



Competing Moral Educators: A Theory of Algorithmic–Parental Authority Contestation in Islamic Education

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Abstract

Children's Islamic moral socialization increasingly occurs in algorithmically curated environments where parental guidance coexists with digitally amplified normative interpretations, yet existing research insufficiently explains how children allocate interpretive authority when these sources offer divergent moral meanings. This conceptual paper develops Algorithmic–Parental Interpretive Authority Contestation Theory (APIACT) to address the gap between parental mediation, religious socialization, algorithmic visibility, and digital religious authority research. Through integrative theory building, the paper connects algorithmic selection, legitimacy attribution, normative incongruence, and child-centered sensemaking into a contingent causal architecture. APIACT proposes that algorithms influence moral socialization indirectly by amplifying normative cues and potential authority carriers rather than functioning as moral educators. When children attribute legitimacy to digitally visible sources whose interpretations diverge from parental Islamic guidance, interpretive authority contestation is activated and resolved through relative authority weighting. This process may produce parental alignment, digital authority displacement, interpretive hybridization, or moral compartmentalization. APIACT advances a middle-range explanation of moral socialization under competing normative infrastructures and provides testable mechanisms, boundary conditions, and directions for empirical research on digitally mediated religious authority..

Keywords

algorithmic amplification; interpretive authority contestation; Islamic moral socialization; child moral sensemaking; digital religious authority; parental mediation

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1. Introduction

Children's moral and religious formation increasingly unfolds within digital environments whose informational visibility is shaped by algorithmic selection. Social media platforms do not merely host content; their recommender systems selectively elevate particular actors, narratives, symbols, and evaluative frames, thereby structuring what becomes repeatedly visible and salient to users (Beer, 2017; Bucher, 2017; Gillespie, 2014; Striplas, 2015). Such infrastructures do not possess moral intentions or pedagogical agency in themselves. Nevertheless, by intensifying the visibility and recurrence of particular normative cues, algorithmic systems can reshape the informational environments through which children encounter claims about appropriate conduct, identity, and moral judgment (Bucher, 2020; Seaver, 2017). The theoretical significance of this shift lies not simply in children's increased exposure to digital content, but in the emergence of a digitally curated field in which multiple sources may claim interpretive relevance over the same moral situation.

This development is particularly consequential for Islamic moral education. Muslim children and adolescents can now encounter religious interpretations through parents, schools, mosques, preachers, influencers, online knowledge communities, and algorithmically recommended sources. Research on digital religion has already shown that mediated environments alter the organization and circulation of religious authority (Campbell, 2012; Hjarvard, 2008; Turner, 2007). More recent studies further demonstrate that online religious learning can support forms of epistemic authority and self-socialization, while digitally visible religious actors increasingly participate in the production and negotiation of religious knowledge (Berger & Golan, 2024; Febrian, 2024). In Indonesia, smartphones and digital media have similarly become embedded in the religious education of young people, generating both opportunities and anxieties concerning the sources through which Islamic understandings are acquired (LARSON, 2024). Thus, children may encounter moral interpretations that are religiously framed, socially validated, and digitally amplified, yet not fully consistent with the interpretations offered by their parents.

Parental mediation research provides an important foundation for understanding how families respond to children's media use. The literature has identified restrictive, instructive, and co-use strategies and has subsequently expanded toward broader models of digital parenting, parent-child communication, digital skills, and digital well-being (Clark, 2011; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Nikken & Jansz, 2014; Valkenburg *et al.*, 1999). Recent work also suggests that parental mediation cannot be reduced to a uniform protective mechanism because its implications vary across children, parenting contexts, and dimensions of digital development (Beyens *et al.*, 2022; Koch *et al.*, 2024; Tan *et al.*, 2025). Yet, despite this growing sophistication, parental mediation largely asks how parents manage children's access to, use of, and communication about digital media. It says comparatively less about whether parents retain legitimate authority to define the moral meaning of situations that children encounter through algorithmically curated platforms.

At the same time, studies of algorithmic culture increasingly explain how algorithms structure visibility, timing, salience, and users' imaginaries of platform processes (Beer, 2017; Bucher, 2017; Schellewald, 2022). Research on algorithmic awareness and literacy further shows that users can interpret, negotiate, and sometimes resist algorithmic recommendations rather than responding as passive recipients (Obreja, 2024; Siles *et al.*, 2024). Parallel scholarship on digital religious authority explains how online actors and sources acquire epistemic or religious credibility in digitally mediated settings (Berger & Golan, 2024; Febrian, 2024). However, these literatures remain insufficiently integrated with family-centered accounts of religious socialization. We therefore know considerably more about how digital sources become visible and how parents mediate media use than about what occurs when digitally amplified normative interpretations and parental Islamic guidance make simultaneous and potentially incompatible claims over a child's moral understanding.

This gap points to an unresolved theoretical problem. Religious socialization has traditionally emphasized processes of value transmission, reception, and internalization within relationships and social environments (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Klingenberg & Sjö, 2019; Maccoby, 1992). Such perspectives remain indispensable, but they are less equipped to explain moral socialization under conditions of persistent normative plurality in which multiple sources may be recognized as legitimate interpreters. Institutional complexity research shows that actors can confront incompatible normative demands associated with different logics or authority structures (Greenwood *et al.*, 2011; Pache & Santos, 2010). Yet this insight has rarely been extended to the child-level interpretive processes through which parental and digitally amplified moral claims are comparatively weighted. The central problem, therefore, is not whether algorithms influence Muslim children. Rather, it is how children allocate relative interpretive authority when parental Islamic guidance and digitally encountered normative sources provide divergent meanings for the same moral situation.

To address this problem, this paper develops Algorithmic–Parental Interpretive Authority Contestation Theory (APIACT). APIACT proposes that algorithms affect Islamic moral socialization indirectly by selectively amplifying normative cues and increasing the visibility of alternative authority carriers. Visibility alone, however, does not constitute authority. A digitally encountered actor becomes theoretically consequential only when a child attributes interpretive legitimacy to that source. When a legitimized digital interpretation conflicts with parental Islamic guidance, moral interpretive incongruence emerges and activates a contest over relative interpretive authority. The child then engages in moral sensemaking through which competing claims are evaluated, weighted, synthesized, or separated.

This theoretical move generates three contributions. First, it reconceptualizes algorithmic influence as an authority-amplification process rather than direct algorithmic moral instruction. Second, it extends parental mediation research by reframing digital parenting as partly a problem of maintaining legitimate interpretive authority under normative competition. Third, it places the child at the center of the explanatory mechanism as an active moral sensemaker whose interpretation may result in parental alignment, digital authority displacement, interpretive hybridization, or moral compartmentalization. This avoids both family determinism and technological determinism while explaining why similar digital environments may produce different moral interpretive outcomes.

Accordingly, the objective of this conceptual paper is to develop APIACT as a middle-range theory explaining how algorithmically amplified normative sources and parental Islamic guidance become competing claims to interpretive authority and how children resolve this contest through moral sensemaking. The following sections examine the limits of family-centered socialization and parental mediation perspectives, specify the domain and constructs of APIACT, develop its causal mechanisms and propositions, and articulate its theoretical contributions, boundaries, and future research agenda.

2. Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Religious Socialization and the Family-Centered Transmission Assumption

The family has long occupied a central position in theories of child socialization because parents provide recurring normative guidance, behavioral models, evaluative feedback, and relational contexts through which children learn what is considered desirable or unacceptable. Classical accounts of parental socialization therefore emphasize processes through which parental values are communicated, received, and eventually internalized by children (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Maccoby, 1992). Parenting contexts further shape the effectiveness of these processes by influencing how parental expectations are interpreted and whether children perceive parental guidance as legitimate, supportive, or coercive (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). From an internalization perspective, children are not merely conditioned to comply; socialization becomes theoretically meaningful when externally communicated

norms are progressively integrated into the child's own regulatory system (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Religious socialization extends this logic to the transmission of beliefs, moral categories, practices, and interpretive traditions. Yet contemporary scholarship has challenged overly linear assumptions that religion simply moves from parents to children through stable intergenerational transmission. Religious socialization involves interaction among social contexts, relationships, institutions, and individual interpretive activity (Klingenberg & Sjö, 2019). This qualification becomes particularly important in digitally mediated environments, where parents are no longer the only recurrent source from which children encounter normatively framed interpretations. The theoretical limitation of a family-centered transmission model is therefore not that parents have ceased to matter. Rather, it is that the model often assumes a socialization sequence in which parental values are transmitted to children without fully theorizing persistent competition from alternative interpretive sources.

APIACT departs from this assumption. It shifts the explanatory sequence from parental value transmission and child reception to competing interpretive claims and child authority weighting. The question is no longer solely whether children internalize parental values, but whether parents continue to be recognized as the most legitimate interpreters of morally relevant situations when other visible sources offer plausible alternatives.

2.2 Parental Mediation and the Missing Problem

Parental mediation research offers the most developed account of how parents manage children's relationships with media. Early approaches distinguished restrictive mediation, instructive mediation, and social co-viewing, while subsequent research extended these categories to Internet use, smartphones, and broader digital parenting practices (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Nikken & Jansz, 2014; Valkenburg *et al.*, 1999). Parental strategies may involve restricting access, discussing content, monitoring behavior, sharing digital activities, or adapting mediation to perceived risks and parenting styles (Clark, 2011; Hwang *et al.*, 2017; Konok *et al.*, 2020).

More recent studies have shown that parental mediation is not a universally effective protective intervention. Its relationships with children's digital skills, maturity, well-being, and risky online experiences vary across contexts and developmental conditions (Geržičáková *et al.*, 2023; Koch *et al.*, 2024; Sciacca *et al.*, 2022; Tan *et al.*, 2025). Communication itself has consequently become a more prominent concern in research on parent-adolescent social media relations (Beyens *et al.*, 2024). These developments make parental mediation theory increasingly sensitive to relational and contextual variation.

Nevertheless, its dominant explanatory question remains centered on how parents manage children's media engagement. Restriction asks what access should be limited. Monitoring asks what children are doing online. Active mediation asks how parents explain or discuss content. These are important questions, but they do not fully address a distinct theoretical problem: why should a child accept the parent's moral interpretation of digitally encountered content as more legitimate than an alternative interpretation encountered online?

This distinction separates mediation from interpretive authority. A parent may successfully initiate discussion yet fail to retain authority over the meaning of the issue being discussed. Similarly, a child may comply behaviorally while privately assigning greater interpretive legitimacy to an influencer, preacher, peer-linked source, or online knowledge community. APIACT therefore reframes parental mediation as insufficient for explaining situations in which the central issue is not media management but the comparative legitimacy of competing moral interpreters.

2.3 Algorithmic Selection as Normative Visibility Infrastructure

Algorithm studies provide a complementary explanation of how digital environments are structured. Algorithms participate in the ordering, selection, and prioritization of

information, thereby influencing which materials gain visibility and which remain less accessible (Gillespie, 2014). Their social significance lies partly in their capacity to organize attention and make particular classifications, cultural patterns, and representations more consequential in everyday life (Beer, 2017; Striphas, 2015). Algorithmic systems should therefore be understood not as neutral delivery mechanisms but as infrastructures that shape the conditions under which users encounter information.

However, APIACT avoids treating algorithms as intentional moral agents. Seaver (2017) cautions against separating algorithmic systems from the cultural environments in which they are produced and used, while Bucher (2017) shows that users themselves develop imaginaries concerning how algorithms function. Algorithmic media also operate through temporally sensitive forms of content delivery, making the timing and recurrence of visibility theoretically relevant (Bucher, 2020). The result is what APIACT conceptualizes as asymmetric normative visibility: some moral claims, actors, and evaluative frames become more recurrent and salient than others.

Such asymmetry matters because repeated visibility can enlarge the pool of interpretations that children perceive as socially available. Yet visibility is not equivalent to authority. An algorithmically recurrent source remains merely visible unless the child attributes credibility or interpretive legitimacy to it. APIACT therefore theorizes algorithms as authority-amplification infrastructures rather than moral authorities. Their role is to intensify the visibility of potential authority carriers and thereby alter the informational conditions under which interpretive legitimacy may be attributed.

2.4 Digital Religious Authority and the Unresolved Contestation Problem

Research on religion and digital media already demonstrates that mediated environments transform how religious authority is produced, circulated, and negotiated. Turner (2007) identified the significance of new media for changing religious authority structures, while Campbell (2012) showed that online and offline religious life are interconnected within networked environments. Hjarvard (2008) similarly argued that media institutions can become significant agents in processes of religious change.

More recent studies move closer to the problem of digitally mediated authority. Online religious learning may facilitate forms of digital epistemic authority and self-socialization (Berger & Golan, 2024). Religious influencers can visually and communicatively construct recognizable forms of authority on social media (Febrian, 2024), while online Islamic knowledge sources increasingly participate in contested processes of knowledge recognition (Askar *et al.*, 2025). In Indonesia, digital media have also become deeply entangled with the education of religious youth and the circulation of Islamic understandings (LARSON, 2024).

The remaining gap is therefore not the absence of digital religious authority research. Existing scholarship increasingly explains how digital actors become visible and credible. What remains insufficiently theorized is the child-level process through which digitally amplified authority is comparatively weighted against parental Islamic interpretive authority when their moral claims diverge. Religious socialization explains transmission, parental mediation explains media management, algorithm studies explain structured visibility, and digital religion explains emerging authority. None adequately explains the mechanism connecting these processes under conditions of interpretive conflict.

APIACT addresses this integrative gap by locating theory at the point of interpretive authority contestation. It proposes that digitally amplified sources and parents become theoretically comparable not because they occupy identical social roles, but because both may be treated by children as sources claiming legitimate capacity to explain what a morally relevant situation means. The central theoretical task is therefore to explain when visibility becomes legitimacy, when divergent interpretations become perceived incongruence, and how children weight competing claims to moral interpretive authority.

To clarify the unresolved theoretical problem addressed by APIACT, Table 1 compares the principal explanatory focus, strengths, limitations, and theoretical reframing offered by the major literature streams underpinning this theory.

Table 1. From Media Management to Interpretive Authority Contestation

Literature Stream	Conventional Explanatory Question	Core Strength	Remaining Limitation	APIACT Reframing
Religious socialization	How are religious values transmitted?	Explains transmission and internalization	Competing interpretive sources underdeveloped	How are competing sources comparatively weighted?
Parental mediation	How do parents manage media use?	Explains restriction, monitoring, and communication	Parental authority often assumed	When do parents retain interpretive legitimacy?
Algorithm studies	How do algorithms structure visibility?	Explains selection and salience	Authority attribution unexplained	When does amplified visibility facilitate authority recognition?
Digital religion	How does digital media reshape religious authority?	Explains emerging epistemic and religious authority	Child-level parental contestation underdeveloped	How is digital authority weighted against parental authority?
Youth digital literacy	How do users understand algorithmic systems?	Explains awareness, interpretation, and resistance	Religious moral authority weakly integrated	How does literacy alter authority allocation?

Source: Authors' conceptualization based on the literature reviewed.

Table 1 clarifies the theoretical space occupied by APIACT. Its contribution is not to replace these literatures but to integrate their unresolved explanatory elements around a single mechanism: the allocation of relative interpretive authority under algorithmically structured normative competition.

Integrating these fragmented explanations reveals a theoretical pathway through which structured normative visibility, parental mediation, religious socialization, and emerging digital authority converge around the unresolved problem of interpretive authority contestation.

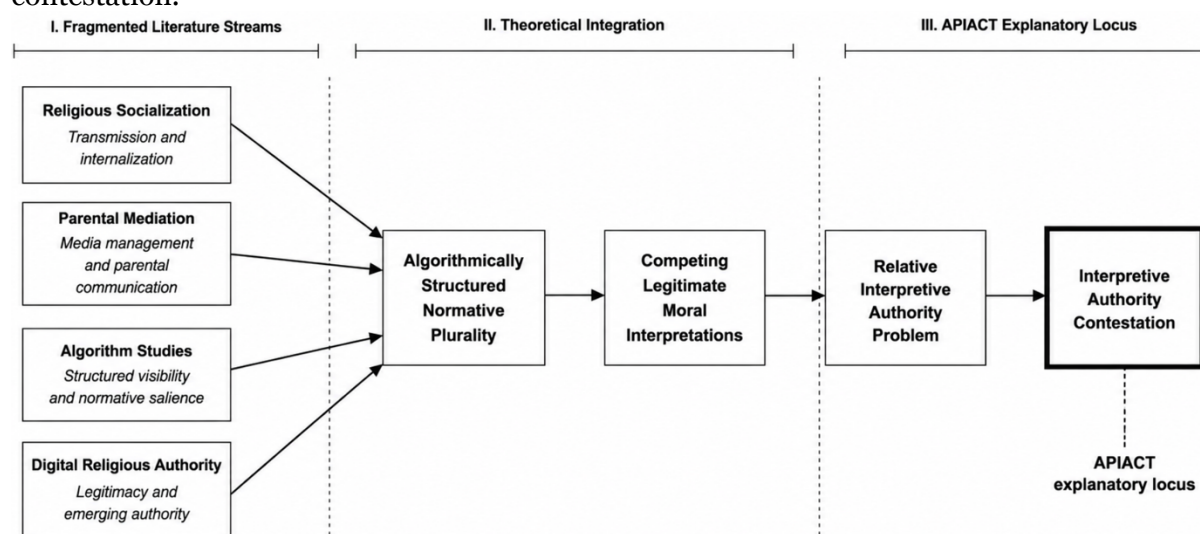


Figure 1. Theoretical Integration Pathway Toward Interpretive Authority Contestation

Source: Developed by the authors as a conceptual synthesis of the literature streams integrated in APIACT.

Figure 1 shows that APIACT emerges from an unresolved intersection among previously fragmented explanatory domains. Algorithm studies explain structured visibility, digital religion explains emerging authority, parental mediation explains family responses, and religious socialization explains transmission and internalization. Their convergence exposes a distinct relative-authority problem: how children comparatively weight legitimate but divergent moral interpretations, creating the explanatory locus for interpretive authority contestation.

3. The Domain and Constructs

3.1 Domain Specification

APIACT is a domain-specific theory of children's moral interpretation under digitally mediated normative competition. Its primary unit of analysis is the child's interpretive processing of competing moral claims, rather than the platform, the family, or the religious institution as independent units. The theory focuses on Muslim children and adolescents who encounter morally relevant situations within algorithmically curated digital environments while remaining embedded in parental Islamic socialization. This domain specification reflects the premise that media effects vary according to individual and contextual susceptibility and should not be assumed to operate uniformly across young users (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). It also recognizes children as participants in socialization rather than passive endpoints of intergenerational value transmission (Klingenberg & Sjö, 2019).

The theory applies when four conditions are jointly present. First, a child encounters a normative cue through an algorithmically curated environment. Second, the cue is connected to an identifiable actor or source that can potentially be recognized as an interpreter of morally relevant conduct. Third, the child attributes at least some interpretive legitimacy to that source. Fourth, the digitally encountered interpretation is perceived as divergent from parental Islamic guidance. Without legitimacy attribution, recurrent digital visibility remains exposure rather than authority. Without perceived divergence, multiple sources may coexist without producing contestation. APIACT therefore explains neither digital exposure in general nor every instance of religious learning online. Its explanatory domain begins when legitimized but incompatible interpretations become simultaneously relevant to a child's moral sensemaking.

This boundary differentiates APIACT from theories of problematic Internet use, digital well-being, behavioral compliance, screen-time negotiation, and general media effects. It also does not primarily explain how children develop the cognitive capacity to distinguish morally appropriate from inappropriate content. Instead, APIACT addresses a narrower question: how children allocate relative interpretive authority when parental Islamic guidance and digitally amplified sources offer competing meanings for a moral situation. The theory is expected to have its greatest explanatory power among children and adolescents with sufficient cognitive and developmental autonomy to recognize source differences, perceive interpretive inconsistency, and engage in comparative moral evaluation.

3.2 Core Constructs

The first construct, algorithmically amplified normative cues (AANC), refers to moral claims, symbols, narratives, evaluative frames, or behavioral interpretations whose visibility and recurrence are selectively intensified through algorithmic curation. Algorithms shape information environments by selecting, ordering, and prioritizing content, thereby producing unequal patterns of visibility (Beer, 2017; Gillespie, 2014). Algorithmic culture further embeds classificatory and cultural processes within everyday media environments (Striphas, 2015), while users experience and imagine algorithmic operations through recurrent platform encounters (Bucher, 2017). AANC therefore captures the normative content made disproportionately salient through algorithmic selection. It does not imply that the algorithm originates the moral claim.

Digitally amplified alternative authority (DAAA) refers to a digitally encountered actor or source to which a child attributes legitimate capacity to interpret morally relevant situations. The construct distinguishes source visibility from authority recognition. Legitimacy concerns the perceived appropriateness or validity of an actor's position within a socially constructed normative order (Suchman, 1995). In digitally mediated religion, emerging actors and online learning sources can acquire epistemic or religious credibility outside conventional institutional arrangements (Berger & Golan, 2024; Febrian, 2024). Thus, an influencer, preacher, knowledge channel, or other digital source becomes a DAAA only when the child recognizes its interpretation as worthy of moral consideration. Algorithmic amplification may increase opportunities for such recognition, but it cannot guarantee legitimacy attribution.

Parental Islamic interpretive authority (PIIA) is the child's recognition of parents as legitimate interpreters of the Islamic moral meaning of situations and conduct. PIIA is conceptually distinct from parental control, monitoring, or formal status. Socialization research indicates that parental messages are not automatically internalized; children's perception and acceptance of parental values are central to transmission processes (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Likewise, parenting operates within relational contexts that shape how parental actions are interpreted (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). APIACT consequently treats parental interpretive authority as recognized rather than inherently secured by parenthood. Parents may possess strong behavioral control while holding weaker authority over how a child privately interprets a moral issue.

Moral interpretive incongruence (MII) denotes the child's perception that parental Islamic guidance and a digitally encountered normative interpretation provide incompatible meanings, evaluations, or prescriptions concerning the same morally relevant situation. MII is perceptual rather than objectively doctrinal. Two interpretations need not be formally contradictory according to Islamic jurisprudence for a child to experience them as incompatible. This formulation draws conceptually on institutional complexity research, which examines situations involving multiple and potentially conflicting normative demands (Greenwood *et al.*, 2011; Pache & Santos, 2010). APIACT transfers the problem from organizational responses to child-level moral interpretation: contestation becomes possible when the child perceives that two legitimized sources cannot be accepted without some form of interpretive reconciliation or prioritization.

Interpretive authority contestation (IAC) refers to the comparative weighting of competing sources' claims to legitimate moral interpretation. IAC is the central construct of APIACT. It does not require explicit conflict between parents and digital actors, nor does it assume that either source knows that a contest exists. The contest is located in the child's interpretive processing. When parental and digitally encountered claims are both treated as potentially legitimate but appear incongruent, the child confronts a relative-authority problem: whose interpretation should carry greater weight in determining what the situation morally means? This conceptualization extends authority research beyond the emergence of digital religious actors toward the comparative allocation of interpretive legitimacy.

Child moral sensemaking (CMS) is the interpretive process through which the child compares, evaluates, reconstructs, synthesizes, or separates competing moral meanings. Children and young people can develop interpretations of algorithmic environments, negotiate recommendations, and exercise varying forms of agency rather than merely receiving platform outputs (Obreja, 2024; Schellewald, 2022; Siles *et al.*, 2024). APIACT extends this insight into moral socialization. CMS may involve evaluating source credibility, relational trust, perceived religious knowledge, experiential resonance, or the apparent relevance of an interpretation to the situation. Sensemaking therefore provides the mechanism through which authority contestation is translated into an interpretive outcome.

Finally, moral interpretive alignment (MIA) refers to the temporarily stabilized pattern of moral interpretation that results from authority contestation and child moral sensemaking. Alignment does not necessarily imply complete internalization or permanent belief change. Rather, it identifies which interpretive pattern becomes relatively dominant or workable at a

particular stage of moral processing. APIACT anticipates four forms: parental alignment, digital authority displacement, interpretive hybridization, and moral compartmentalization. The term temporarily stabilized is important because socialization and interpretive authority remain dynamic processes; subsequent encounters may reactivate contestation and alter the child's authority weighting.

The conceptual architecture of APIACT depends on clearly differentiated constructs. Table 2 summarizes the theory's core constructs, their definitions, theoretical origins, conceptual distinctions, and specific explanatory functions within the proposed framework.

Table 2. Core Constructs of APIACT

Construct	Definition	Theoretical roots	Distinct from	Role in APIACT
Algorithmically amplified normative cues (AANC)	Normative cues whose visibility and recurrence are selectively intensified through algorithmic curation	Gillespie (2014); Striphas (2015); Beer (2017); Bucher (2017)	General digital content or exposure	Creates asymmetric normative salience
Digitally amplified alternative authority (DAAA)	A digital source recognized by the child as legitimately capable of moral interpretation	Suchman (1995); Berger and Golan (2024); Febrian (2024)	Mere influencer visibility	Provides an alternative authority claim
Parental Islamic interpretive authority (PIIA)	Child recognition of parents as legitimate interpreters of Islamic moral meaning	Grusec and Goodnow (1994); Darling and Steinberg (1993)	Parental control or monitoring	Provides the parental authority claim
Moral interpretive incongruence (MII)	Perceived incompatibility between parental and digitally encountered moral interpretations	Greenwood <i>et al.</i> (2011); Pache and Santos (2010)	Objective doctrinal contradiction	Triggers the potential for contestation
Interpretive authority contestation (IAC)	Comparative weighting of competing claims to legitimate moral interpretation	Suchman (1995); Turner (2007)	Parent–child conflict	Central authority-allocation process
Child moral sensemaking (CMS)	Child interpretation, comparison, reconstruction, or separation of competing moral meanings	Schellewald (2022); Siles <i>et al.</i> (2024); Obreja (2024)	Passive media reception	Converts contestation into interpretive outcomes
Moral interpretive alignment (MIA)	Temporarily stabilized pattern of moral interpretation following sensemaking	Grusec and Goodnow (1994); Klingenberg (2019)	Behavioral compliance	Primary theoretical outcome

Source: Authors' conceptualization based on the theoretical foundations reviewed.

Table 2 consolidates the construct architecture of APIACT and clarifies the conceptual distinctions necessary for its explanatory precision. In particular, the framework separates algorithmic visibility from authority, parental status from recognized interpretive legitimacy, perceived incongruence from objective doctrinal contradiction, and moral interpretive alignment from behavioral compliance. These distinctions establish the construct boundaries required to theorize interpretive authority contestation as a distinct child-level process.

3.3 Assumptions and Boundary Conditions

APIACT rests on four assumptions. First, algorithms structure visibility but possess no intrinsic moral authority; authority is attributed to visible sources rather than to computational selection itself. Second, visibility does not automatically generate legitimacy. Children may repeatedly encounter a source while rejecting its moral relevance, particularly as algorithm awareness and literacy develop (Obreja, 2024; Siles *et al.*, 2024). Third, parental interpretive authority cannot be inferred from parental status alone because socialization depends partly on how children perceive and accept parental messages (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Fourth, children are active interpretive agents whose responses to digital environments vary across developmental and individual conditions (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013).

The theory's explanatory relationships are therefore contingent on platform immersion, algorithmic literacy, parental digital competence, developmental autonomy, and the strength of PIIA. High platform immersion may intensify recurrent exposure to alternative normative cues, whereas algorithmic literacy may weaken the conversion of visibility into uncritical legitimacy. Parental digital competence may affect parents' capacity to interpret platform-mediated situations credibly, and developmental autonomy may increase children's independent weighting of competing sources. These conditions do not stand outside the theory as contextual observations; they define when and why the authority-contestation mechanism should become stronger, weaker, or produce different forms of moral interpretive alignment.

4. Building the APIACT Mechanism and Propositions

4.1 From Algorithmic Selection to Normative Cue Salience

The explanatory mechanism of APIACT begins with algorithmic selection. Digital platforms contain more information than users can encounter directly; consequently, algorithmic systems participate in selecting, ranking, and organizing the content that becomes visible (Gillespie, 2014). This selective function is socially consequential because algorithms shape the distribution of attention and the relative prominence of cultural materials (Beer, 2017; Striphas, 2015). For children navigating digital platforms, algorithmic selection therefore produces unequal opportunities to encounter particular moral claims, evaluative frames, and actors.

APIACT conceptualizes this inequality as asymmetric normative visibility. A normative cue that repeatedly appears in recommended feeds, videos, or related content becomes more salient within the child's digitally mediated environment than interpretations that remain less visible. Algorithmic media also organize the timing of encounters, potentially delivering content at moments of situational relevance (Bucher, 2020). Repetition and salience matter because social cognitive processes are partly shaped by recurring symbolic environments and observed representations (Bandura, 2001). However, media effects remain contingent on individual susceptibility and context rather than following a uniform stimulus-response process (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013).

Algorithmic amplification thus does not determine a child's moral position. Its immediate theoretical effect is narrower: it increases the cognitive and situational availability of particular normative cues. Platform immersion strengthens this mechanism because greater engagement provides more opportunities for recurrent algorithmic selection to structure the child's informational environment. Accordingly:

Proposition 1. *The greater the algorithmic amplification of a normative cue, the greater its salience in a child's digitally mediated moral environment.*

Proposition 2. *Repeated visibility of algorithmically amplified normative cues increases the perceived availability of alternative moral interpretations, particularly under conditions of high platform immersion.*

4.2 From Visibility to Alternative Interpretive Authority

Normative visibility alone cannot explain authority contestation. A highly visible source may be ignored, distrusted, or treated merely as entertainment. APIACT therefore distinguishes source salience from interpretive legitimacy attribution. This distinction is grounded in the broader understanding of legitimacy as a socially constructed perception that an actor or action is appropriate or valid within a normative system (Suchman, 1995). Authority becomes theoretically relevant when an audience recognizes a source as entitled or competent to provide consequential interpretations.

Digitally mediated religious environments expand the range of actors to whom such legitimacy may be attributed. New media can destabilize established configurations of religious authority (Turner, 2007), while online learning environments enable individuals to engage with alternative epistemic sources and forms of self-socialization (Berger & Golan, 2024). Religious influencers similarly construct recognizable authority through digital forms of representation and communication (Febrian, 2024). Online Islamic knowledge sources can consequently enter users' repertoires of religious understanding even when they stand outside traditional family-based transmission (Askar *et al.*, 2025).

APIACT argues that algorithmic systems affect this process indirectly. By repeatedly amplifying an actor, narrative, or source, platforms increase opportunities for familiarity, engagement, and perceived relevance. Yet the child must still attribute interpretive legitimacy to the source. A preacher who repeatedly appears in a feed, for example, becomes a digitally amplified alternative authority only when the child regards that actor as capable of explaining what a morally relevant situation means. Algorithmic literacy may weaken an unreflective conversion of recurrence into legitimacy because awareness of recommendation processes can support more critical interpretations of algorithmically selected content (Obreja, 2024; Siles *et al.*, 2024).

Thus, authority is not computationally produced in a deterministic sense. Algorithmic amplification changes the visibility conditions under which authority attribution becomes possible.

Proposition 3. *Algorithmically amplified normative visibility produces digitally amplified alternative authority only when a child attributes interpretive legitimacy to the visible source.*

4.3 Moral Interpretive Incongruence as the Contestation Trigger

The recognition of a digitally amplified alternative authority does not automatically create competition with parents. Multiple sources of moral guidance may coexist when their interpretations are perceived as compatible. APIACT proposes that **moral interpretive incongruence** is the critical trigger that converts authority plurality into authority contestation.

Institutional complexity research provides a useful theoretical bridge for explaining this transition. Organizations experience complexity when they confront multiple institutional prescriptions that may be incompatible or difficult to satisfy simultaneously (Greenwood *et al.*, 2011). Conflicting demands become particularly consequential when actors cannot respond to one expectation without challenging another (Pache & Santos, 2010). APIACT transfers this underlying logic from organizations to the child's interpretive domain. The child may recognize both parents and a digitally encountered source as potentially legitimate while perceiving that their explanations of the same moral situation cannot easily be reconciled.

The incongruence is perceptual. APIACT does not require an objective theological contradiction. A child may perceive divergence concerning appropriate appearance, entertainment, gender interaction, consumption, speech, religious practice, or other digitally encountered situations even when a religious scholar could identify a more nuanced

doctrinal relationship between the claims. What activates the mechanism is the child's experience of interpretive incompatibility.

Religious socialization becomes theoretically more complex under these conditions because the parental message is no longer received in an interpretive vacuum. Digitally mediated religion connects online and offline religious environments (Campbell, 2012), and contemporary religious socialization cannot be reduced to unidirectional transmission (Klingenberg & Sjö, 2019). When two legitimized sources provide divergent meanings, the child faces a relative-authority problem.

Proposition 4. *Perceived incompatibility between digitally amplified normative claims and parental Islamic guidance increases moral interpretive incongruence.*

Proposition 5. *Greater moral interpretive incongruence increases the likelihood of interpretive authority contestation when both parental and digitally amplified sources possess perceived interpretive legitimacy.*

4.4 Child Moral Sensemaking and Relative Authority Weighting

Interpretive authority contestation constitutes the central process of APIACT, but contestation does not specify how children resolve competing claims. The theory therefore introduces child moral sensemaking as the mechanism translating contestation into moral interpretive alignment. The child is conceptualized neither as a passive recipient of parental instruction nor as a predictable subject of algorithmic influence. Instead, the child comparatively weights sources and interpretations.

Research on algorithmic imaginaries and awareness supports the broader premise that users actively develop understandings of platform processes (Bucher, 2017; Schellewald, 2022). Algorithm awareness itself may develop as an ongoing process through everyday encounters with recommendation systems (Siles *et al.*, 2024). Recent work on children and young people further indicates that algorithmic recommendations can be interpreted, negotiated, and incorporated into practices of agency rather than merely consumed without reflection (Ernst, 2025; Jylhä *et al.*, 2025). APIACT extends this interpretive agency to the domain of moral authority.

During moral sensemaking, children may compare sources according to perceived religious knowledge, relational trust, experiential relevance, consistency, communicative accessibility, and the apparent capacity of a source to explain the immediate situation. Parental interpretations may carry relational and socialization-based legitimacy accumulated through recurring family interactions (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Digitally amplified actors, by contrast, may acquire perceived expertise, relevance, or familiarity through recurrent platform encounters. APIACT does not presume that children consciously calculate these dimensions. Relative authority weighting may involve reflective evaluation, intuitive preference, or gradually stabilized source recognition.

The theoretical role of sensemaking is therefore to explain variation in outcomes under similar conditions of incongruence. Two children may encounter the same digitally amplified claim and receive similar parental guidance yet reach different interpretations because they assign different relative weights to the competing authorities. This mechanism is consistent with differential susceptibility perspectives, which reject uniform assumptions about media effects (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013).

Proposition 6. *Interpretive authority contestation activates child moral sensemaking through which competing parental and digitally amplified moral sources are comparatively weighted.*

Proposition 7. *The relative interpretive authority assigned to parental and digitally amplified sources shapes the direction of a child's moral interpretive alignment.*

4.5 Boundary Conditions and Contingent Authority Allocation

APIACT proposes that authority allocation is contingent rather than universal. Four conditions are particularly central to explaining variation in the strength and direction of the mechanism.

First, parental Islamic interpretive authority affects the initial relative position of parental guidance. Socialization research emphasizes that children's acceptance of parental messages cannot be inferred simply from parental communication; perception and acceptance shape value internalization (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Strong PIIA means that parental explanations enter contestation with accumulated legitimacy. It does not eliminate alternative interpretations but increases the relative weight assigned to parental claims.

Second, algorithmic literacy affects the conversion of amplified visibility into alternative authority. Users who develop greater awareness of recommendation processes may become more capable of recognizing that recurrence is partly a product of platform selection rather than independent evidence of normative validity (Obreja, 2024; Siles *et al.*, 2024). Emerging research on children's algorithmic literacy similarly emphasizes differentiated understandings of recommendation systems (Ernst, 2025). Algorithmic literacy should therefore reduce the probability that salience alone becomes a basis for legitimacy attribution.

Third, parental digital competence influences parents' ability to interpret digitally encountered situations credibly. Digital parenting research increasingly connects parental mediation with children's digital skills and maturity rather than treating restriction as the sole response to digital risks (Koch *et al.*, 2024; Sciacca *et al.*, 2022). Parents who understand platform dynamics and the digital contexts in which normative claims appear may be better positioned to provide interpretations that children perceive as situationally informed.

Fourth, developmental autonomy changes the child's role in source selection and authority weighting. Self-determination perspectives emphasize the significance of autonomy in internalization and self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000). As children acquire greater developmental autonomy, parental interpretations may increasingly become claims to be evaluated rather than meanings accepted primarily through dependency.

Accordingly:

Proposition 8a. *Stronger parental Islamic interpretive authority shifts interpretive authority contestation toward greater relative weighting of parental moral interpretations.*

Proposition 8b. *Greater algorithmic literacy weakens the relationship between algorithmically amplified normative visibility and the attribution of alternative interpretive authority.*

Proposition 8c. *Greater parental digital competence strengthens the relative interpretive authority of parental Islamic guidance in digitally encountered moral situations.*

Proposition 8d. *Greater developmental autonomy increases the child's independent weighting of competing interpretive authorities.*

4.6 Four Interpretive Outcomes

The final stage of the APIACT mechanism is moral interpretive alignment. The theory proposes four possible forms. Parental alignment occurs when parental Islamic interpretation receives dominant relative authority. Digital authority displacement occurs when a digitally amplified alternative source becomes the child's dominant interpreter of the moral situation. Interpretive hybridization emerges when the child reconstructs elements of competing claims into a combined moral interpretation. Moral compartmentalization occurs when incompatible interpretations remain separated across contexts rather than being reconciled.

These outcomes are not equivalent to immediate behavior. A child may behaviorally comply with parental expectations while privately assigning greater interpretive legitimacy to a digital source. APIACT therefore separates moral interpretive alignment from behavioral compliance. This distinction preserves the theory's focus on authority allocation and avoids collapsing internal interpretation into observable conduct.

Hybridization and compartmentalization are especially important because authority contests need not produce a single winner. Religious socialization is an interactive and contextually embedded process (Klingenberg & Sjö, 2019), while digitally networked religion connects multiple interpretive environments (Campbell, 2012). When competing sources retain comparable legitimacy, children may reconstruct a workable synthesis. Where persistent incongruence cannot be reconciled, they may instead maintain differentiated interpretations for family and digital contexts.

Proposition 9. *When parental interpretive authority dominates relative authority weighting, child moral sensemaking is more likely to produce parental alignment.*

Proposition 10. *When digitally amplified alternative authority dominates relative authority weighting, child moral sensemaking is more likely to produce digital authority displacement.*

Proposition 11. *When parental and digitally amplified sources retain comparable interpretive legitimacy, child moral sensemaking is more likely to produce interpretive hybridization.*

Proposition 12. *Persistent unresolved interpretive authority contestation increases the likelihood of moral compartmentalization across relational or digital contexts.*

The twelve propositions developed throughout the theory are synthesized into a single explanatory framework. Table 3 organizes their causal relationships, underlying mechanisms, boundary conditions, and expected implications within the overall APIACT architecture.

Table 3. APIACT Propositions and Explanatory Mechanisms

	Proposition & Core relationship	Explanatory mechanism	Boundary condition	Expected implication
P1–P2	Algorithmic amplification → normative salience	Asymmetric visibility and recurrence	Platform immersion	Alternative interpretations become cognitively available
P3	Visibility → alternative authority	Interpretive legitimacy attribution	Algorithmic literacy	Visible source becomes a potential moral interpreter
P4–P5	Divergent claims → contestation	Perceived moral interpretive incongruence	Dual-source legitimacy	Relative-authority problem is activated
P6–P7	Contestation → alignment	Child moral sensemaking and authority weighting	Individual susceptibility	Direction of interpretation varies
P8a–P8d	Contextual conditions → authority weighting	Contingent legitimacy and evaluative capacity	PIIA, literacy, competence, autonomy	Contestation shifts in strength or direction
P9–P12	Relative authority weighting → MIA	Stabilization, synthesis, or separation of meaning	Relative source legitimacy	Alignment, displacement, hybridization, or compartmentalization

Source: Authors' conceptualization.

Table 3 integrates the individual propositions into a sequential yet contingent explanatory mechanism. Rather than representing isolated hypotheses, the propositions collectively explain how algorithmic amplification, legitimacy attribution, interpretive incongruence,

authority contestation, and child moral sensemaking interact to produce different patterns of moral interpretive alignment.

Taken together, the propositions specify a sequential but contingent causal architecture: algorithmic selection creates asymmetric normative visibility; recurrent visibility increases normative salience; legitimacy attribution can transform a visible digital source into an alternative interpretive authority; perceived incompatibility with parental Islamic guidance generates moral interpretive incongruence; incongruence activates interpretive authority contestation; and child moral sensemaking translates relative authority weighting into a temporarily stabilized pattern of moral interpretive alignment. This mechanism constitutes the explanatory core of APIACT.

5. APIACT as a Middle-Range Theory

5.1 Algorithmic–Parental Interpretive Authority Contestation Theory

Algorithmic–Parental Interpretive Authority Contestation Theory (APIACT) is a middle-range theory explaining how children allocate moral interpretive authority when parental Islamic guidance coexists with algorithmically amplified alternative normative sources. Its theoretical locus is neither digital media use in general nor the direct transmission of religious values. Rather, APIACT addresses a specific class of socialization situations in which multiple sources recognized as potentially legitimate provide divergent interpretations of a morally relevant situation. The theory thus connects algorithmically structured visibility with authority attribution, interpretive incongruence, child moral sensemaking, and temporarily stabilized moral alignment.

APIACT begins from the premise that algorithmic systems structure the visibility and recurrence of cultural materials without themselves becoming intentional moral educators. Algorithms influence what becomes prominent, timely, and repeatedly encountered within platform environments (Beer, 2017; Bucher, 2020; Gillespie, 2014). Their theoretical significance for moral socialization lies in the selective amplification of normative cues and potential authority carriers. This formulation avoids technological determinism by separating algorithmic selection from authority attribution. Digital visibility becomes consequential for authority contestation only when children recognize a visible source as legitimately capable of interpreting a moral situation. This distinction is consistent with legitimacy perspectives that treat authority recognition as socially constructed rather than mechanically conferred by structural prominence (Suchman, 1995).

The second premise is that parental interpretive authority is relationally recognized rather than automatically guaranteed by parental status. Classical socialization research demonstrates that the transmission and internalization of parental values depend partly on children's perception and acceptance of parental messages (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). APIACT extends this insight to algorithmically mediated normative environments. Parents may remain highly consequential socialization agents while simultaneously facing alternative sources that children regard as knowledgeable, relevant, or religiously credible. Digital religious research has already demonstrated the emergence of new configurations of epistemic and religious authority (Berger & Golan, 2024; Febrian, 2024; Turner, 2007). APIACT theorizes what follows when these alternative authorities become interpretively relevant within family-based Islamic moral socialization.

The formal theory statement is therefore as follows: APIACT proposes that algorithmic systems affect children's Islamic moral socialization not by becoming moral authorities themselves, but by selectively amplifying normative cues and alternative authority carriers. When children attribute interpretive legitimacy to these digitally visible sources and their moral claims diverge from parental Islamic guidance, moral interpretive incongruence activates a contest over relative interpretive authority. Through child moral sensemaking, this contest produces parental alignment, digital authority displacement, interpretive hybridization, or moral compartmentalization. The direction of these outcomes depends on

parental Islamic interpretive authority, algorithmic literacy, parental digital competence, and developmental autonomy.

The proposed theory integrates these relationships into a contingent causal architecture linking algorithmically structured normative visibility, dual interpretive authority claims, authority contestation, child moral sensemaking, and differentiated moral interpretive outcomes.

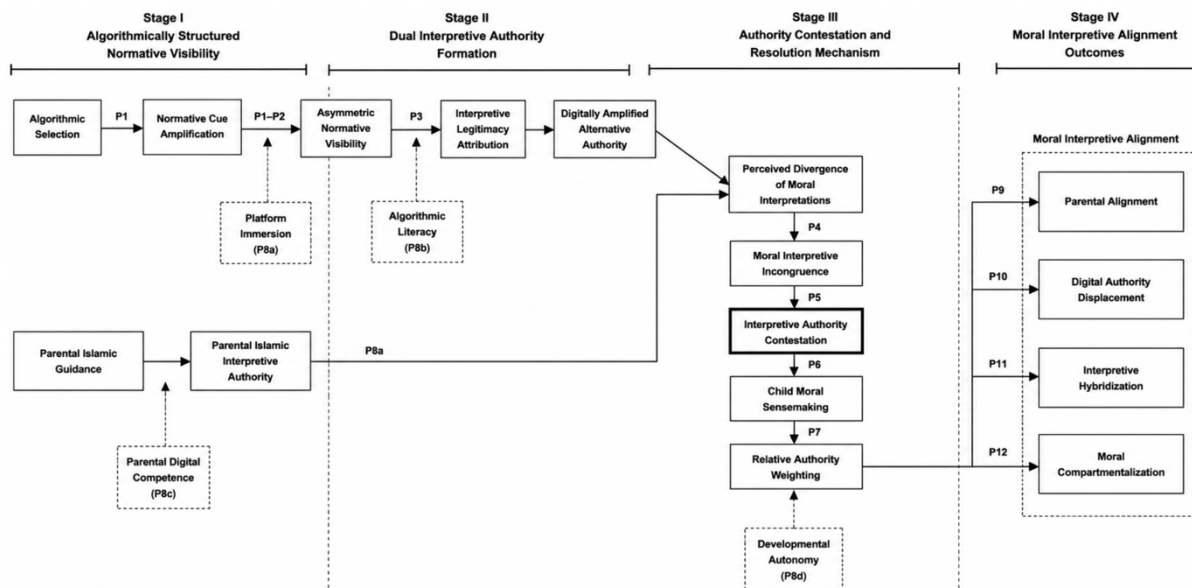


Figure 2. Algorithmic–Parental Interpretive Authority Contestation Theory (APIACT)

Source: Authors' conceptualization.

Figure 2 formalizes APIACT as a contingent authority-allocation mechanism rather than a direct media-effects model. Algorithmic amplification structures normative visibility, but alternative authority emerges only through legitimacy attribution. Divergent parental and digital interpretations activate contestation, which child moral sensemaking resolves through relative authority weighting. Boundary conditions shape specific relationships, producing parental alignment, digital displacement, hybridization, or compartmentalization as differentiated interpretive outcomes.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

APIACT first contributes to parental mediation theory by shifting the explanatory problem from media management to interpretive authority maintenance. Parental mediation scholarship has generated increasingly nuanced accounts of restriction, active discussion, co-use, monitoring, communication, and digital parenting (Clark, 2011; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Nikken & Jansz, 2014). Recent evidence also demonstrates that digital parenting outcomes vary across developmental and contextual conditions (Koch *et al.*, 2024; Tan *et al.*, 2025). Yet these perspectives generally position parents as the actors who select mediation strategies. APIACT introduces a theoretically different possibility: parents may successfully mediate a digital encounter while losing relative authority over its moral meaning. The distinction between parental intervention and parental interpretive legitimacy therefore extends mediation theory into contexts of normative competition.

Second, APIACT contributes to algorithm studies by theorizing an authority-amplification mechanism. Existing scholarship convincingly demonstrates that algorithms structure visibility, classification, attention, and users' understandings of platform processes (Beer, 2017; Bucher, 2017; Schellewald, 2022; Striphas, 2015). APIACT adds explanatory specificity by identifying how selective visibility can become relevant to moral authority without attributing intentional agency to algorithms. The theory proposes a two-stage distinction: algorithmic amplification structures opportunities for recurrent visibility, whereas legitimacy attribution determines whether a visible source becomes an alternative

interpretive authority. This mechanism clarifies why highly amplified content may influence authority allocation for some children but remain normatively irrelevant to others.

Third, APIACT extends digital religion research from the emergence of digital religious authority to the contestation of relative interpretive authority. Research has established that digital environments can reorganize religious authority, facilitate online religious learning, and enable new actors to construct epistemic credibility (Berger & Golan, 2024; Campbell, 2012; Febrian, 2024; Turner, 2007). In Islamic contexts, smartphones, online knowledge sources, and digital religious practices increasingly intersect with processes of religious learning and identity formation (Askar *et al.*, 2025; LARSON, 2024; Pabbajah *et al.*, 2021). APIACT asks a subsequent theoretical question: what happens after an alternative digital authority has become credible? By placing that source in relation to parental Islamic interpretive authority, the theory explains authority as comparatively allocated rather than independently possessed.

Fourth, APIACT contributes to religious socialization theory by replacing a predominantly transmission-centered causal image with a model of socialization under competing normative infrastructures. Traditional socialization perspectives remain essential for explaining parental value communication and internalization (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Maccoby, 1992). Contemporary religious socialization scholarship nevertheless emphasizes the need to recognize more complex, interactive processes (Klingenberg & Sjö, 2019). APIACT advances this move by specifying the mechanism through which normative plurality becomes theoretically consequential. Alternative interpretations do not disrupt parental socialization merely because they exist. They become consequential when algorithmic amplification increases their visibility, children attribute legitimacy to their carriers, and perceived incongruence activates comparative authority weighting.

Finally, APIACT contributes a child-centered account of moral agency that avoids both family and technological determinism. Differential susceptibility research cautions against assuming homogeneous media effects (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013), while research on algorithm awareness increasingly demonstrates interpretive and negotiative agency among users (Obreja, 2024; Siles *et al.*, 2024). By introducing child moral sensemaking, APIACT explains why authority contestation may produce alignment, displacement, hybridization, or compartmentalization rather than a binary parental-versus-digital outcome. The child is therefore not conceptualized as a passive target located between two competing forces but as the interpretive site through which relative authority is evaluated and moral meaning becomes temporarily stabilized.

5.3 Domain Boundaries and Limitations

APIACT is intentionally bounded to preserve its explanatory precision. It applies to Muslim children and adolescents encountering morally relevant normative claims in algorithmically curated digital environments while remaining embedded in parental Islamic socialization. The theory requires both legitimacy attribution and perceived interpretive divergence. Repeated exposure without source legitimacy is insufficient to activate authority contestation, and multiple legitimate sources may coexist without contestation when their interpretations are perceived as compatible.

The theory does not assume that digital sources systematically oppose Islamic values or that Muslim families possess homogeneous interpretations of Islam. Digitally encountered actors may reinforce parental guidance, while parents themselves may differ substantially in religious interpretation, digital competence, and socialization practices. APIACT also rejects uniform media-effects assumptions. Children's responses to digital environments vary, and broad claims about social media effects frequently exceed the strength or consistency of available evidence (Odgers & Jensen, 2020; Orben, 2020; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). The proposed causal relationships should therefore be treated as contingent mechanisms rather than universal predictions.

As a conceptual theory, APIACT further requires empirical validation of its constructs and causal ordering. Interpretive authority contestation is located partly within children's sensemaking and may not correspond directly with observable behavior. A child can comply with parental expectations while privately privileging a digital interpretation. This creates measurement challenges but also reinforces the theoretical necessity of separating moral interpretive alignment from behavioral compliance.

5.4 Future Research Agenda

The first research priority is construct validation. Future studies should develop measures of algorithmically amplified normative cues, parental Islamic interpretive authority, moral interpretive incongruence, interpretive authority contestation, child moral sensemaking, and moral interpretive alignment. Scale development should establish discriminant validity between interpretive authority and adjacent constructs such as parental control, source credibility, religious commitment, and media trust. Qualitative work with Muslim children and adolescents could initially clarify the language through which competing moral sources are recognized and comparatively evaluated.

A second priority is mechanism testing. Longitudinal designs could examine whether recurrent normative amplification precedes alternative authority attribution and whether perceived incongruence subsequently activates contestation. Experience-sampling methods may capture morally relevant digital encounters closer to the moment of occurrence. Vignette experiments could manipulate source visibility, parental interpretation, source legitimacy, and normative incongruence to test specific APIACT propositions. Combining digital trace data with surveys or interviews would be particularly valuable because perceived algorithmic amplification should not be assumed to correspond perfectly with recorded exposure.

Third, research should examine comparative boundary conditions. Developmental stage, platform immersion, algorithmic literacy, and parental digital competence provide immediate tests of theoretical contingency. Cross-context research could examine whether APIACT operates differently across Muslim family environments, national settings, platform architectures, or patterns of religious participation. Such comparisons should not treat "Muslim children" as a homogeneous population but investigate how authority structures and interpretive repertoires condition the mechanism.

Finally, APIACT can be extended to emerging configurations of digital authority. Generative artificial intelligence may introduce conversational sources that provide personalized religious or moral interpretations, potentially altering the visibility–legitimacy mechanism. Peer-mediated circulation may also amplify authority independently of direct platform recommendation. Schools, mosques, and religious teachers could be incorporated as additional interpretive authorities in multi-source extensions of the theory. These extensions should preserve APIACT's core explanatory problem: how relative interpretive authority is allocated when legitimized sources make divergent claims over moral meaning.

To facilitate future empirical advancement, Table 4 consolidates the principal research priorities, corresponding theoretical questions, methodological approaches, and anticipated contributions for extending and validating APIACT across diverse contexts.

Table 4. Future Research Directions for APIACT

Research Stream	Core Question	Focal Constructs	Suggested Methods	Theoretical Extension
Construct validation	Can APIACT constructs be empirically distinguished?	AANC, PIIA, MII, IAC, CMS, MIA	Qualitative elicitation; scale development; CFA	Establishes construct validity
Mechanism testing	Does the proposed causal sequence hold over time?	Amplification, legitimacy, incongruence, contestation	Longitudinal panels; experience sampling; digital trace data	Tests causal architecture

Research Stream	Core Question	Focal Constructs	Suggested Methods	Theoretical Extension
Authority experiments	When does visibility become interpretive authority?	AANC, DAAA, legitimacy attribution	Vignette and source-manipulation experiments	Tests the amplification–authority mechanism
Comparative boundaries	When is APIACT stronger or weaker?	Literacy, autonomy, digital competence, immersion	Multi-group and cross-context designs	Refines boundary conditions
Multi-source authority	How do additional moral interpreters alter contestation?	School, mosque, peers, AI sources	Network and comparative designs	Extends APIACT beyond dyadic authority competition

Source: Authors' conceptualization.

Table 4 positions APIACT as an empirically testable and theoretically extensible framework. The proposed agenda emphasizes construct validation, causal mechanism testing, authority experiments, comparative boundary conditions, and multi-source authority configurations, providing a systematic roadmap for strengthening explanatory precision and expanding the theory beyond its initial conceptual formulation.

Together, these research directions position APIACT as a testable and extensible middle-range theory. Its value lies not in claiming that algorithmic systems replace parents as moral educators, but in explaining the conditions under which algorithmically amplified sources enter the child's field of legitimate moral interpretation and become comparatively weighted against parental Islamic authority. By specifying visibility, legitimacy attribution, incongruence, contestation, sensemaking, and interpretive alignment as distinct stages, APIACT provides an explanatory architecture for theorizing Islamic moral socialization under algorithmically structured normative competition.

6. Conclusion

Islamic moral socialization increasingly unfolds in digital environments where parental guidance coexists with normative interpretations circulated through algorithmically curated platforms. Existing research has substantially advanced understanding of parental mediation, algorithmic visibility, and digitally mediated religious authority. Yet these perspectives do not fully explain how children interpret situations in which parental Islamic guidance and digitally encountered sources make divergent but potentially legitimate claims about moral meaning. The central theoretical challenge is therefore not simply the transmission of Islamic values or children's exposure to digital content, but the allocation of relative interpretive authority under conditions of normative competition.

This paper developed Algorithmic–Parental Interpretive Authority Contestation Theory (APIACT) to explain this process. APIACT proposes a contingent causal sequence in which algorithmic selection creates asymmetric normative visibility, amplification increases the salience of particular moral cues and potential authority carriers, and legitimacy attribution can transform a visible digital source into an alternative interpretive authority. When such authority offers an interpretation perceived as incompatible with parental Islamic guidance, moral interpretive incongruence activates interpretive authority contestation. Through child moral sensemaking and relative authority weighting, this contest may produce parental alignment, digital authority displacement, interpretive hybridization, or moral compartmentalization.

By distinguishing algorithmic amplification from authority attribution, APIACT avoids treating algorithms as intentional moral educators. By distinguishing parental status from recognized interpretive legitimacy, it also moves beyond assumptions that parental authority is automatically preserved through mediation. Most importantly, the theory positions

children as active sites of moral sensemaking whose interpretations emerge through the comparative weighting of competing sources.

In algorithmically curated moral environments, the central problem of Islamic moral socialization is no longer solely how values are transmitted and internalized. It is increasingly how interpretive authority is allocated among competing sources of moral meaning. APIACT offers a middle-range theoretical architecture for explaining this contest and the conditions under which different patterns of moral interpretive alignment emerge.

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