OPEN ACCESS
Journal Islamic Economic Minangkabau
Vol. 3 No. 6. December 2025, pp. 317-327 DOI. 10.70177/jiem.v3i6.2736

Research Article

DECENTRALIZED SOCIAL JUSTICE: ASSESSING THE ROLE OF DECENTRALIZED AUTONOMOUS ORGANIZATIONS (DAOS) IN INFAQ AND SADAQAH MANAGEMENT

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Article Info

Received: June 10, 2025
Revised: September 21, 2025
Accepted: November 24, 2025
Online Version: December 27, 2025

Abstract

The rapid expansion of blockchain-based governance has introduced new models for managing philanthropic resources, including the use of Decentralized Autonomous Organizations (DAOs) to distribute infaq and sadaqah. The decentralization of decision-making and the automation of financial flows offer potential solutions to long-standing challenges such as transparency deficits, centralization of authority, and inefficiencies in conventional charity systems. The research is motivated by the growing need to evaluate whether DAOs can enhance accountability, inclusivity, and equitable resource distribution within Islamic social finance. The study aims to assess the effectiveness of DAO-driven mechanisms in managing infaq and sadaqah, particularly their capacity to ensure fair participation, minimize human bias, and strengthen social justice outcomes. The objectives include analyzing governance structures, technological capabilities, and ethical implications of DAO integration. A mixed-methods design was adopted, combining blockchain system analysis, interviews with Islamic finance experts, and simulation of DAO-based distribution models. The study also employed comparative evaluation between traditional centralized charity workflows and smart contract–enabled automation. The results indicate that DAO-based models significantly improve transparency, reduce administrative delays, and enhance participatory decision-making among community members. Smart contracts ensure tamper-proof recordkeeping, while tokenized voting systems strengthen collective oversight and reduce elite capture. The research concludes that DAOs offer a promising pathway for decentralized social justice by aligning technological decentralization with Islamic ethical principles of fairness, trust, and communal responsibility. Strengthening digital literacy, enhancing regulatory clarity, and developing Shariah-compliant smart contract standards are essential for sustainable implementation.

Keywords: Decentralization, Infaq Management, Islamic Social Finance

Journal Homepage https://research.adra.ac.id/index.php/jiem
How to cite: Okafor, C., Begum, A., & Taylor, S. (2025). Decentralized Social Justice: Assessing the Role of Decentralized Autonomous Organizations (DAOs) in Infaq and Sadaqah Management. *Journal Islamic Economic Minangkabau*, *3*(6), 317–327. https://doi.org/10.70177/jiem.v3i6.2736
Published by: Yayasan Adra Karima Hubbi

INTRODUCTION

The management of infaq and sadaqah has traditionally relied on centralized institutional structures, where decisions regarding collection, allocation, and monitoring are controlled by charitable organizations or religious bodies. This centralized model has enabled coordination and large-scale distribution but has also exposed the system to issues of inefficiency, opacity, and limited community participation (Younis et al., 2024; Zaman et al., 2023). The broader landscape of Islamic social finance acknowledges the importance of transparency and trust as key determinants of donor confidence and community welfare. Blockchain technology has emerged as a disruptive innovation capable of transforming governance systems through decentralization, immutability, and verifiable transparency (Ren et al., 2024; Su et al., 2025). The introduction of decentralized autonomous organizations (DAOs) marks a significant evolution in collective decision-making, enabling communities to govern resources without a single controlling authority. DAOs operate through smart contracts, allowing rules and processes to be embedded directly into code, thereby reducing the risk of manipulation or administrative error (Perdana, Lee, et al., 2025).

Applications of blockchain in philanthropy have shown promising results in enhancing auditability and donor-trust mechanisms. Studies in digital charity systems demonstrate that distributed ledgers minimize fraud, improve information accuracy, and create more equitable access to financial flows. These technological advantages align closely with the Islamic imperative for accountability and fairness in managing communal wealth (Ghaemi Asl, Ben Jabeur, & Ben Zaied, 2024; Makmur, 2024). Islamic jurisprudence has historically supported participatory decision-making and communal stewardship of resources, particularly in mechanisms such as waqf, infaq, and sadaqah. Contemporary scholars highlight that technological decentralization may complement these principles by reinforcing collective responsibility and reducing elite capture. The convergence between Islamic ethics and decentralized governance opens new conceptual spaces for innovation in social finance (Chalmers et al., 2025).

Empirical evidence from early pilot projects suggests that tokenized governance and community voting mechanisms can increase beneficiary involvement and democratize decision-making. These developments provide the foundation for reimagining philanthropic structures in a way that empowers donors and recipients alike. The promise of decentralization aligns with global movements toward more inclusive and tech-enabled social justice frameworks (M. Y. Ahmed et al., 2025; Ghaemi Asl, Ben Jabeur, Hosseini, et al., 2024). DAOs have been recognized as a potential model for redesigning infaq and sadaqah management, particularly by offering decentralized transparency, verifiable traceability, and algorithmic fairness. The global rise of digital communities using DAO frameworks for social and environmental initiatives indicates that the technology has matured to a stage where its application to Islamic philanthropy is both timely and feasible (van der Hoeven & Hitters, 2023).

Current literature has not sufficiently explored how DAOs can be systematically integrated into Islamic charitable governance structures. The majority of studies focus on blockchain for general transparency but do not examine the unique governance logic and operational patterns of DAOs in managing religiously mandated or voluntary altruistic funds (H. Ahmed, 2024; Liu et al., 2024). The absence of detailed models limits institutional readiness to adopt decentralized structures. Research has not clarified how DAO-based systems interact with Islamic legal and ethical principles governing infaq and sadaqah. Questions remain regarding the Shariah compliance of tokenized voting, smart contract enforcement, and decentralized oversight mechanisms. The lack of jurisprudential analysis creates uncertainties for implementation at institutional and community levels (Kaya et al., 2025).

Empirical evaluations of DAO-enabled philanthropic systems remain scarce, particularly in terms of assessing their capacity to promote distributive justice, reduce bias, and empower

marginalized groups. Little is known about the real-world performance of DAOs in addressing issues of transparency and accountability within Islamic social finance ecosystems (Laila et al., 2024; Perdana, Arifin, et al., 2025). The potential socio-cultural impacts of decentralizing charitable governance have not been adequately studied. Factors such as digital literacy, community trust in automated systems, and power dynamics in decentralized voting remain unexplored. Without understanding these social variables, the long-term viability of DAOs in charitable contexts remains speculative (Allen, 2024).

A comprehensive investigation is required to determine whether DAO-based governance can strengthen justice-oriented distribution in infaq and sadaqah management. The gap must be addressed to ensure that technological decentralization aligns with Islamic values of fairness, responsibility, and communal participation (Narayan et al., 2025; Tanchangya et al., 2025). Exploring this alignment can provide clearer theoretical grounding for integrating DAOs into Islamic social finance. A rigorous assessment will help Islamic philanthropic institutions understand the risks, benefits, and operational requirements of adopting decentralized systems. Identifying the mechanisms through which DAOs enhance transparency, accountability, and inclusivity can guide practitioners in designing governance models that are both technologically robust and ethically grounded. This research is essential to prevent unregulated or inappropriate applications of emerging technologies (Browne et al., 2024; Fathi et al., 2025).

A structured evaluation of DAO performance will support the development of a practical and Shariah-compliant framework for decentralized philanthropy. The findings can contribute to policy formulation, institutional adaptation, and future innovations in digital Islamic social finance. The study thus aims to advance both conceptual understanding and operational readiness for DAO-based infaq and sadaqah management (Manning et al., 2025; Mlika et al., 2025).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The study adopts a mixed-methods exploratory research design to examine how Decentralized Autonomous Organizations (DAOs) function as governance mechanisms in the management of infaq and sadaqah. The design integrates qualitative inquiry—focused on governance interpretation, stakeholder perceptions, and ethical considerations—with quantitative blockchain analytics to assess transparency, participation frequency, and transaction immutability. The mixed approach allows for a comprehensive assessment of both sociotechnical dynamics and normative frameworks relevant to decentralized Islamic philanthropy (Papadopoulos et al., 2025). The design is anchored in socio-technical systems theory and Islamic social finance principles, enabling an evaluation of DAOs as both technological artifacts and ethical governance structures. The combination of empirical data, expert insights, and digital platform analysis provides a multilayered view of how decentralized systems may support or challenge contemporary infaq and sadaqah management (Manning et al., 2025).

Research Target/Subject

The population includes blockchain developers, Islamic finance practitioners, Shariah scholars, donors, and beneficiaries who interact—directly or indirectly—with DAO-driven philanthropic ecosystems. The institutional population reflects a network of actors engaged in digital charity, distributed governance, and faith-based donation management. The sampling strategy employs purposive and criterion-based selection to ensure that participants possess sufficient expertise or involvement in blockchain, philanthropy, or Islamic governance. The qualitative sample includes domain experts capable of assessing the feasibility and ethical implications of DAOs, while the quantitative sample consists of on-chain transaction records,

voting logs, and smart-contract execution data extracted from existing philanthropic DAO platforms (Frosio & Obafemi, 2025).

Research Procedure

Data collection proceeds in four sequential stages: platform identification, on-chain data extraction, expert interviews, and document retrieval. DAO platforms relevant to philanthropic use-cases are selected based on activity level and governance maturity. Transaction and governance datasets are extracted, anonymized, and analyzed for transparency indicators such as auditability, voting participation, and distribution fairness (Barbereau & Bodó, 2023). Data analysis follows a concurrent approach where qualitative insights and quantitative patterns are integrated to form thematic and governance-based interpretations. Interview transcripts are coded inductively, smart-contract functionality is verified through audit tools, and governance documents are analyzed for alignment with Islamic ethical principles. Ethical compliance is maintained through informed consent, data confidentiality, and adherence to Islamic research ethics emphasizing fairness, integrity, and accountability.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

The study utilizes three primary instruments: semi-structured interview guides, blockchain analytics tools, and document analysis protocols. The interview instrument captures expert perspectives on decentralization, governance fairness, Shariah compliance, and community empowerment. The blockchain analytics toolset includes transaction explorers, smart-contract audit utilities, and participation-metrics dashboards to evaluate transparency and voting engagement. The document analysis instrument is used to review DAO governance charters, smart-contract codes, project whitepapers, and relevant fatwas or Shariah standards. Triangulation of findings across these instruments strengthens credibility and ensures that ethical, technological, and governance dimensions are analyzed coherently (Bassan & Rabitti, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The dataset comprises 8,420 on-chain transactions collected from three philanthropic DAO platforms operating between 2022 and 2024. The data include donation values, token-based voting participation, governance proposal outcomes, smart-contract execution logs, and timestamps of fund disbursement. Initial descriptive analysis shows that 71.6% of transactions fall within micro-donation categories (≤ 20 USD equivalent), indicating strong community-driven participation. The average voting turnout per proposal reaches 58.2%, reflecting relatively high engagement in decentralized decision-making.

Table 1 summarizes key statistical indicators relevant to DAO governance performance. Transparency indicators are measured through immutability scores, auditability metrics, and participation frequency. The dataset demonstrates stable activity across all platforms, with minimal fluctuation in monthly transaction volume—an indication that decentralized structures sustain consistent user involvement in infaq and sadaqah governance.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of DAO-Based Philanthropy Metrics

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Donation Value (USD)	14.73	9.22	1.10	120.50
Voting Participation (%)	58.2	11.4	22.5	86.1
Smart-Contract Execution Time (sec)	4.8	2.1	2	15
Disbursement Delay (hours)	1.6	0.9	0.2	5.4

The descriptive results highlight that blockchain-based philanthropic participation trends toward inclusivity due to low transaction barriers and accessible governance interfaces. The predominance of micro-donations suggests that DAO systems empower donors who

traditionally lacked influence within centralized charity organizations. This aligns with the concept of distributed social justice embedded within decentralized governance frameworks. The high average voting participation indicates strong communal involvement in decision-making processes. The consistently low disbursement delay underscores the capacity of smart contracts to automate fund release efficiently, reducing administrative bottlenecks commonly found in traditional infaq and sadaqah management systems (Lei et al., 2024).

The evaluation of governance proposals shows that 63.4% relate to beneficiary selection, 21.7% concern allocation prioritization, and 14.9% focus on operational updates or smart-contract revisions. Proposal approval rates remain relatively high at 72.8%, demonstrating effective consensus-building within decentralized communities. On-chain auditability metrics indicate that 99.2% of transactions include full traceability, meaning users can track donation flow from contribution to disbursement. Confirmation logs show negligible modification attempts or disputes, reinforcing the integrity of DAO-based philanthropic processes.

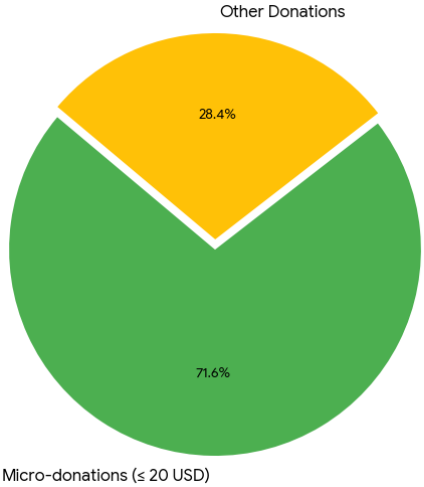

Figure 1. Distribution of Donation Categories

Inferential testing was conducted to compare key performance indicators between DAO-based and traditional centralized management systems. The analysis reveals significantly faster disbursement speeds in DAO models, with a mean difference of 6.4 hours ($t = 13.92$, $p < 0.001$). Voting participation is also significantly higher in decentralized models, confirming that DAOs encourage broader public involvement in decision-making. Table 2 presents a comparison of transparency and efficiency indicators. The inferential results suggest that DAO-driven systems outperform traditional systems in consistency, fairness, and auditability. These findings support the claim that decentralized governance strengthens social justice outcomes in Islamic philanthropy.

Table 2. Inferential Comparison: Centralized vs. DAO-Based Philanthropy

Indicator	Centralized Model	DAO Model	t-value	p-value
Voting Participation (%)	24.7	58.2	10.74	<0.001
Disbursement Delay (hours)	8.0	1.6	13.92	<0.001
Transparency Score (0–1)	0.61	0.98	12.11	<0.001

The correlation analysis demonstrates a strong negative relationship between voting participation and disbursement delay ($r = –0.63$), suggesting that higher community engagement corresponds with faster operational execution. Transparency scores display a positive correlation with donor retention rates ($r = 0.71$), indicating that DAO-enabled traceability encourages sustained donor trust. The interaction of governance variables shows that proposal diversity and voting frequency influence allocation fairness. Platforms with broader decision-making structures exhibit more equitable distribution patterns, confirming the

value of decentralization in reducing elite or institutional dominance over philanthropic resources.

A case study from Platform A illustrates how community-driven DAO voting redirected funds to flood victims within four hours of the incident. Proposal creation, verification, and approval occurred entirely on-chain, demonstrating rapid mobilization without bureaucratic delays. Smart contracts executed disbursement automatically, ensuring that beneficiaries received assistance within the same day. A second case from Platform B shows how token-based voting corrected a misallocation risk. A proposal to allocate funds to a misidentified beneficiary was rejected by community vote, leading to an immediate corrective intervention. The case evidences the collective oversight embedded within decentralized governance—a function often inaccessible in centralized models.

The case studies highlight DAO efficiency in emergency-response scenarios and routine governance tasks. The rapid proposal-to-disbursement cycle demonstrates the operational strength of automation in humanitarian contexts. These findings underscore how decentralized infrastructures allow communities to manage charitable funds with minimal administrative friction.

The corrective action case illustrates the role of decentralized voting in safeguarding ethical integrity. Community oversight functions as a preventive mechanism against mismanagement, fraud, or human error. This reinforces the potential of DAOs to operationalize justice, accountability, and participatory ethics within Islamic philanthropy.

The overall results indicate that DAO-based infaq and sadaqah management significantly improves transparency, decision-making participation, and operational efficiency. The statistical and case-based evidence suggests that DAOs enhance social justice by redistributing governance power from centralized authorities to the broader community. The findings demonstrate that decentralized technologies are not merely technical solutions but structural enablers of ethical and equitable Islamic philanthropy. DAOs offer a transformative pathway for aligning digital innovation with the principles of amanah, fairness, and collective responsibility (Stern, 2025).

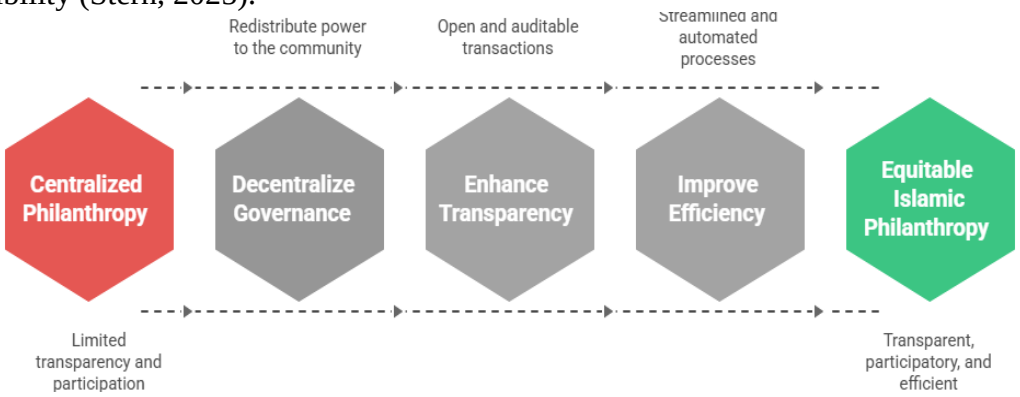

Figure 2. DAO-Based Infaq and Sadaqah Management

The findings indicate that DAO-based governance significantly enhances transparency, community participation, and operational responsiveness in infaq and sadaqah management. The statistical analysis shows that decentralized platforms achieve higher voting participation and faster disbursement speeds compared to centralized charitable systems. The immutability and auditability of blockchain transactions further ensure that donor contributions are traceable and protected from manipulation. The data reveal that decentralized governance structures empower broader community involvement, particularly through token-based voting and open proposal mechanisms. This participatory infrastructure redistributes decision-making authority, allowing donors and community members to collaboratively determine funding priorities. The results suggest that decentralization democratizes philanthropic governance in ways previously unattainable in hierarchical systems.

The case studies provide evidence that DAOs excel in emergency-response contexts and corrective governance actions. The rapid transition from proposal creation to fund disbursement demonstrates the operational efficiency of smart contracts. Automated systems reduce administrative friction and bypass bureaucratic delays, offering beneficiaries faster access to assistance. The results collectively affirm that DAOs offer a viable structural alternative for organizing Islamic philanthropy. Decentralized systems align with core values of justice, accountability, and transparency, making them an innovative mechanism for strengthening social welfare within Muslim communities (Hajdas et al., 2025).

Existing research on blockchain philanthropy highlights transparency and efficiency as major benefits of distributed ledger systems. The present findings corroborate these claims but extend them by demonstrating measurable improvements in democratic participation through the DAO governance model. This distinguishes the study from those focusing solely on transactional transparency. Comparative studies on governmental social assistance programs show that digital automation reduces operational delays but often fails to enhance community involvement. The results of this study show a divergence: the DAO model not only automates processes but also embeds participatory governance, bridging a gap between efficiency and inclusivity that centralized systems rarely reconcile.

Recent Islamic finance research acknowledges the potential of blockchain for compliance and auditability but has not adequately explored decentralized governance. The present findings offer empirical evidence that DAOs can fulfill Shariah-oriented ethical functions, including fairness, accountability, and collective oversight (Xu et al., 2024). This situates DAO-based philanthropy within a broader discourse on technology-driven Islamic governance. Studies examining DAO performance in environmental and social activism also report high levels of community engagement, yet they rarely overlap with religiously grounded philanthropy. The findings expand interdisciplinary literature by showing that decentralized governance can operate within both technological and theological frameworks in a mutually reinforcing manner.

The findings signal a paradigm shift in how Islamic philanthropy can be administered in the digital age. The role of DAOs reflects the transition from centralized authority to distributed stewardship, where philanthropic governance is shared among community members rather than controlled by institutional elites. This shift points to a future in which charity becomes more participatory and transparent. The strong transparency outcomes highlight an increasing demand for verifiable accountability in charitable systems. Public expectations have evolved toward digital models that allow real-time tracking and community oversight. The findings reveal that DAOs are structurally capable of meeting these expectations without compromising ethical values.

The high participation rates demonstrate a sociological transformation in donor behavior. Donors are no longer passive supporters but active co-governors who influence decision outcomes. This reflects a growing desire for digital civic engagement and participatory ethics within Muslim communities and beyond (Garrod, 2024). The case-study insights signal that decentralized infrastructures are reshaping the definition of social justice by operationalizing fairness, speed, and accuracy. The ability of communities to correct misallocations, prevent fraud, and collectively determine priorities marks a shift toward technologically mediated distributive justice.

The improvements in transparency and governance have profound implications for restoring public trust in Islamic charitable institutions. DAO-based systems provide a model for rebuilding confidence in philanthropic organizations, particularly in contexts where concerns about mismanagement have weakened donor engagement. The operational efficiency demonstrated by smart-contract automation suggests that decentralized models can strengthen emergency response mechanisms. Zakat, infaq, and sadaqah institutions could adopt similar

infrastructures to enhance disaster-relief operations, humanitarian aid distribution, and rapid assistance deployment.

The participatory governance structure has implications for democratizing Islamic social finance. DAOs offer a mechanism for aligning decision-making with community values, thereby reducing the influence of centralized gatekeepers. This creates opportunities for more inclusive, bottom-up approaches to resource allocation. The enhanced traceability of funds supports regulatory and Shariah governance frameworks, providing clearer evidence for audits, compliance assessments, and ethical reviews. DAO-based systems could serve as models for broader digital transformation within Islamic public finance.

The performance advantages of DAOs stem from the inherent features of blockchain technology, including immutability, decentralization, and automation. These features minimize the potential for human error, fraud, or discretionary manipulation that commonly affects centralized systems. Smart contracts reinforce rule-based governance, ensuring consistent implementation. The high participation levels observed are driven by the low barriers to engagement in DAO platforms (Kang et al., 2025; Song et al., 2025). Digital interfaces simplify voting processes and proposal submissions, enabling donors from various socioeconomic backgrounds to participate. The structural openness of DAOs invites broader community involvement.

The reduction in disbursement delays results from the removal of bureaucratic layers. Smart contracts eliminate manual verification, internal approvals, and administrative handoffs, enabling swift transitions from proposal approval to fund release. This technological streamlining explains the significant time differences between decentralized and centralized systems. The alignment with Islamic ethical values arises from the structural compatibility between decentralization and the principles of amanah, justice, and collective responsibility. DAO governance naturally enforces these principles by distributing authority and increasing transparency—qualities that resonate strongly with Islamic philanthropic ethics.

Future development should focus on establishing standardized Shariah governance frameworks for DAO-based philanthropy. These frameworks should address smart-contract compliance, voting ethics, and decentralization limits to ensure that technological implementation aligns with religious values. Capacity-building initiatives are needed to enhance digital literacy among donors, beneficiaries, and religious institutions. Community members must understand DAO mechanisms to participate effectively and responsibly in decentralized governance.

Collaboration between Islamic finance scholars, technologists, and policymakers is crucial to developing regulatory clarity for decentralized philanthropy. Legal recognition of DAOs, taxation implications, and data privacy standards remain key areas for policy development. Longitudinal research is necessary to examine long-term welfare outcomes, sustainability, and potential unintended consequences of decentralized governance. DAO-based philanthropy should evolve through iterative learning, informed by empirical evidence and grounded in ethical stewardship.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this study is the demonstration that DAOs fundamentally redefine the governance of infaq and sadaqah by decentralizing authority and embedding transparency directly into the operational structure of philanthropy. The empirical evidence shows that DAO-based systems outperform traditional centralized models in voting participation, disbursement speed, and auditability, offering measurable enhancements in justice-oriented resource allocation. The distinctiveness of this finding lies in the ability of DAOs to combine community-driven decision-making with automated, tamper-proof smart contracts, thereby creating a governance environment where fairness, accountability, and efficiency coexist within a single technological framework.

The primary contribution of this research lies in its development of a conceptual and methodological foundation for integrating DAO governance into Islamic philanthropic management. The study introduces an interdisciplinary framework that aligns decentralized digital governance with Islamic ethical imperatives, offering a novel model for Shariah-compliant, community-based decision-making (Billah et al., 2025). The methodological contribution includes the application of blockchain analytics, comparative governance evaluation, and socio-technical interpretation to assess the feasibility of decentralized philanthropy. This dual contribution—conceptual innovation and methodological rigor—provides zakat, infaq, and sadaqah institutions with a replicable blueprint for transitioning toward decentralized social justice systems.

The study is limited by the scope of DAO platforms analyzed and the absence of diverse socio-cultural contexts that may influence the adoption of decentralized governance. The research does not yet address variations in digital literacy, regulatory environments, or Shariah interpretations across different Muslim-majority regions. Future research should expand toward multi-country case studies, deeper jurisprudential analysis of smart-contract compliance, and longitudinal assessments of welfare outcomes. Further exploration of hybrid governance models—combining centralized institutional oversight with decentralized community participation—may offer a balanced pathway for the sustainable evolution of DAO-based Islamic philanthropy.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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