

Jurisprudential Interpretation and Digital Worship: A Critical Study of the Muhammadiyah Fatwa on Virtual Friday Prayers

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Abstract

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed not only patterns of social communication but also modes of religious practice, thereby challenging the framework of classical Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). This article examines Muhammadiyah's fatwa rejecting the validity of conducting Friday prayers in a virtual format during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the interpretive model underpinning this legal determination. Employing a qualitative, text-based approach, the study treats the fatwa as an Islamic legal text, analyzing it in terms of its structure, argumentation, and sources of authority. Data were collected from official fatwa publications on the digital platform Suara Muhammadiyah and supplemented with relevant institutional documents. The findings reveal that Muhammadiyah employs a textual-normative interpretive model, grounded in *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* (tradition-based exegesis), which emphasizes strict adherence to the prophetic model in ritual worship (*'ibadah mahdah*). The fatwa asserts that virtual congregations do not fulfill the physical and spatial requirements of communal prayer and that the legitimate alternative in emergencies is the performance of *Zuhr* prayer. These findings suggest that Muhammadiyah's approach represents a careful negotiation between textual fidelity and technological adaptation, illustrating how modern fatwa-issuing institutions navigate doctrinal continuity in the face of challenges in the digital era.

[Perkembangan pesat teknologi digital telah mengubah tidak hanya pola komunikasi sosial, tetapi juga praktik keagamaan, sehingga menantang kerangka fikih klasik. Artikel ini menganalisis fatwa Muhammadiyah yang menolak keabsahan pelaksanaan salat Jumat secara virtual selama pandemi COVID-19, dengan menyoroti model interpretatif yang melandasi penetapan hukum tersebut. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif berbasis teks, penelitian ini memperlakukan fatwa sebagai teks hukum Islam yang dianalisis dari segi struktur, argumentasi, dan landasan otoritasnya. Data diperoleh dari publikasi resmi fatwa pada platform digital Suara Muhammadiyah serta berbagai dokumen kelembagaan terkait. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa Muhammadiyah menerapkan model interpretasi tekstual-normatif yang berakar pada tafsir bi al-ma'thur, dengan penekanan pada kepatuhan ketat terhadap model kenabian dalam ranah ibadah (*'ibadah mahdah*). Fatwa tersebut menegaskan bahwa salat Jumat secara virtual tidak dapat memenuhi syarat fisik dan spasial salat berjamaah, dan bahwa alternatif yang sah dalam kondisi darurat adalah salat zuhur. Temuan ini memperlihatkan bahwa pendekatan Muhammadiyah merepresentasikan prinsip kehati-hatian dalam menegosiasikan antara kesetiaan terhadap teks dan adaptasi terhadap teknologi, sekaligus menggambarkan bagaimana lembaga fatwa modern menegosiasikan kesinambungan doktrinal dengan tantangan kontemporer di era digital.]

Keywords: Fatwa, Islamic Legal Interpretation, Muhammadiyah, Text and Technology, Virtual Friday Prayer.

Introduction

The advancement of digital technology has profoundly impacted religious practices, presenting both new opportunities and challenges for the interpretation and application of Islamic law (*Shari'ah*).¹ Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, religious authorities had extensively employed digital technology alongside print media to disseminate Islamic teachings and engage a wider audience, particularly in the realm of *da'wa* (Islamic proselytization).² Some scholars argue that technological innovations have transformed the way Muslims engage in both individual and collective piety, as well as the processes by which Islamic legal opinions, or fatwas, are produced.³ A notable example of such scholarly inquiry is provided by Sunarwoto, who observes that radio *da'wa* has evolved into an interpretive forum for Islam.⁴ In this regard, he argues that radio *da'wa* serves to mediate and refine the very concept of fatwa.⁵

During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital media assumed an increasingly central role in the practice of Islamic rituals. Wahyudi Akmaliah and Ahmad Najib Burhani illustrate that various religious observances—such as *tarāwīḥ* (additional night prayers during Ramadan), *ḥaul* (commemoration of the deceased), *ṣilatunnaḥim* (social visits) during Eid al-Fiṭr, and *taḥlīl* (prayers for the dead)—were conducted virtually with minimal opposition.⁶ In Germany, mosque communities utilized Facebook and their official websites as primary digital platforms. Members of the Muslim diaspora replaced in-person prayers with virtual gatherings facilitated by video conferencing and engaged in the production, dissemination, and preservation of religious content within commercial digital spaces.⁷ Nonetheless, the

¹ See: Mursyid Fikri et al., “Emergence of Digital Matrimony: Exploring Islamic Legal Responses to Metaverse Marriages,” *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 14, no. 2 (December 2024): 246–62; Ali Sati et al., “The Digital Transformation of Tafsir and Its Implications for Islamic Legal Derivation in the Contemporary Era,” *MILRev: Metro Islamic Law Review* 4, no. 1 (June 2025): 389–415; Ugochukwu Godspower Ehirim, “Artificial Intelligence and Healthcare Delivery in Nigeria: Legal and Ethical Dimensions of Patients’ Rights to Safety,” *Indonesian Journal of Sharia and Socio-Legal Studies* 1, no. 1 (May 2025): 47–71.

² Bryan S Turner and Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir, “Religious Authority and the New Media,” in *The Sociology of Islam* (Routledge, 2016); Francis Robinson, “Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print,” *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1993): 229–51.

³ See: J. W. Anderson, “New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere,” *Isim Newsletter* (Netherland), 2000, 5(1) Edition: 39; Dale F Eickelman and Jon W Anderson, “Print, Islam, and the Prospects for Civic Pluralism: New Religious Writings and Their Audiences,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, no. 1 (1997): 43–62; Akh Muzakki, “Islamic Televangelism in Changing Indonesia: Transmission, Authority, and the Politics of Ideas,” in *Global And Local Televangelism* (Springer, 2012), 45–63.

⁴ Sunarwoto Sunarwoto, “Radio Fatwa: Islamic Tanya-Jawab Programmes on Radio Dakwah,” *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 50, no. 2 (2012): 239–78.

⁵ Sunarwoto, “Radio Fatwa,” 239–78.

⁶ Wahyudi Akmaliah and Ahmad Najib Burhani, *Digital Islam in Indonesia: The Shift of Ritual and Religiosity during Covid-19* (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021), <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2021-107-digital-islam-in-indonesia-the-shift-of-ritual-and-religiosity-during-covid-19-by-wahyudi-akmaliah-and-ahmad-najib-burhani/>.

⁷ S. Tabti, “Digital Mosque: Muslim Communities in Germany and Their Digital Strategies in the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 11, no. 3 (2022): 333–53.

increased integration of technology into Islamic rituals has not been without controversy. In Indonesia, such debates became particularly pronounced when Muhammadiyah issued a fatwa rejecting the performance of virtual Friday prayers (*ṣalāt al-jumu'ah*) as a contextual response to the public health crisis.⁸ This fatwa exemplifies the dynamic interaction between Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and contemporary communication technologies and raises critical questions regarding the extent to which technological mediation can be reconciled with normative interpretations of *Shari'ah*.

In a more specific context, Muhammadiyah's fatwa initially appears to contradict its well-established commitment to employing scientific methodologies in the interpretation of religious texts and teachings. This inconsistency becomes apparent when juxtaposed with the organization's approach to the Islamic calendar, wherein Muhammadiyah rigorously adheres to a mathematical method rather than relying on *rukyat al-hilāl* (direct lunar observation). The organization is widely recognized for its "scientific" stance on *ḥisāb ḥaqīqī*, which involves calculating the actual movements of the moon, earth, and sun to determine the lunar calendar, in contrast to other institutions that maintain reliance on the more traditional *rukyat* method.⁹ However, during the crisis concerning virtual Friday prayers, Muhammadiyah adopted a more conservative position by invoking the concept of *rukhsah* (legal concession). Understanding the rationale behind Muhammadiyah's divergent stance in this specific context is challenging without reference to its political relations with other religious organizations. Nonetheless, this article intentionally refrains from political analysis and instead employs a hermeneutical, *tafsīr*-based framework to investigate the interpretive foundations of the fatwa. In particular, it aims to examine the modes of interpretation of Islamic legal sources—the Qur'an, *ḥadīth*, and other authoritative texts—that inform Muhammadiyah's reasoning in formulating its fatwa.

Although few scholarly studies have examined fatwas concerning virtual prayer in detail, Nugroho and Hidayat's research investigates the rationale behind the invalidity of virtual Friday prayers as articulated by Dār al-Iftā' al-Miṣriyyah (Egyptian Fatwa Authority). They conclude that the rejection of such practices is primarily based on *ijmā'* (consensus) and *ḥadīth*.¹⁰ Their study constitutes the closest parallel to the present research, although their focus is on analyzing *istinbāt al-ḥukm* (the method of deriving legal rulings) in five fatwas issued by Dār al-Iftā' al-Miṣriyyah between 1950 and 2020.¹¹ Contextually, their work can be classified as one that regards pre-pandemic fatwas on Friday prayer as the definitive determinants of legal opinion. While similar in subject matter, the current study places greater emphasis on how Muhammadiyah, as a central actor in Indonesia's Islamic ritual life,

⁸ Divisi Fatwa Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid and Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, *Fatwa Tarjih Hukum Shalat Jum'at Online*, February 18, 2021, <https://web.suaramuhammadiyah.id/2021/02/16/fatwa-tarjih-hukum-shalat-jumat-online/>.

⁹ Nailur Rahmi et al., "Contestation of the Determination of 'Idul Adha and Its Implementation According to Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul 'Ulama," *Nurani: Jurnal Kajian Syari'ah dan Masyarakat* 25, no. 1 (June 2025): 262–79; Ismail Koto et al., "Islamic Holy Days: The Contention of Rukyatul Hillal and Hisab Hakiki Wujudul Hilal Disputes for Muslims in Indonesia," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 105, no. 2 (March 2024): 1–14.

¹⁰ F. H. Nugroho and M. S. Hidayat, "Argumentasi Fatwa Dar al-Ifta al-Mashriyyah tentang Shalat Jum'at Dalam Jaringan (Daring)," *Khaṣanah Hukum* 3, no. 2 (2021): 47–58.

¹¹ Nugroho and Hidayat, "Argumentasi Fatwa Dar al-Ifta al-Mashriyyah tentang Shalat Jum'at Dalam Jaringan (Daring)," 47–58.

formulates its legal interpretations and highlights specific textual and doctrinal elements as the basis for its rejection. The apparent tension between Muhammadiyah's rationalist methodology and its conservative legal stance necessitates a more profound hermeneutical inquiry into its interpretive framework. Accordingly, this research aims to identify and analyze the modes of interpretation employed by Muhammadiyah in engaging with the Islamic law sources cited in its fatwa.

The primary data for this study consist of Muhammadiyah's fatwa on virtual prayer, sourced from official texts published in Suara Muhammadiyah, the organization's newspaper and digital platform. Information regarding the general procedures for fatwa formulation within Muhammadiyah is drawn from the author's direct involvement as a member of the organization's interpretive body. Additional materials related to Friday prayer fatwas were collected from various sources, including Muhammadiyah's digital publications on ritual guidance, such as *Buku Tuntunan Ibadah dalam Kondisi Darurat COVID-19* (A Guide to Worship in Emergency Situations during COVID-19), as well as other worship manuals issued by the organization. Furthermore, the author reviewed digital platforms such as muslim.or.id, kumparan.com, Kompas.tv, voaindonesia.com, mui.or.id, and ibtimes.id to examine the discourse surrounding virtual Friday prayer among Indonesian scholars generally and Muhammadiyah members specifically. These public discussions offer valuable insights into the dialogical nature of Muhammadiyah's legal reasoning, demonstrating the interaction between institutional authority and grassroots perspectives in shaping the organization's final fatwa. To mitigate personal bias, this research employs a textual approach, treating the fatwa as an objective legal document. Consequently, the analysis centers on the structure and composition of Muhammadiyah's interpretive reasoning. The textual methodology adopted follows the framework proposed by Fikret Karcic,¹² emphasizing the fatwa's internal logic and degree of textualism.¹³ This approach transcends a purely literal interpretation, aligning with Abdullah Saeed's concept of preserving interpretive traditions as practiced by classical Islamic scholars (*'ulamā'*).¹⁴

Fatwas and Debates on Virtual Friday Prayers

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of conducting virtual Friday prayers had not been a prominent topic within public discourse, nor had other religious rituals been organized via virtual platforms. However, following the onset of the pandemic and the implementation of government restrictions on in-person gatherings, the notion of virtual Friday prayer became a subject of intense debate within Indonesian society. In response to these developments, at least two distinct practices emerged. The first involved performing virtual Friday prayers, justified by the argument that such practices were permissible under emergency conditions.¹⁵ The second entailed substituting the Friday prayer with the *Zuhr*

¹² Fikret Karcic, "Textual Analysis in Islamic Studies: A Short Historical and Comparative Survey," *Islamic Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006): 191–220.

¹³ Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach* (Taylor & Francis, 2014), 3–24.

¹⁴ Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (Taylor & Francis, 2005), 50–6.

¹⁵ Lubabah Shobrina Syahida, Yasinta Dwi Permata Sari, and M. Irsyad Bayhaqi, "Hukum Shalat Jumat Secara Daring pada Masa Pandemi Covid-19 Menurut Prof. Wawan Gunawan dan Hasil Fatwa Majelis Tarjih Wa

(noon) prayer, based on the position that the Friday congregation could not be validly conducted in a virtual format.¹⁶

An illustrative example of the initial practice is the Virtual Mosque of Darul Hikmah, which conducted virtual Friday prayers during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁷ According to multiple reports, this was not the inaugural occurrence of such a ritual.¹⁸ For instance, the Virtual Friday Prayer Congregation (*Salat Jumat Berjamaah Secara Virtual*, SJV) held its thirteenth session on June 11, 2021, with approximately one hundred participants in attendance.¹⁹ A report by VOA Indonesia indicates that the SJV initially attracted around 200 Muslim participants; however, attendance later fluctuated between 80 and 100 individuals, ultimately stabilizing at approximately 100 by the end of that year.²⁰ These accounts suggest that virtual Friday prayers were conducted across various virtual platforms, serving as an alternative mode of communal worship during the COVID-19 pandemic. This phenomenon exemplifies a broader transformation in religious practices amid social restrictions and technological mediation.²¹

In response to the emergence of such practices, dissenting opinions rejecting the validity of virtual Friday prayers were articulated not only by Muhammadiyah but also by Persatuan Islam (Persis) and several other Islamic organizations. The Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) adopted a more stringent stance by issuing a prohibition on conducting virtual Friday prayers during the pandemic. Through Fatwa No. 14 of 2020 concerning the Implementation of Worship during the COVID-19 Outbreak, the MUI justified the temporary suspension of congregational Friday prayers in areas experiencing uncontrolled transmission. This justification was grounded in the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*), Qurʾanic and *ḥadīth* evidence, Islamic legal maxims (*qawāʿid al-fiqhiyyah*), established methods of deriving rulings (*istinbāt al-ḥukm*), and a careful assessment of prevailing social circumstances.²² The fatwa specifically emphasized that, in contexts where the spread of COVID-19 was unmanageable or posed a significant public health threat, Muslims were prohibited from performing virtual Friday prayers and were instead obligated to perform the

Tajdid Muhammadiyah,” *Komparatif: Jurnal Perbandingan Hukum dan Pemikiran Islam* 3, no. 1 (November 2023): 68–97.

¹⁶ Muhammad Fahrudin Nur et al., “Prohibition of Friday Prayer During COVID-19 Pandemic Period Againsts Red Zone Areas in Islamic Law Perspective,” *MILRev: Metro Islamic Law Review* 1, no. 1 (December 2022): 54–69.

¹⁷ Naufal Akmal Majid, “Hukum Shalat Jumat Online Dimasa Pandemi Covid-19 Menurut Ulama Persatuan Islam (PERSIS) Struktural dan Kultural” (Thesis, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2024).

¹⁸ Iman Firdaus, “Ikhtiar Salat Jumat Online di Tengah Pandemi,” *Kompas.tv*, accessed January 15, 2025, <https://www.kompas.tv/nasional/148623/ikhtiar-salat-jumat-online-di-tengah-pandemi>.

¹⁹ Nurhadi Sucahyo, “Salat Jumat Virtual: Berjamaah Tanpa Berkerumun,” *VOA Indonesia*, June 11, 2021, <https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/salat-jumat-virtual-berjamaah-tanpa-berkerumun/5925156.html>.

²⁰ Sucahyo, “Salat Jumat Virtual: Berjamaah Tanpa Berkerumun.”

²¹ See: Mursyid Fikri and Indriana, “Performing Salah in the Metaverse: Analysing the Perspectives of Ahl al-Hadith and Ahl al-Ra’yi within the Intersection of Technology and Religion,” *Manchester Journal of Transnational Islamic Law and Practice* 20, no. 3 (2024): 135–43; Sara Wolf et al., “Spirituality at the Breakfast Table: Experiences of Christian Online Worship Services,” *CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems Extended Abstracts*, ACM, April 27, 2022, 1–7.

²² Raudhatul Jannah et al., “Pandangan Normatif terhadap Fatwa MUI tentang Pelarangan Sholat Jumat di Masa Pandemi Covid-19,” *IBTIKAR: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Sosial* 2, no. 1 (2025): 12–23.

Zuhr prayer individually at home.²³ This position was grounded in the principle of necessity (*ḍarūrah*) and the doctrine of legal facilitation (*fiqh al-taysīr*), both of which permit leniency in religious obligations under conditions of hardship or danger.²⁴

In addition to the MUI, several other prominent religious authorities have issued fatwas rejecting the legitimacy of virtual Friday prayers. These include the International Union for Muslim Scholars (IUMS) and the Dār al-Iftā' al-Miṣriyyah. The IUMS articulated several principal arguments: (1) virtual Friday prayer does not fulfill the essential requirement of physical unity of place (*ittiḥād al-makān*); (2) *Fiqh* rules already provides an established legal substitute (*badal*), specifically the *Zuhr* prayer, for individuals who have legitimate impediments preventing attendance at Friday prayer—this substitution is grounded in explicit and definitive scriptural evidence (*naṣṣ shar'ī* and *qaṭ'ī al-dalālah*); neglecting this legal concession (*rukhsah*), the IUMS contended, would contravene the divine mercy and compassion that underpin Islamic legal principles; and (3) the requirement of physical congregation for Friday prayer constitutes an *ijmā'* among the Prophet's Companions and has been affirmed by all schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*madhāhib*).²⁵ Meanwhile, Dār al-Iftā' al-Miṣriyyah based its rejection on multiple authoritative sources, including the Prophet's practice (*sunnah fi'liyyah*), his sayings (*sunnah qawliyyah*), *ijmā'*, and the writings of classical Islamic jurists (*fuqahā'*), all supported by reasoned argumentation rooted in the tradition of the early generations (*salaf*). Among these sources, *ijmā'* was identified as the most compelling and decisive argument. According to Nugroho's research, Dār al-Iftā' al-Miṣriyyah conducted extensive deliberations concerning the permissibility of digital worship involving digital mediation. These discussions are documented in five fatwas: one addressing prayer conducted via video calls, and four subsequent fatwas issued in 1950, 1955, 1976, and 1979, with the final fatwa issued in 2020 in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁶

The preceding analysis of relevant facts, fatwas, and their foundational arguments reveals a clear division among '*ulamā'*' regarding this issue, which can be categorized into two principal positions. The first group comprises scholars who permit—and in some cases advocate for—the performance of virtual Friday prayers, viewing them as a legitimate adaptation in exceptional circumstances. Conversely, the second group rejects the validity of virtual Friday prayers, arguing that such worship should be replaced with the *Zuhr* prayer in accordance with established Islamic legal schools.²⁷ Notably, classical *fiqh* lacks precedents or explicit textual evidence endorsing prayer conducted via virtual means. Therefore, the central point of contention concerns the interpretation of the requirement for spatial unity between

²³ Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia No. 14 Tahun 2020 tentang Penyelenggaraan Ibadah dalam Situasi Terjadi Wabah COVID-19, accessed January 15, 2025, <https://mirror.mui.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Fatwa-tentang-Penyelenggaraan-Ibadah-Dalam-situasi-Wabah-COVID-19.pdf>.

²⁴ Jannah et al., "Pandangan Normatif terhadap Fatwa MUI tentang Pelarangan Sholat Jumat di Masa Pandemi Covid-19," 12–23.

²⁵ Fakhri Idris et al., "Salat Jumat Daring dalam Perspektif Hukum Islam," *Bustanul Fuqaha: Jurnal Bidang Hukum Islam* 2, no. 1 (2021): 110–29.

²⁶ Nugroho and Hidayat, "Argumentasi Fatwa Dar al-Ifta al-Mashriyyah tentang Shalat Jum'at Dalam Jaringan (Daring)," 47–58.

²⁷ See: Abū Zakariyyā Yahyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Al-Majmū' Sharḥ al-Muhadḍab*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Maktabat al-Irshād, 2006), 309.

the *imām* and the congregation (*ittiṣāl al-jamā'ah*) as a substantive condition for the validity of congregational prayer.²⁸ Scholars diverge in their conceptualization and interpretation of this spatial and communal connectedness within the framework of Islamic legal sources, particularly the Qur'an, *ḥadīth*, and classical *fiqh* literature.

Some '*ulamā*' contend that virtual Friday prayers compromise the communal nature of the congregation (*jamā'ah*), which is designed to promote social cohesion and collective religious practice. They argue that the physical presence of worshippers is a *Shari'ah* mandate that cannot be substituted by virtual interaction. In contrast, reformist and contextualist scholars propose that the *maqāṣid al-shari'ah*—such as maintaining the continuity of worship and advancing public welfare—may legitimize virtual participation under exceptional circumstances.²⁹ This perspective highlights the adaptability of Islamic law in responding to shifting contexts without compromising its fundamental principles.³⁰ The debate further exemplifies broader methodological tensions within contemporary *fiqh*, specifically between strict adherence to textual sources and the dynamic application of legal principles to contemporary challenges.³¹ As digital forms of worship continue to proliferate, the discourse on virtual Friday prayer emerges as a critical site for exploring how Muslim scholars reconcile tradition with modernity in the interpretation of religious duties.

From an interpretive standpoint, the practices of the MUI and Dār al-Iftā' al-Miṣriyyah, as prominent institutional fatwa authorities, can be partially characterized as exemplifying what Saeed designates as “sub-textualism.”³² This approach is defined by the incorporation of contextual factors as the foundational basis for legal reasoning; nevertheless, this inductive methodology remains ultimately constrained by classical jurisprudential conclusions. Specifically, both the MUI and Dār al-Iftā' al-Miṣriyyah commence with a contemporary context (the COVID-19 pandemic) but derive their conclusions firmly from classical textual sources. Comparably, Muhammadiyah exhibits a commitment to textualism, particularly through its emphasis on *ḥadīth*, albeit with a somewhat more nuanced engagement with scriptural evidence.

Muhammadiyah Fatwa on Virtual Friday Prayers

As previously discussed, the debate surrounding the validity of virtual Friday prayer is characterized by two opposing perspectives: proponents and opponents. This discourse has also emerged within the internal circles of Muhammadiyah. Specifically, although the Muhammadiyah organization has officially issued a fatwa rejecting the practice of virtual

²⁸ Abd al-Rahmān al-Jazīrī, *Al-Fiqh 'ala al-Madhāhib al-Arba'ah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2008).

²⁹ To see this debate, see: Wael Hegazy, “Muslim Online Prayer in a Sociocultural Context,” *CyberOrient* 14, no. 2 (2020): 64–84.

³⁰ Mahfidhatul Khasanah Khasanah, Saifuddin Zuhri Qudsy, and Thoriqatul Faizah, “Contemporary Fragments in Islamic Interpretation: An Analysis of Gus Baha's Tafsir Jalalayn Recitation on YouTube in the Pesantren Tradition,” *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 24, no. 1 (March 2023): 137–60.

³¹ See: Bambang, “Ijtihad and the Dynamics of Islamic Legal Interpretation: An Epistemological Exploration in the Contemporary Context,” *NUSANTARA: Journal of Law Studies* 3, no. 1 (July 2024): 56–67; MIMOZA Hatixhe et al., “Kosovar Muslims and the Hanafi School: Legal Interpretations in a Post-Ottoman Context,” *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Law* 8, no. 1 (June 2025): 113–34.

³² Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century*, 3–24.

Friday prayer, some scholars affiliated with Muhammadiyah have expressed divergent views. Reports of this internal debate have been documented in various digital media outlets, including *ibtimes.com*.³³ However, within the scope of this study, these internal differences within Muhammadiyah are not the primary focus and are therefore addressed only briefly.

In response to the theological and jurisprudential discussions concerning the conduct of Friday prayers via digital platforms such as Zoom or YouTube Live, the Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid of Muhammadiyah issued a fatwa on February 2, 2021. This fatwa was subsequently published on February 18, 2021, through Muhammadiyah's official digital platform, Suara Muhammadiyah. All references and explanations of this fatwa, as presented herein and in the following sections, are derived directly from Muhammadiyah's official publications accessible on the Suara Muhammadiyah website.³⁴

Figure 1
Muhammadiyah's Fatwa Publication on Virtual Friday Prayers



Source: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2021.

Structure of the Fatwa

In this context, the term structure comprises three components: the *mufti* (the authority issuing the fatwa), the *mustafti* (the inquirer or recipient of the fatwa), and the substantive content of the fatwa itself. The fatwa issued by Muhammadiyah explicitly states that the ruling was formulated in response to a question submitted to the Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid. The question was presented as follows:³⁵

³³ For example, see: Wawan Gunawan Abdul Wahid, "Sekali Lagi, Tidak Ada Masalah Shalat Jumat Secara Online," *Fikih, IBTimes.ID*, May 4, 2020, <https://ibtimes.id/sekali-lagi-tidak-ada-masalah-shalat-jumat-secara-online/>.

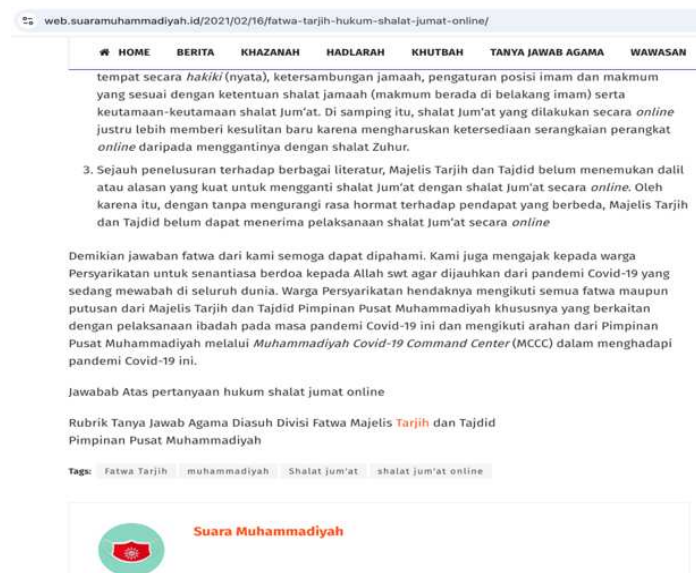
³⁴ This fatwa is also published online on Muhammadiyah's official website. See: Redaksi Muhammadiyah, "Sholat Jum'at Online, Bolehkah?," *Muhammadiyah*, March 3, 2021, <https://muhammadiyah.or.id/2021/03/sholat-jumat-online-bolehkah/>.

³⁵ Suara Muhammadiyah, *Fatwa Tarjih Hukum Shalat Jum'at Online*, Tanya Jawab Agama, February 16, 2021, <https://web.suaramuhammadiyah.id/2021/02/16/fatwa-tarjih-hukum-shalat-jumat-online/>; Muhammadiyah, "Sholat Jum'at Online, Bolehkah?"

“What is the legal status of performing the virtual Friday prayer, considering the recent emergence of delivering the Friday sermon and prayer via digital platforms?”

This inquiry was subsequently presented for discussion on Monday, February 2, 2021. However, the publication does not reveal the identity of the individual who submitted the question or the exact date on which it was initially posed; consequently, the precise context of the inquiry remains indeterminate. It can only be broadly inferred that the question arose in response to the widespread practice of virtual Friday prayers during that period. At the conclusion of the fatwa, it is noted that the “*Religious Q&A Column is administered by the Fatwa Division of the Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid*,” followed by the designation “fatwa tarjih.”³⁶ It indicates that the fatwa originates from the institutional authority of Muhammadiyah—specifically, the Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid. Therefore, the fatwa constitutes an institutional, rather than an individual, legal opinion, collectively issued by the organization in response to a theological and jurisprudential question. Accordingly, it represents Muhammadiyah’s official stance on the issue of virtual Friday prayer. The identity of the *mustafti* is not explicitly disclosed, suggesting that the fatwa is directed either to members of the Muhammadiyah community or to the broader Muslim public.

Figure 2
A Capture of the End of the Fatwa



Source: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2021.

At the outset of the fatwa, the *mufti* clarifies that the issue of Friday prayer is not a novel subject within Muhammadiyah’s internal discourse. The *mufti* underscores that several related fatwas have previously been compiled in Muhammadiyah’s official worship guides, issued by the Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid. These fatwas are documented across multiple volumes of the *Tanya Jawab Agama* (TJA) series,³⁷ which functions as an authoritative reference for religious and legal rulings within the organization. Overall, Muhammadiyah’s

³⁶ Suara Muhammadiyah, *Fatwa Tarjih Hukum Shalat Jum’at Online*.

³⁷ Muhammadiyah, “Fatwa Tarjih,” *Fatwa Tarjih*, accessed July 8, 2025, <https://fatwatarjih.or.id/download/>.

deliberations on Friday prayer, as presented in Volumes I through IV of the TJA, consistently converge on the central conclusion that when an individual is unable to perform Friday prayer for legitimate reasons, the obligation is fulfilled by performing the *Zuhr* prayer as a valid alternative.³⁸

In TJA Volume I, page 64, the Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid asserts that individuals who are unable to perform the Friday prayer due to legitimate impediments may substitute this obligation with the *Zuhr* prayer. This stance is grounded in the principle that the Friday prayer is obligatory for Muslim men who fulfill the requisite conditions; however, this obligation is waived (*sāqīʾ*) in the presence of a legally recognized excuse (*ʿudhr sharʿī*).³⁹ TJA Volume II, page 92, presents a fatwa regarding a congregant (*maʾmūm*) who prays in a location separate from the *imām*, such as an adjacent room or behind a wall. Under these circumstances, the *maʾmūm* may still participate in the congregation provided that he can directly observe or hear the *imām*'s movements and recitations. This position exemplifies Muhammadiyah's juridical flexibility in interpreting the concept of *ittiṣāl al-jamāʿah*, contingent upon the sensorial verification—either visual or auditory—of such connectedness during congregational worship. TJA Volume III, page 92, discusses the performance of Friday prayer in multi-level mosques. The fatwa asserts that congregational prayer is valid when the *imām* is situated on an upper floor and the *maʾmūm* on a lower floor, provided that both occupy a single unified space (*waḥdat al-makān*). The use of technological aids, such as screens or loudspeakers, is permitted to the extent that these devices enhance the visibility and audibility of the *imām* without compromising the essential spatial unity required for the validity of congregational prayer. TJA Volume IV, page 123, reaffirms the legal principle concerning the substitution of the *Zuhr* prayer for the Friday prayer.⁴⁰ The fatwa specifies that individuals with a legitimate *ʿudhr sharʿī*—such as slaves, women, children, or the ill—as well as those prevented from attending the Friday prayer for other reasons recognized by Islamic law, are exempt from this obligation. Instead, they are required to fulfill their religious duty by performing the *Zuhr* prayer. This provision highlights the Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid's consistent stance that the obligation of the Friday prayer is contingent upon individual capacity and specific circumstances, in accordance with the broader principles of Islamic jurisprudence.⁴¹

During emergency situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Central Board of Muhammadiyah issued a series of official circulars emphasizing the application of the principle of *rukhsah*. In Maklumat No. 01/MLM/I.O/H/2020, dated March 14, 2020, titled Guidelines for Worship during the COVID-19 Pandemic, it was stipulated that when circumstances threaten human life, the Friday prayer should be replaced by the *Zuhr* prayer performed at home—the directive aimed to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus while

³⁸ Muhammadiyah, "Materi-Pengajian-Tarjih-Edisi-119," Tarjih Muhammadiyah, <https://tarjih.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Materi-Pengajian-Tarjih-Edisi-119.pdf>.

³⁹ Alwi Shobri, "Contradiction in Hadiths Regarding Praying on a Conveyance," *Nabawi: Journal of Hadith Studies* 5, no. 1 (June 2024): 31–59.

⁴⁰ Tim PP Muhammadiyah Majelis Tarjih, *Tanya Jawab Agama Jilid 4*, 2nd ed. (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2003), 123.

⁴¹ Muhammadiyah, "Fatwa Tarjih," *Fatwa Tarjih*, accessed July 8, 2025, <https://fatwatarjih.or.id/download/>.

ensuring the continuation of religious obligations.⁴² A similar provision was reiterated in Circular No. 05/EDR/I.0/E/2020, dated June 4, 2020, regarding Guidelines for Facing the Pandemic and Its Impacts. This circular clarified that Friday prayer could be conducted not only in mosques but also in *musalas* (small prayer halls) or other appropriate locations, provided that health protocols were strictly observed.⁴³ Additionally, to minimize large gatherings, Friday prayer could be performed in two consecutive sessions, provided that each session met the legal and procedural requirements for a valid congregational prayer.

Following the establishment of the general context of Friday prayer, the fatwa reaffirms its legal status as an obligatory act of worship (*farḍ ‘ayn*) incumbent upon every Muslim who fulfills the requisite conditions. This obligation is substantiated by both explicit textual commands (*amr*) and admonitions directed at those who neglect it. For instance, as cited in *al-Muntaqā Sharḥ al-Muwatta’*, anyone who deliberately disregards and disparages the Friday prayer will have their heart sealed.⁴⁴ The fatwa further clarifies that the obligation to perform the Friday prayer does not extend to certain groups—namely, enslaved people, minors, women, and the ill—who are exempt according to Islamic law.⁴⁵ In this context, the *mufti* frames the discussion within the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, contending that divine injunctions do not apply to individuals who miss the Friday prayer for legitimate reasons acknowledged by the *Shari‘ah*, such as natural disasters or life-threatening situations. The *mufti* asserts that COVID-19 represents a form of danger that threatens human life; consequently, those who refrain from attending the Friday prayer to mitigate such risks are considered legitimately excused from this religious obligation. Based on this reasoning, the *mufti* proposes an alternative: performing the *Zuḥr* prayer as a substitute. The fatwa explicitly states:⁴⁶

“For individuals unable to attend Friday prayer due to the reasons previously mentioned, it is permissible to forgo attendance; however, they are required to perform the Zuḥr prayer as a substitute, in accordance with the original legal ruling (‘azīmah) applicable to those excused from Friday prayer attendance (see Tanya Jawab Agama, Volume IV, p. 123). Nonetheless, these individuals remain eligible to receive the spiritual benefits associated with Friday prayer.”

Following a detailed discussion on the obligation of the Friday prayer, the *mufti* proceeds to address the procedural elements involved in its performance. These elements encompass the requirement that the Friday prayer be conducted within a mosque, the organization of prayer rows (*sufūf*), and the necessity for the *ma’mūm* to remain attentive to the *imām*’s movements and recitations. In examining the designated place of prayer and the congregation’s attentiveness to the *imām*, the *mufti* emphasizes the concept of *ittiṣāl al-jamā‘ah*, which will be explored in greater depth in the third section of this study.

⁴² Muhammadiyah, “Maklumat Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah No. 01/MLM/I.0/H/2020,” March 14, 2020.

⁴³ Surat Edaran Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah No. 05/EDR/I.0/E/2020.

⁴⁴ Suara Muhammadiyah, *Fatwa Tarjih Hukum Shalat Jum‘at Online*.

⁴⁵ Suara Muhammadiyah, *Fatwa Tarjih Hukum Shalat Jum‘at Online*.

⁴⁶ See: Suara Muhammadiyah, *Fatwa Tarjih Hukum Shalat Jum‘at Online*; Muhammadiyah, “Sholat Jum‘at Online, Bolehkah?”

The fatwa subsequently addresses the primary issue concerning the legitimacy of conducting virtual Friday prayers. The *mufti* articulates four principal arguments opposing its validity. First, the act of worship is categorized as pure ritual worship (*‘ibādah maḥḍah*), which must strictly conform to prophetic precedent. Second, the requirement of spatial unity is unmet due to the absence of a shared physical location. Third, the presence of a clear *rukhsah*—specifically, the option to perform *Zuḥr* prayer as a substitute—renders this innovation unnecessary. Fourth, the issue entails *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) in a domain already governed by strong textual evidence.⁴⁷ Based on these considerations, the *mufti* concludes that the validity of virtual Friday prayer cannot be justified within the framework of Islamic legal reasoning.

Textual Foundations of the Fatwa: Legal Sources

The legal sources referenced in the fatwa primarily comprise Qur’ānic verses, *ḥadīths*, and *qawā‘id al-fiqhiyyah*. Within the discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (Islamic legal theory), these are termed *mashādir al-aḥkām*, denoting the normative foundations upon which Islamic legal rulings are established. According to al-Zuhaylī, Islamic legal sources can be categorized into two groups: revelatory (*wahyī*) and non-revelatory (*ghayr wahyī*).⁴⁸ The revelatory sources encompass the Qur’ān, a divinely revealed and recited text (*matlū*), and the *ḥadīth*, which conveys revelation in meaning but is not recited as divine scripture (*ghayr matlū*). The non-revelatory sources include *ijmā‘*, *qiyās* (analogical reasoning), and various secondary sources elaborated in classical *uṣūl al-fiqh* literature, such as *istiṣlāḥ* (consideration of public interest), *istiḥsān* (juristic preference), *sadd al-dharī‘ah* (blocking the means to harm), *istiṣḥāb* (presumption of continuity), *‘urf* (custom), *qawl al-ṣaḥābī* (the opinion of the Companions), and *shar‘ man qablana* (the law of previous prophetic communities).⁴⁹

Abū Zahrah further categorizes the sources of Islamic law into two distinct groups: those universally accepted and those subject to scholarly debate. The four sources unanimously acknowledged by Muslim jurists are the Qur’ān, the *ḥadīth*, *ijmā‘*, and *qiyās*. According to Abū Zahrah’s classification, the contested sources include *istiḥsān*, *‘urf*, *maṣlaḥah mursalah* (unrestricted public interest), *sadd al-dharī‘ah*, and *istiṣḥāb*.⁵⁰ Among these, there is general scholarly consensus that the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* constitute the primary and most authoritative foundations of Islamic law.⁵¹ The Qur’ān is regarded as the divine word of God and serves as the supreme guide for all aspects of Muslim life, encompassing acts of worship (*‘ibādāt*), social transactions (*mu‘āmalāt*), and ethical conduct. In the discipline of Qur’ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*), the *ḥadīth* functions both as an explanatory source (*bayān*) for Qur’ānic verses and as an independent legal source that clarifies matters not explicitly addressed in the

⁴⁷ Suara Muhammadiyah, *Fatwa Tarjih Hukum Shalat Jum‘at Online*.

⁴⁸ Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh al-Islāmī* (Damaskus: Dār al-Fikr, 1986), 1:417.

⁴⁹ Al-Zuhaylī, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, 1:417.

⁵⁰ M. Abu Zahrah, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* (Dar al-Fikr al-‘Arabi, n.d.), 73–5. Even Al-Qurṭubī states that nine out of ten Islamic legal rulings are established on the basis of secondary source, *istiḥsān*. See: Ibn Rusyd al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Bayān wa al-Taḥṣīl*, IV (Beirut: Dār al-‘Arab al-Islāmī, 1988), 156.

⁵¹ Al-Zuhaylī, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, 1:417.

Qur'ān.⁵² Collectively, these two sources occupy the highest position within the hierarchy of legal authority and constitute the ultimate reference for all forms of *ijtihād* in *fiqh*.⁵³

In addition to the two primary sources, scholars of *uṣūl al-fiqh* have identified several secondary sources to address emerging issues not explicitly covered in the *naṣṣ* (revealed texts). These secondary sources include *ijmā'*, *qiyās*, *istiḥsān*, *'urf*, *istiṣḥāb*, *qawl al-ṣaḥābi*, *shar' man qablana*, and *sadd al-dharī'ah*. The employment of these sources illustrates the flexibility and adaptability of Islamic law in responding to social changes and evolving human circumstances, while maintaining fidelity to the fundamental principles of the *Shari'ah*.⁵⁴ Consequently, the sources of Islamic law represent a system that is both theocentric and rational: theocentric in its foundation upon divine revelation, which is absolute and immutable, and rational in its openness to human reasoning and *ijtihād* for interpreting and applying the law within specific socio-historical contexts. This integrative nature ensures that Islamic law remains relevant across diverse temporal and spatial settings, effectively balancing divine values with human needs in social life.

Within the scope of this study, the researcher identifies the legal sources cited in the fatwa, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Legal Sources in the Fatwa

No.	Source	Text	Description
1.	Qur'ān	Al-Shūrā verse 21	The manner of worship must conform to the Prophet's guidance.
		Al-Jumu'ah verse 9	The command and call to perform Friday prayer.
		Al-Ḥashr verse 7	The performance of Friday prayer must follow the guidance of the Qur'ān and the <i>ḥadīth</i> .
2.	Ḥadīth	Aḥmad, Ibn Mājah, Ibn Ḥibbān, Ibn Khuzaimah	Friday prayer must conform to prophetic guidance and practice.
		Al-Bukhārī and Muslim	Rejection of religious innovations (<i>bid'ah</i>).
		Muslim	Rejection of acts not prescribed by the Prophet.
		Al-Bukhārī	Performing prayer in accordance with the Prophet's example.
		Abū Dāwūd	The obligation of Friday prayer.
		Aḥmad	Prohibition against abandoning Friday prayer.
		Muslim	Exhortation not to neglect Friday prayer.
		Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī	Warning to those who abandon Friday prayer.
		Al-Bukhārī	Permission to omit Friday prayer due to <i>'udhr shar'i</i> .
		Mālik	The virtue and merit of Friday prayer.
		Aḥmad	The unity of place and audibility of the <i>imām</i> 's voice in Friday prayer.

⁵² See: Hasbi ash-Shiddieqy, *Sejarah dan Pengantar Ilmu Hadis* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1974), 179–83; Mustafa al-Siba'i, *Al-Sunnah wa Makānatuha fī al-Tashrī' al-Islāmī* (Egypt: Al-Dār al-Qawmiyyah, 1966).

⁵³ See: Abdul-Hakim al-Matroudi, "The Qur'an as a Source of Law: A Reassessment of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal's Use of the Qur'an as a Legal Source," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2006): 186–212; Tahir Mahmood, "Law in the Qur'an-A Draft Code," in *Islamic Legal Theory: Volume 1*, ed. Mashood A. Baderin (Taylor and Francis, 2017), 1:127–58; Amr Osman, "The Qur'an and the Hadith as Sources of Islamic Law," in *Routledge Handbook of Islamic Law* (Routledge, 2019), 125–40; Ahmed Souaiaia, "On the Sources of Islamic Law and Practices," *Journal of Law and Religion* 20, no. 1 (2005): 123–47.

⁵⁴ Zahrah, *Ushul al-Fiqh*, 52.

		Al-Shāfi'ī	Permissibility of performing Friday prayer outside the mosque while maintaining spatial unity with the main congregation.
		Aḥmad	The requirement to straighten and close the prayer rows (<i>sufūf</i>).
		Aḥmad	The hierarchical merit of the front rows and those that follow.
		Abū Dāwūd	The arrangement of prayer rows—beginning from the right and rear.
		Al-Bukhārī	The obligation of the congregation to follow the <i>imām</i> .
		Al-Bukhārī	Choosing the easier of two lawful options.
3.	<i>Qawā'id al-Fiqhiyyah</i>	-	In principle, acts of worship are prohibited unless established by valid evidence (<i>mashrū'</i>).
			Acts of worship are <i>tawqīfī</i> (restricted to what is prescribed by revelation)
			Worship is invalid unless sanctioned by the <i>Shari'ah</i> .
			It is preferable to avoid matters of juristic disagreement (<i>khilāf</i>).
4.	Imām Mālik's Opinion	<i>Al-Muntaqā Sharḥ al-Muwatta'</i> , 1/204	Warning against neglecting Friday prayer.

Source: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2021.

Table 1 illustrates that Muhammadiyah's fatwa concerning the virtual Friday prayer is based on a diverse array of sources, including the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, *qawā'id al-fiqhiyyah*, and the opinion of Imām Mālik, as well as several scholarly views cited indirectly. The majority of references utilized in the fatwa originate from prophetic traditions transmitted by prominent *ḥadīth* authorities such as Imām al-Bukhārī, Imām Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, Aḥmad, Ibn Mājah, Ibn Ḥibbān, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Khuzaimah, and Imām Mālik. Only three Qur'ānic verses are cited as primary references, alongside four *qawā'id al-fiqhiyyah* and a single citation from Imām Mālik's opinion. This distribution highlights the textual emphasis on *ḥadīth* as the principal legal foundation of the fatwa, reflecting Muhammadiyah's longstanding methodological orientation, which derives legal rulings in matters of *'ibādah* directly from authentic prophetic sources.⁵⁵

The Qur'ānic references cited in the fatwa delineate both the obligation and the injunction of the Friday prayer, as well as the proper procedures for its performance, all of which must adhere to the guidance provided by the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*. The citation from Imām Mālik further reinforces the obligation of the Friday prayer by emphasizing the spiritual admonition against deliberate neglect. The *qawā'id al-fiqhiyyah* articulate fundamental principles governing acts of worship, namely that worship is *tawqīfī* (restricted to divine prescription), prohibited unless sanctioned by revelation, and invalid without explicit authorization from the *Shari'ah*. Additionally, *ḥadīth* evidence is extensively employed to substantiate every aspect of the ruling—establishing the obligation of the Friday prayer, prohibiting its abandonment, defining the appropriate place and manner of its performance, permitting exemptions for legitimate excuses, and outlining prophetic guidance on choosing

⁵⁵ Suara Muhammadiyah, *Fatwa Tarjih Hukum Shalat Jum'at Online*.

between two lawful options while rejecting religious innovations (*bid'ah*) in worship.⁵⁶ This analysis reveals that the fatwa is predominantly text-dependent, with its legal reasoning primarily grounded in *ḥadīth*-based sources. Such reliance exemplifies a textual-normative interpretive approach characteristic of Muhammadiyah's legal thought, especially concerning issues related to *'ibādah maḥḍah*.

Primary Argumentation

The legal conclusion articulated in Muhammadiyah's fatwa explicitly states that virtual Friday prayer is impermissible; specifically, a Friday prayer conducted virtually cannot be considered a valid form of worship. This ruling is grounded in four principal arguments. The first pertains to the dispensation from the obligation to perform Friday prayer under exceptional circumstances. The Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid affirms that Friday prayer constitutes an act of *'ibādah maḥḍah* that must be performed strictly in accordance with the guidance of the Prophet Muḥammad. Any ritual practice conducted beyond or outside the textual framework of the *Sharī'ah* is considered to lack a legitimate legal foundation. In circumstances where Friday prayer cannot be performed—such as during emergencies or public health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic—the obligation is waived and may be substituted with *Zuḥr* prayer, consistent with the principle of *rukhsah* recognized in *fiqh*.⁵⁷

Secondly, conducting virtual Friday prayer does not satisfy the essential requirements of congregational worship. The Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid asserts that performing Friday prayer via digital or digital platforms is not justifiable under *Sharī'ah* law, as it fails to meet fundamental validity conditions such as *ittiḥād al-makān*, *ittiṣāl al-jamā'ah*, and appropriate spatial alignment between the *imām* and the *ma'mūm*. These conditions are inherently physical and cannot be fulfilled through virtual means. Third, conducting the virtual Friday prayer presents practical and technical challenges. It necessitates a sophisticated array of technological tools and reliable internet connectivity, which may pose greater difficulties compared to performing the *Zuḥr* prayer as an alternative.⁵⁸

Finally, the fourth argument underscores the lack of compelling textual or rational evidence to support substituting the traditional Friday prayer with a virtual alternative. In the absence of explicit legal proof, such a practice cannot be deemed valid within the framework of Islamic jurisprudence. The four arguments can be summarized as follows: (1) the exemption from the obligation to perform the Friday prayer under exceptional circumstances, (2) the inability of virtual prayer to fulfill the fundamental requirements of congregational worship, (3) the increased complexity and technical challenges involved, and (4) the lack of authoritative legal evidence substantiating its validity. As demonstrated in Figure 3, these points can be logically articulated as follows: if the obligation to perform the Friday prayer has been temporarily suspended, its performance is no longer mandatory; if the conditions for validity are not satisfied, the act is intrinsically invalid; and if there is no textual or legal evidence supporting the practice, it constitutes an unauthorized form of

⁵⁶ Suara Muhammadiyah, *Fatwa Tarjih Hukum Shalat Jum'at Online*.

⁵⁷ Suara Muhammadiyah, *Fatwa Tarjih Hukum Shalat Jum'at Online*.

⁵⁸ Suara Muhammadiyah, *Fatwa Tarjih Hukum Shalat Jum'at Online*.

worship, making its performance both unwarranted and unnecessary. These arguments are clearly presented in the concluding section of the fatwa.⁵⁹

Figure 3 Fatwa Conclusion



Source: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2021.

Among the four arguments constituting the legal reasoning of the fatwa, the first and second can be categorized as substantive, as they address the fundamental requirements for the validity of the Friday prayer. The first argument pertains to the obligatory nature of the Friday prayer, whereas the second concerns its essential pillars (*arkān al-jumu'ah*). Both are thus situated within the ontological framework of the ritual itself. In contrast, the fourth argument operates within an epistemological framework, examining the legal sources from which the legitimacy and authority of virtual Friday prayer might theoretically be derived. The third argument is best understood as supplementary—technical rather than normative—focusing primarily on the challenges introduced by technological mediation. This configuration suggests that technology is not considered a decisive factor in determining legal validity. Quantitatively, three of the four arguments exhibit a textualist orientation, emphasizing scriptural interpretation and adherence to prophetic precedent, while only one argument explicitly addresses technology, portraying it as a source of complexity and potential disruption rather than as an integral element of ritual practice.

Jurisprudential Interpretation: Advancing Textual Exegesis in the *Fiqh* of Worship

Saleh classifies contemporary Qur'ānic exegesis into four primary categories. The first category, scientific exegesis (*tafsīr 'ilmī*), interprets the Qur'ān as a text containing indications and anticipations of scientific discoveries that emerged during the modern scientific revolution.⁶⁰ The second category is sectarian exegesis, typically exemplified by compilations

⁵⁹ Suara Muhammadiyah, *Fatwa Tarjih Hukum Shalat Jum'at Online*.

⁶⁰ See: Walid A Saleh, "Preliminary Remarks on the Historiography of Tafsīr in Arabic: A History of the Book Approach," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 12, nos. 1–2 (2010): 6–40; Anggi Radar and Lukman Al-Hakim,

produced by modern Shī'ī scholars and commentators. The third category includes blasphemous or controversial exegesis, referring to interpretive approaches or texts considered heterodox or provocative by traditional scholars. The fourth category is literary-social exegesis, associated with the reformist school of *tafsīr* initiated by Muḥammad 'Abduh and further developed by his disciples, such as Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā and Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī.⁶¹ According to Saleh's typology, the interpretive approach of Muhammadiyah most closely corresponds to this latter model. However, prior to engaging in this comparison, it is essential to delineate the epistemological framework from which Muhammadiyah's textualist orientation can be logically derived.

To elucidate the epistemological foundation for interpreting a legal verse, this analysis commences with Sūrat al-Nisā' verse 105, which exemplifies an interpretive methodology grounded primarily in the textual dimension of the Qur'ān. Given that the sources of Islamic law derive from the application of the Qur'ān, it adheres to the Qur'ān's own interpretive principles, which later came to be known as *istiḍlāl*, reflection (*al-naẓar*) upon the evidences and contemplation (*al-ta'ammul*) to discern the essence of that which is being contemplated.⁶² The phrase "*bimā arāka Allāh* (by what Allah has shown you)" functions as an instrumental clause in the verse "*taḥkum bayna al-nās bimā arāka Allāh* (so that you may judge among the people by what Allah has shown you)", signifying that in the formulation of legal systems, norms, and moral frameworks, the Prophet is directed to rely upon the divine knowledge and guidance revealed to him by Allah as his epistemic and ethical foundation. From this emerges what is known as *al-khiṭāb al-shar'ī*, which, according to some scholars, refers to the eternal Divine attribute of God⁶³ that becomes articulated as speech concerning a particular matter, directed to a particular audience,⁶⁴ and conveyed in a manner intended to ensure that its content is accepted and followed.⁶⁵

Classical exegetes have proposed various interpretations of this expression. Some understand it as referring to what Allah has taught and revealed to the Prophet,⁶⁶ while others interpret it as encompassing what He has informed, inspired,⁶⁷ enjoined, or instructed.⁶⁸ Al-Māwardī and other commentators attribute these differing interpretations to the semantic richness and flexibility inherent in the Arabic language. Linguistically, the verb *arā* derives from *ra'ā*, which means "to show" or "to make see." Within exegetical discourse, the repetition of the verb alone is insufficient to convey the full meaning; therefore,

"Between Science and Revelation: A Critical Assessment of Zaghlūl al-Najjār's Scientific Hermeneutics in Hadith Interpretation," *Basmala: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith* 1, no. 1 (July 2025): 68–85.

⁶¹ Saleh, "Preliminary Remarks on the Historiography of Tafsīr in Arabic," 6–40.

⁶² See: Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *Al-Taqrīb wa al-Irṣād (al-Ṣaghīr)*, I (Beirut: Al-Risālah, 1988), 208; Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, *Al-Talkhīṣ fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, I (Dār al-Basyā'ir al-Islāmiyyah, n.d.), 118.

⁶³ Ali Jum'ah, *Al-Mushṭalah al-Uṣūlī wa Mushkilat al-Mafāhīm*, I (Kairo: Al-Ma'had al-Ālamī li al-Fikr al-Islāmī, 1966), 52.

⁶⁴ Zahrah, *Ushul al-Fiqh*, 52.

⁶⁵ Muḥammad Ḥasan Jabal, *Al-Muḥjam al-Isyīqāqī li Aljāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, I (Kairo: Al-Adab, 2010), 578.

⁶⁶ Al-Husain bin Masūd al-Baghawī, *Ma'alim al-Tanzīl* (Dār al-Taybah, n.d.), 381.

⁶⁷ Abū al-Qasim ibn Muḥammad ibn Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshaf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl* (Intisyarat Afab, n.d.), 365.

⁶⁸ Al-Jilānī, *Tafsīr al-Jilānī*, vol. 1 (Dār al-Rukni wa al-Maqām, 2009), 393.

commentators elaborate on it using related terms such as *‘allama* (to teach), *‘arrafa* (to inform), *amṣā* (to enjoin), and *amḥā* (to reveal). Accordingly, in Indonesian translation, the phrase “*bimā arāka Allāh*” is rendered as “what Allah has shown you,” thereby capturing both the revelatory and epistemological aspects of divine instruction.⁶⁹

Within this framework, Muhammadiyah’s interpretation of the virtual Friday prayer practice represents a manifestation of its commitment to textual authority. The fatwa is explicit and firmly rooted in scriptural sources, primarily drawing upon Qur’ānic verses and *ḥadīths*, supplemented by interpretations from classical *mufasssīrūn* and *fuqahā’*.⁷⁰ The textual directives concerning the obligation of Friday prayer and the conditions under which its suspension or substitution is permissible in exceptional circumstances are considered sufficiently clear. Accordingly, any attempt to establish a new legal ruling permitting virtual Friday prayer beyond these textual parameters is assessed through a strictly textualist lens. In this regard, Muhammadiyah’s interpretive approach can be characterized as textualist, closely aligning with the tradition of *tafsīr bi al-ma’thūr* (tradition-based exegesis).⁷¹

The textual methodology employed in Muhammadiyah’s fatwa is predominantly characterized by its reliance on the Qur’ān, *ḥadīth*, and established jurisprudential sources. Nonetheless, this does not suggest that the interpretive process is exclusively textual or rigidly literal. The fatwa incorporates a degree of contextualization, particularly by recognizing the COVID-19 pandemic as a valid basis for *rukhsah*. In this context, *rukhsah* is indeed applied; however, the pandemic is not considered sufficient justification to transform the traditional procedures of Friday prayer into a virtual format. Instead, it warrants a return to an alternative already authorized by the textual tradition—specifically, performing *Zuḥr* prayer as a substitute. This position contrasts with that of scholars who advocate for the legitimacy of virtual Friday prayer. Consequently, the central issue in this debate concerns the manner in which text and context are integrated within the interpretive and legal reasoning process. Indirectly, this suggests that the presence of digital platforms in this context does not necessarily alter traditional religious authority structures, as observed by Ali and Aljahsh.⁷² Instead, it demonstrates a heightened level of caution in the production of fatwas.

⁶⁹ Al-Māwardī, *Al-Nukat wa al-Uyūn* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1999), 528.

⁷⁰ As a comparison, studies by Ibnu and Mun’im identifies this interpretive tendency within a different context. See: Ibnu Elmi A. S. Pelu, “Kedudukan Fatwa dalam Konstruksi Hukum Islam,” *El-Mashlahah* 9, no. 2 (2019): 167–81; Zainul Mun’im, “Peran Kaidah Fikih dalam Aktualisasi Hukum Islam: Studi Fatwa Yūsuf Al-Qarāḍāwī tentang Fiqh al-Aqalliyāt,” *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* 15, no. 1 (2021): 151–72.

⁷¹ *Tafsīr bi al-ma’thūr*, known as tradition-based exegesis, refers to the interpretation of the Qur’ān based on transmitted reports from the Prophet Muhammad, his companions, and early Islamic scholars. This method relies heavily on *ḥadīth* (prophetic traditions) and the sayings of the early generations of Muslims to elucidate the meanings of Qur’ānic verses. Aṭ-Ṭabarī and Al-Suyūṭī are among prolific pioneer representing this style of interpretation. See: S.R. Burge, “Scattered Pearls: Exploring al-Suyūṭī’s Hermeneutics and Use of Sources in al-Durr al-Manthūr fīl-Tafsīr bi’l-Ma’thūr,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24, no. 2 (2014): 251–96; M.A. Koç, “On the Allegedly Overstated Importance of Aṭ-Ṭabarī (d. 310/922) within the Sunnī Exegetical Tradition: An Answer to Walid Saleh,” *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 173, no. 2 (2023): 343–58; Giyarsi, Iim Fahimah, and Miti Yarmunida, “Indonesian Ulema Council Fatwa on Boycotting Products Supporting Israel in the Ijtihad Discourse of Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah,” *NUSANTARA: Journal of Law Studies* 2, no. 2 (December 2023): 156–67.

⁷² Abdelhalim Mohamed Mansour Ali and Muhammad Ahmad Ibrahim Aljahsh, “The Proliferation of Anomalous Digital Fatwas: A Critical Examination of Jurisprudential Challenges and Societal Impacts in the Digital Age,” *Abkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 25, no. 1 (2025): 37–52.

Within this context, Muhammadiyah deliberately endeavors to preserve the purity of ritual worship. This commitment is evident in its assertion that prayer constitutes an act of *‘ibādah maḥḍah*, a purely ritual form of worship whose procedures and details are definitively prescribed by the *Shari‘ah*.⁷³ Accordingly, the interpretive model most widely endorsed in these matters is one grounded in explicit and authoritative textual evidence. Acts of worship cannot be altered unless supported by a clear *naṣṣ* or justified by an undeniable state of *‘udhr*. It indicates that the Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid employs a textual-normative interpretive framework in the domain of ritual practice, rather than a hermeneutical or liberal approach that would readily adapt ritual forms in response to technological or social developments. In this context, Muhammadiyah’s interpretive tradition exemplifies a reasoning system consistent with the *bayānī* mode (textual reasoning). It is evidenced by several defining features: (1) a pronounced focus on textual sources, (2) primary reliance on the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* as the foundational bases for interpretation, and (3) a relatively limited emphasis on rational (*ta‘līlī*) reasoning. Nonetheless, the *bayānī* interpretation employed is neither rigid nor exclusionary. Muhammadiyah does not wholly reject contextual *ijtihād*; instead, it delineates its scope by employing textually adaptive reasoning firmly anchored in its established scriptural sources.

Conclusion

The Muhammadiyah fatwa prohibiting the performance of Friday prayer in a virtual format exemplifies a distinctly textualist approach to Islamic legal interpretation, grounded in the epistemology of *tafsīr bi al-ma‘thūr* (tradition-based exegesis). The findings of this study reveal that the Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid conceptualizes Friday prayer as *‘ibādah maḥḍah*—a pure form of ritual devotion whose validity is strictly contingent upon prophetic precedent. Consequently, any procedural innovation lacking explicit textual authorization is deemed legally untenable. In the exceptional context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Muhammadiyah frames the crisis as a legitimate circumstance warranting *rukhsah* (legal concession), thereby authorizing the substitution of Friday prayer with the *Zuḥr* prayer rather than adapting the ritual into a digital format. This interpretive position reflects a deliberate effort to preserve the sanctity of worship and to protect the boundaries of *ta‘abbudī* practice from the intrusion of technological mediation. Epistemologically, the fatwa reinforces Muhammadiyah’s enduring commitment to legal textualism, demonstrating that its modernist ethos—often associated with rationalism and scientific reasoning in disciplines such as Islamic astronomy—remains constrained by the normative authority of the *Shari‘ah*. The predominant reliance on *ḥadīth* and *qawā‘id al-fiqhiyyah* evidences a hierarchically text-centered legal reasoning that privileges scriptural fidelity over juridical innovation.

Beyond its immediate legal conclusions, this study holds significant methodological and socio-legal implications. It demonstrates how Muhammadiyah’s institutional *ijtibād jamā‘ī* (collective reasoning) operates as a site of negotiation between textual constancy and

⁷³ For a comparison, see: Muhammadong Muhammadong, Muwafiqus Shobri, and Ma’adul Yaqien Makkarateng, “Religious Freedom in Islamic Law: A Review of Maqasid, Aqidah, Ibadah, and Muamalat,” *Manchester Journal of Transnational Islamic Law and Practice* 20, no. 4 (2024): 137–49.

contextual adaptation within the digital era. The fatwa thus serves as a paradigmatic example of the reconstitution of Islamic legal authority through the dialogical interaction between tradition and technological modernity. Furthermore, the study highlights that Muhammadiyah's approach to modernity does not necessarily imply hermeneutical liberalization but rather a disciplined engagement with change grounded in scriptural boundaries. Methodologically, this research is confined to a qualitative textual analysis of Muhammadiyah's official fatwa documents and related publications. It does not incorporate empirical data concerning public reception, digital worship practices, or religious transformations following the pandemic. Future research could expand this inquiry by exploring the dynamic relationship between Muhammadiyah's textual conservatism and the evolving manifestations of digital religiosity in post-pandemic Muslim communities. Such investigations would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how Islamic authority, interpretive continuity, and technological mediation converge to influence the development of contemporary Muslim worship and legal consciousness.

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