

Blind Faith? User Preference and Expert Assessment of AI-Generated Religious Content

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Abstract

The increasing use of AI tools like ChatGPT for religious information-seeking among Muslims raises critical questions about the intersection of technology, faith, and expertise. This mixed-methods study investigates user and expert evaluations of AI-generated religious content, through both quantitative and qualitative analysis of user preferences and expert feedback elicited through interviews, surveys, and expert consultations. Our findings reveal a significant disconnect: despite expressing distrust in AI for religious guidance and stating a preference for scholarly answers, Muslim users overwhelmingly preferred AI-generated responses to Islamic questions in blind evaluations, favoring them in 81.3% of cases. Quantitative analysis showed significant differences in ratings, including along dimensions of perceived accuracy, usefulness, completeness, and clarity. AI answers were also rated more favorably when the source was unknown, compared to when it was known. This positive sentiment persisted with source awareness, when users asked AI their own religious questions and evaluated the responses as high quality. However, expert evaluations revealed critical deficiencies in AI responses, highlighting users' limited ability to recognize such shortcomings. These findings suggest the need to move beyond purely user-centric approaches to AI alignment in sensitive domains, prioritizing both user and expert values in future LLM development.

CCS Concepts

• **Computing methodologies** → **Natural language processing**: *Artificial intelligence*; • **Social and professional topics** → *Computing / technology policy*; • **Information systems** → *Information retrieval*; *Information systems applications*.

Keywords

Human-Computer Interaction, AI Alignment, Large Language Models, User Preferences, Religious Information-Seeking

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1 Introduction

Aligning Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems with human values is a crucial challenge [14, 34, 49, 82], especially in sensitive domains requiring specialized expertise. Conversational AI tools like ChatGPT are becoming increasingly prevalent as accessible alternatives to traditional human experts across various domains, including nuanced areas such as religious guidance [25, 30, 59, 78]. While AI-generated responses can be persuasive, they may also produce results misaligned with user needs, including incomplete, unpredictable, inconsistent, fabricated, or unverifiable outputs [64, 74, 85]. Such misalignment carries profound personal and ethical implications for sensitive contexts, and as AI increasingly addresses questions involving cultural, ethical, and theological nuances, it is crucial that these systems are designed to reliably produce outcomes that align with user needs and values [35, 65, 86, 89, 95].

Religious information-seeking presents a complex alignment challenge, requiring a balance between user preferences, trust, and acceptance, and the accurate interpretation and contextual understanding of traditional teachings [54]. This tension is difficult to operationalize, particularly within the context of traditional Islamic scholarship, where rigorous methodological frameworks for interpreting and disseminating religious knowledge have been maintained by scholars for centuries [65]. The increasing reliance on digital resources, including conversational AI, which often lacks adherence to these established principles, risks generating unreliable and misleading religious content. This creates a profound misalignment with core Islamic values of preservation and authenticity, potentially misrepresenting Islamic principles or failing to meet nuanced user needs of Muslims [11, 100]. Aligning user preferences for accessible information with these core values is therefore a key challenge, as LLMs produce plausible and user-friendly outputs but lack the formal mechanisms considered essential to Islamic scholarship. To explore alignment dynamics between Muslim users and scholars, we ask the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** How do Muslim Americans perceive and evaluate AI-generated versus scholar-authored responses to religious questions? What factors influence their preferences, and to what extent do these preferences align with their stated preferences?



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- **RQ2:** What types of Islamic questions do Muslim Americans pose to AI systems? What sentiments do they use to describe their experiences interacting with AI for religious guidance?
- **RQ3:** How do Islamic scholars assess AI-generated responses to various types of Islamic questions? What key distinctions emerge in the evaluation criteria and perspectives between Islamic scholars and general users?

To answer these questions, we conducted a mixed-methods study using interviews and surveys to uncover Muslim users' expectations, preferences, trust, and evaluations regarding AI-generated religious information. We collected quantitative data for measuring user preferences and statistical comparisons of user-expert agreement, supported by thematic analysis of qualitative feedback that provided valuable insight on participants' experiences and values influencing their preferences and evaluations. Our findings reveal a significant disconnect: despite stating a strong preference for scholarly guidance, users overwhelmingly favored AI-generated responses to religious questions in blind evaluations. Even when aware of the AI source, users rated their own interactions with ChatGPT positively. However, expert evaluations of the same AI-generated responses revealed critical shortcomings in terms of accuracy, depth, and contextual sensitivity, indicating that users may overestimate the quality of AI-generated religious information. These findings suggest that expert-driven alignment strategies may be more effective than relying solely on user feedback, particularly in domains where users explicitly value expertise but struggle to accurately articulate their own alignment values.

2 Background

2.1 Technology-Mediated Religious Information-Seeking

Technological advancements have long shaped the dissemination of religious knowledge. The 15th-century invention of the printing press, for example, enabled mass production of the Bible, allowing Christians to interpret it independently. This democratized knowledge, reduced reliance on clergy, and sparked the Protestant Reformation [42]. Today, the internet has also transformed religious engagement. Online platforms offer spaces for worship, education, community building, and idea exchange, empowering individuals to explore religious information without direct reliance on traditional authorities [23, 31, 51, 94]. This particularly benefits religious minorities in non-majority settings, like Muslims in the U.S., who cannot rely on cultural immersion to engage with religious knowledge, but rather make individual efforts to access Islamic information¹ [21, 33, 94]. While online access facilitates self-directed learning, it also presents challenges in discerning reliable information and avoiding personal misinterpretations [37, 65, 94]. While Islam encourages personal study, scholars caution against

relying solely on online sources, and recommend consultation with those trained in traditional scholarship [65].

Conversational LLMs like ChatGPT are further reshaping information access by providing direct, personalized answers, reducing the need to search across online sources [22, 46, 55, 63]. Despite their limitations, LLMs offer potential for democratizing access to information and expertise, and there is indication that LLMs could dominate future information access [25, 30, 59, 61, 88]. Religious information-seeking is emerging as a key use case, with many communities and leaders exploring their role in spirituality [5, 19, 29, 40, 40, 47, 58, 84–87, 92, 93]. Specialized tools, coined “God Chatbots,” have sparked both excitement and concern, as AI systems synthesize spiritual insights, offering what some describe as “divine wisdom on demand” [42, 92]. By delivering authoritative-sounding, human-like responses (despite opaque reasoning), they provide simplicity and certainty in addressing complex spiritual questions—qualities that attract users, even at the cost of accuracy [40, 75, 83, 93]. Yet their friendly conversational style can foster overtrust in potentially fallible outputs, especially in high-stakes contexts [25, 53]. While developers emphasize that chatbots are not a replacement for human spiritual leaders, they are increasingly serving as a first point of contact for those seeking spiritual support, including ubiquitous and general-purpose options like ChatGPT [92].

3 Related Works

3.1 HCI Research on Technology and Religion is Limited

While HCI research acknowledges the influence of religious beliefs on technology interaction, exploration of technologies that support spiritual practices remains limited [20, 41, 71, 81, 91, 98]. Some work has addressed secular bias in computing and the need for faith-sensitive design [50, 71, 72], and the emergence of technospirituality has spurred related areas like Spiritual and Faith Informatics [28, 39, 44, 56]. A 2014 study's “digital prophet” design fiction [17] foreshadowed the development of religious chatbots, but empirical research on user interaction with these now-real technologies remains scarce, particularly concerning Muslim users. A 2022 study on chatbot receptiveness in spiritual contexts included only one Muslim participant [10], highlighting a critical gap given this community's prevalent use of online religious resources.

3.2 The Need for Value-Aligned LLMs

LLMs are not value-neutral. Their outputs reflect the biases of human inputs, design decisions, and broader societal contexts, making it challenging to capture the full complexity of human preferences [1, 13, 57, 80]. Traditional alignment methods like Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF) can oversimplify user needs and amplify existing biases, potentially marginalizing minority views [32, 48, 82, 99]. While newer approaches like multi-dimensional preference optimization and pluralistic alignment aim to better represent diverse perspectives, alignment challenges persist [82, 99]. Conversational LLMs like GPT-4 align with average safety standards but struggle with nuances across demographics, highlighting a need to better understand subgroup specific needs

¹Google, YouTube, and dedicated websites provide access to information on a wide range of topics, including daily practices, legal rulings, and scriptural interpretations [33]. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Reddit, and X, facilitate knowledge sharing, discussions, and community building [3, 27, 31]. Muslims use these platforms to seek guidance on religious obligations, ethical dilemmas involving halal (permissible) and haram (impermissible) decisions in areas such as food, finance, relationships, and entertainment. Spiritual inquiries often focus on strengthening faith, overcoming doubts, seeking repentance, and preparing for the afterlife [6, 33, 77]. People explore contemporary ethical challenges, text interpretations, and Islamic history [11, 70, 77].

[48, 60, 82, 99]. Recognizing the dominance of Western, secular values in this field, prior work has advocated for incorporating faith-based sensitivities and consulting with relevant scholars [8, 72, 89]. And given the significant influence of moral values (often rooted in religious teachings) on perceptions of offensiveness [32], prioritizing religious and spiritual considerations in LLM design is crucial. Prior studies reveal that highly religious individuals tend to prefer AI systems aligned with their beliefs. However, only 3.05% of religious participants in one relevant study identified as Muslim [95], highlighting the need for further research specifically exploring alignment values within the Muslim community.

3.3 Misaligned LLM Outputs Risk Representational Harm for Underrepresented Users

LLMs often reinforce stereotypes by portraying socially subordinate groups as more homogeneous and with a narrower range of experience [52]. This can lead to significant representational harms, including behavioral, psychological, and cognitive impacts on individual and collective reputation, societal standing, and cultural cohesion [26]. Religious misinformation can leave users feeling spiritually disoriented and harmed, and for Muslim users, who are underrepresented in both the development and evaluation of these models, this risk is particularly acute.

Studies have shown that LLMs like ChatGPT and Gemini exhibit anti-Muslim biases and misquote Quranic verses, issues compounded by their eloquent delivery, which can make errors difficult to detect [2, 16, 24, 38]. While specialized tools like QuranGPT, Ansari, and Mufassir attempt to address this by leveraging fine-tuned models based on authentic sources [7, 45, 66, 92], they face limitations. Many authoritative Islamic texts are in Arabic or other languages, and LLM performance in low-resource languages remains unreliable [12, 90]. These Islamic tools are also less popular than mainstream models like ChatGPT, and they include disclaimers emphasizing users' responsibility to verify information. Ansari's terms include such disclaimers, and show evidence that GPT-3.5 has relatively low accuracy on questions related to Islam, although it is the model that is currently most widely available and affordable to use [45]. These disclaimers create a value tension with Islamic principles of authentication and accountability [45, 73, 100].

3.4 The Challenge of Aligning LLMs with Religious Scholarly Traditions

Islamic knowledge and law are deeply rooted in sacred sources, namely the Quran (Islam's holy book, considered the literal word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad), complemented by the Hadith (oral traditions) and Sunnah—collections of the Prophet's sayings and practices—which provide essential context for interpreting Quranic guidance [36]. Preservation and authenticity are strictly regulated in Islamic scholarship. Scholars undergo rigorous training in classical Arabic and Islamic sciences to perform *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis) and authenticate Hadith through *ijazah* (scholarly authorization) and *isnad* (validating chains of transmission) [58, 73, 97, 100]. These meticulous methods safeguard the accuracy, context, and integrity of Islamic teachings, ensuring continuity across generations and preventing corruption [11, 65, 100].

Through *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and *qiyas* (analogical reasoning), scholars address new issues while staying grounded in core principles, issuing *fatwas* (religious rulings) that balance timeless tenets with contemporary contexts [65, 68]. While Islam allows flexibility and multiple valid perspectives on certain issues, every interpretation must be rigorously substantiated with respect to broader *ijma* (consensus). Thus, even in "gray areas", the validity of rulings relies on established scholarly frameworks that ensure Islam's teachings remain authentic and relevant.

Even as modern Muslims rely increasingly on digital resources for religious knowledge, Islamic scholarship continues to uphold these traditional mechanisms of learning and authentication to ensure knowledge interpretations remain true to core Islamic tenets [65]. In contrast, LLMs lack the formal mechanisms essential to Islamic scholarship. LLMs do not verify sources, analyze transmission chains, or distinguish valid from invalid interpretations. They generate content based on probabilistic patterns in data, which may include unauthenticated, diluted, or contradictory sources. And unlike static online content which allows for fact-checking and validation by experts or communities, LLM-powered conversational search is dynamic, and often not saved or published, which also challenges principles of reliable transmission that are central to Islamic scholarship [79, 100]. This creates a profound misalignment with Islamic values of preservation and authenticity where outputs may misrepresent Islamic principles or fail to meet the nuanced needs or preferences of Muslim users [11, 100].

4 Methods

This research involves a two-part mixed-methods design (exploratory semi-structured interviews and blind comparison, then a separate survey followed by an expert evaluation). In the first study, we explored 16 Muslim Americans' perceptions and behaviors regarding access to religious information through semi-structured interviews. This was followed by a blind comparison study that compared their preferences between AI-generated and scholar-authored religious responses. Building on the interview findings, we conducted an online survey where 60 Muslim participants engaged directly with ChatGPT for religious questions, providing feedback on their experiences and allowing us to examine AI usage patterns. We then conducted an expert evaluation study, where Islamic scholars assessed a subset of these AI-generated responses to examine how well user perceptions aligned with expert assessments.

4.1 Blind Comparison Reveals Preferences Between AI-Generated and Scholar-Authored Responses

To address RQ1 and understand the factors influencing preferences between AI-generated and scholar-authored responses to religious questions, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 16 Muslim American participants, recruited through online advertisements on social media, in community group chats, and at mosques. The interview combined a direct comparative evaluation task—designed to reveal unbiased preferences—with broader inquiries into participants' existing information-seeking practices and their perceptions of AI's role in religious contexts. This approach allowed us

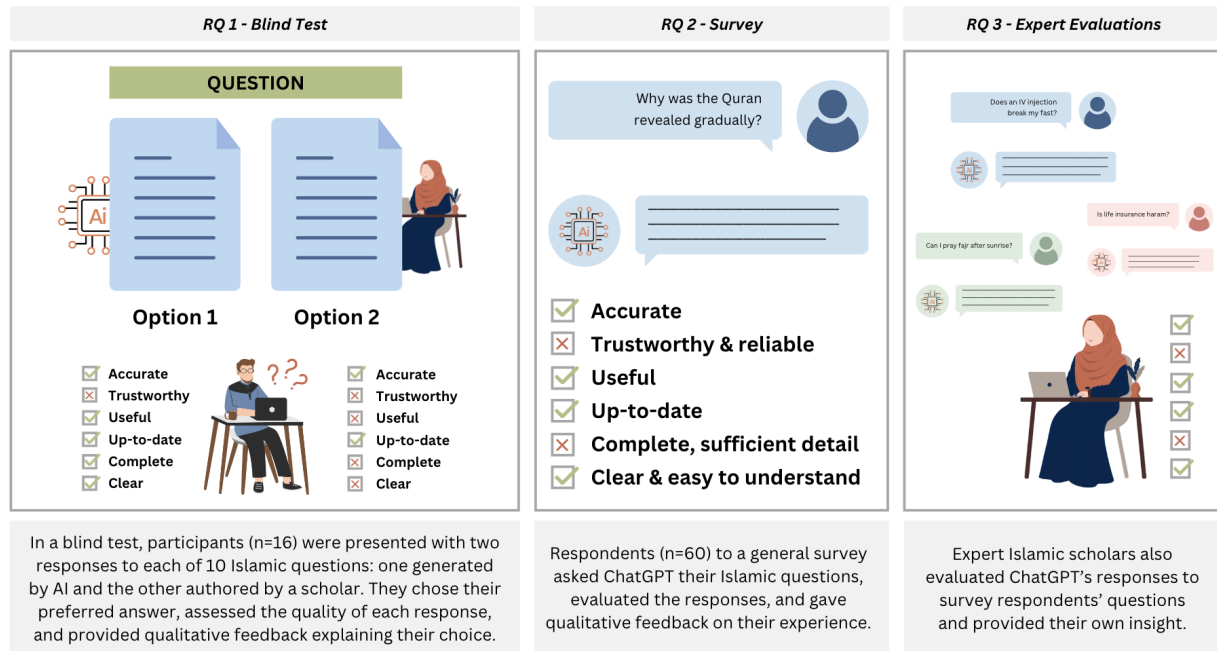


Figure 1: Study Overview

to contextualize observed preferences within participants' broader information-seeking behaviors and attitudes toward AI.

In the comparative evaluation task, participants were presented with pairs of responses to 10 Islamic questions, with one response generated by ChatGPT and the other authored by a human scholar. Each scholarly response was sourced verbatim from publicly available, published online materials intended for a general audience, and written by a different scholar. The 10 questions spanned a range of Islamic topics, including religious practice, theology, jurisprudence, and personal spirituality. These questions were selected based on responses from an initial survey and included commonly asked jurisprudential inquiries that often lack straightforward answers, reflecting the types of questions individuals might genuinely seek guidance on. Questions and answers were given in English, although some responses included commonly used Arabic terms, which are universally familiar to Muslims (including non-Arabic speakers), as they are part of everyday religious discourse. Participants were not informed which answer was AI-generated and which was scholarly, nor were they given any indication about the origins of the responses during the evaluation process.

To minimize confounding factors, we took steps to address differences in the presentation of the answers. For instance, because AI-generated responses tend to be well-structured and concise, we included some examples where the existing scholarly responses were structured similarly or were more concise than the AI-generated ones. Importantly, to maintain ecological validity, the content of the responses were not altered in any case. AI-generated answers were taken verbatim from ChatGPT's response to the posed question, and scholarly answers were selected as-is from accessible online sources intended for a general Muslim audience.

Participants read and evaluated both responses for each question, selected their preferred response, and explained their reasoning. Participants evaluated each question along dimensions of it being accurate, trustworthy, useful, up-to-date, complete, clear, and/or needing improvement. We conducted a proportional z-test on the average evaluations of these criteria to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the evaluations of AI-generated and scholarly answers. We also conducted thematic analysis of their qualitative feedback to explain their preferences.

Beyond the comparative evaluation, the interviews explored participants' current information-seeking habits, including commonly used sources and how they evaluate the quality, credibility, and relevance of religious information. We also assessed participants' familiarity with AI technologies and their attitudes toward their use in religious contexts. Specifically, we explored their trust in AI-generated responses, comfort levels with AI's role in answering religious questions, and their views on the potential benefits, ethical concerns, and risks associated with AI. These broader inquiries provided valuable context for interpreting participants' preferences in the comparative evaluation task.

4.2 Survey Identifies Behaviors and Perceptions Regarding AI for Islamic Information-Seeking

To broaden insights from the interview and address RQ2, we surveyed 60 Muslim American participants. The survey was distributed to Muslim communities across the United States to examine whether our interview insights were held in a broader context where users were aware their answers were AI-generated. Participants were invited to engage with ChatGPT by posing three religion-related

questions and subsequently evaluating the responses and providing qualitative feedback on their experience. We selected ChatGPT for this study due to its widespread familiarity and ubiquity. Unlike specialized religious AI tools, nearly all interview participants had heard of or used it, making it highly likely to be used independently. The survey was distributed online via social media, community group chats, and advertisements in local mosques. Responses were anonymous to ensure privacy and encourage openness, and revealed key trends in how Muslims use AI for religious information, including usage frequency, question types, and evaluations of answers in terms of quality and relevance.

4.3 Annotation Task Compares User and Expert Evaluations of AI-Generated Responses

Consulting domain experts is an emerging approach for developing responsible LLM policies in various fields [9, 25, 67]. To address RQ3 and investigate potential discrepancies between user perceptions and expert assessments of AI-generated religious content, we asked Islamic scholars to evaluate a representative subset of AI-generated responses to user queries, based on the proportion of responses that were flagged by users as needing improvement. Scholars evaluated these responses for accuracy, trustworthiness, usefulness, timeliness, completeness, clarity, and needing improvement, while annotating errors and adding context.

Recognizing the importance of diverse expert perspectives, we contacted several prominent Islamic institutions (including Qalam, Miftaah, Tayseer, Yaqeen, AlMaghrib, Maqasid, and Zaytuna) and individual scholars in the U.S. While extensive outreach yielded limited participation due to scholars' demanding schedules, we are deeply grateful to the four scholars—all highly respected and knowledgeable community leaders—who contributed their valuable insights to this study. Their positionality is as follows:

Tuscany Bernier is a White American Islamic scholar. She holds an associate's degree in Islamic Studies from Mishkah University and is a graduate of Tayseer Seminary. As a spiritual counselor specializing in Muslim convert care, she provides guidance on Islamic legal matters and has authored a book on Islamic rulings related to menstruation and women's issues.

Zaynab Ansari is an African American and Middle Eastern American scholar who completed her formal Islamic education in Syria. She instructs courses in Islamic law, Quranic sciences, exegesis, interpretation of Arabic texts, Prophetic biography, American Muslim history, and women in Islam at Boston Islamic Seminary and Tayseer Seminary. She is a recognized public speaker and leader within the American Muslim community.

Ibrahim Qureshi is a South Asian American scholar specializing in Islamic ethics and textual translation. He holds a B.A. and M.A. in Islamic theology and philosophy from Zaytuna College and is currently pursuing advanced studies in Hanafi jurisprudence, legal theory, and Sufism under scholars in Jordan. He is also actively translating and publishing works in these fields. He primarily serves the East Bay community in California.

Farooq Aboelzahab is a North African Egyptian scholar and Imam. He memorized the entire Quran by age 10 and pursued Islamic studies at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Specializing in Quranic interpretation, he leads courses and workshops in his areas

of expertise. He served as an Imam in Iowa for seven years before leading a community in Ohio, where he has been an Imam since 1998. He is also active in interfaith work and serves as a regular contributor to local news outlets as an expert on Islam.

We compared expert evaluations with users' assessments by cross referencing what percentage of expert-flagged responses had also been flagged by users, and by using Cohen's kappa of inter-rater reliability to measure the level of agreement between them on which responses were adequate and which needed improvement. Cohen's kappa is a metric that accounts for the possibility of agreement occurring by chance. To compare user and expert evaluations, we used two methods for defining expert consensus. In the first method, consensus was determined by majority agreement, where a response was considered "expert-flagged" only if the majority of experts agreed it required improvement.

However, given that each response in our sample was evaluated by only a single user without any aggregation of user judgments (as this reflected the natural curiosity of each user engaging with AI), we also used a second, more inclusive definition of expert consensus, where a question was considered "expert-flagged" if at least one expert identified it as needing improvement. We chose this approach based on the nuances observed in qualitative feedback from experts. In many cases, even when multiple experts flagged a response as needing improvement, their specific feedback on what needed improvement varied. As our goal was to capture the collective judgment of expert scholars, across their diverse specializations, this approach is appropriate in this context. It also aligns with quality assurance principles of prioritizing sensitivity to potential problems and minimizing false negatives.

5 Results

Our interview study included 16 interviewees, and 60 respondents completed the general survey, with demographics as shown in Table 1. Participants shared that they primarily rely on accessible digital resources for Islamic information but prefer scholarly opinions from authentic sources and generally distrust AI for religious inquiries. However, in a blind test, most consistently favored AI-generated responses over those from scholars, rating them significantly higher on quality measures. Qualitative feedback highlighted the appeal of AI responses. Despite positive user assessments, expert evaluations identified far more issues with accuracy and completeness, revealing significant shortcomings undetected by users.

5.1 Stated User Preferences Prioritize Digital Convenience and Scholarly Authority

Our results showed that users value digital convenience and access to religious information, but state that they would prefer scholarly responses from an Islamic authority over online responses. Digital resources dominate users' information-seeking habits, as illustrated in Figure 2. A majority (62.5%) of interview respondents initially turn to online communities, forums, or social media for answers to their Islamic questions. 25% consult a trusted friend or family member, while 12.5% turn to a scholar. If unsatisfied with their first answer, 68.8% turn to trusted friends, family, or community members, and 50% consult online forums or social media. The least



Figure 2: Users, who typically seek Islamic information from digital resources and personal contacts, expressed a preference for authentic sources and distrust of AI for religious information (though comfort levels varied). However, in a blind evaluation, they overwhelmingly chose and more favorably rated AI-generated responses over scholar-authored ones.

common follow-up methods were asking a scholar (25%), and consulting a published book (18.8%). When asked to identify the key factors influencing their satisfaction with Islamic answers, 87.5% of interview participants prioritized evidence from authentic sources, followed by 75% emphasizing logical soundness. Other considerations, such as alignment with their sect, *madhab*, personal lifestyle, or mindset, were noted as well, though by less than half of the participants. These insights indicate that digital resources play a key role in religious information-seeking for Muslim users, and while users prefer answers that are authentic, consulting with scholars is not a common or accessible avenue. When asked about their preferred source for religious guidance, all participants strongly favored receiving answers from scholars over AI-generated responses. This demonstrates that participants generally hold scholarly opinions in high regard, and consider them to be essential.

5.2 Users' Stated Distrust of AI Contradicts Observed Preference for AI-Generated Responses over Scholar-Authoring Responses

In interviews, most participants expressed neutrality or distrust regarding AI's ability to provide accurate Islamic information, but they preferred AI-responses in a blind evaluation (Figure 2). When presented with a series of questions on diverse topics—each accompanied by one AI-generated response and one scholar-authored response, with authorship undisclosed, participants overwhelmingly preferred AI-generated answers. Across 10 questions, AI responses were favored 81.3% of the time, compared to 18.7% for scholarly responses (Figure 2). This suggests that while participants value scholarly authority in principle, their preferences shift when comparing responses in a neutral setting.

Interestingly, this positive sentiment toward AI-generated responses persists in non-blind conditions. Survey results revealed that, 83.3% of respondents reported having previously asked Islam-related questions to an AI chat interface, and a majority felt neutral

Category	Subcategory	Interview Participants	Survey Respondents
Gender	Female	11	37
	Male	5	21
Age Group	18–22 years	5	18
	23–35 years	8	26
	35–50 years	1	8
	50–65 years	2	5
	65+ years	–	2
Ethnicity	South Asian	10	34
	Middle Eastern/North African	1	13
	African American/Black	2	8
	Southeast Asian	3	4
	White	–	1
	Native American	–	1
Education	Less than high school	–	1
	High school completed	–	1
	Some college completed	4	21
	College completed	5	13
	Some postgraduate education	4	11
	Postgraduate degree completed	3	12
Religiosity	Very observant	9	26
	Moderately observant	7	29
	Culturally observant	–	4

Table 1: Combined Demographic Information of Interview Participants and Survey Respondents. Note that religiosity level was self-identified. Rather than imposing external criteria, we allowed participants to choose the term that best reflected their personal identification, recognizing religiosity as deeply personal.

or positive about their experience (Appendix Figure 7). When respondents were instructed to ask ChatGPT their own questions, fully aware the answers were AI-generated, 60 respondents posed 170 questions on a wide range of consequential topics, including religious practice, jurisprudential matters, women-specific issues, theological concepts, historical contexts, and personal spirituality (Appendix Figure 7). Respondents' evaluations of ChatGPT's responses under these non-blind conditions were notably positive, described as accurate, clear, and useful, with 72.6% of qualitative feedback reflecting positive sentiment, 16.4% neutral, and only 10.9% negative (Figure 3). These findings indicate that although users may express distrust of AI's ability to provide high-quality answers to Islamic questions, in practice they find the answers impressive.

Overall, the blind test (n=16) was designed to isolate preferences without external bias, showing that even without knowing the source, participants favored AI-generated responses. The larger non-blind survey (n=60) then assessed whether this preference also occurs in a natural setting, when participants were aware they were engaging with AI. The continued positive sentiment in the non-blind condition suggests that AI-generated responses appeal not just due to source anonymity but also because of their perceived quality.

5.3 Users Evaluate Blind AI Responses As Higher Quality Than Both Blind Scholarly and Known AI Responses

In the survey, respondents evaluated each AI-generated response to their questions, indicating whether it was accurate, trustworthy,

useful, up-to-date, complete, clear, or needing improvement. In the comparison study, participants did the same for each AI-generated and scholar-authored response, while blind to their authorship. Comparisons across these evaluations found that the responses most favored by users were AI-generated, with source undisclosed (Figure 3).

Under blind test conditions, we found that users rated AI generated responses significantly higher than scholar-authored responses, according to a series of two-proportion z-tests. For instance, AI-generated responses were rated significantly higher than scholar-authored responses for accuracy ($z = 3.36$, $p = 0.000768$), usefulness ($z = 6.59$, $p = 4.28e-11$), being up-to-date ($z = 4.71$, $p = 2.48e-6$), completeness ($z = 5.39$, $p = 6.89e-8$), and clarity ($z = 6.89$, $p = 5.75e-12$). No significant difference was found for trustworthiness ($z = 1.09$, $p = 0.28$). Comparing blind AI and known AI conditions, responses were rated significantly higher in the blind condition for accuracy ($z = 2.39$, $p = 0.016$), usefulness ($z = 3.35$, $p = 0.00082$), completeness ($z = 2.18$, $p = 0.029$), and clarity ($z = 3.45$, $p = 0.00056$), with no significant differences for trustworthiness ($z = 0.395$, $p = 0.692$) or being up-to-date ($z = -0.249$, $p = 0.692$).

These findings indicate that under blind conditions, AI-generated responses were consistently rated more favorably across most dimensions, except for trustworthiness, where both were evaluated similarly. However, knowledge of the AI source leads to more negative perceptions of AI-generated responses.

5.4 Preferences for AI Responses Highlight User Values: Clarity, Detail, Emotional Resonance, Spiritual Engagement, and Perceived Objectivity

Although users emphasized the importance of authentic sources, AI-generated responses rarely included citations, while scholar-authored responses almost always did. This discrepancy did not prevent participants from preferring AI-generated answers, suggesting a shift in priorities during evaluation, where AI may have fulfilled other criteria that participants did not initially consider essential. A thematic analysis of qualitative user feedback confirmed the importance of these previously unarticulated criteria.

Readability and Clarity - Users valued AI responses' clear organization, structured presentation, and well-defined terminology, which made complex topics more accessible. In contrast, some scholarly responses were perceived as overly complex, leaving users uncertain. *"I prefer the second option [AI-generated]. It clearly defined the terms. I'm not an Arabic speaker, so when I see certain words I don't really know the meaning of them at all, so defined terms is helpful for me. And this is modern English, simplified and organized."* [p2]; *"I would say it's a better search engine. Like, before, the user has a lot of effort to understand Shaykh Google. Now Shaykh Google goes to communications school and comes back with a better way of communicating with the user. I would say maybe the knowledge is still the same, but the way it communicates with the with the user, it's extremely improved."* [p16]

Balance of Detail - AI-generated responses tailored responses to the question's complexity, and were preferred both when they were more concise and when they were more detailed than scholarly responses, which were sometimes perceived as either lacking detail



Figure 3: Users - Overwhelmingly positive feedback; significantly higher ratings in blind evaluations for AI responses (accuracy, usefulness, timeliness, completeness, clarity) over scholar-authored ones. Experts - Mostly favorable as well, but identified significant shortcomings in accuracy and completeness, flagging AI responses for improvement significantly more often than users.

or overwhelming. P1 mentioned that “the first answer [AI-generated] was more concise. And the second one [scholar-authored] has more references. Having references is a huge thing for me personally. It makes the answer much more credible. But given how lengthy it is, and most of the points are covered in the first option [AI-generated], I would actually pick the concise answer.” [p1]; “I don’t like the first answer [scholar-authored] at all—it makes me more confused. I understand the appeal of it because it’s short and easy to understand. But option 2 [AI-generated] has detailed explanation, and for a complex topic like this, that requires a detailed explanation.” [p1]; “I was able to learn more from option 2 [AI-generated], even though this one is less concise. It would satisfy my curiosity more.” [p5]

Empathy and Tone - Participants appreciated AI addressing the underlying emotions and motivations of users, providing nuanced, situational guidance, that offered flexibility and clear explanations that helped users apply the information in their daily lives. Often AI-generated responses included modern examples that resonated with participants. Participants also valued the inclusion of diverse perspectives, that went beyond simply stating what is permissible or impermissible. “Honestly I’m really surprised! I asked this question very genuinely. I’m trying to improve myself and become a better Muslim, and the answer is very thorough. It covers a lot of things I know are important, and does it all in a really nonjudgmental tone, even commending me for taking the first step and trying. I wasn’t expecting it to be so gentle.” [anonymous survey respondent] “The tone is so kind, and there’s no judgment or shame in it. It’s encouraging.” [anonymous survey respondent]

Depth of Spiritual Engagement - AI-generated responses defied participants’ expectations of being mechanical or overly secular, and instead held a respectful and spiritually-aligned tone. ChatGPT’s ability to gently correct misconceptions, provide actionable guidance with modern examples, and encourage further exploration

proved valuable. “I thought because it’s AI, that it wouldn’t have any kind of spiritual dimension to it. Like that it would be really dismissive about religion. But it wasn’t. It seemed to actually care about my spiritual journey.” [anonymous survey respondent]; “I’m really surprised by how good this answer is. It gave so many tips that are both practical and spiritual, and some of them are things I’ve never thought of before. I think it’s shocking to see AI advance to the point of knowing the religion this well. It went above and beyond.” [anonymous survey respondent], “I liked that it also thought ahead of me and came up with places where women could be perceived as unequal, like in testimony, inheritance, marriage/divorce, and polygamy, and preemptively gave me some reasons for why Islam handles those issues the way it does. If it can anticipate what I need next, I think that helps me learn better too.” [anonymous survey respondent]

Perception of Objectivity and Comprehensiveness - Participants valued the perceived objectivity of AI-generated answers, appreciating the lack of human bias even for sensitive topics. ChatGPT’s ability to provide both firm guidance and open-ended answers that acknowledged gray areas and offered a range of perspectives. “I like the idea of using AI for these questions because the answers are unbiased. It’s not affected by a scholar’s personal opinions or their cultural backgrounds.” [anonymous survey respondent]; “I can see several benefits. One is that it provides instant access to the information, otherwise I would have to look up books and I’d have to know, maybe I read one book and I did not read another book, so my knowledge would be fragmented. At least I know that ChatGPT has ingested a lot of information, so I’m not only getting instant access, but I’m also getting a diversified perspective. There’s also a challenge of asking a specific person about religious issues, which is that the person often filters that information. I don’t know if the word bias is an appropriate one, but AI is not human, so it doesn’t bring this human bias into this discussion.” [p2]

Comparisons with Scholarly Responses - Users also shared insights into why they sometimes preferred scholarly answers over AI-generated ones. The most common reason was the inclusion of direct quotes and references to religious texts, which lent a sense of authority and authenticity to the responses. Additionally, scholarly answers often conveyed a tone of deeper conviction and in certain cases, the perceived strictness of scholarly responses was seen as more fitting for important topics, with some users expressing a preference for this approach over the AI's gentler tone. *"I like that it [AI] understands the importance of prayer. I think the only thing I'm iffy about is that it isn't harsh enough. It tries to say that what you're doing is okay and that you can improve, which is encouraging but it might not get the gravity or severity of the situation. A real scholar would probably be much more honest with you, and that might be more motivating."* [anonymous survey respondent]; *"Option one [AI-generated] doesn't provide the affirmation or reaffirmation, that is in option 2 [scholar-authored] of, this is also the true religion—which I think when you're looking for answers to Islamic questions, you do need that aspect of affirming that this the right way, or the right choices that we're making."* [p12]

5.5 Expert Feedback Highlights Limitations in AI Responses Unrecognized by Users

While assessing the quality of AI-generated responses, users flagged the AI-generated responses that they felt needed improvement, and we compared these evaluations with expert opinions. To assess the alignment between user and expert evaluations of AI response quality, we used a stratified random sampling method to select a representative subset of 60 questions from the original 170. Given that 34% of the original questions were flagged by users as needing improvement, we maintained a comparable user-flag rate of 33% in the subset by randomly selecting 20 flagged and 40 non-flagged questions. This proportional sampling strategy ensured that the expert evaluations were conducted on a sample representative of the user experience, enabling a statistically valid comparison of the two groups' judgments.

When flagging responses that needed improvement, experts provided feedback on identified shortcomings. Thematic analysis on this feedback showed that experts identified various flaws in flagged responses, including lack of depth, fundamental inaccuracies, and incomplete or misleading information. Some responses presented a single perspective without acknowledging alternative interpretations or the potential for disagreement. Furthermore, AI sometimes reinforced pre-existing user misunderstandings embedded in the question itself. Experts also rated fewer questions as accurate and complete than users did (Figure 3).

We evaluated Cohen's kappa to measure inter-rater reliability (IRR) between user and expert evaluations of AI-generated responses, based on questions flagged by each as needing improvement. We calculated this under two conditions: first, we evaluated IRR based on majority agreement that a response needed improvement among the 4 experts. Second, we evaluated IRR based on whether any of the experts flagged an AI-authored response as needing improvement. The first condition yielded a Cohen's kappa of 0.143, indicating only a slight agreement between users and majority expert consensus. The second condition, under "at least

one expert" yields an even lower Cohen's kappa of 0.061. These values highlight a substantial disconnect between user and expert perceptions of AI response quality, suggesting users are likely overestimating the quality of AI-generated responses, compared to experts.

The statistical differences found in this study suggest that users and experts prioritize different aspects of AI-generated responses. While users recognize the importance of scholarly opinions, they tend to appreciate other aspects that conversational AI provides, such as readability, balance of detail, and tone. On the other hand, experts prioritize the completeness and accuracy of content and are better attuned to recognizing when AI-responses are not rigorous enough, doing so more readily than lay users.

6 Discussion

6.1 Users Favor AI Responses Despite Stated Preferences and Limited Evaluation Skills

Interviews revealed that while participants were familiar with AI and used it often, they expressed neutrality or distrust specifically regarding its use for religious information-seeking. Many anticipated inaccuracies, inconsistencies, or biases due to training data reflecting secular or non-Islamic perspectives, particularly in areas like jurisprudence and theology. Some participants opposed AI's use in religious contexts altogether, viewing it as a mechanical intrusion on a sacred and personal endeavor. When asked directly in our interview study, all participants preferred scholarly responses.

However, our findings in the blind comparison study reveal a significant discrepancy between these stated preferences and actual evaluations. In blind evaluations, participants overwhelmingly preferred AI-generated responses (81.3%), a preference supported by statistically significant differences across various criteria. Even with source awareness, users generally found AI responses satisfactory, with only 34% flagged as needing improvement. This consistency highlights the perceived quality and utility of AI-generated responses.

Furthermore, our findings from the survey and expert evaluation suggest that users may not always be equipped to effectively evaluate the quality of AI-generated Islamic information. The low levels of agreement between expert and user evaluations indicate that users often fail to recognize when AI-generated responses are insufficient or misleading. This highlights a critical vulnerability: while users are drawn to AI-generated answers, they may lack the necessary insight to discern inaccuracies or nuances that are readily apparent to scholars. This combination of user preference and limited evaluation skills could potentially leave users susceptible to potentially harmful inaccuracies in AI-generated religious information.

6.2 User Preference for AI Over Human-Generated Content Demonstrated Across Diverse Fields

The complex interplay between user perceptions, AI accessibility, and expertise in religious knowledge found in our study reflects broader trends. AI-generated content is frequently preferred over expert opinions in various contexts, from medical information,

where patients often favor AI-generated explanations over doctors' advice, to creative arts, where readers often prefer AI-generated poetry [15, 69, 96]. This suggests a widespread tendency to perceive AI outputs as more accessible, engaging, or aligned with immediate expectations, and highlights an "accessibility paradox": the potential trade-off between easily digestible information and its depth, nuance, and accuracy [4]. It also suggests that users may use flawed heuristics when evaluating content. For example, studies on poetry evaluation demonstrate that explicitly labeling poems as human-written can inflate ratings, regardless of actual authorship, and conversely, in the absence of such labeling, AI-generated poems are often preferred, likely due to their structured and comprehensible nature [69]. This also aligns with the concept of "human favoritism," where perceived human involvement enhances the perceived quality of outputs, even when the content itself remains unchanged [43].

Our study extends this phenomenon to the domain of religious information-seeking. Participants, unaware of the responses' source until the study's conclusion, frequently expressed surprise upon discovering they had favored AI-generated answers—or even that the answers were AI-generated at all. This shows the influence of user expectations and implicit biases in shaping perceptions of quality and reliability. Furthermore, expert evaluations revealed that many highly-rated AI responses, while fulfilling immediate user expectations, lacked crucial details and nuanced information, confirming the accessibility paradox.

6.3 The Importance of Expert-Driven Alignment in Sensitive Domains

The disconnect between users' stated and actual preferences suggests they may not fully understand their true priorities when evaluating religious information. However, their reasons for preferring AI responses highlight valued aspects that are less common in traditional scholarly answers and deserve consideration when meeting such specialized information-needs.

The divergence between user and expert evaluations indicates that while users can identify aspects they appreciate in AI-generated responses (such as readability, balance of detail, and empathy), they are limited in recognizing critical shortcomings. Experts, on the other hand, are able to readily identify these areas of improvement, demonstrating that their alignment values for AI outputs are likely different from users.

It is notable that while participants reported overwhelmingly positive experiences with AI responses, they still placed significant cultural value on expertise, with every participant preferring scholar-provided answers and emphasizing the essential role of scholars in religious guidance. Many also stressed the importance of scholarly oversight in curating or supervising AI-generated religious material (Appendix Figure 7). This, in and of itself, is an alignment value of users to account for. In sensitive domains like religious guidance, user-centric AI alignment may be insufficient or even counterproductive. Given that users explicitly value scholarly expertise, aligning AI with expert values could help align outputs with user values, even when they cannot fully articulate or define those values themselves. Future exploration of such approaches may improve both AI performance and user acceptance.

7 Conclusion

While Muslims are increasingly drawn to the accessibility of AI tools like ChatGPT for religious inquiries, a significant disconnect exists between user perception and expert assessment of AI response quality. Despite expressing distrust in AI and stating a preference for scholarly guidance, users overwhelmingly preferred AI-generated responses under blind conditions, and maintained positive perceptions even when aware of the source. However, expert evaluations revealed critical deficiencies in these responses, highlighting users' limited ability to recognize such deficiencies. This underscores the need to critically assess AI's role in specialized domains like religious discourse and prioritize user and expert alignment values in future LLM development.

8 Positionality and Study Limitations

All authors of this paper identify as Muslim and all reside in the United States. The first and second authors are of South Asian descent, with the first born and raised in the United States and the second born in South Asia and raised in the Middle East and the United States. The last author was born and raised in Iran and completed higher education in the United States. These personal backgrounds inform the authors' perspectives on Muslim communities and religious practices in the United States.

Our recruitment strategy, which utilized both public forums and personal networks, resulted in a participant sample with a majority of individuals of South Asian descent. While efforts were made to recruit participants from other ethnic backgrounds within the American Muslim community (including Middle Eastern, North African, and African American), these efforts produced limited engagement. This overrepresentation of South Asian participants is a limitation of our study, as it may not fully capture the diversity of Muslim backgrounds and experiences. Future research should prioritize recruitment strategies that ensure greater representation across diverse ethnic and cultural groups across Muslim populations.

In our initial study, each of the 16 participants completed a one-hour interview, offering in-depth insights into religious information-seeking habits, perceptions of AI, and answer preferences. Thus the limited sample size was shaped by the one-on-one format and logistical constraints. However, this sample size is also typical for qualitative research and aligns with prior work [18, 62, 76]. It is important to note that the insights provided by these participants were not intended to draw broad generalizations, but to explore early preferences in a controlled setting. The follow-up survey (n=60) added a more naturalistic, non-blind perspective. Together, the studies reveal consistent trends, though larger future studies could further validate these findings.

The limited availability of scholarly experts for participation also presented a challenge. This difficulty, also noted by our lay participants, highlights a real-world constraint on access to expert religious guidance and further substantiates the motivation for individuals to seek alternative resources. While this limited expert participation is a limitation of our study, it underscores the practical challenges of accessing scholarly expertise and supports the rationale for exploring alternative means of information access.

Future research could benefit from partnerships with larger U.S. religious institutions to facilitate broader expert participation.

Furthermore, this study focused specifically on Islamic religious information-seeking and the values associated with traditional Islamic scholarship. The findings may not be generalizable to other religious traditions, which may have different norms and values surrounding information access and dissemination. Future research should explore similar dynamics in other religious contexts to understand the broader implications for AI alignment in sensitive domains.

Finally, our study utilized ChatGPT, currently one of the most widely recognized and accessible LLMs. This choice was deliberate, as ChatGPT's widespread use makes it a relevant and important subject of study in understanding current user experiences with AI-generated religious information. Users accessed ChatGPT on their own, and at this time of data collection, were using GPT-3.5 and GPT-4o mini. While other AI models may produce different results, focusing on ChatGPT allows us to capture a snapshot of the current landscape of AI-driven religious information-seeking and provides a valuable baseline for future comparative research. Additionally, the rapid evolution of AI models like ChatGPT means that our findings may be specific to the version of the model used in this study and may not be generalized to future iterations. Future work could conduct comparative studies across various LLMs and track the evolution of these models over time.

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A Appendix

Figure 4: Data collection involved participants submitting their questions to ChatGPT, evaluating the responses, and providing qualitative feedback. Participants also shared a link to their interaction or used the above interface we created, enabling us to analyze both the questions and the AI-generated answers directly exactly as the user saw them.

Religious Practices and Worship (21.5%)	Questions about ritual prayer (including frequency, how to address missed prayers, proper methods of performance, and valid prayer timings), fasting (including Ramadan rites and exceptions to fasting), ablution, ritual purity, and regulations for performing Hajj and Umrah.
Legal and Jurisprudential Inquiries (18.8%)	Inquiries on interpretations of Islamic law, rulings for specific practices, and clarifications on what is legally permissible or impermissible.
Women's Religious Experience (17.4%)	Topics related to women's religious observance, including menstruation, hijab, gender-specific rights and responsibilities pertaining to marriage, family regulations, and reproductive rights.
Theological Concepts (16.7%)	Questions on the nature of God, the purpose of worship, free will versus fate, the afterlife, divine mercy, interpretations of Quranic verses, and metaphysical/supernatural phenomena (such as angels and jinn).
Historical and Cultural Contexts (14.6%)	Inquiries into the spread of Islam, roles of Islamic organizations, interactions between Islam and other religions, cultural practices versus religious principles, and political and social interpretations of Islam.
Personal Identity and Spirituality (11.1%)	Questions related to personal identity, conversion, spiritual journeys, sincerity in worship, personal decision-making, repentance, self-improvement and overcoming inner vices.

Figure 5: Survey respondents asked ChatGPT Islamic questions across a variety of topics.

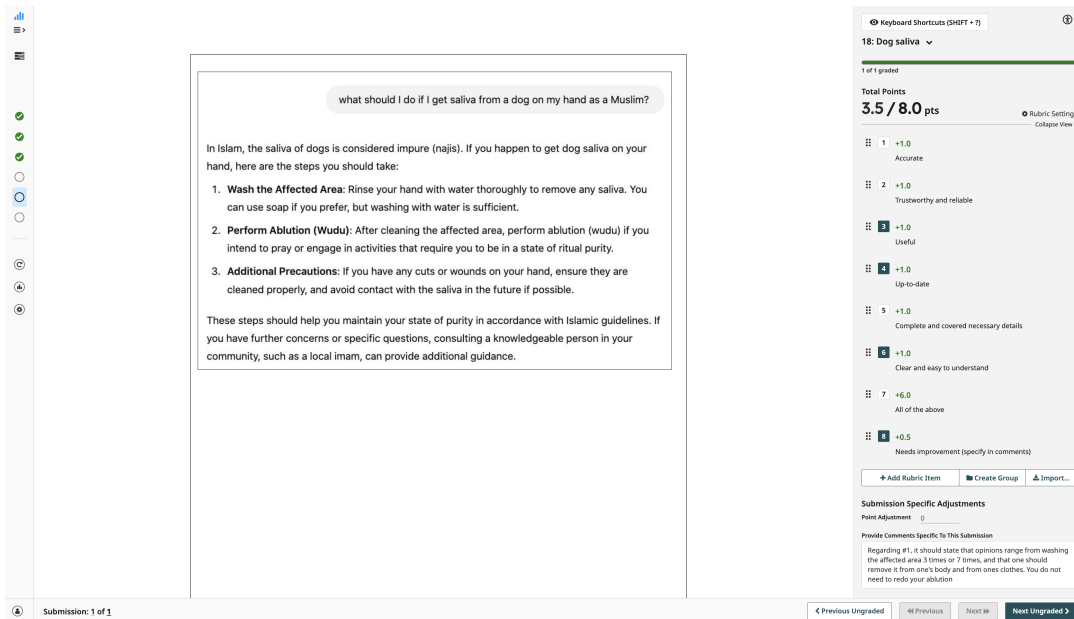
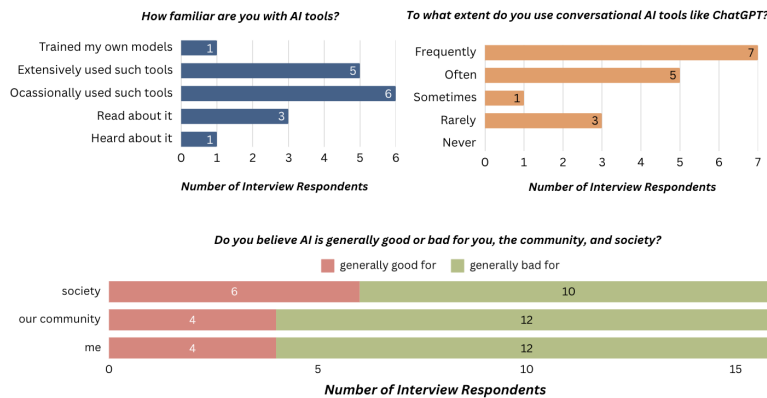


Figure 6: Interface used by experts to evaluate AI-generated responses gathered from survey.

Interviewed Muslim-American users are familiar with AI tools, use them often, and generally view them favorably



Surveyed and interviewed Muslim Americans have used AI chatbots for Islamic questions and felt generally satisfied, but still value input from religious experts for design of future AI tools

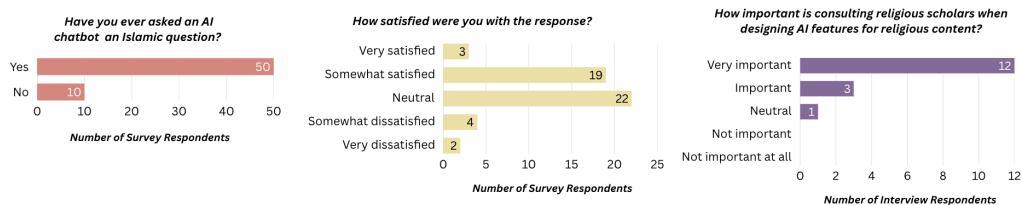


Figure 7: Additional insight on Muslim American users' perceptions and habits regarding AI.

[BLIND TEST QUESTIONS & ANSWERS]

Question 1 : Why was the Qur'an revealed gradually?

[OPTION 1]

AI-Generated

The Quran was revealed gradually over 23 years, a process that served multiple purposes, both practical and spiritual, for the early Muslim community and for humanity as a whole. Here are the key reasons for this gradual revelation:

1. Facilitating Comprehension and Implementation

- **Ease of Understanding:** The gradual revelation allowed people to understand, reflect upon, and absorb the teachings of the Quran. Given the complexity and depth of the Quranic message, revealing it all at once would have been overwhelming.
- **Step-by-Step Implementation:** The gradual revelation enabled the early Muslim community to implement the teachings of the Quran step by step. For example, prohibitions like those against alcohol were introduced in stages, allowing the community to adapt to changes gradually.

2. Addressing Specific Situations

- **Guidance in Real Time:** The Quran was revealed in response to specific situations, questions, and challenges faced by the Prophet Muhammad and his followers. This allowed the Quran to provide immediate and relevant guidance, making it more impactful and directly applicable.
- **Reassurance and Strengthening:** The gradual revelation offered continuous reassurance and support to the Prophet and his followers, especially during difficult times. It strengthened their faith and resolve by addressing their concerns as they arose.

3. Building a Strong Foundation

- **Development of Faith:** The gradual nature of the revelation helped to build and strengthen the faith of the early Muslims over time. This steady spiritual growth was crucial for establishing a firm foundation for the community.
- **Social and Moral Reforms:** The gradual revelation allowed for a smooth transition in implementing social and moral reforms. This approach minimized resistance and facilitated the acceptance of new ethical standards and laws.

4. Miraculous Nature and Divine Wisdom

- **Demonstration of Divine Wisdom:** The process of revelation itself, occurring over such an extended period, showcased the divine wisdom and the miraculous nature of the Quran. Despite the passage of time and changing circumstances, the Quran remained consistent, cohesive, and relevant.
- **Testing and Training:** The gradual revelation served as a test and a form of training for the early Muslims. It tested their patience, commitment, and willingness to submit to God's commands over time.

5. Preservation and Memorization

- **Ease of Memorization:** Gradual revelation facilitated the memorization and preservation of the Quran. Many early Muslims committed the Quran to memory as it was revealed, and the slow, steady pace allowed for more accurate retention and transmission.

This gradual process reflects the divine wisdom in ensuring that the message was fully understood, accepted, and implemented in a way that could transform not only the lives of the early Muslims but also serve as guidance for all future generations.

[OPTION 2]

Scholar-Authored

The Noble Quran was gradually revealed upon the heart of the Seal of the Prophets and Messengers (Allah bless him and give him peace) over a period of more than twenty years. Several purposes and wisdom were behind its gradual revelation. The

revelation of the Quran upon the heart of the chosen one (Allah bless him and give him peace) is distinct from the revelation of the other heavenly books, which were revealed all at once. The Quran, however, was revealed gradually.

The evidence for this gradual and segmented revelation is found in the words of Allah (Most High): “(It is) a Quran We have revealed in stages so that you may recite it to people at a deliberate pace. And We have sent it down in successive revelations.” [Quran, 17:106]

And His words: “The disbelievers say, ‘If only the Quran had been sent down to him all at once!’ (We have sent it) as such (in stages) so We may reassure your heart with it. And We have revealed it at a deliberate pace. Whenever they bring you an argument, We come to you with the right refutation and the best explanation.” [Quran, 25:32-33]

It is narrated that the disbelievers from among the Jews and polytheists criticized the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) for the gradual revelation of the Quran and suggested that it be revealed all at once. Allah revealed these two verses in response to them. [Zurqani, Manahil al-‘Irfan]

The gradual revelation of the Noble Quran had several secrets and numerous wisdoms, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Strengthening and Fortifying the Prophet’s Heart and Spirit

- **Renewal of Revelation:** The repeated renewal of revelation and the frequent descent of the angel with it from the Divine to His Messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace) brought joy and filled the Prophet’s heart with happiness. This occurred because each instance of revelation conveyed a sense of divine care and attention.
- **Ease of Memorization and Understanding:** The gradual revelation facilitated the Prophet’s task of memorizing, understanding, and comprehending its laws and wisdom.
- **Miraculous Nature:** Each instance of the segmented revelation often included a new miracle. The Quran repeatedly challenged the disbelievers to produce something like it, showcasing their inability and causing them great frustration. Undoubtedly, the miracles supported the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), bolstered his followers, and defeated his enemies.
- **Consolation during Hardships:** The enmity against the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) intensified, and he faced numerous hardships. During these times, the Prophet’s heart needed consolation. Whenever his enemies pressured him, his Lord comforted him. This consolation sometimes came through the stories of the prophets and messengers, which have a significant presence in the Quran. Allah (Most High) says, “And We relate to you (O Prophet) the stories of the messengers to reassure your heart.” [Quran, 11:120]. Other times, the comfort came through Allah’s promises of victory, support, and protection, as in His saying: “So be patient with your Lord’s decree, for you are truly under Our (watchful) Eyes.” [Quran, 52:48] Sometimes the consolation was through warnings to his enemies, as in: “(Soon) their united front will be defeated and (forced to) flee.” [Quran, 54:45], and “If they turn away, then say, (O Prophet,) ‘I warn you of a (mighty) blast, like the one that befell ‘Ād and Thamūd.’” [Quran, 41:13] At other times, the consolation took the form of explicit commands to be patient, as in Allah’s statement, “So endure patiently, as did the Messengers of Firm Resolve.” [Quran, 46:35]

2. Gradual Education and Training of this Ummah in Knowledge and Action

- **Facilitating Memorization:** The Quran was revealed to an illiterate nation with limited writing tools available even to the few who could write. If the Quran had been revealed all at once, they would have struggled to memorize it. Therefore, Divine wisdom necessitated that it be revealed gradually, making it easier for them to memorize and recite.
- **Easing Comprehension:** Similarly, the gradual revelation facilitated their understanding of the Quran, as it was easier for them to grasp its meanings in smaller portions.
- **Gradual Abandonment of False Beliefs and Practices:** The gradual revelation helped in the systematic eradication of their false beliefs, corrupt worship practices, and reprehensible customs. They were gradually trained to abandon these practices step by step. Each time Islam succeeded in demolishing one falsehood, it moved on to the next, starting with the most important and then addressing the lesser issues, until they were completely rid of these impurities.
- **Strengthening the Hearts of Believers:** The Quran fortified the believers’ hearts and equipped them with patience and certainty through the stories of the prophets and messengers. These stories recounted their experiences with their enemies and disbelievers, and Allah’s promises of victory, reward, support, and empowerment for His righteous servants. As Allah (Most High) says: “Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good that He will certainly make them successors in the land, as He did with those before them; and will surely establish for them their faith which He has chosen for them; and will indeed change their fear into security—(provided that) they worship Me, associating nothing with Me. But whoever disbelieves after this (promise), it is they who will be the rebellious.” [Quran, 24:55]

3. Accommodating Events and Emergencies as They Arise

- **Addressing New Developments:** Whenever something new occurred, verses were revealed to address it, and Allah provided detailed rulings that suited the situation. This included answering the questions posed to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), whether the questions were to confirm his message or to seek enlightenment and know Allah's rulings.
- **Providing Immediate Guidance:** The Quran provided guidance for specific incidents and events as they happened, detailing Allah's rulings for each situation. These incidents did not occur all at once but rather progressively, necessitating the detailed and gradual revelation of the Quran in accordance with these events, such as the incident of slander (Hadithat al-lfk).
- **Correcting Mistakes and Guiding Muslims:** The Quran also aims to correct Muslims' mistakes and guide them to the right path simultaneously. Undoubtedly, these mistakes occurred at different times, and it was wise for the Quranic revelations that addressed these mistakes to be timely as well.

4. Indicating the Divine Origin of the Quran

The Quran's gradual revelation over more than twenty years, without showing any disjointedness or inconsistency, points to its divine origin. It is impossible for the Quran to be the words of Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace) or any other created being. The seamless and consistent nature of the Quran, despite its segmented revelation corresponding to various events and incidents, leads us to understand that, "Had it been from anyone other than Allah, they would have certainly found in it many inconsistencies." [Quran, 4:82]

Summary

The entire Book of our Lord (Most High) is full of secrets and wisdom. It is like the rain, which revives dead land whenever it falls, causing it to flourish. The gradual revelation of the Quran, piece by piece, is more beneficial than if it had been revealed all at once.

Question 2 : Is life insurance haram?

[OPTION 1]

Scholar-Authored

May Allah, Most High reward you for your desire to increase in knowledge.

Purchasing conventional life insurance is impermissible in Islam, regardless of one's intentions.

Life insurance is impermissible due to the fact that the policies contain various forms of interest, uncertainty, and gambling. All three of these are forbidden by the sacred law.

Allah, Most High says:

"O believers! Intoxicants, gambling, idols, and drawing lots for decisions are all evil of Satan's handiwork. So shun them so you may be successful." [Qur'an, 5:90]

"O believers! Do not consume interest, multiplying it many times over. And be mindful of Allah, so you may prosper." [Qur'an, 3:130]

Insurance of one's life or possessions is haram and is not permitted, because it involves gharar (buying/selling something where it is not known whether what is being bought/sold will actually be achieved/delivered, or in what specific quantity, thus putting one's money at undue risk to being lost) and riba (usury, interest).

Allah has forbidden all transactions that are based on riba, and all transactions which involve deceit, as a mercy to this ummah, and to protect them from that which may harm them. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): "...whereas Allah has permitted trading and forbidden riba" [al-Baqarah 2:275]. And it was narrated in a sahih report that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) forbade deceit.

The permissibility of life insurance in Islam is a subject of debate among scholars, and opinions vary. The issue revolves around several key principles in Islamic law (Sharia), including **riba** (interest), **gharar** (uncertainty), and **maysir** (gambling), which are generally prohibited. Here's a breakdown of the different perspectives:

Arguments for Life Insurance Being Haram

1. **Riba (Interest):**
 - Traditional life insurance policies often involve investments by the insurance company, which may include interest-bearing instruments. Since riba is explicitly prohibited in Islam, any association with interest can render life insurance haram.
2. **Gharar (Uncertainty):**
 - Life insurance involves uncertainty, particularly regarding the time of death and the payout. This uncertainty, or gharar, is generally prohibited in Islamic contracts. The argument is that life insurance creates an environment of excessive uncertainty.
3. **Maysir (Gambling):**
 - Some scholars argue that life insurance resembles gambling because it involves a payment (premium) for a potential future benefit (payout) that depends on an uncertain event (death). This element of speculation is seen as akin to maysir, which is also prohibited.
4. **Violation of Tawakkul (Trust in God):**
 - Some argue that life insurance may contradict the concept of tawakkul, which is placing trust in God regarding life and death, sustenance, and future security. They believe that relying on an insurance policy instead of God's will might be seen as a lack of faith.

Arguments for Life Insurance Being Permissible

1. **Social Welfare and Mutual Assistance:**
 - Some scholars argue that life insurance can be viewed as a form of mutual assistance, which is encouraged in Islam. The pooling of resources to provide for the family of a deceased person is seen as a positive action, akin to cooperative societies that are halal.
2. **Takaful (Islamic Insurance):**
 - **Takaful** is a Sharia-compliant alternative to conventional insurance. It is based on the principles of mutual cooperation, shared responsibility, and the absence of riba, gharar, and maysir. In Takaful, participants contribute to a fund that is used to support members who experience losses, and it operates on a profit-sharing basis rather than a risk-transfer model.
 - Scholars who support Takaful argue that it meets the community's needs without violating Islamic principles.
3. **Necessity (Darura):**
 - In some cases, life insurance might be considered permissible under the principle of darura, which allows exceptions in cases of necessity. For example, if life insurance is required by law or is essential for the financial stability of a family, some scholars might permit it under specific conditions.

Given the diverse opinions, the permissibility of life insurance depends on the interpretation of Islamic principles by scholars, the type of insurance policy, and the context in which it is used. While traditional life insurance is considered haram by many scholars due to its association with riba, gharar, and maysir, alternatives like Takaful provide a Sharia-compliant option that is widely accepted.

Question 3 : How does Islam address destiny and free will?

In addressing destiny and free will The Qur'an and Sunnah follow a middle path between the two extremes of unrestricted free will and fatalism.

- Belief in destiny, or God's power in determining events, is one of the six articles of faith in Islam. However, Islam also notes that **fate, destiny, or divine decree do not mean that people have no agency or free will**. Ultimately, everyone is responsible for their own actions and choices.
- The early Muslims used to say in their prayers, *"O God, if You have decreed me among the damned, then wipe it away from me and affirm me among the blessed."*
- In other words, **while Allah has willed all matters in an absolute and unchanging sense, there are portions of destiny that He allowed to be influenced by our actions**.
- The Qur'an and Sunnah follow a middle path between the extremes of complete free will and complete pre-determination. God knows about all things before they happen, and He decrees them into existence with limitless power—but He also delegated a share of agency to human beings in order to fairly test their deeds, which will be evaluated on the Day of Judgment.

[OPTION 2]

AI-Generated

Islam addresses the concepts of destiny (known as *qadar* or *taqdeer*) and free will in a way that emphasizes the balance between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. The relationship between these two concepts is complex and nuanced, and understanding it requires considering various aspects of Islamic theology.

1. Divine Destiny (Qadar)

- **God's Knowledge and Decree:** In Islam, it is believed that God (Allah) has complete and perfect knowledge of everything that has happened, is happening, and will happen. This encompasses every event and action in the universe. God's knowledge is absolute, and nothing occurs without His will or decree.
- **Predestination:** The concept of *qadar* also implies that God has predetermined certain aspects of creation, including key events in the lives of individuals. This doesn't negate human actions but suggests that God has a master plan in which all things happen according to His wisdom and purpose.

2. Free Will and Human Responsibility

- **Human Agency:** Despite God's knowledge and decree, Islam asserts that humans have free will. They are capable of making choices and are responsible for their actions. This is emphasized in numerous verses of the Quran that command people to do good, avoid evil, and take responsibility for their deeds.
- **Moral Responsibility:** Because humans have the ability to choose, they are held accountable for their actions. On the Day of Judgment, individuals will be judged based on the choices they made, and they will be rewarded or punished accordingly. This accountability reinforces the idea that humans have genuine free will.

3. Balancing Destiny and Free Will

- **Theological Schools:** Different Islamic theological schools have approached the balance between *qadar* and free will in various ways. The Ash'ari school, one of the most prominent in Sunni Islam, argues for a middle path known as *acquisition* (*kasb*). According to this view, God creates actions, but humans "acquire" them through their choices, making them responsible.
- **Human Effort and Divine Will:** Islam teaches that while humans must strive to make the right choices and put in their best effort, the outcome is ultimately in God's hands. This is why Muslims often say "Insha'Allah" (if God wills) when talking about future actions, acknowledging that while they have intentions and plans, the final result is determined by God.

4. Quranic Perspective

- **Verses on Free Will:** The Quran contains many verses that emphasize human free will and accountability. For example, "Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves" (Quran 13:11). This verse underscores the importance of human initiative and responsibility.

- **Verses on Destiny:** Conversely, the Quran also affirms God's control over all things, as in "And no soul can ever die except by Allah's leave and at an appointed term" (Quran 3:145), indicating that certain events are predestined.

5. Practical Implications for Muslims

- **Trust in God (Tawakkul):** Muslims are encouraged to trust in God's plan while making every possible effort to do what is right. This balance between trust in God and human effort is central to the Islamic way of life.
- **Acceptance of Outcomes:** When things don't go as planned, Muslims are taught to accept the outcome as part of God's wisdom, understanding that everything happens for a reason, even if that reason is not immediately apparent.

Islamic teachings on destiny and free will reflect a sophisticated understanding that attempts to harmonize divine omnipotence with human moral responsibility. While God's knowledge and decree encompass all events, humans are still endowed with free will, and their choices matter. This balance encourages Muslims to live righteously, trust in God's wisdom, and accept the outcomes of their efforts with patience and faith.

Question 4 : Does an IV injection break my fast?

[OPTION 1]

AI-Generated

The primary consideration for breaking the fast is whether something enters the body through a natural orifice and provides nourishment. The injection of substances through an intravenous (IV) line raises specific questions, depending on the type of substance administered.

Two scenarios of IV injections:

1. **Nutritional IV (like glucose, saline, or vitamins):** These are generally considered to break the fast, as they provide nourishment to the body, which is one of the main purposes of fasting. The fast is meant to prevent anything that nourishes the body from entering.
2. **Non-nutritional IV (like medications):** Opinions among scholars vary on this. Many scholars from different Islamic schools of thought consider non-nutritional injections (such as painkillers or antibiotics) as permissible and not breaking the fast, since they do not provide nourishment or enter through a natural orifice (mouth, nose, etc.).

In conclusion:

- **Nutritional injections** (e.g., glucose, saline) are likely to break the fast.
- **Non-nutritional injections** (e.g., antibiotics, painkillers) are generally considered permissible and do not break the fast, though it's recommended to check with a trusted scholar for a specific ruling based on your school of thought.

If you are undergoing medical treatment, it's advisable to consult with your doctor and religious authority for guidance, particularly if fasting could affect your health.

[OPTION 2]

Scholar-Authored

Injections do not break the fast. IV fluids do not nullify the fast. It must be noted that one cannot take intravenous fluids for a 'boost' e.g. to rehydrate oneself or to receive glucose whilst fasting. A person receiving intravenous fluids is generally too ill for fasting and should keep the missed fasts when he or she is well.

It is permissible to give medicine by means of intramuscular or intravenous injections for one who is fasting during the day in Ramadan, but it is not permissible for one who is fasting to be given a nutritional injection during the day in Ramadan, because that comes under the same ruling as consuming food or drink, so taking these injections is regarded as a kind of loophole in Ramadan. If it is possible to give the intramuscular or intravenous injection at night, that is preferable.

Question 5 : Why do women receive less in inheritance than men?

[OPTION 1]

Scholar-Authored

Gender differences in inheritance law exist within a larger system of gendered rights and duties laid out in Islamic law. While men receive greater shares of inheritance in certain situations, they also have greater financial responsibilities within this system. For instance, a man is financially responsible for providing for his wife and children, while a wife is not obligated to spend anything on her husband, her household, or anyone else.

Additionally, if inheritance laws are examined comprehensively, women inherit less than men in only four instances, while they inherit more than men in 16 instances, and equal to men in 10.

It is notable that Islam's declaration of inheritance for women preceded the Western world by a millennium, where until the end of the sixteenth century, women were essentially denied the right to inherit property.

[OPTION 2]

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In Islamic law, women often receive less in inheritance than men under certain circumstances, but the reasoning behind this is rooted in the broader framework of Islamic obligations and responsibilities. The difference in inheritance shares is related to the distinct roles and financial responsibilities assigned to men and women in Islamic society.

Key Points Explaining the Distribution:

1. **Financial Responsibility of Men:** In Islam, men are generally required to shoulder the financial burdens of the family. A husband or father is responsible for providing for his wife, children, and sometimes extended family members. Women, on the other hand, are not required to spend their wealth on family responsibilities. A woman's wealth is entirely her own, and she is under no obligation to spend it on her family unless she chooses to do so.
2. **No Financial Obligation for Women:** Since women are not obliged to provide for anyone financially, their inheritance is seen as supplementary to their wealth. Even if they inherit less, they are not expected to use this wealth to support others. In contrast, men must use their inheritance and income to fulfill their duties as providers.
3. **Fairness vs. Equality:** Islamic inheritance laws are based on fairness rather than strict equality. The share differences are part of a broader system in which financial responsibilities are unequally distributed. Men receive more because they have greater financial obligations, while women receive less because they are not responsible for family expenditures.
4. **Examples of Inheritance Shares:** The most commonly cited rule is that a son inherits twice as much as a daughter. For example, in the case of siblings, a brother will receive twice the share of a sister. However, there are situations where women inherit equal or more than men, such as when a woman inherits as a mother, wife, or even a half-sister under certain circumstances.

Context of Roles: Islamic inheritance law is part of a broader social system where men and women have different roles. The financial rights and duties are distributed in a way that aims to balance these obligations, with men being responsible for their family's welfare and maintenance.

A Broader Perspective: The inheritance system may seem unequal at first glance, but it reflects the complementary roles within the family structure, where the financial obligations are primarily placed on men. Women benefit from the financial support of their male relatives while retaining full control over their own financial assets.

This perspective emphasizes that Islamic inheritance laws are not solely about dividing wealth equally but ensuring that the needs of all parties are addressed in a way that considers broader social and financial responsibilities.

Question 6 : Can you do wudu with socks on?

[OPTION 1]

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Yes, you can perform **wudu** with socks on under certain conditions, through an act known as **masah (wiping)** over the socks.

This practice is permissible in Islam if the socks meet specific criteria. Here's what you need to know:

Conditions for Masah Over Socks:

1. **Material of the Socks:**
 - The socks must be thick enough to cover the skin and not be see-through.
 - Traditional leather socks (**khuff**) are always permissible, but fabric socks are acceptable if they meet the above condition.
2. **State of Purity:**
 - You must have been in a state of complete wudu before putting on the socks.
3. **Duration of Wiping:**
 - For residents: You can wipe over the socks for **24 hours** after the first time you break your wudu.
 - For travelers: You can wipe over the socks for **72 hours**.
4. **How to Perform Masah:**
 - Wet your hands and wipe over the top part of each sock, from toes to the ankle, using your fingers. Wiping the soles or taking off the socks is not required.

When Masah Is Not Permissible:

- If the socks do not cover the area of the foot that is required to be washed in wudu (up to the ankles).
- If the socks are torn or too thin, exposing the skin.
- If you lose your state of purity through a major ritual impurity (**janabah**), you must remove the socks and perform a full **ghusl**.

If these conditions are met, wiping over socks during wudu is valid and in accordance with Islamic jurisprudence.

[OPTION 2]

Scholar-Authored

You can do wudu with socks on if you apply these four conditions:

1. **That they should have been put on when one was in a state of purity**, i.e., when one has wudu. The evidence for that is what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said to al-Mughirah ibn Shu'bah: "Don't worry, because I put them on when I was clean."
2. **That the khufuf (leather slippers which cover the ankle) or socks should be pure**. If they are impure then it is not permissible to wipe over them. The evidence for that is that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) led his Companions in prayer one day wearing shoes, which he took off whilst he was praying. He said that Jibril had told him that there was something dirty/impure on them. This was narrated by Ahmad from the hadith of Abu Sa'id al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him) in his Musnad. This indicates that it is not permissible to pray wearing anything that is impure, because if the impure thing is wiped over, the person will be contaminated by that impurity, so he cannot be considered to be pure.
3. **They may be wiped over when one is purifying oneself from minor ritual impurity (i.e., doing wudu after passing wind, urine or stools), not when one is in a state of major ritual impurity following sexual activity or when ghusl is required**. The evidence for that is the hadith of Safwan ibn 'Assal (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: "The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) commanded us, when we were travelling, not to remove our khufuf for three days and three nights, except in the case of janabah. But we could keep them on and wipe over them in the case of stools, urine and sleeping." This was narrated by Ahmad from the hadith of Safwan ibn 'Assal (may Allah be pleased with him) in his Musnad. So the condition is that wiping the socks may be done when purifying oneself (doing wudu)

from minor ritual impurity, and it is not permissible in the case of major ritual impurity, because of the hadith which we have mentioned here.

4. **That the wiping may be done within the time specified by Shari'ah , which is one day and one night in the case of one who is not travelling , and three days and three nights in the case of one who is traveling.** This is because of the hadith of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: "The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stated one day and one night for the one who is not traveling, and three days and three nights for the one who is traveling, i.e., for wiping over the khufuf." This was narrated by Muslim. This period starts from the first time one wipes over the socks when doing wudu after some minor ritual impurity, and it ends twenty-four hours later for the one who is not traveling, and seventy-two hours later for the one who is traveling. So if we assume that a person purifies himself for Fajr prayer on Tuesday and remains tahir (pure, i.e., keeps his wudu) until 'Isha prayer on Tuesday evening, then he sleeps and wakes up to pray Fajr on Wednesday, and he wipes his socks at five o'clock zawali time , then the period begins from 5 a.m. on Wednesday and lasts until 5 a.m. on Thursday. If we assume that he wiped his socks before 5 a.m then he can pray Fajr on Thursday with this wiping and pray as much as he wants as long as he remains tahir, because according to the most correct scholarly opinion, wudu is not broken when the time period for wiping over the socks expires. That is because the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not set a time limit for taharah, rather he set a time limit for wiping over the socks. Once that time limit expires, one cannot wipe over the socks again, but if a person remains in a state of taharah then his taharah is still valid, because this is what is implied by the shar'i evidence, and whatever is proven by shar'i evidence cannot be invalidated unless there is further shar'i evidence to that effect. There is no evidence to suggest that wudu is broken when the time limit for wiping over the socks expires, because what the basic principle is that he remains as he is (i.e., tahir) until it becomes apparent that this is no longer the case.

Question 7: My husband is against my wishes to be an organ donor.

What should I do?

[OPTION 1]

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This is a sensitive and deeply personal issue, especially when it involves religious beliefs and familial harmony. In Islam, the permissibility of organ donation varies based on interpretation, but many scholars and organizations now support it under specific conditions. Here's how you might approach the situation:

1. Understand the Islamic Perspective

- **Consult reliable Islamic scholarship:** Many Islamic scholars and organizations, such as the Islamic Fiqh Council and the Fatwa Committees in various countries, have stated that organ donation is permissible if it saves lives and is done without financial gain. However, conditions and interpretations may vary.
- **Consider the principle of saving lives:** In Islam, saving one life is akin to saving all of humanity (Quran 5:32). This principle is often cited in support of organ donation.

2. Communicate with Your Husband

- **Share your intentions and beliefs:** Explain why organ donation aligns with your understanding of Islamic values and why it's important to you.
- **Address his concerns:** Ask him to share his reasons for opposition. Is it due to religious interpretation, cultural beliefs, or personal discomfort? Understanding his perspective may help you find common ground.

3. Seek Guidance Together

- **Consult a trusted religious scholar or imam:** Engaging with a knowledgeable and respected authority might help bridge the gap between your views and your husband's concerns.
- **Read Islamic rulings together:** Look into fatwas and discussions from credible Islamic bodies about organ donation.

4. Make Your Wishes Known Legally

- If you firmly decide to be an organ donor, you may document your decision legally. In many jurisdictions, individuals can register as organ donors regardless of spousal consent.
- Discuss with a lawyer or legal expert how to include this decision in a will or other binding document in accordance with local laws.

5. Consider Patience and Prayer

- If this disagreement causes tension, take time to pray for guidance (dua) and resolution. Trust that Allah will provide clarity and peace.
- Sometimes, showing understanding and patience can lead to a change in hearts over time.

Ultimately, the decision is deeply personal and requires balancing your own convictions with maintaining harmony in your marriage. Seeking mutual understanding and the counsel of Islamic scholars may help you both navigate this sensitive topic.

[OPTION 2]

Scholar-Authored

Anas narrated that the Prophet (upon him be blessings and peace) said: “None of you believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.” [Tirmidhi]

It is your right to donate your organs after your death. However, this is a sensitive topic.

Please be patient with your husband, and don’t expect him to change his opinion overnight. He does not need a religious reason to oppose your decision. Ignoring his wishes would hurt him, just as him ignoring yours would hurt you.

Try to put yourself in his shoes. See if that will help soften your stance towards him. For the sake of a harmonious marriage, it is in your best interests to come to a mutually satisfying decision. This will take patience, dua, and excellent character.

Question 8: Can I work at a restaurant that serves alcohol?

[OPTION 1]

Scholar-Authored

It is not only considered haram (forbidden) to consume what is haram (unlawful), but it is also haram to promote, condone, aid, or assist the same. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) did not stop at prohibiting the drinking of alcohol, whether much or little, but he also forbade any trading in it, even with non-Muslims.

It is not permissible for a Muslim to import or export alcoholic beverages, or to produce, serve, handle or sell them. In connection with alcohol, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) cursed ten categories of people saying: “Truly, Allah has cursed khamr (alcoholic beverages) and has cursed the one who produces it, the one for whom it is produced, the one who drinks it, the one who serves it, the one who carries it, the one for whom it is carried, the one who sells it, the one who earns from the sale of it, the one who buys it, and the one for whom it is bought.” (At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah)

Income in compensation for working for stores that sell alcohol is permissible provided that the work itself does not include handling of alcoholic beverages, because handling these liquors is not permissible and consequently payment received for such a prohibited action is not earned lawfully from the Shari’ah point of view.

It becomes worse if the purchasers of alcohol are Muslims because alcoholic drinks are not considered property for a Muslim, and the only action that should be taken with them is to destroy them and drain them in the sewer, whereas for non-Muslims (even in a Muslim land and under the Islamic laws) alcoholic beverages are considered property protected by the Islamic law.

Eating in halal restaurants that sell alcohol is permissible as long as you don't share the same table with a person who drinks. It is, however, shameful for such restaurants to offer halal meat side by side with alcoholic beverages.

[OPTION 2]

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Working at a restaurant that serves alcohol involves nuanced considerations in Islam. The permissibility largely depends on the specific nature of your work and the extent of your involvement with alcohol. Here's a breakdown of the Islamic perspective and some possible approaches:

1. Islamic Perspective on Alcohol

- **Alcohol Prohibition:** In Islam, consuming alcohol is strictly forbidden (haram) as it is clearly prohibited in the Quran (Surah Al-Ma'idah 5:90-91).
- **Facilitating Alcohol:** Many scholars extend this prohibition to earning money through the sale, promotion, or handling of alcohol, as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) cursed not only the one who drinks but also the one who serves it, sells it, buys it, and others involved in its production or trade (Hadith in Sunan Abi Dawood, 3674).

2. Nature of Your Job

- If your **primary role** at the restaurant does not involve handling, serving, or selling alcohol (e.g., working as a cook or dishwasher), some scholars might consider it permissible, though not ideal.
- If you are **directly serving or handling alcohol**, most Islamic rulings deem this impermissible, as it involves direct facilitation of something haram.

3. Consider Alternative Employment

- **Seek halal income:** Islam places a strong emphasis on earning through lawful (halal) means. If possible, seek employment in an environment where you are not involved in anything prohibited.
- **Make dua for provision:** Trust in Allah's provision (rizq) and pray for guidance and opportunities that align with Islamic principles.

4. Temporary Exceptions

- **Necessity and circumstances:** If your financial situation is dire and you have no other means of earning, some scholars may consider it permissible as a temporary measure until you find halal employment. This is based on the principle of necessity (darura) in Islamic jurisprudence.

5. Practical Steps

- **Look for ways to minimize involvement:** If leaving the job is not immediately feasible, try to adjust your role to avoid directly handling or serving alcohol.
- **Seek guidance from a local scholar:** Every individual's situation is unique. Consulting a knowledgeable and trustworthy Islamic scholar who understands your circumstances can provide tailored advice.

While Islam encourages Muslims to strive for halal income, it also recognizes human challenges and struggles. Balance your immediate needs with your long-term commitment to living according to Islamic principles, and trust in Allah to guide you to a better path.

Question 9: Can I pray fajr after sunrise?

[OPTION 1]

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In Islam, the **Fajr prayer (Salat al-Fajr)** has a specific time window, and it is strongly recommended to pray within this prescribed time. However, if you miss it for a valid reason, such as oversleeping or forgetting, it is still permissible to pray it after sunrise as a **make-up prayer (qada)**. Here's a detailed explanation:

1. The Prescribed Time for Fajr

- **Start of Fajr time:** Begins at **true dawn (al-Fajr al-Sadiq)**, which is the appearance of a horizontal line of light on the horizon.
- **End of Fajr time:** Ends at **sunrise**. Performing Fajr prayer within this time is the most virtuous and is considered praying "on time."

2. Praying Fajr After Sunrise

- If you miss Fajr due to **oversleeping** or **forgetting**, it is permissible to pray it as soon as you remember or wake up. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:
- *"Whoever forgets a prayer or sleeps and misses it, let him pray it when he remembers, for there is no expiation for it other than this."*
(Sahih Muslim, 684)
- **Deliberately delaying** Fajr beyond its time without a valid reason is sinful, as it neglects the obligation of praying on time. However, even in this case, it is still necessary to pray it later and repent for the delay.

3. How to Pray Fajr After Sunrise

- Perform the **two rak'ahs of the Fajr Sunnah** first (if you usually pray them).
- Then perform the **two rak'ahs of Fard Fajr** prayer.
- If you're pressed for time, prioritize the **Fard prayer**, as it is obligatory.

4. Seeking Forgiveness and Improving Timeliness

- **Repentance:** If the delay was intentional, sincerely repent and resolve to pray on time in the future.
- **Practical Steps:** Set multiple alarms, ask family members to wake you, or take other measures to ensure you don't miss Fajr.

Praying Fajr on time is of great spiritual significance, but if you miss it for any reason, do not skip it entirely. Pray it as soon as possible, ask Allah for forgiveness, and strive to be punctual in your prayers moving forward.

[OPTION 2]

Scholar-Authored

It is not permissible to perform the Fajr prayer at sunrise. If you wake up at sunrise and have missed the obligatory Fajr prayer, do not pray at sunrise. Instead, you should wait approximately ten minutes or a third of an hour after sunrise, then

perform the sunna of Fajr along with the Fajr Fard (obligatory).

This was also experienced by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions during a journey. Some of the companions suggested stopping to rest at the end of the night. The Prophet said, “I fear that you may miss the prayer.” Bilal said, “I will wake you,” and they all rested. However, Bilal leaned against his camel and fell asleep until the Prophet woke up after sunrise. The Prophet said, “O Bilal, what about what you said?” Bilal replied, “I have never been overcome by sleep like that before.” The Prophet said, “Indeed, Allah took your souls when He wished and returned them when He wished. O Bilal, get up and call the people to prayer.” They performed ablution, and when the sun had risen higher and became bright, they prayed.
[Bukhari]

This incident indicates that it is not permissible to pray at sunrise because the Prophet waited until the sun was clear and bright, and there are also prohibitions against this [ʿAyni, Umdat al-Qari]

The Prophet Muhammad instructed us (the Companions) not to pray or bury our dead during three times: “When the sun rises until it is fully up, when it is at its zenith until it begins to decline, and when it starts to set until it has fully set.” [Muslim]

The prohibition addressed to the Companions extends to all members of the community.

Question 10: How can I gain khushu while praying?

[OPTION 1]

Scholar-Authored

The perfection of prayer comes from following the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Outwardly, this means following the Prophetic teachings [with regards to actions]. Inwardly, this means embodying the Prophetic state: having presence with, and remembrance of, Allah Most High.

This has 3 aspects:

- 1) During prayer.** This is achieved by focusing on what we are saying and what we are doing. One should know the meaning of what is said, and one should bring to mind why they are praying to begin with.
- 2) When you begin.** Focus. Gather your thoughts before you step into prayer. Pay attention to your intention. The significant action is not that you are praying, it is that you are praying to Allah.
- 3) Outside of prayer.** Have presence of heart with Allah outside of prayer, and you will have presence within it. Strive to keep your tongue moist with the remembrance of Allah in all that you do.

[OPTION 2]

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Khushu (focus and humility) in prayer is an essential aspect of Salah (prayer) in Islam, as it helps connect the worshipper with Allah and makes the prayer more meaningful. Achieving khushu requires effort, mindfulness, and practice. Here are some practical tips:

1. Understand the Meaning of Salah

- **Reflect on the words:** Learn the meanings of the Arabic phrases and Surahs you recite in Salah. Understanding what you are saying deepens your connection to Allah.
- **Focus on Allah's greatness:** Remind yourself that you are standing before your Creator, the Most Merciful, the All-Knowing.
- **Study Allah's names and attributes:** Meditate on Allah's names and qualities, which can help you feel awe and humility during prayer.

2. Prepare Mentally and Physically

- **Perform Wudu with mindfulness:** Treat your ablution (wudu) as a moment to cleanse not just physically but spiritually, preparing yourself to stand before Allah.
- **Choose a quiet and clean place:** Minimize distractions by praying in a tranquil environment where you won't be disturbed.
- **Wear clean and modest clothing:** Dressing well for prayer can help create a sense of importance and reverence.

3. Eliminate Distractions

- **Set aside worldly thoughts:** Take a moment before beginning your prayer to clear your mind. Remind yourself that nothing is more important than standing before Allah.
- **Silence your devices:** Ensure your phone or any other distractions are turned off or put away during Salah.
- **Pray in the early hours:** Praying as soon as the time for Salah begins can help you focus without the stress of daily commitments.

4. Slow Down and Focus on Each Action

- **Recite calmly:** Don't rush through the prayer. Slow and deliberate recitation allows you to reflect on the words and their meanings.
- **Pause between actions:** Take a brief moment of reflection in each position (e.g., bowing, prostration) to deepen your awareness of Allah.
- **Visualize standing before Allah:** Imagine standing in front of Allah on the Day of Judgment, presenting your prayer.

5. Engage Your Heart

- **Personalize your dua:** When making supplications, speak to Allah as though you are confiding in Him. Share your gratitude, fears, and hopes.
- **Cultivate gratitude:** Reflect on Allah's blessings in your life and how prayer is an opportunity to thank Him.
- **Cry or feel emotional:** Allow yourself to feel moved by the verses you recite or the connection you're making with Allah.

6. Practice Mindfulness Outside of Prayer

- **Avoid sin:** Sins can weigh heavily on the heart and hinder spiritual focus. Strive for repentance and righteousness.
- **Be consistent with dhikr:** Regularly remembering Allah (dhikr) throughout the day can help you maintain a state of mindfulness during Salah.
- **Simplify your life:** Reducing unnecessary busyness or attachment to worldly matters can free your mind to focus on Allah.

7. Make Dua for Khushu

- Regularly ask Allah for khushu in your prayers. A recommended dua from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is: *"O Allah, I seek refuge in You from a heart that does not humble itself."*

Khushu in prayer is a journey that takes time, consistency, and sincerity. Strive to improve gradually, and trust that Allah rewards every effort you make to strengthen your connection with Him.