



540774 - Is it permissible to seek fatwas from AI (artificial intelligence)?

the question

Is it permissible for me to use an AI app to ask about some Islamic issues and take the ruling from it and follow the rulings it gives?

Summary of answer

Artificial intelligence is a permissible tool in principle, but it is not permissible to ask it for fatwas or trust its answers in matters of religion, because it is not qualified to issue fatwas as it does not understand religion or real-life issues, and it does not meet other conditions.

The answers it gives are automatically generated from information that may come from unknown sources or be wrong, and it may be biased and not pay attention to differences between people that could have an impact on the fatwa. However, it is permissible for a researcher to use artificial intelligence to collect material or understand the situation, on condition that he verifies the sources.

As for the ordinary Muslim, it is not permissible for him to trust a fatwa generated by artificial intelligence and act in accordance with it; rather he should ask trustworthy scholars.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

I.

The purpose of seeking a fatwa is to find out about the ruling, and when a scholar gives a fatwa it means that he is giving the ruling on a particular issue.

Al-Misbah al-Munir, 2/462.

Ar-Raghib al-Asbahani said in *Mufradat al-Qur'an* (p. 625): A fatwa is an answer to what is not clear



of rulings. End quote.

Al-Mardawi said in *Al-Insaf* (28/314): The mufti is the one who explains a shar`i ruling and tells people about it without imposing it on them, and the qadi (judge) is the one who explains the ruling and imposes it. End quote.

II.

AI (artificial intelligence) was defined by the Saudi Authority for Data and Artificial Intelligence (SADAI) as: Systems that use technological means that are able to collect data and use it to make forecasts of what could happen in the future, give recommendations, or take decisions with various levels of automation, and choose the best procedures and methods to achieve certain goals. End quote.

AI (artificial intelligence) is a modern tool that is useful in many fields in the sciences, humanities and Islamic knowledge. It is a tool like other tools which it is permissible to use in ways that do not go against Islamic teachings, because the basic principle is that things are permissible. Islamic sharia aims to help people to obtain that which is good for them and increase it, and to ward off that which is bad and limit it; Islamic teachings do not prevent anything that could serve people's interests, both spiritual and worldly; rather it seeks to prevent that which could harm them in this world and the next.

Therefore it is not allowed to use artificial intelligence in activities that are haram, could cause harm to others, spread corruption and evil, or involve cheating and deceiving people. It is also not permissible to provide it with false information and train it to mislead those who use it.

Moreover, many researchers have warned against becoming too attached to artificial intelligence and making it take the place of humans in many social interactions, which could lead to serious troubles and mischief in the long run.

In order for AI to give fatwas, they feed into it a great deal of information about Islamic teachings and shar`i rulings, and train it on that, by means of computer programs. This information will



accumulate to form a huge amount of information on various topics in different fields of knowledge, from different sources and with varying levels of accuracy. Then the process of generating answers will take place in accordance with sophisticated procedures and programs, and the answers will be generated from this information that is connected to the questions that are submitted to particular apps.

III.

It is very clear that issuing fatwas is a very serious matter in Islam, because it is like signing on behalf of the divine and explaining His rulings to His slaves, and applying the rulings to the novel issues that they face. No one should undertake this serious task except one who has certain qualities and has met a number of conditions that qualify him to take on this immense responsibility and allow him to take up this important position. Those conditions include: being Muslim, being an adult, being of sound mind and good character, having knowledge of sharia, and being smart and able to derive rulings and to understand the realities of life.

Imam ash-Shafa`i (may Allah have mercy on him) said, according to a report narrated by al-Khatib al-Baghdadi with his isnad in *Al-Faqih wal-Mutafaqqih* (2/331): It is not permissible for anyone to issue a religious verdict (fatwa) except a man who has knowledge of the Book of Allah, what abrogates and is abrogated, its clear and unambiguous verses, its meanings and how to apply them to life, which passages are Makki (revealed before the Hijrah) and which are Madani (revealed after the Hijrah), its intended purpose and reasons for revelation. After that, he should also have knowledge of the hadiths of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and what abrogates and what is abrogated; he should have as much knowledge of hadith as he has of the Qur'an. He should also have knowledge of the Arabic language, poetry and other branches of knowledge that he needs to know. Furthermore, he should be known to be fair-minded, not talk too much, be aware of real life in different regions, and in addition to all that, he should have deep insight and intuition.

If he is like that, then he can speak and give fatwas about what is halal and haram.



But if he is not like that, then he has no right to discuss issues of knowledge or to issue fatwas.
End quote.

Ibn al-Qayyim said in *A`lam al-Muwaqqi`in `an Rabbi l-`Alamin* (1/189): The mufti and judge will not be able to give correct fatwas and verdicts unless they understand two things:

First of all, they should understand the real situation and have detailed knowledge of it, and be able to work out what really happened on the basis of circumstantial details, signs and indications, until they have reached a deep understanding of what really happened.

Secondly, they should understand what must be done in this real-life novel issue, which is understanding the ruling of Allah that He has ordained in His Book or on the lips of His Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that is applicable to this novel issue, then he must apply the one to the other. So whoever strives his utmost and puts great effort into these two things will inevitably have either two rewards or one reward. The scholar is the one who, by means of understanding the reality of the novel issue and becoming fully acquainted with it, will be able to work out the ruling of Allah and His Messenger...

But whoever follows a path other than that will inevitably be the cause of people losing their dues and rights, and he will attribute that to sharia and Islamic teachings with which Allah sent His Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

It is well known that it is difficult for these conditions to be met by artificial intelligence, no matter how advanced it becomes. There is no acceptable shar`i justification for trusting it and seeking fatwas from it. Rather issues should be referred to people of knowledge, specialists and people who are known for piety, as Allah, may He be Glorified, says:

{So [O people] ask those who have knowledge, if you do not know} [An-Nahl 16:43].

What is required of one who finds himself faced with a novel issue, or something happens to him that calls for an Islamic ruling, is to consult people of wisdom and knowledge. But he will not be doing what is required of him if he seeks a fatwa from someone who is not qualified to give one,



because he will be asking someone who does not meet the conditions of the mufti.

IV.

The difference between artificial intelligence and referring to Islamic websites for fatwas is that those who issue fatwas on those websites are real people, whether it is a particular scholar or a group of researchers. Moreover, the mission of the website is only to publish these fatwas, which they attribute to the organization that issued them.

If that organization is trustworthy, or the scholar who gave the answer is known for his knowledge and good character, then his fatwa can be trusted, if it is applicable to the question asked and one is certain that there are no discrepancies between the question and the fatwa that could invalidate it... As for artificial intelligence, it tries to act like a human and come up with an answer, and it tries to work out a fatwa based on what it has access to of knowledge and data that has been uploaded to cyberspace, in accordance with the programs and technical arrangements that work in a statistical and mathematical way that could be influenced by differences in quantity of various data, and does not go through the logical methods and steps that lead to a conclusion, as is known to the scholars.

V.

These problems and shortcomings that could appear in answers given by artificial intelligence may be due to many reasons, the most significant of which are:

1. Not knowing the source of the information on which AI based the fatwa, which means that we cannot trust the content, because artificial intelligence only answers on the basis of the data that has been fed into it. So when it is asked about anything, it searches the data that has to do with the answer in all websites, in all forms of written material, in audio and video clips that are available, in different languages and from different sources, even non-Islamic sources, or sources that are deviant or distorted.
2. Not taking into consideration things that could have affect the fatwa and change the ruling, such as differences in customs and traditions, and ensuring that guidelines, conditions and



reservations are taken into account. Artificial intelligence also does not take into account variations in the circumstances of those who ask for fatwas or matters that require exemptions, and it does not take into consideration the pros and cons of the matter or look at the likely consequences and results of various actions, which no one can do except an experienced mufti who examines a novel issue faced by the one who is asking for the fatwa.

It is well known that Islamic rulings are of two types: those that are open to change due to changes in what leads to them and what impacts them, and those that are fixed and cannot be changed.

Ibn al-Qayyim said in *Ighathat al-Lahfan* (1/330): Rulings are of two types: the first type does not change and always remains the same, regardless of time and place, and there is no room for scholarly ijtiḥad. This includes obligatory duties that are always obligatory, prohibitions on things that are always prohibited, hadd punishments that are ordained by the religious texts for certain offences, and so on. This type is not subject to change or ijtiḥad that could make it different from what it is.

The second type may change according to what is in people's best interests, and could change with changes of time, place and circumstances, such as working out unspecified disciplinary punishments (ta`zir) and defining their types and description, for Islam varies between them according to what is in people's best interests. End quote.

Rulings that change according to changes in time have two qualities which, if they are absent or one of them is absent, the rulings will not be regarded as changeable; rather they will be regarded as fixed rulings. These two qualities are:

1. The ruling has to do with matters that are subject to ijtiḥad, as opposed to issues concerning which there are clear, definitive texts which are definitive in terms of both soundness and meaning.

Dr. Muhammad az-Zuhayli said in his book *Al-Qawa'id al-Fiqhiyyah wa Tatbiqatuha fil-Madhahib al-Arba`ah* (1/355): The madhhabs are agreed that the rulings which may change with changes in



time and people's manners are rulings that are subject to ijtihad that is based on analogy and what is in people's best interests. So if the rulings become no longer suited to the current time and what is in people's interests now, they should be changed.

ii.. They should be rulings that are based on customs and traditions, or people's best interests and analogy (qiyas).

Shaykh Ahmad az-Zarqa said in *Sharh al-Qawa'id al-Fiqhiyyah* (p. 227): It is quite normal that rulings may change with changes in time, i.e., changes in people's customs and traditions. If their customs and traditions dictated that the mufti should give a certain ruling, but then the customs and traditions changed, the ruling should also change to something that is appropriate to the new customs and traditions.

3. Presenting wrong and fabricated explanations that have no basis as if they are sound and authentic information. That may include names, numbers and statistics which appear to be accurate and objective, but in reality are fabricated and do not exist in websites and other sources of information. These are what are called "AI hallucinations"!

It is possible to change the opinion given by artificial intelligence by changing some words of phrases in the question that should not have any impact on the ruling.

4. It is possible for those who are in charge of artificial intelligence to train it to embrace some beliefs and principles that will inevitably lead to bias from the outset, so that it will be in favour of certain ideas and concepts that are contrary to Islamic teachings regarding many issues of thought, the family, creed and other matters, which will have an impact on answers that have to do with these matters.

Because artificial intelligence has these characteristics and these faults, it cannot be relied on for fatwas and seeking shar'i rulings on the basis of which one may act and live one's life, because it does not meet the conditions required to issue fatwas that are acceptable according to Islamic teachings.



What must be done is work on developing artificial intelligence, or some of its applications, to overcome these problems and get rid of the causes of the shortcomings, whilst paying attention to the required conditions and guidelines.

VI.

There are two types of people who could make use of artificial intelligence for the purpose of working out fatwas:

The first is the mufti or researcher on Islamic topics who wants to answer a question and explain the Islamic ruling on a particular novel issue. So if he is a specialist and has knowledge, he may make use of artificial intelligence to produce a fatwa. Using artificial intelligence, he will be able to develop a general understanding about the issue, after which he can work out the answer himself.

The most important benefit which will be of use to the one who is working out a fatwa is that it will help him to find out about sources and references, then he can go and check those sources himself to find the information he is looking for and to verify the answer given by artificial intelligence. How often has artificial intelligence caused frustration to researchers on some academic issues, and has referred them to sources that have nothing to do with the specific information being sought!

The researcher on Islamic topics can also make use of artificial intelligence to obtain summaries of books, papers and clips having to do with the topic in question, and help him to understand a lot of issues and novel matters that are contemporary to the issue he is dealing with. It is very clear that this will save him a great deal of time and effort, and make his work easier. In that case, using artificial intelligence is in accordance with the objectives of sharia, as the means come under the same rulings as the goals. But – as noted above – he cannot trust it completely or rely on what it presents to him, because it lacks accuracy in all of that and it presents many of its results on the basis of similarities between words. There is also the possibility that the source from which AI takes information may be tampered with, or it may not pay attention to context or be able to take into account changes in time and place. It may also be unable to deal with individual cases, or to



take into account requirements dictated by necessity and need, situations in which exceptions are needed or the need to take customs, values and manners into consideration. For it is no more than a tool of which the output is based on input.

In that case, whenever a researcher tries to seek help from artificial intelligence, at the stage when he is collecting the material that he needs and information that will help him to understand the situation as it really is, and to develop an understanding of the novel issue and give an appropriate Islamic fatwa regarding it, he must go back to the original sources himself to verify all information, to make sure that the answer takes into consideration the necessary guidelines and conditions, and is tailored precisely to the novel issue in question.

The second type of person who can make use of artificial intelligence is one who is seeking a fatwa and looking for an answer for himself. So he asks artificial intelligence, not to seek an answer but to have an idea about the topic, or to understand some aspects and dimensions of the novel issue that he is facing, or to have some general knowledge about that issue without relying on that answer. He may be granted a concession to seek answers from artificial intelligence regarding Islamic matters, but he must take precautions, be careful and beware of lack of accuracy and unknown sources. This is like checking different websites, because he usually refers to them, but in this case there is the possibility of changes and distortion that requires more caution and verification. In addition to that, there is the fear that repeatedly asking questions and using artificial intelligence for a long time could lead to one beginning to trust it and rely on it.

However, we do not think that we should pay too much attention to its answers in that regard, even if the researcher's search and results were not intended to be applied to himself or others. For knowledge is part of our faith, so you should consider from whom you learn your religion, as the salaf (early generations) said.

What the Muslim should do, if he needs to find out about some matter pertaining to his religion, even if it is by way of increasing his knowledge and ridding himself of ignorance, is to seek that knowledge from a safe and trustworthy source, from the books of scholars or from their well-known words and speeches. He can make use of artificial intelligence for that by asking for



references and links to fatwas that it based its answers on, so that the one who is seeking a fatwa can go and check the sources himself. If they are reliable sources, then he has found the answer he was looking for, and if it is applicable to his situation, then he may take the fatwa directly from its original source. In that way, he will have used artificial intelligence as an intelligent search engine to get the answer from trustworthy sources.

As for the one who seeks a fatwa from artificial intelligence and trusts the answer that AI generated by itself, and acts on the fatwa it gave, it is not permissible for him to do that, because of what we know about the ways in which artificial intelligence operates, as it does not meet the shar`i conditions that are required for a fatwa that can be followed, and it pays no attention to the proper guidelines on which fatwas should be based.

VII.

Researchers and contemporary scholars have two views on seeking fatwas from artificial intelligence and relying on it to find out about shar`i rulings.

The first view adheres to the original ruling which disallows seeking fatwas from it and says that we should not trust its answers.

The second view is that we should differentiate between the two types of fatwas that may be sought from artificial intelligence:

The first type of fatwa has to do with issues that are applicable to all accountable Muslims and have nothing to do with personal circumstances, and do not require examining pros and cons, exemptions and consequences; rather the ruling is the same and applies to all people equally, such as rulings on what invalidates wudu', the obligatory parts of prayer, the types of wealth that are subject to zakah, to whom zakah may be given, what invalidates the fast, and what is prohibited when in ihram for Hajj and `umrah. In their view, artificial intelligence may be helpful in seeking fatwas on these issues, subject to certain conditions:

i.. The organization that supports the artificial intelligence app should be known to be trustworthy



in issuing fatwas.

1. The artificial intelligence app should be based on the fatwas of that organization, with no other unknown or untrustworthy sources.
- iii. The one who uses it should have the ability to correctly understand phrases and the meanings of words used in the fatwa.
 1. He should make sure that the answer matches the novel issue asked about, without any discrepancy that could render the fatwa inapplicable in this case.

If any one of these conditions is not met, then he must go back to the original method of seeking fatwas, which is asking people of knowledge and seeking their fatwas on novel issues faced by accountable people.

The second type of fatwa is those that are based on traditions and customs, which vary according to circumstances and the people involved, and require examining the circumstances surrounding the issue and how it came about, or examining issues of necessity, need, exemptions and so on.

In this case, it is not permissible to refer to artificial intelligence, or to rely on the answer it gives or act in accordance with it. Rather the individual must refer to trustworthy scholars so that they can give him a fatwa that is appropriate to his situation, and is suited to that particular novel issue.

What appears to us to be the case is that the view of those who say that it is disallowed to rely on the answers given by artificial intelligence as it exists at present is the stronger view and is more likely to be correct, because AI is not qualified to issue fatwas and there are some shortcomings and problems with its answers.

What is required of the Muslim is to be cautious with regard to his religion, and not to be careless in seeking rulings; rather he should take them from their proper sources and seek knowledge from qualified scholars.



And Allah knows best.