculation, media literacy, and trust calibration rather than simply adding more counter-information.[29] The Qur'anic model reaches the same structural conclusion by different means: the obstruction must be addressed at the level of receptivity, not only at the level of message supply.

A useful analytical distinction follows. Dispositional waqr concerns habits of pride, avoidance, and identity-protective interpretation. Relational waqr concerns social trust networks that elevate insiders and discredit outsiders. Infrastructural waqr concerns the architecture that repeatedly ranks and recirculates congenial signals. None of these levels is sufficient alone. A highly reflective user can resist a narrow feed; a plural network can weaken selective exposure; and a diverse platform can still be used sectarianly. The model's contribution is therefore interactional: closure emerges when the three layers align and mutually reinforce one another.

Recent digital-Islam scholarship reinforces the relevance of this layered approach. Studies of Indonesian religious influencers show that authority is increasingly visualized and platformized, while newer research describes networked Islam as characterized by fluid forms of everyday influence beyond formal clerical structures.[30] Work on online sectarian conflict

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[27] Dubois and Blank, "The Echo Chamber Is Overstated," https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1428656; Seth Flaxman, Sharad Goel, and Justin M. Rao, "Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption," Public Opinion Quarterly 80, S1 (2016): 298–320, https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfw006.

[28]Christopher A. Bail et al., "Exposure to Opposing Views on Social Media Can Increase Political Polarization," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 115, no. 37 (2018): 9216–9221, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1804840115.

[29]Gordon Pennycook et al., "Shifting Attention to Accuracy Can Reduce Misinformation Online," Nature 592 (2021): 590–595, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03344-2; Jon Roozenbeek and Sander van der Linden, "Fake News Game Confers Psychological Resistance against Online Misinformation," Palgrave Communications 5 (2019): 65, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0279-9.

[30]Bouziane Zaid, Mohammed Ibahrine, and Mohamed Ben Moussa, "Networked Islam and Liquid Authority: Everyday Influencers and Young Muslim Practice," New Media & Society (online 2026), https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448261436035; Febrian, "Visualizing Authority," https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241286850.

likewise indicates that accelerated religious learning without embedded scholarly formation can intensify antagonistic boundary-making.[31] These studies provide the contemporary social field in which algorithmic waqr becomes plausible as a comparative concept.

Qur'anic Epistemic Receptivity as a Counter-Model

The third result is constructive. If waqr names a failure of receptivity, the appropriate response is not merely content correction but the cultivation of Qur'anic Epistemic Receptivity (QER). QER is proposed here as a five-part counter-model: reflective listening, source pluralization, epistemic humility, verification, and dialogical correction. These components are not presented as a complete Islamic epistemology; they are practical inversions of the closure mechanisms identified above.

Reflective listening is the first component because waqr concerns hearing without uptake. Digital religious communication rewards speed: short clips, immediate reactions, quote cards, and rapidly circulating verdicts. Yet research on misinformation shows that even small interventions that redirect attention toward accuracy can improve sharing discernment.[32] Deliberation also reduces belief in false headlines relative to intuitive responding.[33] Reflective listening therefore involves intentionally slowing the transition from exposure to endorsement, asking what a claim means, what evidence it uses, and what interpretive assumptions it carries.

Source pluralization responds to relational closure. It does not require treating all sources as equally credible. Rather, it requires maintaining epistemic contact with multiple accountable traditions of expertise and distinguishing disagreement from disqualification. This is particularly necessary in religious environments where influencers can bypass institutional gatekeeping. Digital religion research shows that online authority is negotiated through network, presentation, and audience recognition, not only formal credentials.[34] QER therefore asks users to diversify not merely topics but authority pathways—consulting trained scholars, institutional fatwa bodies, primary texts, and credible alternative interpretations.

Epistemic humility counters arrogance, one of the central causes of waqr identified in the thesis. Humility here is not indecision or relativism. It is the capacity to treat one's current interpretation as corrigible and to separate religious commitment from infallibility of personal judgment. Social-identity research demonstrates that partisan attachment can alter information evaluation and make belief revision psychologically costly.[35] In religious settings, the cost may be even higher because reinterpretation can feel like betrayal of community, teacher, or pious self-image. QER therefore frames correction as a discipline of faithfulness rather than defeat.

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[31]Hammis Syafaq et al., "'Santri without Pesantren' and the Sectarian Violence on Indonesian Muslim Social Media," Cogent Arts & Humanities 13, no. 1 (2026), https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2612046.

[32]Pennycook et al., "Shifting Attention to Accuracy," https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03344-2.

[33]Gordon Pennycook and David G. Rand, "Lazy, Not Biased," Cognition 188 (2019): 39–50, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2018.06.011; Cameron Martel, Gordon Pennycook, and David G. Rand, "Reliance on Emotion Promotes Belief in Fake News," Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications 5 (2020): 47, https://doi.org/10.1186/s41235-020-00252-3.

[34] Campbell, "Religious Authority and the Blogosphere," https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2010.01519.x; Heidi A. Campbell, "Looking Backwards and Forwards at the Study of Digital Religion," Religious Studies Review 50 (2024): 83–87, https://doi.org/10.1111/rsr.17062.

[35]Van Bavel and Pereira, "The Partisan Brain," https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2018.01.004; Jan-Willem van Prooijen and Karen M. Douglas, "Belief in Conspiracy Theories," European Journal of Social Psychology 48, no. 7 (2018): 897–908, https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2530.

Verification counters both misinformation and prestige-based imitation. The literature on fake news indicates that people often share inaccurate content because attention is directed toward social signaling or other goals rather than truth assessment.[36] Accuracy prompts can improve discernment, and digital-literacy interventions have shown cross-national effects on the ability to distinguish false from mainstream news.[37] In Qur'anic terms, verification is a procedural practice that prevents the 'weight' of popularity from substituting for evidence. For religious content, this means checking verse context, hadith sourcing, attribution, scholarly consensus claims, and whether an edited clip accurately represents the speaker's full position.

Dialogical correction is the final component because entrenched echo chambers are relational systems, not only collections of false propositions. Nguyen argues that echo chambers are sustained by mechanisms that actively undermine outsider trust, so escape may require rebuilding trust rather than merely inserting contrary evidence.[38] This insight resonates strongly with waqr: if the obstacle is a disposition that renders guidance inaudible, aggressive correction can harden the obstruction. Effective religious correction therefore needs credible relationships, interpretive charity, and a path for identity-preserving revision.

These five elements generate practical implications for religious institutions and educators. First, digital da'wah should be evaluated not only by reach but by whether it produces reflective understanding. Second, platforms and religious organizations can design 'friction' before resharing decontextualized religious claims, similar to accuracy-oriented interventions studied in misinformation research.[39] Third, Islamic education can treat algorithmic literacy as part of contemporary adab al-'ilm: students should learn how ranking systems, engagement metrics, bots, and personalization influence what appears authoritative. Fourth, scholars should cultivate cross-network presence rather than retreating into audiences that already agree with them.

The proposed framework also revises how religious polarization is conceptualized. Polarization is often measured by distance between opinions, but waqr draws attention to the quality of hearing across difference. Two groups may disagree strongly without epistemic closure if each remains capable of accurately representing, evaluating, and learning from the other. Conversely, apparent consensus can conceal waqr if a community excludes relevant evidence and treats dissent as morally illegitimate before examination. QER therefore shifts the diagnostic question from 'How far apart are the beliefs?' to 'What conditions govern whether counter-evidence can be heard?'

This reframing is particularly relevant for contemporary Indonesian Islam. Social media has expanded Islamic learning, piety, and participation, but it has also intensified competition among institutional scholars, influencers, sectarian entrepreneurs, and ordinary users.[40] The

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[36]Andrew Guess, Jonathan Nagler, and Joshua Tucker, "Less than You Think: Prevalence and Predictors of Fake News Dissemination on Facebook," Science Advances 5, no. 1 (2019): eaau4586, https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aau4586.

[37]Andrew M. Guess et al., "A Digital Media Literacy Intervention Increases Discernment between Mainstream and False News in the United States and India," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 117, no. 27 (2020): 15536–15545, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1920498117.

[38]Nguyen, "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles," https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2018.32.

[39]Anastasia Kozyreva, Stephan Lewandowsky, and Ralph Hertwig, "Citizens versus the Internet: Confronting Digital Challenges with Cognitive Tools," Nature Human Behaviour 4 (2020): 126–131, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-019-0747-9; Pennycook et al., "Shifting Attention to Accuracy," https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03344-2.

[40] Slama, "Practising Islam through Social Media in Indonesia," https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416798; Hew Wai Weng, "The Art of Dakwah," Indonesia and

Qur'anic category of waqr offers a vocabulary for diagnosing not a specific ideology but a mode of reception that can occur across ideological positions. This symmetry is methodologically important: the concept should never become a label used only to pathologize opponents. Used responsibly, it must first function as a reflexive category by which communities examine their own habits of listening.

The article's conceptual contribution can therefore be summarized as a matrix. The Qur'anic layer identifies moral-epistemic dispositions; social epistemology explains trust structures and exclusion; platform studies explain ranking and amplification; digital-religion research explains the reconfiguration of authority. Algorithmic waqr is the zone where these layers converge. QER is the inverse zone where reflective agency, plural trust, verification, humility, and dialogue interrupt their convergence.

A second boundary concerns theology. Waqr in the Qur'anic passages participates in a discourse of divine guidance and judgment, whereas platform-mediated closure is an empirical phenomenon produced within ordinary social causation. The present model therefore uses analogical-conceptual reconstruction rather than theological equivalence. 'Algorithmic waqr' should be read as a heuristic that identifies structural resemblance in failed receptivity, not as a claim that a platform user can be assigned the same moral or eschatological status as the Qur'an's original opponents. This boundary is essential for ethical use of the concept and prevents scholarship from converting a diagnostic framework into a polemical accusation.

The framework also has implications for research design. Empirical studies should avoid treating 'echo chamber' as a binary label and instead measure the four diagnostic conditions proposed here: congruent repetition, outsider discrediting, social costs of revision, and verification decline. Mixed-method research could combine digital trace data with interviews that investigate why users trust particular preachers, how they interpret disagreement, and whether algorithmic recommendations are experienced as discovery, confirmation, or pressure. Such operationalization would permit the Qur'anic concept to generate testable questions without forcing modern phenomena into premodern categories. It would also allow comparison between platforms whose affordances differ substantially, an issue highlighted by cross-platform studies of echo-chamber effects.

CONCLUSION

This study has reconstructed waqr from a Qur'anic metaphor of obstructed hearing into a conceptual model of epistemic closure relevant to digital religion. The analysis shows that waqr is not adequately described as physical deafness, ignorance, or lack of exposure. It is a condition in which information is encountered but fails to become epistemically effective because receptivity has been shaped by rejection, arrogance, imitation, distrust, and accumulated commitment. Contemporary research on motivated reasoning, selective exposure, echo chambers, misinformation, and religious authority clarifies how analogous forms of closure can be socially and technologically reinforced. The article's main novelty is the concept of algorithmic waqr, defined as a risk configuration emerging when dispositional closure, relational trust segregation, and infrastructural amplification align. This formulation avoids blaming either users or algorithms in isolation and explains why merely increasing access to religious content does not guarantee understanding. The constructive counterpart, Qur'anic Epistemic Receptivity, organizes five practices—reflective listening, source pluralization, epistemic humility, verification, and dialogical correction—as a framework for digital religious literacy. The model is conceptual and therefore requires empirical testing. Future research should operationalize its three layers, compare different platforms and Muslim communities, and

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the Malay World 46, no. 134 (2018): 61–79, https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416757; Rony Kurniawan Pratama, "Disciplining the Image," Media Asia (online 2025), https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2025.2580531.

examine whether QER-based interventions can increase openness to credible corrective information without weakening principled religious commitment. By linking tafsir with social epistemology and platform studies, the framework positions Qur'anic concepts as contributors to contemporary theory rather than as objects of retrospective analogy alone.

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