JCSS Journal of Cyberspace Studies
eISSN: 2588-5502
http://jcss.ut.ac.ir
University of Tehran

The engagement of *Hawzeh* media with Artificial Intelligence as a modern technology

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Article Info

Original article

Main Object: Media

Received: 23 November 2025
Revised: 01 December 2025
Accepted: 01 December 2025
Published online: 17 December 2025

Keywords:
artificial intelligence,
Hawzeh members,
media,
religion,
technology.

Abstract

Background: In Iran, following the introduction of modern technologies, various social groups have responded to them, among whom "Tolab" constitute one category. Due to their religious authority within Iranian society, seminarians exert both direct and indirect influence on people's social lives.
Aims: This study aims to explore how *Hawzeh* members engage with artificial intelligence (AI) as a manifestation of modern technology, by examining *Hawzeh* media such as journals and news agencies, and to explain its relationship with modernity and technological application approaches.
Methodology: 122 texts from *Hawzeh* media over a two-year period were selected and analyzed using thematic analysis. Ultimately, three main categories were identified: "Understanding the Nature of Artificial Intelligence among *Hawzeh* Members", "The Relationship between Power and Artificial Intelligence among *Hawzeh* Members", and "The Operational Attention of the *Hawzeh* to Artificial Intelligence".
Findings: *Hawzeh* media perceive AI as having a variable nature, which can be utilized depending on the intention, design, and use by its users.
Conclusion: The experience of the People of the *Hawzeh* with AI demonstrates that the systematic form of religion can also be integrated with technology as a product of modern science, because it is not entirely anti-modern, nor is it modern and subjective in the sense of defining its existence solely as a specific mode of being.

Cite this article: Alikhani Z, Malekmohammadi H, Gholami F. (2026). "The engagement of *Hawzeh* media with Artificial Intelligence as a modern technology". *Cyberspace Studies*. 10(1): 257-279. doi: https://doi.org/10.22059/jcss.2025.406840.1206.

Website: https://jcss.ut.ac.ir/| Email: jcss@ut.ac.ir |
EISSN: 2588-5502
Publisher: University of Tehran

Cyberspace Studies, Vol 10, No 1, January 2026

1. Introduction

"Artifacts" refer to the physical products or signs of human activity. These objects, due to their tangibility, are significant and serve as materials for retrospective analysis. Artifacts are typically regarded as symbols of earlier aspects of culture or social activity, and their study—as part of material culture—contributes to a deeper understanding of culture (Woodward, 2018).

Discussions about "technique" and its specific requirements have existed across various cultures; although such engagements may have been direct and explicit, or indirect and implicit (Davari Ardakani, 1999: 185). Nevertheless, "technology" in its modern sense is considered a distinct and particular phenomenon. According to Heidegger (1994), modern technology is "something utterly different and therefore new", whose aim is to organize resources in a more flexible and efficient manner (Dreyfus & Spinosa, 2009: 5). Of course, this technology is defined in various ways depending on individuals' perspectives and understandings.

A group of scholars conceptualize technology as "tools". They view technology as the result of the convergence of components such as hardware, humanware, infoware, and orgware, adopting a managerial perspective toward it (Sharif, 1995, Quated in Taghavi, 2012: 56). Others define it as the "application of tools". However, it must be noted that not every use of tools should be equated with technology; rather, such use must be conscious and purposeful. Another group introduces technology akin to *Gestell*, considering it to possess a distinct nature and specific prerequisites (Taghavi, 2012).

Individuals also behave in accordance with a range of these perspectives when encountering and utilizing technology. Yet, which perspective becomes dominant within a society, state, or culture is not merely limited to purely technical or engineering-related factors. Rather, such choices are fundamentally linked to power. In other words, more powerful individuals are likely able to alter or influence others' outlooks (Acemoglu & Johnson, 2023: 37). One of the institutions that significantly shapes culture is religion.

In many societies, the institution of religion functions as a regulator of cultural and social norms. Its encounter with technology often has multiple dimensions: on the one hand, it may respond to new developments with resistance and caution; on the other hand, by offering new interpretations of the technological domain, it can enable the integration of technology into religious life (Szerszynski, 2005). Therefore, religious societies are constantly engaged in complex evaluative processes, as they must determine how to approach emerging technologies. For example, People of the Book such as Muslims, using the Qur'an—which they regard as a divine text—formulate norms and guidelines that shape their individual and collective lives. Thus, sacred scriptures influence their relationship with technologies such as

artificial intelligence, and shape the ways they approach it as a guiding framework for life (Campbell, 2010).

In Iran, following the introduction of modern technologies, various social groups have responded to them, among whom *Tolab* constitute one category. Due to their religious authority within Iranian society, seminarians exert both direct and indirect influence on people's social lives. In other words, their value judgments regarding various issues affect broader societal outcomes. Therefore, their perceptions of different technologies can influence the development or application of such technologies (Nasiri, 2019: 236). In this regard, studying *Hawzeh* - as a structured organization comprising seminarians, the state, and society—can reveal how the institution of religion encounters modern technologies.

One of the contemporary technologies that has become a subject of discussion in various circles—including among seminary scholars—is the issue of "artificial intelligence" and its related components. Artificial intelligence has prompted exchanges of views and rethinking of the political, intellectual, social, and ideological foundations of societies. Some, such as "Transhumanists", predict that AI agents will replace human beings (Coeckelbergh, 2022). Others think that "Concerns about AI overwhelming human agency are largely misplaced. Just as humanity has managed previous technological revolutions— including writing, mechanization, and computing— AI will be integrated and regulated according to human needs and ethical considerations" (Shahghasemi, 2025). These debates also appear in the context of society's relationship with AI. Some individuals, attributing data bias to AI systems, view it as a tool for reproducing and reinforcing social power, while others describe it as a liberating instrument for marginalized groups (Coeckelbergh, 2022). People of *Hawzeh* have likewise attempted to adopt various positions in relation to this phenomenon and to raise new questions regarding it.

This study seeks to evaluate this issue by analyzing the themes present in domestic *Hawzeh* media outlets such as *Pasdār-e Eslām*, *Ofogh-e Hawzeh*, and *Hawzeh News Agency*, aiming to answer the question: How have Iran's *Hawzeh* media approached artificial intelligence as a modern technology?

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Approaches to engaging with technology

Andrew Feenberg, in his typology of approaches to technology, identifies three principal clusters: the instrumental, the substantive, and the critical. The instrumental theory—arguably the most widespread perspective—conceives of technologies as objects that serve the intentions and uses of their operators. From this viewpoint, technology is neutral and lacks inherent qualities. In other words, technology is regarded as fluid and adaptable (Feenberg, 2002). This conception

emerges from reflections on the nature, function, and context of technology and largely shows how technology tends to remain stable over time (Glazebrook, 2006, Quated in Boroumand & Hosseini, 2015). Generally, the instrumental theory reflects a positive stance toward technology, one that expands human capacities and leads to improved living conditions. Under this framework, negative consequences are attributed to the improper use of technology by its users (Fransen et al., 2016).

In contrast, the substantive approach rejects the neutrality of technology. Most strongly associated with the writings of Jacques Ellul and Martin Heidegger, this perspective treats technology as a force that transcends the intentions of its creators and ultimately shapes their lives. Technology thus generates its own cultural order (Feenberg, 2002).

For example, Ellul (1964: 14) argues: "Technology has become autonomous." Similarly, Heidegger (1994: 8) asserts: "... therefore, technology is not a mere means. Technology is a mode of revealing. When we pay heed to this, an entirely different domain regarding the essence of technology opens itself to us—namely, the realm of revealing: the setting-into-work of truth."

Positioned between the instrumental and substantive perspectives, Feenberg (2002) proposes a third approach: the critical theory of technology. This view aligns closely with his Frankfurt School–inspired philosophical orientation. The critical approach resembles the substantive view in that it does not reduce technology to its observable form and recognizes its deeper socio-cultural implications. However, unlike the substantive approach, it does not posit a fixed or monolithic technological essence. Feenberg (2002) argues that the manifestation of modernity may vary across civilizations and cultures, and is not confined to the current Western, capitalist configuration. Human societies, therefore, are not passive or entirely determined by technology; human agency plays a central role in shaping technological development.

According to Feenberg (2002), through the intelligent appropriation of technology, cultural and social values can be preserved, allowing for the construction of an indigenous civilization in opposition to Western modernity. Thus, modern technology can be mobilized to safeguard culture and reinforce local value systems (Feenberg, 1991, Quated in Boroumand & Hosseini, 2015). Correspondingly, in contrast to the four primary dimensions of technical action in capitalist societies—decontextualization, reductionism, autonomization, and positioning—technology may be reoriented through a "secondary instrumentalization" involving embodiment, vocation, aesthetic investment, and praxis. Such alternative, culturally situated rationality becomes possible through these practices (Feenberg, 1990).

Albert Borgmann, similar to Feenberg, distinguishes between instrumental and substantive approaches, but unlike Feenberg,

designates the third approach as "pluralism". Borgmann argues that "pluralism perceives the entire complex network of countervailing forces and their transformations. Against this picture, any large and grand design must appear as a distortion of reality" (Borgmann, 1984: 11). In other words, the pluralist approach simultaneously accepts both instrumental and substantive characteristics of technology, yet refrains from addressing the validity of either or explaining how they might be reconciled.

2.2. Artificial intelligence and religion

Definitions of artificial intelligence (AI) are diverse. Some offer broad characterizations that capture certain aspects of AI while overlooking others. Nonetheless, AI may be defined as "a system's ability to correctly interpret external data, to learn from such data, and to use those learnings to achieve specific goals and tasks through flexible adaptation" (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019: 17, Quated in Singler, 2025).

Today, AI is employed across numerous domains of human life—from the most superficial layers such as online shopping and searching, to more profound realms including ethical decision-making, the performance of religious practices, and the shaping of human affairs that were traditionally situated within the authority of religious institutions. Given this expansive reach, scholars have sought to develop various theoretical and scientific frameworks to facilitate interaction between religion and AI (Umbrello, 2023).

In this regard, Singler and Watts (2024) identifies three domains in which, drawing on an anthropological framing, the relationship between AI and religion can be observed within the field of religious studies. In the first entanglement, AI and religion are positioned in a "contested" relationship. That is, AI generates problems and consequences for both society and religion that faith traditions are compelled to address and mitigate.

The second entanglement refers to the "interaction" between AI and religion. The discourse surrounding AI, by promoting a notion of freedom embedded within it, contributes to the emergence of new religious movements that—drawing on the cultural and religious backgrounds of users—also create conditions for the expansion of AI itself (ibid). From this perspective, AI can serve as an empowering and revitalizing force for contemporary religion.

The third entanglement refers to the "struggle" between AI and religion. As AI is framed as a potentially intelligent entity, it raises questions about the notion of "personhood"—questions that religions have long sought to answer based on their theological understandings of the human being. In effect, engagement with AI prompts religious traditions to revisit their foundational concepts (Singler, 2018). Overall, in the second and third entanglements, AI can assume a revitalizing role: issues emerging in public discourse that are inspired by AI can, in

turn, lead to renewed attention to existing religious conversations on topics such as human identity, creation, ethics, and personhood.

In response to Singler's typology, King-Ho Leung introduces an additional category. He offers a critical interpretation of AI as a philosophical concept that exemplifies a secular understanding of thought. One of the fundamental differences between AI and conventional understandings of "thinking" is that AI does not require "life" as a precondition; in other words, the possibility of "thought without life" is assumed. Accordingly, the concept of thinking in AI is tied to rationalistic or computational modes of cognition and positioned in opposition to other existential forms of thought—such as spiritual or contemplative thinking. In this sense, the use of AI, given this particular nature, leads to a secularization and disenchantment of thought, distancing it from the realm of the religious (Leung, 2019).

In this same direction, Singler identifies yet another entanglement in her work. The fourth entanglement refers to the "creation" of new forms of religiosity resulting from the interaction between AI and religion. Here, AI—through its intersections with secularism and atheism—becomes a kind of ritual or creed with roots in religious narratives, generating new forms of spiritual experience. Thus, even materialist interpretations of AI may be viewed as a form of contemporary religion that can shape the trajectory of AI development. More generally, Singler (2022), drawing on concepts such as "implicit religion", argues that even the idea of the "end of religion" through AI may itself become a new form of religiosity.

3. Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative content analysis approach. "By qualitative research we mean any type of inquiry that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other forms of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 2014). Thematic analysis, one of the principal qualitative research methods, is used to assess saturation during data collection. Its primary mode of identification is the examination of recurring patterns that emerge from analyzing extracted codes (Lapadat, 2010, cited in Sheikhzadeh & Bani Asad, 2020). In this article, thematic analysis was adopted to derive the dominant themes in media outlets associated with the *Hawzeh*.

Accordingly, in the first stage, the researcher familiarized herself with the data through repeated reading. In the second stage, initial codes were systematically generated, resulting in approximately 576 codes. The next step involved searching for themes which, following review and thematic mapping, were subsequently named and defined. Ultimately, three overarching themes were identified, each comprising several sub-themes. In the final stage, the analytical report was drafted, linking the themes to the research question and the study's theoretical framework. These stages follow the established phases of thematic

analysis: "familiarization with the data", "generating initial codes", "searching for themes", "reviewing themes", "defining and naming themes" and "producing the report" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 87).

To examine themes related to *Hawzeh* media engagement with artificial intelligence, three sources were selected as the study's sample. These sources include active and ongoing written platforms most closely affiliated with *Hawzeh*, situated within the domains of "news" and "print publications". Two of these—*Pasdār-e Eslām* and *Ofogh-e Ḥaweh*—are printed periodicals, while the third—*Hawzeh News Agency*—functions as an online news and content-production platform. The unit of analysis in this study is therefore the "news text or report".

For sampling, a census strategy was employed for *Pasdār-e Eslām* and *Ofogh-e Ḥawzeh*; that is, all items retrieved through searching the keyword "artificial intelligence" were included. For the *Hawzeh News Agency* website, a "purposeful random sampling" strategy was applied. This approach, used in qualitative research, enhances the credibility—rather than representativeness—of the data (Shaheen et al., 2018). To this end, search results generated through the keyword "artificial intelligence" were randomly displayed, and items were selected if they aligned with the conceptual focus of the study. The sampling time frame extended from 19 April 2023 to 19 June 2025. Ultimately, 33 items from *Ofogh-e Ḥawzeh*, 7 from *Pasdār-e Eslām*, and 82 from *Hawzeh News Agency* were selected.

4. Findings

Based on thematic analysis and after reviewing the extracted themes, three major themes were identified. In what follows, each theme and its sub-categories are explained.

4.1. Main themes

The main themes of this study—derived from the condensation of open and selective codes—form a triad: "Understanding the Nature of Artificial Intelligence among the People of the *Hawzeh*", "The Relationship Between Power and Artificial Intelligence among the People of the *Hawzeh*", and "The Operational Attention of the *Hawzeh* to Artificial Intelligence". These three themes are, in a sense, sequential. That is, the *Hawzeh*, based on its definition of the nature and dimensions of AI, shapes its relationship with AI on two levels: the level of power and the level of the *Hawzeh* itself.

Thus, when confronted with a technological phenomenon such as AI, the *Hawzeh* reflects on the technological object itself, the relationship of that object with the *Hawzeh*, and the relationship of that object with power (or the surrounding environment), and then seeks ways to utilize it. The following sections elaborate on the dimensions and sub-categories of each theme.

4.1.1. Understanding the nature of artificial intelligence among the People of the Hawzeh

This theme broadly attempts to capture how the People of the *Hawzeh* seek to understand AI. Two major sub-categories emerge under this theme, each with several dimensions: Definitions and conceptualizations of AI, and Limitations and challenges of AI.

a) Defining artificial intelligence

These materials attempt to explore various dimensions of AI as a concept. These dimensions include defining the nature of AI in relation to itself, in relation to technology, in relation to human beings, and in relation to the *Hawzeh*.

a1) The nature of artificial intelligence in relation to itself

Clergy have engaged in extensive theoretical and multidisciplinary engagement with artificial intelligence. They have conducted research, held scholarly meetings, and published academic materials in areas such as foundational sciences, AI theology, the philosophy of AI, *Fiqh* and AI, and philosophical studies of art and AI. They argue that one must avoid simplistic understandings of AI, because a deeper engagement helps neutralize its potential negative consequences. For this reason, they have sought to examine the nature of AI.

Members of the *Hawzeh* describe AI as a "machine" and "computer". While this machine may be autonomous and self-operating, the notions of *will* and *agency* must be approached cautiously. From the perspective of the *Hawzeh*, AI lacks will in the human sense—and this distinction sets it apart from human beings.

Yet, two differing perspectives exist among the People of the Hawzeh regarding AI's "intelligence". Some consider AI to be *thinking* and possessing a type of rational faculty, yet still devoid of will. In this view, AI is technology that has intelligence but lacks volition. In contrast, others deny that AI possesses genuine intelligence at all, understanding it instead as a system of patterns: "Even in the issue of *Taqlid -e- Avalieh* from a deceased *Marja*, many do not consider it valid—despite the deceased once being a fully qualified *Mojtahed*. How then can one grant epistemic authority to AI, which is not even sentient?"[1]

In line with these foundational characteristics, AI interacts broadly with all sciences and disciplines, functioning as an inherently interdisciplinary phenomenon: "AI has several features; the first is that it is a horizontal technology—it can be applied across all sciences and industries."[2] Beyond academic fields, AI is also present in everyday

1. *Ofogh-e Hozeh.* "Utilizing information technology is a prerequisite for fulfilling certain aspects of the message of the Supreme Leader". Science and Culture Group, Weekly, No. 840, May 18, 2025.
2. *Hawzah News Agency*. "Artificial intelligence technology is certainly directional".

life, indicating its wide reach:"All of us, knowingly or unknowingly, interact with AI."[1]

In defining AI, the concept of data plays a central role. From the perspective of the People of the *Hawzeh*, data is fundamentally intertwined with AI: "The components of AI begin with data. For example, if the audio of this session is converted into text, it becomes textual data; if a photo is taken, it becomes visual data, and so on."[2] AI decides and "thinks" through data. Therefore, by producing data and establishing rich information banks, one can manage AI: "To develop AI, we need enriched databases—which means we need both natural language experts and software specialists."[3] Consequently, the People of the *Hawzeh* emphasize that the *Hawzeh* must devote significant attention to data in order to manage AI effectively.

a2) The relationship of artificial intelligence with other technologies

AI can also be understood and defined in relation to other technologies. The People of the *Hawzeh* pay attention to the relationship between the internet and AI, identifying three types of connections: dependence, similarity, and lessons learned. From their perspective, AI and the internet are interconnected and inseparable, since social networks function as data sources for AI, and user characteristics are identified through AI systems. Therefore, managing both requires parallel strategies, and access to AI technology is considered a precondition for governing cyberspace: "In the contemporary world, the governance of cyberspace is at issue. Unfortunately, it is currently in the hands of corrupt global politicians. Such governance is impossible without access to AI technology, and without serious attention to this technology, proper governance of cyberspace will not be achievable."[4]

a3) The relationship between artificial intelligence and human beings

Within the thought of the People of the *Hawzeh*, one can speak of a resemblance between AI and the human mind: "AI is a capability through which a machine can imitate part or all of human thought and, after imitation, generate behavior."[5]

However, AI holds a lower position compared to human beings and

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Provinces (Hamedan), February 24, 2024.

1. *Hawzah News Agency*, "The speed of knowledge doubles every 45 minutes". Provinces (Mazandaran), June 23, 2024.
2. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "Howzavian institutions should enrich their processing infrastructures". Hawzah News Group, Weekly, No. 819, November 7, 2024.
3. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "To achieve artificial intelligence, we need a rich database". Science and Culture Group, Weekly, No. 751, May 8, 2023.
4. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "Artificial Intelligence: Opportunities, Challenges, and Solutions". Hawzah News Group, Weekly, No. 825, December 9, 2024.
5. *Hawzah News Agency*. "The scholarly meeting 'Artificial Intelligence; Hajj and Islamic Civilization' was held". Qom Howzeh, October 4, 2023.

possesses inherent limitations: "There are still considerable shortcomings and limitations in areas such as genuine creativity, reasoning, understanding human emotions, and more—especially when compared to human intelligence."[1]

Despite these limitations, AI can have various consequences for human beings. These consequences may lead either toward the decline of humanity or toward its advancement. Humans might one day submit to robots and thereby lose their human essence. Conversely, AI may contribute to enhanced human insight, support the process of human thought, improve quality of life, and accelerate humanity's ability to shape and transform the natural world: "AI can be considered a tool that, through the organized and intelligent use of vast amounts of information, can assist researchers in pursuing deeper thought and reflection."[2]

a4) The relationship between artificial intelligence and the Hawzeh

This part of the material aims to explain how AI is approached and conceptually framed in relation to the *Hawzeh*. It includes two areas: "The relationship between commonly used *Hawzeh* concepts and AI" and "the modern encounter with AI".

a4.1) The relationship between commonly used Hawzeh concepts and AI

In this section, local issues, the humanities, Islam, and ethics—topics typically examined in the *Hawzeh*—are discussed in relation to AI. Concerning the relationship between local issues and AI, the necessity of linking them across different areas—algorithms, theory, and data production—has been emphasized. Producing AI infused with local issues also strengthens AI itself:

"Our architecture, rooted in our philosophical foundations and ethical principles, is our distinguishing feature in the field of AI."[3]

The connection between Islamic issues and AI can be categorized into eight general approaches: connection, transmission, union, enhancement, completion, obligation, *Ahkam*, and preliminaries.

In the connection approach, the People of the *Hawzeh* seek to link issues related to Islam and the humanities with AI through an interactive process—a combination of ideas in which each side maintains its identity, while a third result emerges from their interaction.

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1. *Hawzah News Agency*. "Artificial Intelligence and Challenge (Tahaddi)". Qom Howzeh, May 20, 2025.
2. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "Artificial intelligence can assist researchers on the path toward deeper thought and reflection". Front Page Group, Weekly, No. 826, December 24, 2024.
3. *Hawzah News Agency*. "The Hawzeh's critique of the UNESCO document is an example of the seminary's proactive engagement with artificial intelligence technology". Qom Hawzeh, December 17, 2024.

The transmission approach refers to using AI for Islamic purposes without altering the foundations of Islamic teachings. In this view, AI can be used for religious propagation, promoting the Qur'anic culture, and conveying the message of the *Ahl al-Bayt*: "To fulfill the Supreme Leader's directives on promoting Islam to the youth of the region through AI—such as visualizing Qur'anic verses and narrations—acquiring modern sciences has become necessary for Islamic seminary students."[1]

The union approach imagines full harmony between the use of AI and Islamic principles. In this perspective, AI aligns with Islam, divine creation, and humanity's divine mission. Therefore, using AI is regarded as a form of benefiting from God's blessings: "In the Qur'an, the believers are repeatedly called to equip themselves and make use of new tools."[2]

Enhancement refers to improving AI by integrating it with Islam. Western AI has produced complex crises, and secular humans have an anxious relationship with AI. However, if this modern technology is combined with Islamic foundations, its challenges will be overcome, it will gain depth and transcendence, and its mastery over nature will remain grounded: "We must approach AI through revelatory intelligence; with divine rationality, we can use AI, turn its threats into opportunities, and transform its weaknesses into strengths."[3]

The completion approach stands in contrast to enhancement and refers instead to the services AI provides to strengthen Islamic sciences. AI contributes to systematized *Hawzeh* sciences, *Mojtahed* theorization, religious propagation, unifying *Hawzeh* currents, better transmission of Islamic theology, facilitating *ijtihad*, and promoting scholarly growth. It also introduces new methods for the People of the *Hawzeh*—such as Qur'anic visualization. As a result, the path toward Islamic civilization accelerates, and a new era of Islamic sciences emerges through AI:"AI accelerates the growth and flourishing of the 'New Islamic Civilization.'"[4]

In the obligation approach, the People of the *Hawzeh* emphasize that engaging with AI is necessary. Designing, using, and studying AI is seen as a religious duty: "Today one of the essential responsibilities of preachers is to identify and analyze key issues in AI. This is a religious

1. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "Meeting on the Role of Artificial Intelligence in Shaping the New Islamic Civilization". Provinces Group, Weekly, No. 833, February 18, 2025.
2. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "To defend religion and Islamic–human values, we must be equipped with modern science". Science and Culture Group, Weekly, No. 750, May 1, 2023.
3. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "Differences and Special Functions of Artificial Intelligence Data Processing and Revelatory (Divine) Intelligence". Hawzah News Group, Weekly, No. 773, October 23, 2023.
4. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "Differences and Special Functions of Artificial Intelligence Data Processing and Revelatory (Divine) Intelligence". Hawzah News Group, Weekly, No. 773, October 23, 2023.

obligation *Wajib al-Kifā'i*[1] upon religious scholars."[2]

Another approach the *Hawzeh* adopts is the *Ahkam* approach, which itself has three categories. The first includes capabilities AI provides for *Figh*, such as AI-assisted derivation of *Ahkam*. The second includes new issues AI raises for *Figh*. The third includes the *Ahkam* that must be examined *about* AI: "If a person falsely attributes a statement to someone using AI, is such an act permissible? Even when the attribution is not false, is it permissible to use a real person's likeness without their consent?"[3]

The final approach is preliminaries. This view asserts that AI may be used, but to avoid misleading the user, reliance on revelation and tradition must be reinforced, and one must remain committed to divine boundaries in using AI. Thus, the use of AI requires internal spiritual preliminaries.

a4.2) The modern encounter of the Hawzeh with AI

The People of the *Hawzeh* strive to articulate and frame their technological engagement with AI. One group of the People of the *Hawzeh* opposes strict instrumentalism, arguing that such an approach does not allow for a deep understanding of AI and should not be promoted. Accordingly, academics and other societal groups who adopt this approach are seen as engaging with AI superficially: "The instrumentalist current, supported by university scholars, considers AI merely as a tool for solving national challenges such as taxation, money laundering, and eliminating existing dissatisfaction."[4]

However, the same group also rejects essentialism, as they associate it with a form of passivity. Therefore, their approach is a hybrid perspective between instrumentalism and essentialism, though they do not specify exactly how this combination is applied.

Another group—represented by a larger number of content codes—supports instrumentalism, arguing that through a tool-oriented perspective, AI can be controlled and directed. However, its use must be conscious and deliberate: "We believe a balanced perspective is possible: one must both seize the opportunities AI offers as an instrumental tool and remain fully attentive to its threats, without neglecting them."[5]

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1. collective obligation
2. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "Identifying and analyzing key issues in artificial intelligence is an important duty of preachers". Hawzah and System Group, Weekly, No. 826, December 24, 2024.
3. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "Using artificial intelligence is not only permissible but also obligatory". Hawzah News Group, Weekly, No. 838, April 28, 2025.
4. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "Hozeh institutions should enrich their processing infrastructures". Hawzah News Group, Weekly, No. 819, October 29, 2024
5. *Hawzah News Agency*. "Artificial intelligence technology is certainly directional". Provinces (Hamedan), February 24, 2024.

A third group advocates contextualism, maintaining that the significance of AI depends on cultural needs. They argue that AI's value is determined by human use; if technology is guided by divine intent, it becomes sanctified. In other words, changing the form of AI usage can transform its content and nature: "The more human interventions in nature are guided by divine intent, the more lasting and stable they become, bringing humans closer to true and ultimate felicity. Tools and technologies, if produced and applied with this intention, are sanctified and blessed."[1]

This technological engagement, combined with other approaches, constitutes what can be termed a modern encounter. The *Hawzeh* experiences minor transformations through the use and application of AI. For example, the People of the *Hawzeh* emphasize the creation of specialized fields and disciplines related to AI within the *Hawzeh*. They also stress the importance of establishing scientific communication with other scholarly institutions and employing non-*Hawzeh* experts in this area, creating a form of specialized division of labor: "In the extensive Qur'anic research and in the macro-project of revelatory intelligence and the use of AI in service of this intelligence, all members of the Hawzeh—from All first-year students in the seminary to *mujtahids* and theorists in various disciplines—can be involved and share tasks."[2]

AI has prompted the *Hawzeh* to reconsider form and methodology. For instance, the process of responding to religious inquiries has been transformed through chatbots. Likewise, attention to the general audience and audience-orientation has increased through AI. To achieve this, tradition must be integrated with modernity: "Transformation in the *Hawzeh* does not mean diminishing the legacy of predecessors or replacing texts with lower-quality content; rather, scholars and Islamic jurists must respond to contemporary issues within the same framework and high levels of *Figh* exemplified by *Jawheri*, *Sharif al-Ulama*, *Saeed al-Ulama*, and *Sheikh Al Ansari*—or even higher."[3]

Another outcome of engaging with AI is the mathematical and quantitative approach to various issues. Emphasizing data-centric AI, the People of the *Hawzeh* focus on designing algorithmic and mathematical solutions to human problems. This mathematical perspective has even become a pervasive lens through which other matters are viewed. In this framework, the Qur'an is considered a

1. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "The necessity of aligning artificial intelligence technology with the sovereignty of monotheism and the rejection of tyranny". Front Page Group, Weekly, No. 831, February 4, 2025.
2. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "Differences and Functions of Artificial Intelligence Data Processing and Revelatory (Divine) Intelligence". Hawzah News Group, Weekly, No. 773, October 23, 2023.
3. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "Artificial intelligence can assist researchers in the path toward deeper thought and reflection". Front Page Group, Weekly, No. 826, December 24, 2024.

unifying divine dataset: "All the data of phenomena in the world have been processed in a software system, and the Qur'an is the data-driven, creation-oriented processing of phenomena."[1]

Finally, he practical application of artificial intelligence constitutes another key element of this modern encounter. The *Hawzeh* seeks rational, practical, and optimal use of AI. This functionalism aligns with the path of martyrs and therefore has a revolutionary and theological foundation, corresponding to the trajectory of Iranian theology: "Practical application based on three components—our own data, our own algorithms, and our own processing infrastructure—is the path shown to us by *Martyr Fakhrizadeh*, which today is evident in the country's defense industry and many other industries."[2]

b) Deficiencies and challenges of AI

In this category of content, the *Hawzeh* has attempted to highlight the obstacles and difficulties in the application of AI. These challenges are divided into two main subcategories: "Existing Gaps in Advancing AI" and "Challenges in Using AI".

b1) Existing gaps in advancing AI

From the perspective of the People of the *Hawzeh*, the national-level gaps include: lack of infrastructure, absence of legislation, lack of practical application, insufficient specialized studies and clear discourse, and overlapping institutional roles. For example, regarding the lack of infrastructure, the People of the *Hawzeh* describe the situation as follows: "The model existing in Iran is a combination of three previous models. Concerning national data, we have a good law called the 'Durability Law'; however, for personal data—that is, the data produced and distributed about you and me on social networks—the legislation is still pending with the government. Processing infrastructure for AI is a very important issue, and our country, except for the defense sector, is very weak in this regard."[3]

The issue of weak infrastructure also exists within the *Hawzeh* itself. Additionally, scientific limitations and the lack of a unified understanding of AI constitute significant challenges. For instance, the absence of a common definition of AI among the People of the *Hawzeh* is identified as a problem: "We have not yet reached a shared understanding of the concept of artificial intelligence."[4]

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1. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "Differences and Specific Functions of Artificial Intelligence Data Processing and Revelatory (Divine) Intelligence". Hawzah News Group, Weekly, No. 773, October 23, 2023.
2. *Hawzah News Agency*. "Artificial intelligence technology is certainly purposeful". Provinces (Hamedan), February 24, 2024.
3. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "Hozavian institutions should enrich their processing infrastructures". Hawzah News Group, Weekly, No. 819, October 29, 2024.
4. *Hawzah News Agency*. "Compilation of over 300 fighi, ethical, and philosophical

A notable aspect of addressing these gaps is that it also reflects the needs of AI itself. In the thinking of the People of the *Hawzeh*, AI requires infrastructure, a defined discourse, practical application, legislation, and focused work—thus presenting a multidimensional definition of AI in terms of its requisites.

b2) Challenges of AI

The People of the *Hawzeh* have also attempted to enumerate the challenges associated with AI. Some of these challenges relate to the reciprocal relationship between religion and AI, meaning that AI occupies a lower position than divine revelation: "The miraculous nature of the Qur'an lies in its substantive content and divine spirit, which are inaccessible to human tools and capabilities such as AI."[1]

Furthermore, AI contains content that may conflict with religious and Islamic principles. It is important to note that this conflict does not reside in the nature of AI itself, but rather in non-native AI systems: "Many credible Islamic knowledge datasets produced by Hawzeh-affiliated research centers are not publicly accessible. [Therefore,] AI-based tools cannot utilize these datasets… Meanwhile, a significant portion of the available data consists of superficial or misleading information about Islam, often propagated by malicious actors to undermine the religion and promote Islamophobia."[2]

Additionally, AI can contribute to distortion or superficiality of Islamic teachings, though it is not always clear whether these issues are inherent to AI or limited to non-native AI systems. Nevertheless, these risks are manageable. AI carries the potential dangers of distraction from divine proximity and the generation of multifaceted doubts, which can mislead humans. Furthermore, neglecting deep Islamic dimensions, reducing scholars' engagement with religious texts, and superficiality among researchers may result in inauthentic interpretations of Islam. For example, "In Islamic sources (Qur'anic verses and narrations) engaged with by clerics, researchers, and mujtahids, knowledge is intertwined with ethics and spirituality. When modern technology provides researchers only with scientific information, the spiritual dimension may be neglected—a serious risk that must be addressed."[3]

Other challenges identified regarding AI include algorithmic bias, social threats, dehumanization, and ambiguity or uncertain status of various AI issues.

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issues of artificial intelligence". Qom Howzeh, January 30, 2024.

1. *Hawzah News Agency*. "Artificial Intelligence and Challenge (Tahaddi)". Qom Howzeh, May 20, 2025.
2. *Hawzah News Agency*. "Statement of the Steering Committee on Intelligent Technologies". Qom Howzeh, December 18, 2023.
3. *Hawzah News Agency*. "To defend Islamic and human values, we must be equipped with modern science". Qom Howzeh, April 27, 2023.

4.1.2. Power relations and AI among the People of the Hawzeh

This theme aims to illustrate the existing relationships between different types of power and artificial intelligence. Part of these relationships concerns the connection between acquiring power in general terms and AI, while another part addresses the relationship between the current power institutions in Iran and AI. Each is explained below.

a) Acquiring power and AI

In this section, the People of the *Hawzeh* sought to demonstrate that AI can be used to acquire power in various domains, making its utilization not only necessary but essential. Without AI, one would lack sufficient power in today's world.

a1) Military power and AI

Regarding military power and AI, security-related issues tied to AI must first be addressed. National security is always exposed to threats through AI, as adversaries can use it for warfare, infiltration, hegemony, or colonization: "Artificial intelligence is a powerful tool in media warfare, and imperialist media use it to manipulate the cognition of audiences and steer public opinion."[1]

Therefore, to counteract these threats, it is necessary to employ AI in various defensive and military domains to succeed in cognitive warfare: "Global arrogance has waged an all-out cultural war against the principles and values of Islam and the Islamic system. They use all capacities of modern technologies at the highest level, and we too must arm ourselves with modern weapons to achieve victory."[2]

a2) Political power and AI

Regarding political and international power, AI provides opportunities to facilitate and create international relations, as well as predict political events and global developments: "Using advanced AI algorithms and models, it is possible to predict future events in the international arena. These predictions are crucial for national, economic, security, and political planning in Iran."[3]

AI enables the maintenance of political power, and failure to use it can disrupt political arrangements: "If we cannot create enabling conditions in this governance space, an alternative governance will be

1. *Hawzah News Agency*. "The seminary has an active engagement in the field of artificial intelligence". Qom Howzeh, January 4, 2025.
2. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "To defend religion and Islamic and human values, we must be equipped with modern science". Science and Culture Group, Weekly, No. 750, May 1, 2023.
3. *Pasdar-e Islam*. "The Application of Artificial Intelligence in International Relations: Opportunities and Threats". Mohammad Hossein Pouramini, Nos. 489–490, April 2024.

imposed upon us."[1]

In the AI era, using AI for international relations and political interactions with other countries and global institutions is inevitable: "Artificial intelligence is one of the main factors of power distribution in the present era. A country unable to lead in this field will remain marginalized in the international system."[2]

To become a leader and among the "Top 10 AI countries", it is necessary to learn from the experiences of other nations in AI. In other words, AI expands the scope of attention from domestic issues to international affairs.

a3) Development and AI

The use of AI fosters social power. AI can shape public opinion and social movements, as well as predict societal events. Regarding economic power, AI can enhance employment and productivity, thereby improving the country's economic condition. In other words, AI can accelerate development in various sectors.

b) The current power institution in Iran and AI

In this section, the People of the *Hawzeh* attempt to present AI in relation to Iran's current governance—the Islamic Republic—and subsequently the current government under President Mr. Pezeshkian. Their discussion adopts descriptive and prescriptive perspectives, generally conveying a positive view.

b1) AI in relation to current governance in Iran

According to clerical scholars the existence of a proper national structure has fostered the attention to and development of AI in Iran, ensuring the acceleration of this technology in the future. The fundamental concepts of the Islamic Revolution and the leadership's commitment have contributed to the appropriate application of AI in the country: "The opportunities created after the Islamic Revolution for students to become familiar with IT technologies have made the horizon for AI application promising and provided an encouraging outlook."[3]

This has also contributed to the advancement of AI itself, eliminating issues such as monopolization and maximizing its potential: "The convergence of the Islamic Revolution's influence with AI's influence

1. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "The necessity of creating a foundation in the field of AI governance". Hawzah and System Group, Weekly, No. 749, April 17, 2023.
2. *Hawzah News Agency*. "The country's artificial intelligence should be developed based on Islamic data, not merely Western models". Qom Howzeh, January 14, 2025.
3. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "To defend religion and Islamic and human values, we must be equipped with modern science". Science and Culture Group, Weekly, No. 750, May 1, 2023.

can lead to blessed outcomes."[1]

Thus, a positive view of the country's existing capacities exists. The presence of skilled personnel, adequate human resources, data production, attention to AI development in provinces, and reliance on national capabilities are all outcomes of the governance environment in Iran.

b2) AI in relation to the government

Here, the People of the *Hawzeh* seek to draw the government's attention to AI's role in power acquisition and offer strategies for its application at governmental and supra-governmental levels. After emphasizing the necessity of AI utilization, they highlight the importance of legislation and the development of a national AI roadmap, as well as structural reforms in line with AI: "It is essential for governments to formulate and implement policies and laws aligned with AI to benefit from the positive impacts of this technology."[2]

4.1.3. Operational attention of the Hawzeh to AI

In this section, the People of the *Hawzeh* aim to evaluate the position and operational role of AI within the *Hawzeh* and discuss its applications. Accordingly, this section is divided into several subthemes, each explained below.

a) The position of the Hawzeh in prioritizing AI in the country

Seminary-affiliated media outlets assert that due to its pioneering role in technology and advanced software design, the *Hawzeh* is ahead of other institutions in dealing with AI. It is the *Hawzeh* that has drawn the country's attention to AI and established the first academic chairs and research areas in AI. Furthermore, through foresight, the *Hawzeh* has engaged with international AI documents and prevented numerous potential problems that could have arisen from contracts: "The Hawzeh was among the pioneering institutions in translating and critiquing this document, and this work was published with the collaboration of the Contemporary Fiqh Office of the Hawzeh, making it available to those interested in AI ethics."[3]

Moreover, seminary-affiliated media outlets assert that due to its forward-looking approach, the *Hawzeh* serves as a reference authority on AI. With its scientific rigor and deep engagement with AI, there is

1. *Hawzah News Agency*. "Compilation of over 300 jurisprudential, ethical, and philosophical issues of artificial intelligence". Qom Howzeh, January 30, 2024.
2. *Pasdar-e Islam*. "The Application of Artificial Intelligence in International Relations: Opportunities and Threats". Mohammad Hossein Pouramini, Nos. 489–490, April 2024.
3. *Hawzah News Agency*. "The Howzeh's critique of the UNESCO document is an example of its proactive engagement with artificial intelligence technology". Qom Seminary, December 17, 2024.

no alternative institution in the country; other organizations must rely on the *Hawzeh* regarding AI matters. The *Hawzeh* seeks to maintain this authority and establish a form of exclusive governance over AI. For example, they strive to remain independent from domestic AI companies: "Unfortunately, Hawzeh institutions are weak in processing infrastructure. In the near future, institutions with strong processing infrastructure—such as some large companies in Tehran—will play a decisive role, and other institutions will depend on them."[1]

For these reasons, the *Hawzeh* defines a governance role for itself regarding AI. In other words, there is a perceived necessity for the People of the *Hawzeh* to participate actively in AI management: "Hawzeh institutions must actively participate in shaping the coordinates of this era, especially in regulation and rule-making."[2]

b) Attention to AI in Hawzeh management

Due to its positive functions, AI is applied across various sections of the *Hawzeh*, and there is an aspiration to use it more effectively in different areas. Examples of this active and extensive use include: designing intelligent systems, utilizing AI in *Hawzeh* publications, developing *Hawzeh* reasoning systems with AI, monitoring AI news, creating media content banks, such as for *Arbaeen* with AI, using AI in scientific databases of the *Hawzeh*, and establishing digital humanities and AI laboratories, etc.

For instance, the *Hawzeh News Agency* notes: "The main goal of this conference is to assist school librarians in moving beyond traditional methods and using modern technologies such as AI in library processes, as these changes will facilitate researchers' and readers' access to scientific resources available in libraries."[3]

Furthermore, due to AI's pervasive role in the *Hawzeh*, the People of the *Hawzeh* consistently aim to upgrade the community's knowledge of technology through technical and theoretical classes and courses for students and teachers—both male and female. They also extend attention to other groups, such as the general public and younger audiences like adolescents. This indicates that the audience of the *Hawzeh* regarding AI extends beyond the *Hawzeh* itself.

5. Conclusion

The content analysis indicates that the People of the *Hawzeh* have

1. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "Seminary institutions should enrich their processing infrastructures". Hawzah News Group, Weekly, No. 819, October 29, 2024.
2. *Ofogh-e Hozeh*. "The necessity of employing artificial intelligence for future studies and effective governance". Front Page Group, Weekly, No. 825, December 9, 2024.
3. *Hawzah News Agency*. "The sixth knowledge-enhancement conference and appreciation of Howzeh School librarians in Khorasan Province was held". Provinces (Razavi Khorasan), January 8, 2025.

adopted diverse and multifaceted approaches in their engagement with artificial intelligence. They perceive AI as having a fluid nature; in its current state, it originates from the West and embodies a secular essence that can lead to subjugation and misguidance of individuals. However, this essence can be "neutralized" through careful preparation and preliminary measures, transforming AI into a tool—a tool detached from its original values and capable of producing desirable outcomes and effects.

This instrumental view of AI can, in turn, lead to a secondary essentialism. In other words, by modifying AI's foundations, such as data and algorithms, the People of the *Hawzeh* think that they can instill an Islamic, truth-oriented, and religious essence into it. Consequently, their approach resembles critical engagements with technology, aiming to shape and guide its development in accordance with religious and ethical principles.

This indicates that the People of the *Hawzeh* are closer to the second approach among the various modes of engagement between religion and artificial intelligence. They do not interpret AI as inherently anti-religious and something to be avoided; rather, they consciously strive to align themselves and society with it. In this context, technology has not only served as a tool to enhance the efficiency of religious activities but has also played a role in the reorganization of religious knowledge and social structures (Beltramini, 2023).

Their perspective challenges the views of scholars such as Daniel Lerner, who considered the combination of tradition (religion) and modernity as an impediment. On the contrary, they think that individuals can structure their lives—and in this case, their religious lifestyle—in a manner that integrates traditional and modern elements. For instance, the Islamic Revolution of Iran can be seen as a living example of an entity that has adapted itself to various technologies (Thompson, 2020). However, this adaptation can be analyzed from two distinct perspectives.

The engagement of the People of the *Hawzeh* with artificial intelligence can be contingent upon the 'scientific' domains within Islam; that is, the Islamic framework inherently includes concepts such as scientism, which are reinterpreted when confronting what is considered the most advanced modern technology. In this context, the People of the *Hawzeh*, through their engagement with AI, invoke a reference to the past and the Golden Age of Islam, a period when the frontiers of scientific knowledge were actively pursued. However, this cannot be considered a "return" but rather a referencing of past scientism within the framework of modern exigencies, because one of the primary axes in the interaction between AI and the People of the *Hawzeh* is the question of modernity.

As noted in the research findings, the People of the *Hawzeh* have experienced changes in their engagement with AI, including

mathematical perspectives, form modification, audience-orientation, and functionalism. They have also combined a kind of secondary instrumentalism—as Finberg referred to in his critical theory—with a rejection of the continuous essence of AI. This instrumentalism represents a secular engagement with AI technology. Therefore, the *Hawzeh*'s interpretation of AI is not purely traditional.

But how has the combination of Islamic approaches, modernism, and AI as a technology been possible? Simmel (2009) speaks of the incompatibility of science and religion, arguing that the two can only be reconciled if religion is understood as a specific mode of existence rather than a set of claims or a systematic imitation of science. In this case, religion is not falsified by science. The experience of the People of the *Hawzeh* with AI demonstrates that the systematic form of religion can also be integrated with technology as a product of modern science, because it is not entirely anti-modern, nor is it modern and subjective in the sense of defining its existence solely as a specific mode of being.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Ethical considerations

The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence. In this article, AI tools (DeepSeek and ChatGPT) were utilized to refine sentence structure and grammar.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Funding

This research did not receive any grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or non-profit sectors.

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