



Research Article

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Hadith Authentication in the Digital Sphere: The Dissemination of Weak and Fabricated Hadith in Social Media

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The rapid expansion of social media has significantly transformed the circulation of religious knowledge, including the dissemination of hadith within digital preaching. This study aims to analyse the phenomenon of potentially weak or fabricated hadith circulating in religious sermons on social media and to evaluate their authenticity using scientific methods within hadith studies. The research is important because the use of unverified hadith in digital sermons may influence public religious understanding and contribute to the spread of religious misinformation in contemporary Muslim societies. This study employs a qualitative research design that combines social media content analysis with classical hadith verification methods. Data were collected from selected religious sermons circulating on YouTube that contain hadith quotations suspected to be weak or fabricated. The analysis involved identifying the hadith cited in the sermons and examining their authenticity through the process of *takbrij al-hadith*, including the analysis of sanad (chain of transmission) and matan (text) using classical hadith literature as reference sources. In addition, audience responses were examined through comment sections to understand how digital audiences interpret and respond to the dissemination of such hadith. The findings indicate that several hadith cited in the analysed sermons do not have clear references in classical hadith sources and are presented without explanation of their sanad or textual authenticity. Despite this, these hadith are often delivered as authoritative religious statements that strengthen the persuasive power of sermons. The study also reveals that social media functions both as a platform for the rapid dissemination of unverified hadith and as a space where audiences engage in clarification and critical discussion. This research contributes to contemporary hadith studies by integrating classical hadith methodology with digital media analysis. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening digital hadith literacy to prevent the spread of religious misinformation in the digital era.

1. Introduction

The development of information technology has brought significant changes in patterns of communication and the dissemination of knowledge in society. The emergence of social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok has created new spaces for people to access, share, and discuss various forms of information, including religious knowledge (Ramdhani, 2016). Social media no longer functions merely as a medium for entertainment or personal communication, but has also evolved into a digital public sphere that facilitates the wide circulation of religious discourse. Religious figures, preachers, and religious influencers increasingly utilise these digital platforms to reach wider audiences compared with conventional preaching methods that are limited to particular physical spaces. This condition indicates that religious practices in the digital era are increasingly shaped by the dynamics of digital communication that enable religious knowledge to spread rapidly and extensively.

Although social media provides easier access to religious knowledge, the openness of digital platforms also presents serious challenges regarding the validity of the information circulating within them. The absence of strict verification mechanisms allows various forms of religious misinformation and disinformation to spread widely. In the Islamic context, one particularly concerning phenomenon is the circulation of weak (*ḍa'if* – weak or unreliable) and fabricated (*maḍḍū'* – fabricated or falsely attributed) hadith on social media. Several studies indicate that social media has become one of the main sources of religious learning for many individuals. A survey conducted among university students shows that approximately 45.84% of respondents consider social media a useful source for learning religion, while the trend of using digital media as a means of religious learning exceeds 80% in certain contexts (Ahsan, 2026). However, the dissemination of religious information on social media is often not accompanied by adequate verification processes. Many users directly share religious content without examining the authenticity of its sources. This situation highlights the importance of applying the principle of *tabayyun* (verification or clarification of information) within the digital ecosystem in order to prevent the spread of inaccurate religious information.

The phenomenon of unverified hadith circulation on social media can also be observed in the use of hadith to reinforce particular narratives, including narratives concerning religious authority or genealogical legitimacy (*nasab* – lineage or genealogical descent). In several cases, religious figures cite hadith whose authenticity remains uncertain in order to support particular claims in their sermons or digital content. One example frequently discussed in public discourse is the use of hadith in the sermons and social media uploads of Habib Bahar bin Smith that relate to narratives of lineage or *nasab*. The controversies surrounding the authenticity of the hadith used in such sermons demonstrate that the dissemination of hadith through social media is not merely related to preaching activities but is also closely connected to the construction of religious authority in the digital public sphere. When hadith that lack strong scholarly foundations are widely disseminated without proper verification, they may influence public understanding of Islamic teachings and create confusion regarding the authoritative sources of religious knowledge (Fauziah, Syafrin, & Nawawi, 2022).

Research concerning the relationship between religion and social media has been conducted by various scholars with diverse emphases. The first group of studies discusses the role of social media in transforming religious preaching practices and religious communication in the digital era. Research within this category emphasises that social media has created new spaces for the dissemination of religious discourse while also enabling the emergence of new actors in religious authority. Digital platforms allow religious leaders and preachers to reach significantly wider audiences and shape public opinion on various religious issues (Hadi, 2020).

The second group of studies highlights the phenomenon of religious misinformation and the circulation of problematic religious narratives on social media. Studies in this category demonstrate that the rapid distribution of information on digital platforms is often not balanced by adequate verification processes. Consequently, inaccurate religious interpretations, including weak and fabricated hadith, can circulate widely and influence public understanding. Several studies also indicate that the popularity and authority of religious figures on social media often play an important role in shaping public acceptance of the religious narratives they promote, even when the sources do not necessarily have strong scholarly foundations (Achmad, 2020).

The third group of studies focuses on strategies to prevent the spread of fabricated hadith and religious misinformation in digital spaces. Safitri and Musaddad (2025) explain that globalisation and the development of social media have accelerated the spread of fabricated hadith that are often manipulated or packaged attractively in order to become viral and influence the religious understanding of society. This phenomenon is driven by low levels of religious literacy, weak verification practices, and the misuse of social media. Its impact includes not only misunderstandings of Islamic teachings but also the potential to trigger divisions within the Muslim community. Similarly, Ghifari (2023) emphasises that the viral nature of social media facilitates the dissemination of inaccurate religious narratives, including the manipulation of hadith texts. Therefore, preventive strategies are required, including strengthening digital religious literacy, enhancing the role of scholars and religious communities in providing correct religious guidance, utilising technology to verify the authenticity of hadith, and fostering collaboration with social media platforms in order to preserve the integrity of Islamic teachings in the digital era.

Despite the contributions of these studies to understanding the dynamics of religion on social media, most research has primarily focused on patterns of religious information dissemination, audience responses, or strategies for preventing misinformation. Very few studies have systematically examined the authenticity of hadith circulating on social media using the methodological framework of classical hadith scholarship. In many cases, discussions of fabricated or problematic hadith remain general in nature without conducting scholarly verification through the methods of *takbrij* (the process of tracing hadith sources and chains of transmission) as well as *sanad–matan criticism* (critical examination of the chain of transmission and textual content). Consequently, a significant research gap remains in examining the quality and authenticity of hadith circulating within digital religious discourse.

Based on this research gap, this study seeks to integrate the classical methodology of hadith scholarship with social media analysis within the context of digital preaching. Specifically, this research analyses the use of hadith in the sermons and social media content of Habib Bahar bin Smith by examining the authenticity of the hadith cited and exploring how such narratives are constructed and received by audiences in the digital public sphere. By combining approaches from hadith studies and digital media analysis, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of hadith dissemination in the age of social media.

Therefore, the primary objective of this research is to analyse the phenomenon of potentially weak or fabricated hadith circulating in sermons and social media content and to evaluate their authenticity using scholarly methods from hadith studies. In addition, this study seeks to understand how these hadith narratives are constructed in digital sermons and how audiences respond to and interpret them within the digital public sphere.

This study begins with the preliminary assumption that the use of hadith classified as weak or lacking a strong chain of transmission may function as a narrative strategy to reinforce claims of religious authority or genealogical legitimacy (*nasab* – lineage). When such narratives are delivered by influential religious figures on social media, they may shape public understanding of religious teachings and

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influence perceptions of religious authority. Through a critical examination of the authenticity of the hadith employed in these narratives, this research aims to clarify the relationship between religious authority, digital media, and the circulation of religious knowledge within contemporary Muslim societies.

2. Methodology

This study focuses on the circulation of problematic hadith in digital religious discourse, particularly those disseminated through social media platforms. The unit of analysis in this research is digital religious content containing hadith narratives related to claims of genealogical legitimacy (*nasab* – lineage or genealogical descent). Specifically, the study examines audiovisual sermon content delivered by Habib Bahar bin Smith and distributed through social media, along with the audience responses reflected in online comments and discussions. The research does not only analyse the textual content (*matan* – the textual content of a hadith) cited in the sermons, but also explores how such hadith are utilised, interpreted, and positioned within the broader narrative of religious authority and lineage legitimacy in the digital public sphere.

This research employs a qualitative research design using a content analysis approach (Neuendorf, 2018). The qualitative approach was chosen because the study aims to interpret meanings, themes, and patterns in the use of hadith within digital religious discourse rather than to measure variables quantitatively. Content analysis allows researchers to systematically examine textual and audiovisual materials and to interpret the symbolic meanings embedded in them. In this study, content analysis is used to investigate how hadith are cited and framed within digital sermons and how these narratives function in constructing claims of religious authority in online spaces. The analytical framework is informed by the perspectives of Krippendorff and Bardin, who conceptualise texts and media content as socially constructed messages that carry meanings shaped by cultural and communicative contexts.

The primary data source in this research consists of audiovisual recordings of Habib Bahar bin Smith's sermons that contain references to hadith narratives related to lineage claims. These materials were documented through video recordings re-uploaded on the Guru Gembul YouTube channel, which functions as a digital archive and distribution platform for the sermons in question. One example of the primary data analysed in this study is a statement attributed to the Prophet in which it is claimed that "anyone who doubts the prophetic lineage is a hypocrite or a child of adultery." This statement was selected as a research object because it contains a strong theological claim regarding lineage legitimacy, yet no equivalent narration or recognised legitimacy has been found in the corpus of authoritative hadith literature (*al-kutub al-mu'tabarah* – recognised authoritative collections of hadith), whether within the categories of *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic), *ḥasan* (sound), or *ḍa'īf* (weak) hadith (Sarbanun, 2019). The analysed video was uploaded approximately two years prior to the conduct of this research and has accumulated more than two million views, indicating the extensive reach and influence of religious discourse circulated through social media.

Data collection in this study was conducted through non-participatory observation of video content and related social media materials, particularly those available on the YouTube platform. Non-participatory observation was employed because the researcher did not participate in the production or dissemination of the content but instead acted as an external observer analysing materials that had already been publicly circulated. The data collected include sermon videos, accompanying video descriptions, audience comments, and the contextual information surrounding the distribution of the content. These materials were documented and organised in order to capture patterns of discourse, audience reception, and the broader communicative context in which the hadith narratives were presented.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes, and narrative structures present in the video content. The analysis process involved several stages: initial familiarisation with the data, coding segments of content containing hadith claims, grouping the codes into broader thematic categories, and interpreting the narratives within the framework of hadith scholarship and digital religious discourse. In addition to thematic analysis, the authenticity of the hadith cited in the content was examined by comparing the claims found in social media materials with authoritative hadith literature (*al-kutub al-mu'tabarab* – canonical hadith collections), including *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, and major *Sunan* collections. The verification process followed the principles of *muṣṭalah al-ḥadīth* (the science of hadith methodology), particularly through *sanad criticism* (evaluation of the chain of transmission) and *matan criticism* (evaluation of the textual content), in order to determine whether the cited hadith could be classified as authentic, weak (*da'if*), or fabricated (*mandū'ū*).

3. Results

The Phenomenon of Hadith Dissemination in Sermons and Social Media

The phenomenon of the dissemination of potentially weak or fabricated hadith in the digital sphere can be observed through the interaction between religious sermons circulating on social media and the emergence of clarification content produced by digital creators. Based on non-participant observation of video content on the YouTube platform, this study finds that one form of problematic hadith distribution occurs when a religious sermon containing a specific hadith quotation is recorded, uploaded, and subsequently spreads widely through social media. In the digital environment, sermons that were originally delivered to a limited audience can quickly reach a much broader public through online circulation.

One of the cases analyzed in this study is a sermon delivered by Habib Bahar bin Smith, which contains a statement claimed to be a prophetic hadith related to the issue of prophetic lineage. The sermon later became the subject of criticism in an analytical video uploaded on the YouTube channel *Guru Gembul* (Figure 1). In the video, the content creator presents excerpts from the sermon containing the disputed hadith quotation and then provides a critical explanation regarding the validity of the hadith by referring to scholarly approaches within hadith studies. This process illustrates that the hadith narrative initially delivered in a religious sermon does not remain confined to its original oral context before a congregation; rather, it undergoes processes of reproduction, reinterpretation, and wider dissemination when it enters the digital sphere, where the content can be accessed, discussed, and debated by a broader audience.



Figure 1. Analytical video on the Guru Gembul YouTube channel criticizing the use of hadith

Source: (Guru Gembul, 2023)

Within the context of digital distribution, YouTube appears as the dominant platform for the dissemination and discussion of the hadith examined in this study. The *Guru Gembul* YouTube channel functions as a key medium for revealing, reviewing, and critically examining the use of hadith circulating in the digital public sphere. This channel was selected as a primary data source because it consistently produces content discussing religious issues that have become viral on social media through an analytical approach that is argumentative and educational. Through the videos uploaded on the channel, the creator not only replays excerpts of sermons containing disputed hadith quotations but also provides explanations regarding the status and validity of the hadith by referring to classical hadith literature and the methodological principles of hadith studies. The content generally takes the form of responses or reactions to statements by religious figures that have gone viral online, particularly those involving the use of hadith without clear verification of sources. This phenomenon indicates that social media does not merely function as a medium for disseminating religious information but also operates as a discursive space where clarification and criticism of religious narratives can emerge.

The findings further suggest that the dissemination of hadith within the digital sphere can be understood through several stages of content distribution (Usman & Nasir, 2022). Religious sermons serve as the initial source from which hadith narratives originate. These narratives are then reproduced through reaction or analytical videos produced by other content creators, and finally gain broader exposure through the distribution mechanisms of digital platforms. This distribution pattern is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution Patterns of Hadith in Sermons and Social Media

No	Distribution Pattern	Content Form	Actors Involved	Example Case	Implication
1	Dissemination through digital sermons	Religious sermons containing hadith quotations	Preachers and congregation	Sermon by Habib Bahar bin Smith containing a hadith claim about prophetic lineage	Hadith presented as religious authority without scholarly verification
2	Reproduction through reaction content	Analytical and critical videos	Digital content creators	Analytical video on the Guru Gembul YouTube channel	Social media becomes a space for clarification of hadith usage
3	Distribution through digital platforms	Videos widely circulated on YouTube	Digital platforms and audiences	Sermon videos and analytical responses gaining large audiences	Platform algorithms expand the reach of hadith discourse

Beyond the patterns of content distribution, the content analysis of the observed videos also indicates that the presentation of hadith in digital sermons generally employs a persuasive and normative approach. Hadith quotations are often introduced with religious expressions intended to establish legitimacy and religious authority before the audience. In this communicative pattern, hadith are positioned as normative truths that must be accepted by listeners as part of religious teachings. Consequently, audiences tend to accept the hadith directly without receiving adequate explanations regarding the source, context, or scholarly validity of the quoted narration.

In several cases observed in this study, the presentation of hadith in sermons was not accompanied by clarification regarding its status based on *samad* analysis, *matn* analysis, or scholarly evaluations found

in classical hadith literature. The absence of such academic clarification can potentially lead to misunderstandings among audiences, as the hadith is received as part of the preacher's religious authority without clear information on whether the hadith is classified as *ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḥasan*, or even *ḍa'īf*. In this context, hadith within digital sermons do not only function as sources of religious teachings but also as rhetorical devices used to strengthen the legitimacy of religious narratives conveyed to the public (Abd. Majid, 2018).

Overall, the findings indicate that the dissemination of the hadith examined in this study occurs through an interconnected process involving religious sermons and the distribution of content on social media. The hadith initially appears in the form of a statement delivered in a sermon by a religious figure. The sermon is then recorded and circulated through digital platforms such as YouTube, allowing it to reach a broader audience. Once the content circulates widely, other creators such as the Guru Gembul channel, produce response videos that replay excerpts of the sermon while providing explanations regarding the validity of the hadith by referring to hadith literature and scholarly methodology.

These findings demonstrate that social media functions not only as a channel for disseminating religious sermons but also as a space for discussion and clarification regarding the content of those sermons. Nevertheless, in many cases, hadith are presented within sermons through persuasive and normative approaches without adequate explanation of their sources or authenticity. As a result, audiences tend to accept the hadith directly as part of religious teachings without conducting further verification.

The dissemination of hadith on social media occurs through a sequence of interconnected processes involving religious sermons as the initial source of narrative, the reproduction of content through analytical or reaction videos, and the amplification of distribution through digital platform mechanisms. The interaction of these factors illustrates how social media plays a significant role in expanding the reach of religious discourse while simultaneously enabling criticism and clarification regarding the use of hadith whose scholarly basis may not be clearly established.

Evaluation of Hadith Authenticity Based on the Methodology of Hadith Studies

The evaluation of the authenticity of the hadith cited in the sermon was conducted using a methodological approach in hadith studies, particularly through the verification of hadith sources in classical literature and the analysis of both sanad (chain of transmission) and matn (textual content). The research data indicate that the sermon analyzed in this study contains a statement claimed to be a prophetic hadith related to the issue of prophetic lineage. This statement later became the subject of criticism in an analytical video uploaded on the Guru Gembul YouTube channel.

dari Ali: Rasulullah saw bersabda “Siapa yang tidak mengetahui hak Ahli baitku dan kaum Ansar maka ia termasuk salah satu dari yang tiga; Bisa jadi munafiq, dan bisa jadi karena anak hasil zina dan bisa jadi karena lahir tidak suci



H.R baihaqi

Figure 2. The disputed hadith quotation

Source: (Guru Gembul, 2023)

In the video, the content creator presents excerpts from the sermon containing the disputed hadith quotation and provides an explanation regarding the status of the hadith by referring to classical hadith literature and the methodological principles of hadith studies. Through this approach, the video does not merely reproduce the statement delivered in the sermon but also functions as a form of scholarly clarification regarding the use of hadith that lacks clear source references.

The process of evaluating the authenticity of the hadith in this study was carried out by tracing the quoted statement within authoritative hadith collections, including *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, and the books of *Sunan*. This search aimed to determine whether the hadith mentioned in the sermon has a verifiable basis within the established tradition of hadith scholarship. In addition, the evaluation considered two main analytical aspects in hadith studies: sanad analysis and matn analysis (Sohari, 1995). Sanad analysis seeks to trace the chain of transmission of a hadith and assess the credibility of its narrators, while matn analysis examines the textual content of the hadith and its compatibility with established Islamic teachings and recognized hadith literature.

The results of this verification indicate that the statement claimed to be a hadith in the sermon is not accompanied by any explanation regarding its chain of transmission or its source in classical hadith literature. As a result, the hadith cannot be scientifically verified through the standard methods commonly used in hadith studies.

Table 2. Results of Hadith Verification Based on Hadith Studies Methodology

Analytical Aspect	Findings
Source of hadith in the sermon	Statement claimed to be a hadith concerning doubts about prophetic lineage
Search in hadith collections	Not found in <i>Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī</i> , <i>Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim</i> , or the books of <i>Sunan</i>
Sanad analysis	No explanation regarding the chain of transmission
Matn analysis	The content has no clear reference in authoritative hadith literature

These findings indicate that in digital sermons, hadith are often delivered using persuasive and normative approaches without providing explanations regarding their authenticity within the framework of hadith scholarship. The presentation of hadith without clear references to sanad and classical sources can potentially lead to misunderstandings among audiences, as the hadith are accepted directly as part of religious teachings without undergoing scientific verification. Therefore, the application of scholarly methods in hadith studies becomes essential to ensure that the hadith used in religious sermons have a reliable basis within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

Based on the analysis presented above, the study further demonstrates that the hadith cited in the sermon and discussed in the YouTube video does not have a clear foundation in authoritative hadith literature. The verification process involved tracing the statement within major hadith collections such as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, and several *Sunan* collections, yet no references supporting the existence of such a hadith were found. Moreover, there is no information regarding the chain of transmission (sanad) that could identify the narrators responsible for transmitting the hadith. From the perspective of textual analysis (matn), the statement also lacks a clear basis in recognized hadith literature. This situation suggests that the hadith cited in the sermon cannot be scientifically verified using standard hadith methodologies, highlighting the importance of encouraging audiences to critically examine the sources of hadith before accepting or disseminating them as part of religious teachings.

Further analysis of the data reveals several patterns related to how hadith are used in digital sermons and how they are later verified through scholarly approaches. The first pattern is the use of hadith without

clear source references. The data show that the hadith cited in the sermon was presented without any reference to a specific hadith collection. In the sermon, the statement was used as part of a religious narrative aimed at strengthening the message delivered to the audience, yet no information was provided regarding the source of transmission or the hadith compilation from which it originated. When the statement was traced in classical hadith collections such as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, and the books of *Sunan*, no corresponding narration was found. This situation suggests a tendency in digital sermons to emphasize the rhetorical function of hadith rather than the accuracy of their scholarly sources.

The second pattern concerns the absence of explanation regarding the sanad of the hadith. In the tradition of hadith scholarship, sanad is a crucial element for determining the authenticity of a hadith, as it allows scholars to identify the narrators involved in the transmission and evaluate their credibility. However, in the case analyzed in this study, the hadith was delivered without mentioning the chain of transmission or any narrators associated with it. This indicates that the presentation of hadith in digital sermons often does not follow the methodological standards commonly applied in academic studies of hadith.

The third pattern highlights the role of social media as a space for scholarly clarification of hadith. While the sermon demonstrated a pattern of hadith usage without clear verification, the analytical video uploaded on the Guru Gembul YouTube channel attempted to address this issue by presenting excerpts of the sermon and offering critical explanations regarding the authenticity of the hadith. By referring to classical hadith literature and the analytical methods of sanad and matn, the video illustrates how social media can function not only as a medium for disseminating religious sermons but also as a platform for discussion, critique, and scholarly evaluation of religious narratives circulating in the digital public sphere.

Based on these patterns, it can be tentatively concluded that the use of hadith in digital sermons is not always accompanied by adequate scholarly verification, both in terms of source references and explanations of the chain of transmission. At the same time, however, social media also provides opportunities for the emergence of clarification and scholarly evaluation regarding disputed hadith. This finding suggests that the digital sphere performs a dual function: on the one hand, it acts as a medium for the dissemination of religious narratives, while on the other hand, it creates a discursive space that allows audiences to reassess the authenticity of hadith through scholarly approaches within the field of hadith studies.

Audience Responses and Meaning-Making in the Digital Public Sphere

Audience responses to the hadith narratives circulating on social media can be observed through user interactions in the comment sections of YouTube videos discussing the issue. Based on observations of the comment section of the analytical video uploaded on the *Guru Gembul* YouTube channel, it appears that the comment space functions as a digital public sphere where audiences express their views, attitudes, and interpretations regarding the disputed hadith. The variety of comments indicates that audiences are not merely passive recipients of information but actively participate in evaluating the sermon criticized in the video. These responses reflect diverse attitudes, ranging from support for the clarification of the hadith, personal experiences related to the sermon being discussed, to emotional comments expressing criticism of the use of religion in the digital public sphere (Wahab, 2023).



Figure 3. Audience interaction in the YouTube comment section

Source: (Guru Gembul, 2023)

Analysis of the comments appearing on the video reveals several observable response patterns. First, a significant number of audience members express support for the criticism of the hadith presented in the video. This support is reflected in comments that directly appreciate the efforts of the content creator in providing clarification. For example, one user wrote:

@twj14: “Finally There Is A Muslim Who Is Intellectually Knowledgeable And Dares To Fight Ignorance. I Fully Support Guru Gembul!!”

Another comment expressing similar support states:

@donyprasetyo7078: “Respect to Guru Gembul for bravely speaking the truth. We need more people like Guru Gembul. Very enlightening.”

In addition, some comments suggest that the video helped broaden the audience’s understanding of the issue being discussed, such as:

@polishprotection6292: “Alhamdulillah, I feel enlightened regarding the issue of the habib.”

Second, several comments reveal personal experiences from audience members who have interacted directly with the sermons of the religious figure discussed in the video. These comments illustrate how some viewers attempt to independently verify the information they hear in religious sermons. One user wrote:

@Syarifu_K: “I once attended Bahar bin Smith’s sermon because it happened to be held in a mosque near my house. There I noticed not only his rude behavior such as using harsh language, but he also mentioned a hadith that sounded strange to me. I immediately researched and searched the internet for the hadith he mentioned but could never find it. Whenever I searched, I only found his sermons again and again. From that point on I started doubting Bahar bin Smith simply because I couldn’t find the hadith he mentioned.”

This comment indicates that some audience members do not simply accept the content of sermons but actively seek additional information to verify the authenticity of the hadith being presented.

Third, several comments contain social and emotional criticism related to the broader phenomenon of religious discourse in the public sphere. Some users express sharp criticism toward the dissemination of religious narratives that they perceive as lacking a clear basis. For instance, one comment states:

@BatalyonImperium: “Let’s destroy ignorance in this country so Indonesia can progress.”

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Another comment criticizes the phenomenon of religious fanaticism in society:

@ZomiKayama: “People really need enlightenment. Blind fanaticism in this country has already reached a worrying level.”

To clarify the diversity of audience responses to the content discussing the hadith, the categories of responses identified in the data can be summarized in the following table.

Table 3. Categories of Audience Responses to Hadith Content on Social Media

Type of Response	Example of Audience Comment
Support for hadith criticism	“Finally There Is A Muslim Who Is Intellectually Knowledgeable And Dares To Fight Ignorance. I Fully Support Guru Gembul!!”
Support for clarification	“Respect to Guru Gembul for bravely speaking the truth. We need more people like Guru Gembul.”
Personal audience experience	“I once attended Bahar bin Smith’s sermon... and tried to find the hadith he mentioned but could not find it.”
Social and emotional criticism	“People really need enlightenment. Blind fanaticism in this country has already reached a worrying level.”

These findings indicate that the comment section on social media does not merely function as a space for responding to content but also as a form of public discussion arena where audiences interpret and negotiate religious issues circulating in the digital sphere. The responses reveal support for critical approaches to hadith studies while also illustrating the dynamics of debate and social criticism that emerge among social media users when discussing religious authority and the legitimacy of religious narratives in the digital age.

The comment data from the analyzed YouTube video further show that audiences provide a wide range of reactions to the discussion of the disputed hadith. Many users express support for the clarification offered in the video, as reflected in comments such as “Finally There Is A Muslim Who Is Intellectually Knowledgeable And Dares To Fight Ignorance” and “Respect to Guru Gembul for bravely speaking the truth.” In addition to expressions of support, several comments recount personal experiences of attending the same sermon and attempting to locate the hadith mentioned but failing to find it in recognized sources. Furthermore, some comments contain broader social criticism regarding religious fanaticism and the spread of religious information perceived as lacking a clear foundation. Overall, the comment data demonstrate that audiences on social media do not merely consume content passively but actively contribute opinions, experiences, and evaluations related to the hadith issues discussed in the digital public sphere.

Further analysis of these responses reveals several patterns that illustrate how audiences interpret and respond to hadith narratives circulating on social media. The first pattern is support for the clarification and criticism of hadith. Many comments express appreciation for the effort to critically analyze the hadith mentioned in the sermon. Audience members view the analytical discussion presented in the video as an important step toward correcting misunderstandings in religious discourse. This perspective is evident in comments such as “Finally There Is A Muslim Who Is Intellectually Knowledgeable And Dares To Fight Ignorance. I Fully Support Guru Gembul!!” and “Respect to Guru Gembul for bravely speaking the truth. We need more people like Guru Gembul.” These responses indicate that some audiences appreciate critical and knowledge-based approaches when discussing religious issues, particularly those related to the use of hadith.

The second pattern is the emergence of personal experiences related to the verification of sermons. Some comments show that audiences do not only respond to the content of the video but also share their own experiences of attending the same sermon or encountering the hadith being discussed. In one comment, a user explained that they attended the sermon and later attempted to search for the hadith mentioned but could not find it in available sources. This pattern suggests that some audiences have developed an awareness of the need to verify religious information and increasingly rely on digital resources to check the authenticity of hadith cited in sermons.

The third pattern is the emergence of broader social criticism toward religious fanaticism and authority. In addition to supporting the clarification of hadith, some comments express criticism regarding the phenomenon of blind fanaticism in society. Comments such as “People really need enlightenment. Blind fanaticism in this country has already reached a worrying level” and “Let’s destroy ignorance in this country so Indonesia can progress” demonstrate that the discussion of hadith is not viewed solely as an academic issue but also as part of broader social concerns related to how religious authority is interpreted and practiced in contemporary society.

Based on these patterns, it can be tentatively concluded that audience responses to hadith narratives on social media demonstrate complex dynamics of interpretation and engagement. Some audiences support critical approaches to hadith studies, others share personal experiences related to verifying sermons, while others express broader social criticism regarding religious fanaticism. These findings indicate that the comment sections of social media platforms function not only as spaces for responding to content but also as arenas of public discussion where audiences interpret, evaluate, and negotiate religious issues circulating within the digital environment.

4. Discussion

This study aims to analyse the phenomenon of the dissemination of potentially weak or fabricated hadith in religious sermons circulating on social media, while also evaluating the authenticity of these hadith using scientific methods in hadith studies. The findings indicate that the hadith cited in the analysed sermons do not have clear references in classical hadith literature and are not accompanied by explanations regarding their sanad (chain of transmission). Nevertheless, these hadith are still presented within sermons as part of a religious narrative that functions to strengthen the authority of the message delivered to the audience. In addition, this study finds that social media serves not only as a space for the distribution of hadith narratives but also as a space for discussion and critique. On the one hand, sermons containing these hadith quotations can spread widely through digital platforms. On the other hand, social media also enables the emergence of clarification content and critical responses from audiences who attempt to reassess the authenticity of the hadith presented.

The phenomenon of the dissemination of unverified hadith in digital sermons can be explained through several interrelated factors. First, within preaching practices, hadith are frequently used as rhetorical devices to reinforce religious messages delivered by preachers. The presence of hadith in sermons provides an impression of authority because it is directly associated with the Prophet Muhammad, leading audiences to accept the sermon content without verifying the sources of the hadith. Second, religious authority in the digital sphere is not solely constructed through scholarly competence but also through popularity, performative preaching styles, and the symbolic influence of religious figures on social media. Under these conditions, hadith quotations delivered by influential figures can easily be accepted by audiences as religious truth. Third, the distribution mechanisms of social media accelerate the spread of religious content without undergoing the rigorous verification processes that characterise

classical hadith scholarship. Digital platform algorithms enable sermons that attract public attention to circulate widely in a short period of time, allowing hadith narratives that may not be verified to quickly become part of public discourse.

The findings of this research are closely related to several previous studies that discuss the dissemination of hadith within digital spaces. Studies conducted by Hadi (2020), Achmad (2020), and Ghifari (2023) demonstrate that social media plays a significant role in accelerating the distribution of problematic or unverified hadith. These studies generally emphasise patterns of religious content circulation on social media and audience responses to such content. However, this research offers a distinct contribution by integrating social media analysis with methodological approaches from hadith studies. This research not only examines how hadith circulate and are interpreted by audiences but also evaluates the authenticity of these hadith through tracing them within classical hadith literature and analysing both sanad and matan (text). In doing so, this study contributes to contemporary hadith scholarship by linking classical hadith methodology with the dynamics of religious communication in digital environments.

From a historical perspective, the findings of this study indicate a shift in the mechanisms through which hadith authority is transmitted. In the classical Islamic tradition, the validity of hadith was determined through rigorous transmission processes and verification by hadith scholars through analyses of sanad and matan. In contrast, within the digital sphere, the authority of hadith is no longer determined solely by scholarly verification processes but is also influenced by the popularity of religious figures, digital communication skills, and the virality of content on social media. This phenomenon corresponds with the concept of *digital religious authority*, which refers to transformations in religious authority resulting from the development of digital technologies, where religious legitimacy is derived not only from institutional or scholarly authority but also from the ability of religious actors to utilise digital platforms to reach wider audiences (Abusharif, 2023; Cheong & Campbell, 2022). In digital spaces, new figures such as religious digital creatives, celebrity preachers, or cyber-muftis can gain religious influence through a combination of religious texts, communicative performativity, and algorithmic visibility generated by social media platforms (Whyte, 2022). These conditions demonstrate that digital media has decentralised religious authority and opened opportunities for various actors to produce and distribute religious narratives outside traditional authority structures, while simultaneously creating new challenges regarding the verification of religious information and the religious literacy of society in the digital age (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020; Laugu, Arianto, & Mustafa, 2024).

From a social perspective, this research demonstrates that social media has become a new arena for society to discuss and negotiate religious authority. Audiences are no longer merely passive recipients of information but increasingly participate in evaluating religious narratives circulating online. The comment sections of the analysed YouTube videos illustrate how audiences support hadith clarification, share personal experiences in verifying sermons, and express criticism towards the phenomenon of religious fanaticism. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of *participatory religion*, which refers to the active involvement of individuals and communities in religious discourse and practices that are collaborative and open to public participation (Nanthambwe, 2025). In the digital context, such participation is further strengthened by the use of online platforms that enable the formation of virtual religious communities and expand spaces for religious dialogue beyond traditional institutions (Głębocka, Zaczek, Mierzejewska, & Waligórski, 2025). Consequently, social media functions not only as a medium for the distribution of religious messages but also as a participatory space in which audiences contribute to the processes of verification, interpretation, and critique of religious discourse within the digital public sphere.

From an ideological perspective, the use of unverified hadith in digital sermons can function as a tool for legitimising particular narratives within religious discourse. Hadith are often employed to provide normative foundations that reinforce messages delivered by preachers, making these narratives appear to possess strong religious authority despite lacking clear references within classical hadith literature. In this context, hadith function not only as sources of religious teachings but also as discursive instruments that shape how society understands religious authority and determines the legitimacy of particular religious viewpoints. This phenomenon corresponds with the concept of *religious legitimacy*, which refers to the process through which religious authority is constructed through the use of symbols, texts, or religious figures in order to obtain normative recognition within society (Izmuddin, Amalia, Nasir, & Muttaqin, 2023). In many social and political contexts, religious legitimacy is often achieved through claims of authority over sacred texts or religious scholars who are considered to possess moral authority in interpreting religious teachings. Therefore, within digital spaces, the use of hadith—whether authentic or unverified—can become an ideological strategy to strengthen certain narrative positions while influencing how audiences interpret religious authority in contemporary public discourse.

From a functional perspective, social media has positive potential in expanding public access to religious discourse. Digital platforms enable wider dissemination of religious knowledge while opening spaces for critical discussions regarding the use of hadith in sermons. The clarification content analysed in this research demonstrates that social media can also serve as an educational medium that contributes to improving hadith literacy among the public. Nevertheless, social media also possesses the potential for dysfunction in the context of hadith dissemination. The rapid distribution of information in digital spaces enables unverified hadith to spread widely without undergoing adequate scholarly verification. In such conditions, hadith may be utilised as tools of legitimisation to reinforce particular narratives despite lacking strong foundations within the scholarly tradition of hadith studies. Consequently, society may unknowingly accept and disseminate hadith with unclear origins as part of religious teachings. This phenomenon corresponds with the concept of *religious misinformation*, which refers to the spread of inaccurate or unverified religious information that increasingly circulates through digital platforms and social media (Al-Zaman, 2022). Other studies also indicate that during global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, social media became a primary channel for the viral spread of religious advice, including hadith or religious messages lacking clear scholarly foundations, thereby generating confusion and degrading the quality of the religious information environment within digital public spaces (Alimardani & Elswah, 2020). Thus, the dissemination of unverified hadith on social media is not merely a matter of hadith scholarship but also part of a broader issue of religious misinformation that influences how society understands religious teachings.

Based on the findings of this study, several strategic measures can be proposed to address the problem of the dissemination of unverified hadith in digital spaces. First, strengthening digital hadith literacy through public education programmes is necessary to explain how to identify weak or fabricated hadith and to introduce the basic methodologies of hadith scholarship to the wider community. Second, religious and academic institutions should play a more active role in utilising social media as an educational platform by providing religious content grounded in academically verifiable research. Third, social media platforms could be encouraged to collaborate with religious and academic institutions to develop mechanisms for clarifying religious content that may potentially mislead the public. These measures are expected to enhance public religious literacy while preventing the spread of unverified hadith within the digital public sphere.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the dissemination of weak or fabricated hadith in digital religious sermons occurs through persuasive and normative narrative strategies that are rarely accompanied by adequate scholarly verification. The findings indicate that the hadith cited in the analysed sermons do not have clear references in classical hadith literature and are often presented without explanation regarding the validity of their sanad (chain of transmission) or matan (text). Nevertheless, such hadith are frequently positioned as authoritative religious statements, making them easily accepted by audiences. In this context, YouTube emerges as an important platform not only for the dissemination of religious sermons but also for the emergence of clarification content and critical responses that form part of contemporary religious discourse within the digital public sphere.

The study also shows that the spread of unverified hadith has broader social implications. Beyond influencing individual religious understanding, the circulation of questionable hadith narratives may contribute to internal polarisation among Muslims, verbal conflicts in digital spaces, and the emergence of exclusivist attitudes or judgemental practices towards other groups. These dynamics illustrate how religious narratives circulating on social media can shape both religious interpretation and social interaction in contemporary Muslim societies. Academically, this research contributes to the development of contemporary hadith studies by integrating classical hadith verification methods with social media analysis. By combining textual analysis of hadith authenticity with the study of digital religious communication, this research offers a new perspective for understanding how hadith function within modern digital environments. It also highlights the urgency of strengthening hadith literacy based on scientific methodology in order to respond to the challenges of religious misinformation in the digital era.

However, this study has several limitations. The analysis focuses primarily on a limited number of sermons circulating on YouTube, which means that the findings may not fully represent the broader dynamics of hadith dissemination across other social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, or Facebook. Future research could expand the scope of data sources and employ interdisciplinary approaches, including digital ethnography or computational analysis of religious content, in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the circulation of hadith in contemporary digital environments.

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