

A Critical Analysis of Auguste Comte's Positivism for Islamic Digital Research

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Abstract

Auguste Comte's Positivism, a philosophical paradigm that originated in the early 19th century, has been widely discussed and debated among scholars in various fields. In recent years, this issue has gained increasing attention in the context of Islamic digital research. This paper aims to critically analyze Comte's Positivism and its impact on Islamic digital research. In Islamic digital research, Positivism has been criticized for its lack of cultural and historical context and its disregard for the role of ethics and values. This article illustrates how positivism's emphasis on empirical observation and data is compatible with the Islamic digital research paradigm. Given the vast data generated by digital technologies, the scientific method provides a convincing foundation for comprehending complicated phenomena in the digital world. Findings indicate that applying positivism as a research paradigm in digital research is beneficial. However, digital researchers are advised to be cautious of the weaknesses of the paradigm they would adopt for a study.

Keywords: Auguste Comte; Positivism; New Media; Islamic Digital Research

Abstrak

Positivisme Auguste Comte, sebuah paradigma filosofis yang berasal dari awal abad ke-19, telah banyak dibahas dan diperdebatkan di antara para sarjana di berbagai bidang. Dalam beberapa tahun terakhir, isu ini semakin mendapat perhatian dalam konteks penelitian digital Islam. Makalah ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara kritis Positivisme Comte dan dampaknya terhadap penelitian digital Islam. Dalam penelitian digital Islam, Positivisme telah dikritik karena kurangnya konteks budaya dan sejarah serta pengabaian terhadap peran etika dan nilai-nilai. Artikel ini mengilustrasikan bagaimana penekanan positivisme pada pengamatan empiris dan data sesuai dengan paradigma penelitian digital Islam. Mengingat banyaknya data yang dihasilkan oleh teknologi digital, metode ilmiah memberikan landasan yang meyakinkan untuk memahami fenomena yang rumit di dunia digital. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa menerapkan positivisme sebagai paradigma penelitian dalam penelitian digital bermanfaat. Namun, para peneliti



digital disarankan untuk berhati-hati terhadap kelemahan paradigma yang akan mereka adopsi untuk sebuah penelitian.

Kata Kunci: Auguste Comte; Positivisme; Penelitian Digital Islam

Introduction

Innovation and technological advancement are striking in the way people live and interact with each other. The potential impact of digital and online technology on society in the 21st century is considerable and undeniable. Recently, digital technology has enabled social media influencers and other users to create, consume, and share religious contents with diverse online groups of people.¹ This induces hyper-mediation in which knowledge providers and consumers are nearly indistinguishable.² Experts also refer to this phenomenon as "The Wave Theory of Information,"³ which also alters the digital era's social interaction and religious knowledge transmission pattern.⁴ Academics argued that digital media is a more effective and efficient alternative to knowledge production and transmission. Therefore, it is believed that examining how knowledge is generated, disseminated, and comprehended in the digital age is a good one for thinking.

The authors proposed that the transformation in social media interaction could be analyzed with a positivist methodology. Positivism, introduced by Auguste Comte in the 19th century, has significantly influenced modern science and research methods.⁵ This paradigm, which emphasizes using empirical evidence and scientific methods as the only means of acquiring knowledge, has been widely debated and critiqued in various fields.⁶ Positivism in the context of Islamic digital research has become an increasingly important topic of discussion. Islamic digital research encompasses a wide range of disciplines, methodologies, the impact of digital technology on Islamic social-cultures, and the role of Islamic

¹ Bouziane Zaid et al., "Digital Islam and Muslim Millennials: How Social Media Influencers Reimagine Religious Authority and Islamic Practices," *Religions* 13, no. 4 (2022): 335.

² Giulia Evolvi, "The Theory of Hypermediation: Anti-Gender Christian Groups and Digital Religion," *Journal of Media and Religion* 21, no. 2 (April 3, 2022): 69–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348423.2022.2059302>.

³ Massimo Franceschetti, *Wave Theory of Information* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139136334>.

⁴ Yla Tausczik and Xiaoyun Huang, "Knowledge Generation and Sharing in Online Communities: Current Trends and Future Directions," *Current Opinion in Psychology* 36 (December 2020): 60–64, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.04.009>.

⁵ Gertrud Lenzer, *Auguste Comte and Positivism: The Essential Writings* (Routledge, 2017).

⁶ Michael Sonenscher, "Positive Thinking: Social Science, Sociology and the Intellectual Legacy of Auguste Comte," *Modern Intellectual History* 19, no. 3 (2022): 947–57.

values in this context and ethics especially in shaping digital experiences.⁷ Therefore, Positivism has been seen as a valuable tool for understanding both the technological and economic aspects of Islamic digital practices and as a limiting framework that disregards the cultural and historical context in which these practices are also embedded.

Positivism is one of the paradigms used by social scientists to examine social phenomena.⁸ The theory is utilized to develop knowledge consistent with present human needs. Given positivism paradigm emphasizes empirical data and scientific methods, the theory has been widely used by scholars in various research fields, including the social sciences.⁹ Positivist approach asserts that social science ought to use natural science methods in its research derived from the positivist ontology. Thus, an objective reality is completely independent of our perceptions of the world.¹⁰

A recent study has demonstrated that positivist methodologies have been frequently employed in digital research, particularly in information systems and computer science. For instance, the study by Kalpana Chauhan and Ananda Pilai assessed the role of content strategy on social media websites in order to initiate and enhance customer engagement using positivist methodologies to comprehend the use of social media in communities¹¹. Another study examined the impact of digital technology on education using positivist methodologies.¹² Positivism's emphasis on empirical observation and data analysis makes it more appealing to digital researchers that often experience difficulty in comprehending complex occurrences in the digital realm.

Although positivism has been criticized for lacking cultural and historical context, some scholars argued that the narrow focus on empirical evidence in

⁷ Wahyudi Akmaliah and Ahmad Najib Burhani, *Digital Islam in Indonesia: The Shift of Ritual and Religiosity during Covid-19* (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021).

⁸ Philip Kwaku Kankam, "The Use of Paradigms in Information Research," *Library & Information Science Research* 41, no. 2 (2019): 85–92.

⁹ Ryan McVeigh, "Organism and Environment in Auguste Comte," *History of the Human Sciences* 34, no. 3–4 (July 2021): 76–97, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0952695120917908>.

¹⁰ Ryan McVeigh, "The Neurosociology of Auguste Comte," *Social Science Information* 59, no. 2 (June 2020): 329–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018420922759>.

¹¹ Kalpana Chauhan and Anandan Pillai, "Role of Content Strategy in Social Media Brand Communities: A Case of Higher Education Institutes in India," *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 22, no. 1 (2013): 40–51; L Schlenkrich and David A Sewry, "Factors for Successful Use of Social Networking Sites in Higher Education," *South African Computer Journal* 49, no. 1 (2012): 12–24.

¹² Hedviga Tkacová et al., "Credibility and Involvement of Social Media in Education—Recommendations for Mitigating the Negative Effects of the Pandemic among High School Students," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 5 (2022): 2767; Justice Boateng Dankwah and Kobby Mensah, "Political Marketing and Social Media Influence on Young Voters in Ghana," *SN Social Sciences* 1, no. 6 (2021): 152.

Positivism needs to fully capture social research's complexity and richness.¹³ Additionally, the reductionist approach of Positivism is seen as insensitive to the nuances and nuances of the Islamic digital landscape, which is shaped by diverse historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors. On the other hand, proponents of Positivism argued that instead, the paradigm has provided a rigorous and systematic approach to research that can lead to more objective and reliable results. Furthermore, Positivism is seen as a valuable tool for understanding the technological and economic aspects of Islamic digital practices, which are crucial for the development of the field.

This article demonstrates a critical analysis of Comte's positivism in digital research. Some studies have scrutinized how positivist approaches have been used to understand and explore the complexities of the Islamic digital phenomena. However, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations and criticisms of positivism in this field and to consider alternative approaches in future studies.

Methods

The data analysis in this research is carried out through data analysis stage, and theoretical data analysis. All data obtained from the field is then analysed descriptively and qualitatively. The next stage is data reduction, presenting data, and drawing conclusions so that the data collected from this process is summarized and selected categorically to achieve the targeted results.¹⁴

Result and Discussion

Auguste Comte and his Work

Auguste Comte was born in Montpellier, southern France, on January 19th, 1798. His full name is Isidore Auguste Marie Francois Xavier Comte. This philosopher, who founded sociology, is descended from Catholic public officers. Comte's father, a tax official named Louis Comte, and his mother, Rosalie Boyer, were staunch royalists and devout Roman Catholics.¹⁵ Comte was greatly interested in education. In 1814, after attending school at his place of birth, he completed his study at the Ecole Polytechnique in Paris. At that time, Ecole Polytechnique was renowned for its devotion to republican values and process

¹³ Lenzer, *Auguste Comte and Positivism: The Essential Writings*.

¹⁴ Harvey Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Antropology : Qualitattative and Qualitative Approaches*, 2nd Editio (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Inc., n.d.).

¹⁵ "Auguste Comte | Biography, Books, Sociology, Positivism, & Facts | Britannica," January 15, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Auguste-Comte>.

philosophy. The Polytechnic was closed for reorganization in 1818. Comte left Ecole and attended medical school in Montpellier to continue his education.¹⁶

Comte was a highly critical thinker. He observed between his Catholic beliefs and those of the governing monarchy during this time in Paris. However, he felt unsatisfied due to rigid differences among them leading to leaving the country. Earlier in August 1817, he became a student and secretary of Claude Henri de Rouvroy, Comte de Saint-Simon, who introduced him to the intellectual community. In April 1824, Comte left Saint-Simon because he once again thought their relationship was incompatible. He understood what he had to do next: investigate positivism's philosophy.¹⁷ This idea was later published in 1822 under the title Scientific study plan for the reorganization of society (Plan of scientific labor required to reform society).

His life and research depended on his friends' sponsorships and financial aids. Subsequently, he wed a woman named Caroline Massin. Comte's reputation for being haughty, cruel, and quickly offended led to his placement in an asylum in 1826, although he escaped before recovering. Then, as Massin stabilized his condition, he resumed his original plan. Nevertheless, she divorced his wife-Massin in 1842 for unknown reasons. In between rewriting his divorce plans, he produced The Positive Philosophy Course (A course on positive philosophy) in six volumes between 1830 and 1842.

Comte's stage of life can be divided into three intellectual periods. Initially, the idea came up when he worked with and was friendly with Henri Saint-Simon who was a Utopian socialist at one time Comte's mentor. At this point, he considered a new governmental structure in which scientists and the function of troops would replace the function of medieval clergy and would be moved to industry. Second, specifically, after he has undergone a mental healing process as a result of his tumultuous personal life. 1830-1842 saw the publication of Comte's magnum opus on the philosophy of positivism, which he conceived around this time. The first fifty years of Comte's life were the most impactful. Third, Comte's intellectual life occurred between 1851 and 1854, when he composed A Positive Policy System. In the course of history, Comte is more known as a practitioner of historical science and an advocate for applying the scientific method to explain and forecast social institutions and behavior than a philosopher. On September 5, 1857, he passed away in Paris and was buried at Cimetière du Père Lachaise.

¹⁶ Ulfatun Hasanah, "Kontribusi Pemikiran Auguste Comte (Positivisme) Terhadap Dasar Pengembangan Ilmu Dakwah," *Al-I'lam: Jurnal Komunikasi Dan Penyiaran Islam* 2, no. 2 (2019): 70–80.

¹⁷ Michel Bourdeau, "Auguste Comte," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Spring 2023 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2023), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/comte/>.

Comte was among the several thinkers who left behind monumental writings. Comte's most significant works masterpiece are; Positive Philosophy Course (1830-1842), six volumes (translated and condensed by Harriet Martineau as Auguste Comte's Positive Philosophy); System of Positive Polity, or Treatise on Sociology, Instituting the Religion of Humanity, (1851–1851), four volumes; and Early Writings (1820–1829), in which one can see the influence of Saint-Simon, for whom Comte The Early Writings is the most comprehensive introduction to Comte's philosophy.¹⁸

Auguste Comte and Positivism; The Essential Writings

Comte's enormous books "Cours De Philosophie Positive" are the source of Positivism¹⁹. The book's original language is French, and it has been translated into several languages, including English. This masterwork subsequently becomes a reference of future works creation teaching about the epistemological perspective of positivism. One of these authors is J.H. Bridges,²⁰ who authored "The General View of Positivism." Another hand, there is John Stuart Mill²¹ with the title "Auguste Comte and Positivism."

Positivism is a school of thought that holds science as the only genuine body of knowledge, rejects metaphysics, does not acknowledge speculation, and is based solely on empirical data. Positivism is derived from the Latin phrase positives "orto put", which means to place the stance of his entire understanding based on existing facts. Positivism is the antithesis of the metaphysical worldview that originates as a justification strategy. Because before the emergence of positivism appread humans offered to all sorts of justifications for metaphysical-smelling concepts. Positivism emphasizes positive truth in its epistemology. According to Karl Bertenz, this positive phrase is equivalent to fact.²² The disputed fact is that positivists adhere to sensory experience-based truth.

This paradigm restricts human thought to items attained through ratio-based human reasons. It is obvious that positivism truly venerates empirical experience to discover the truth of knowledge. Positivism and empiricism share parallels. It's just that the pressure exerted differs in each case. Empiricism acknowledges that inner or subjective experience is a source of knowledge. Whereas positivism is objective and only relies on facts.²³ In addition, knowledge still reflects on the empiricism and rationalism worldview. However, positivism replaces knowledge

¹⁸ G. W. F. Meyer, "Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography, Volume II," *Contemporary Sociology* 40, no. 5 (September 1, 2011): 611–13, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094306111419111ii>.

¹⁹ Auguste Comte, *Cours De Philosophie Positive Vol. 4* (BoD-Books on Demand, 2023).

²⁰ John Henry Bridges, "A GENERAL VIEW OF POSITIVISM.," *Fortnightly* 1 (1865): 250–51.

²¹ John Stuart Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, 2005, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/16833>.

²² The Michel Bourdeau and Mary Pickering, *Love, Order, and Progress: The Science, Philosophy, and Politics of Auguste Comte* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018).

²³ Juhaya S Praja, "Aliran-Aliran Filsafat Dan Etika," *Jakarta: Kencana*, 2003.

with technique, specifically the methodology of the natural sciences. This methodology presents a lens for analyzing existent phenomena and achieves the truth as a final result.

Positivism builds its truth on all good things supported by objective, actual, and undeniable facts. These three factors constituted the primary criterion of Comte's positive paradigm. Comte added that if the fact is a symptom of material life, then the discipline is a biological science. If the facts involve inanimate objects, so science is known as physics. More specifically, all knowledge must be demonstrated through proof and systematic observation. When it refers to considered from the perspective of its evolution, positivism is a philosophy in the Galilean tradition that emerged and evolved in the eighteenth century. Positivism arose from Comte's mathematical and physical background and his philosophical thought.²⁴ Comte concluded that human life may always be explained as a process of implementing the law of cause and effect.

Comte's positivism paradigm is very thick with the use of scientific logic. The positivism paradigm fronted by Comte is very thick with scientific logic. The use of this logic emphasizes scientific and systematic reasoning of facts. In its development, this kind of paradigm becomes the foundation of research. If positivism puts more emphasis on empirical and objective data and denies value. In contrast to post-positivism, which continues to use it, positivism can be identified through a quantitative approach, while post-positivism is a qualitative approach. The paradigm promoted by Comte, despite in the receiving much criticism, remains the starting point for philosophical development. The positive paradigm also has positively impacted the development of science.

Comte and the Development of Human Thought

Comte, in *Course de Philosophie Positive*, explained the stages of development of human thought. According to Comte, the history of human thought (human mind) increases from the level of theology and metaphysics and finally reaches the third level, called the positive level. This level is then well known as the level of knowledge (science), in which humans limit and base their knowledge on what can be seen (observable), what can be measured (measurable), and what can be proven (verifiable).

Further explanation of the three stadia explained by Comte is as follows:

1. Theological Stage (*L'état Théologique*)

At this stage, Comte explained that humans based their truth on supernatural powers outside of themselves in the early stages. This power, called God or God, has a great power that surpasses humans (infinity power).²⁵ He further

²⁴ Flew Antony and Priest Stephen, "A Dictionary of Philosophy," *Fontana, London*, 1979.

²⁵ Bourdeau, "Auguste Comte."

explained that this stage is divided into three parts: *First*, Fetishism which assumes that all objects around humans have a soul; *Second*, Polytheism, which equates these forces to the embodiment of the Gods; *Third*, Monotheism, which ultimately creates the Gods into a form of existence of the One God.²⁶

2. Metaphysical Stage (*L'état Metaphysique*)

At the metaphysical stage, the development of society is shown by the development of minds that demonstrate the ability to conceptualize metaphysics through abstract concepts and principles, such as the deepest substance, essence, cause, and so on. The development of these stages is demonstrated by human understanding of the conception of the natural order without involving God or Gods.²⁷ At this stage humans already have a better conception ability than in the previous stages.

3. Positive Level (*L'esprit Positif*)

This stage is at the highest stage of the development of human thought. At this stage, moreover, humans reach the peak of their mentality. Comte explained that at this stage, humans are able to explain existing realities rationally using the ability to analyze facts based on empirical data. This stage also explains that the knowledge acquired by humans must be concrete, exact, accurate, and beneficial. The term positive is given an explicit meaning with a philosophical content, namely that what is true and real must be concrete, exact, accurate, and beneficial.²⁸ Comte in Positive Philosophy Course also explains the level of knowledge. According to Comte, the level of knowledge begins with Mathematics; Astronomy/Cosmology; Physics; Chemicals; Biology; and Social Physics or Sociology.

²⁶ Herman Arisandi, *Buku Pintar Pemikiran Tokoh-Tokoh Sosiologi Dari Klasik Sampai Modern: Biografi, Gagasan, Dan Pengaruh Terhadap Dunia* (IRCiSoD, 2015).

²⁷ Arisandi.

²⁸ Koento Wibisono. Hubungan Filsafat , Ilmu Pengetahuan, dan Budaya. Makalah pada Internship Dosen-Dosen Filsafat Pancasila se Indonesia, 8 September 1996, Yogyakarta. hlm. 6

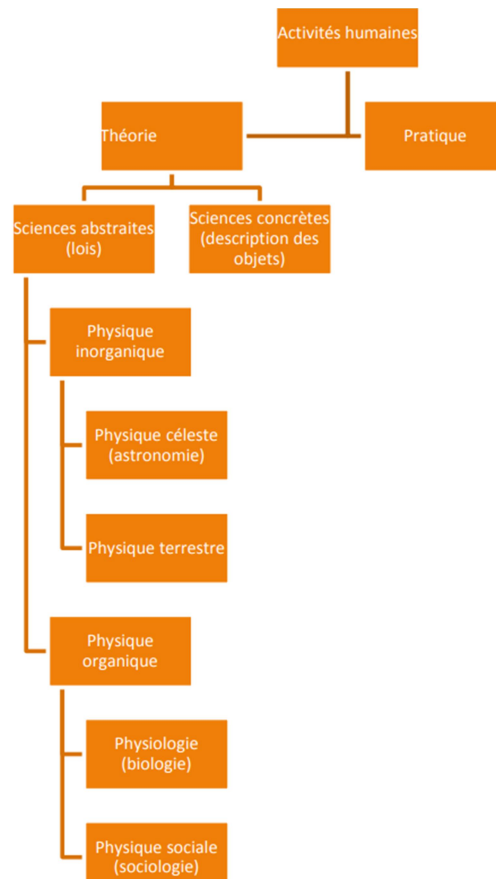


Figure 1.
The treatise of Human Knowledge
Source: Comte, *Cours De Philosophie Positive*

The Critique of Auguste Comte's Paradigm

Auguste Comte's thought about his theory of Positivism has been the subject of much criticism over the years. While it was widely influential during the 19th century, its philosophical foundations have been widely challenged and debated in the decades since. One of the most prominent criticisms of Positivism is its narrow focus on empirical evidence and the scientific method as the sole means of acquiring knowledge.²⁹ Critics argued that this approach disregards the cultural, historical, and ethical context in which knowledge is produced and utilized, leading to a reductionist understanding of complex phenomena. Positivism has also been attacked for ignoring subjective experience, intuition, and other types of knowledge beyond its

²⁹ Emma Dysmala, "Kritik Terhadap Paradigma Positivisme," *Jurnal Wawasan Yuridika* 28, no. 1 (2014): 622–33.

restrictive framework. Thus, the most common controversial assumption that positivists make is that knowledge is value-free.³⁰

Another criticism of Positivism is that claiming the quantitative method is more valuable than the qualitative method. Instead, in the context of digital research, qualitative methods are also needed.³¹ In quantitative data is more likely to be overlooked due to the incapability of uncovering certain fields, such as sociology, psychology, and cultural studies, where qualitative data can provide more valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of individuals and communities. One of the members of the Frankfurt school namely Horkheimer and Jurgen Habermas have sharply criticized Positivism, as they have other philosophical schools in general. Horkheimer disagreed with positivism's framework in regards to the paradigm concept that stands for achieving a universal systematic science that renders its conceptions a neutral instrument for examining anything and can be applied at anytime.³² Horkheimer believed the positivism will yield knowledge that is contemplative and independent of space and time.

Positivists attempted to comprehend social reality objectively in a way keeping themselves away from that reality without intending to affect the facts. In that case, they will inevitably discard various values in their studies and research. Horkheimer further argued that that social sciences are value-free, separated from social practices and morals, predictable, objective, etc., supporting the status quo of society under the pretense of objectivity and ideology. Horkheimer added that positivism has descended into dogmatism because it asserts that the knowledge produced by the methodology of the natural sciences is the ultimate truth and the only science capable of "saving" society.

Moreover, Habermas stated that it is not just events, as positivism thinks, that have meaning, but also the meaning that these events obtain in the eyes of society members. Nevertheless, positivism's causal explanations may apply to various events, but only some of these explanations can be applied to the world of meaning. Therefore, Habermas recognized the danger of positivism in the social sciences

³⁰ Pamela J Bettis and James A Gregson, "The Why of Research: Paradigmatic and Pragmatic Considerations," *Research Pathways: Writing Professional Papers, Theses, and Dissertations in Workforce Education*, 2001, 1–21.

³¹ Ted Palys and Chris Atchison, "Qualitative Research in the Digital Era: Obstacles and Opportunities," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 11, no. 4 (2012): 352–67; Bonnie S Brennen, *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies* (routledge, 2021); David M. Berry, ed., *Understanding Digital Humanities* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230371934>.

³² Andreas Vrahimis, "Scientism, Social Praxis, and Overcoming Metaphysics: A Debate between Logical Empiricism and the Frankfurt School," *HOPOS: The Journal of the International Society for the History of Philosophy of Science* 10, no. 2 (2020): 562–97.

attempting to regulate natural processes in society, which ought to be known through reflective knowledge to achieve intersubjective comprehension.

According to Habermas, positivism's desire to implement social technology on the social stage will result in social dominance and determination. In a total technocracy, the subject's involvement in shaping social facts is eliminated. The subject is required to duplicate factual facts that are presumed to be explicable with an objective mechanism. Additionally, the author believes that Comte's denial of metaphysics can diminish the source of knowledge, diminishing the truth's worth. For the author, the truth of a body of information depends not only on empirical values but also on rationalistic, intuitive, and even the credibility of other people's testimonies. While positivism is a source of knowledge, it cannot describe what spiritual experience entails on this basis. Thus, the authors contend that the many sources of knowledge are complementary and do not contradict one another in their pursuit of truth. This in line with the arguments made by Karl Popper, one of the most renowned critics of Logical Positivism. In 1934 A.D., he authored the book *Logik der Forschung* (Logic of Scientific Discoveries).

Popper discovered an alternative notion of distinguishing scientific statements from metaphysical statements. According to him, a metaphysical statement does not have to be meaningless, and a statement that is metaphysical at one time, because at that time, there was no particular method of rebutting it or scientifically proven. Given that time is changing and growing, if scientists could figure something out that can scientifically be proven that was initially disproved, then it will be classified as knowledge. On this basis, the authors conclude that metaphysics, in which Comte did not give space as a source of knowledge, eventually can be proven so that it can be scientific. To illustrate, in some Javanese traditions, they believe in the power of water prayer - water that is recited with prayers, which can cure people of disease. Referring to Comte's thoughts, this fact could not be relied upon scientifically. Masaru Emoto, a Japanese researcher, found that water will change its molecules depending on the interaction environment.³³ This finding can then explain from the realm of myth to "logos".

Authors believe Comte has greatly discovered many breakthroughs regarding the theory of positivism which is well known and has become a reference over the world. However, his thoughts in regards to empirical facts, which is the only source of knowledge, finally need to be further criticized.. Nevertheless, scientific work is the only work-finding that will be always considered and accounted. Scientific work should have acknowledged the determination of space and time, which is the main factor in the development of science.

³³ Masaru Emoto, *The Hidden Messages in Water* (Simon and Schuster, 2011).

The Relevance of Positivism in Islamic Digital Research

Positivism's emphasis on empirical observation and data fits well with the digital research paradigm. The enormous volume of data generated by digital technologies makes the scientific method more attractive, especially in understanding complex phenomena in the digital world. Positivism can guide digital research and open the way for new, more ambitious, and more interdisciplinary Islamic studies – one which builds on valuable forms of humanities expertise while integrating the best insights from non-humanities fields.³⁴ Handelman also stated that digital research is currently in dire need of a positivist paradigm.³⁵ However, a positivist emphasis on empirical observation in digital research may only sometimes be feasible. Online communities are often in virtual places; it can be difficult to observe their activities.

Several current studies can show several examples related to the use of this positivism paradigm.³⁶ Nakissa argued that Islamic Digital research makes it possible to quantitatively define long-term global psychological, economical, and cultural patterns; explain how these trends relate to one another; and explain how these trends relate to Muslim societies.³⁷ Another researchers, Lövheim and Campbell highlighted that a need for quantitative data analysis methods remarkably missing in current work in Islamic Digital Research³⁸. More large-scale quantitative work is required to study the ambiguous effects of the big data era in terms of surveillance, security, and individual privacy.

Positivism's reliance on data and empirical observations makes it a more popular approach among digital researchers. With the enormous amount of data generated by digital technologies, the scientific method provides a compelling framework for understanding complex phenomena in the digital world. By collecting data and conducting observations, researchers can uncover patterns and relationships that can help explain and predict the behavior of online communities and other digital systems. For example, the research about the factors influencing the intention to use

³⁴ Aria Nakissa, "Cognitive and Quantitative Approaches to Islamic Studies: Integrating Psychological, Socioeconomic, and Digital-cultural Statistics," *Religion Compass* 15, no. 12 (2021): e12424.

³⁵ Matthew Handelman, "A Messianic Theory of Digital Knowledge: On Positivism and Visualizing Rosenzweig's Archive," in *Volume 5 Digital Humanities and Libraries and Archives in Religious Studies* (De Gruyter, 2022), 31–56.

³⁶ Giulia Evolvi, "Religion and the Internet: Digital Religion, (Hyper)Mediated Spaces, and Materiality," *Zeitschrift Für Religion, Gesellschaft Und Politik* 6, no. 1 (2022): 9–25, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41682-021-00087-9>. Kerstin Radde-Antweiler and Xenia Zeiler, eds., *Mediatized Religion in Asia: Studies on Digital Media and Religion*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315170275>.

³⁷ Nakissa, "Cognitive and Quantitative Approaches to Islamic Studies: Integrating Psychological, Socioeconomic, and Digital-cultural Statistics."

³⁸ Mia Lövheim and Heidi A Campbell, "Considering Critical Methods and Theoretical Lenses in Digital Religion Studies," *New Media & Society* 19, no. 1 (2017): 5–14.

online platforms in paying zakat in Indonesia.³⁹ The results showed that the intention to use an online platform to pay zakat in Indonesia is strongly affected by performance expectations, effort expectations, conditions that make it easy, and zakat literacy. Another research analyzed the potential usage of Islamic Digital Resources.⁴⁰ The findings described that creating Islamic Digital Resources is promising.

However, the feasibility of a positivist emphasis on empirical observation in Islamic digital research is only occasionally warranted. One of the challenges of this issue is that online communities and other digital systems are often located in virtual spaces that are not physically accessible. This eventually affects the final result of the truth of positivism, which relies on empirical data and observations. Thus, Islamic digital researchers need to consider other methods, such as surveys, interviews, or log data analysis, to collect data and make observations.

Another challenge of Islamic digital research is that the digital world is possibly constantly changing and developing. Digital technologies, platforms, and communities are constantly developing, and researchers need to be adaptable regarding the methods used to keep up with these developments. This requires digital researchers to be flexible and open-minded, as they may need to use a variety of approaches and techniques to make sense of the complexities of the digital world. Despite these challenges, the relevance of positivism in digital research remains significant. By relying on empirical data and observations, digital researchers can ensure that their findings are based on credible and reliable evidence.

Additionally, the scientific method provides a rigorous framework for testing hypotheses and validating conclusions, which can help increase the credibility and generalizability of Islamic digital research findings. In conclusion, while the application of positivism in digital research may sometimes be challenging, its emphasis on empirical data and observation remains a valuable approach to understanding the complexities of the digital world. Digital researchers should be aware of the limitations of positivism but also embrace its strengths to help ensure that their findings are based on credible and reliable evidence.

The Limitations of Positivism in Islamic Digital Research:

Positivism, emphasizing empirical data and scientific methods, has been widely used in various research fields, including digital research. Positivism relies fully upon objectivity, and so dismisses the importance of individuals' subjective experiences and values of research participants. In more detail, researchers are not allowed to

³⁹ Rahmatina Awaliah Kasri and Adela Miranti Yuniar, "Determinants of Digital Zakat Payments: Lessons from Indonesian Experience," *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research* 12, no. 3 (2021): 362–79.

⁴⁰ Aliff Nawi et al., "The Needs of Islamic Digital Resources in Polytechnic Brunei Darussalam: A Preliminary Study," *International Journal of Instruction* 13, no. 1 (2020): 225–34.

involve in the experiment in any meaningful different circumstances. This grounded theory leads to the limitation of the Positivism paradigm that, in turn, limits the scientific method and the scope of research.

Since Islamic digital research often involves analyzing large amounts of data, the Positivist methodology must fit more to get involved in digital research fully. Suppose researchers consider unstructured data in digital research, such as social media posts, customer reviews, and chat logs. In that case, a researcher needs to get involved in participants' subjective experiences so that the data scrutinized is more valid and reliable. However, the Positivism theory is a theory that knowledge is gained objectively without the values of the researchers and participants that can influence the result of development. The nature of knowledge in the positivist approach depends on the separation between the research participant and the researcher. This, in turn, creates the real meaning of all genuine knowledge as stated by Comte – either true by definition or positive that involves reason and logic from sensory experience.

The authors suggest using a digital humanities⁴¹ approaches to overcome this limitation is highly considered. Digital humanities is a relatively new discipline that integrates the study of literature, history, and other subjects with the application of modern technologies.⁴² Through this method, Islamic Digital researchers can exhaustively explore Islam's phenomena in digital space and time. Digital humanities are also aligned with positivism's focus on empirical evidence, and the scientific method has been widely applied to other study domains, including digital research. Nevertheless, regardless of its utility, positivism has limitations that are especially pertinent in digital research. One of the constraints of positivism in digital research is its restricted focus on the scientific process, which might restrict research breadth. Digital research frequently entails the analysis of vast quantities of data, and not all of this material is amenable to positivist approaches. For example, when the researcher wants to analyze the religious authority on the internet,⁴³ could use the qualitative approach. However, unstructured data like social media posts, customer reviews, and chat logs may not easily fit into a positivist research framework. In such instances, alternate methods may be preferable, such as text mining, network analysis, and sentiment analysis.

⁴¹ Patrik Svensson, "Humanities Computing as Digital Humanities," in *Defining Digital Humanities* (Routledge, 2016), 175–202.

⁴² Fotis Jannidis, Hubertus Kohle, and Malte Rehbein, *Digital Humanities* (Springer, 2017).

⁴³ Shaheen Amid Whyte, "Islamic Religious Authority in Cyberspace: A Qualitative Study of Muslim Religious Actors in Australia," *Religions* 13, no. 1 (2022): 69; Dindin Solahudin and Moch Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority," *Religions* 11, no. 1 (2019): 19.

Furthermore, another limitation of positivism in digital research is its inability to address digital research's interpretive nature adequately. Digital research often involves the analysis of complex phenomena, such as online communities, digital culture, and digital behavior, which are inherently interpretive. In these cases, the researchers should consider multiple perspectives and the context and mean embedded in the data. However, more than positivism's narrow focus on empirical data may be required to capture this interpretive aspect of digital research. Thus, although positivism provides a useful framework in conducting research, its limitations must be considered in Islamic digital research. Islamic digital research often involves complex and interpretive analysis of phenomena, which may require alternative methods and more holistic and interdisciplinary approaches. By embracing a more comprehensive and inclusive approach, Islamic digital researchers can ensure that their findings are robust, relevant, and meaningful.

Conclusion

The rapid growth of digital technology has altered the social fabric of our culture. Currently, digital research is expanding and moving fast. Therefore the applicability of positivism in this subject must be investigated. Digital research may utilize the positivist paradigm. In digital research, positivism's emphasis on empirical facts and the scientific method has been widely adopted. One of the difficulties of digital research is that online communities and other digital systems are frequently located in inaccessible virtual realms. This makes it challenging to watch their behavior directly. To collect data and make observations, digital researchers must rely on different approaches, such as surveys, interviews, or log data analysis.

Positivism has been attacked in Islamic digital research for its lack of cultural and historical context and disdain for ethics and values in generating knowledge and study. Some scholars believe Positivism's narrow focus on empirical evidence fails to comprehend Islamic digital activities' complexity and richness. Positivism's reductionist approach ignores the Islamic digital landscape's historical, cultural, and geopolitical complexities. In addition, another shortcoming of positivism in digital research is its failure to handle the interpretive aspect of digital research. With these advantages and disadvantages, the authors believe positivism will be able to investigate digital research efficiently.

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