



## Islamic Communication Strategies in Addressing Religious Hoaxes on Social Media

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### ABSTRACT

The development of digital media has changed the way Indonesians access and disseminate religious information, creating vulnerability to hoaxes that impact behavior, perceptions, and the dynamics of religious diversity in both public and private spaces. This study aims to understand how religious hoaxes are constructed and disseminated on social media, as well as how emotions, identity, and digital authority shape user responses. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design based on document analysis, this study examines news archives, fact-checking databases, national hoax monitoring reports, and digital traces from various social media platforms. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of meaning that emerged in circulating religious narratives. The results reveal four main findings: the use of religious arguments and aesthetics in building narrative authority; the exploitation of fear, guilt, and chain logic; the shift of religious authority towards algorithm-based legitimacy and virality; and the normalization of hoax dissemination in private spaces reinforced by a culture of digital charity. These findings enrich the study of Islamic communication, media ecology, and disinformation studies by emphasizing that hoax mitigation requires an ethical-spiritual approach that can address the affective and identity dimensions of users. In practical terms, this research provides direction for strengthening religious digital literacy and public communication strategies that are more adaptive to the algorithmic dynamics and digital culture of society.

### 1. Introduction

The advancement of information technology over the past decade has significantly transformed societal communication patterns, particularly in the consumption and distribution of religious content via social media (Putra et al., 2024). The surge of internet users in Indonesia, totaling 221.56 million in 2024, indicates a heightened level of public engagement in the digital realm (Hashmi et al., 2021). Nonetheless, the rapid increase in information dissemination has not been matched by a corresponding enhancement in digital literacy, as evidenced by several studies indicating that the public is increasingly inundated with vast quantities of information, although their capacity to evaluate its veracity remains deficient (Al-Zaman, 2022). This circumstance has facilitated the proliferation of religious deceptions, including misinformation about fatwas, distortion of passages

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and hadiths, and incitements rooted in religious passion, which have consistently demonstrated the capacity to incite societal polarization and discord among groups (Febriani & Ritonga, 2022). Misleading religious narratives frequently disseminate more rapidly than authoritative clarifications, so potentially undermining official religious authority and fatwa structures (Kambali et al., 2023).

This problem is becoming increasingly significant as religious content possesses strong virality due to its exploitation of emotional sensitivities and group identification connections (Noor Huda Ismail, 2025). Its distribution channels are extensive, encompassing WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and X/Twitter, including the intersection with hate speech and ideological propaganda (Arief & Karlinah, 2022). In some cases, the spread of manipulated religious narratives can be one of the triggers of digital radicalization. It is consequently perceived as a threat to national stability and social unity (BNPT, 2024). The public's difficulty in validating religious communications, particularly among family WhatsApp groups and internal communities, intensifies the dissemination of hoaxes, since some individuals are hesitant to challenge the authenticity of information presented as religious doctrine (Haq & Widyatama, 2025). The national hoax monitoring report indicates a persistent trend of propagation via social media, particularly in the lead-up to elections 2024 (Indra et al., 2024).

Efforts to prevent hoaxes have primarily depended on technological methods and the implementation of governmental regulations, including content control and the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (Subekti et al., 2025). Nonetheless, academic literature on Islamic communication methods that function as ethical and epistemological frameworks for discerning religious content remains very scarce (E-sor et al., 2025). Consequently, the incorporation of Islamic communication ethics is vital to enhance the resilience of Muslim communities against digital deception.

Religious hoaxes constitute a phenomenon of digital communication that operates through emotional, ideological, and group identity messaging (Dhona, 2024). Moreover, the primary venues for its transmission are WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and X/Twitter, frequently linked to hate speech and extremist propaganda (Weimann & Masri, 2023). Prior research underscores the imperative of digital literacy through content verification competencies; however, there is a paucity of comprehensive studies that amalgamate Islamic communication principles such as *tabayyun* (verification of information accuracy), *tabligh* (responsible message dissemination), *amanah* (integrity and precision), *hikmah* (wisdom), and *mau'izhah hasanah* (peaceful communicative counsel) as a framework for digital public communication (Muta et al., 2021). Numerous research have substantiated the significance of these concepts, including the efficacy of *tabayyun* as a technique for information verification, the ethical framework of digital *da'wah* grounded in *amanah* and *hikmah*, and the imperative for Islamic media literacy instruction (Mildad, 2018).

Within the framework of disinformation theory, research on religious hoaxes in social media typically pertains to the information disorder model, which categorizes three types of information disruption: misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (Hananthiyo et al., 2025). This model serves as a crucial basis for comprehending the phenomena of information distortion that arises inside the digital media ecosystem during the dynamics of religious public opinion formation. Consequently, research indicates that misinformation proliferates rapidly due to its capacity to evoke shock and curiosity, so leveraging the emotional traits of social media users, which allows misleading content to disseminate more extensively than accurate information. Recent studies confirm that religious content exhibits significant virality due to its activation of moral emotions, fear of retribution, aspiration for reward, and robust group identity. Consequently, hoaxes are frequently presented through quotations from religious texts, narratives of heaven and hell, threats of punishment, or assertions of legitimate religious authority.

This framework engages with the principles of Media Ecology Theory, wherein the proliferation of religious hoaxes signifies not only a deficiency in information verification but also constitutes a transformation in the community's epistemic environment, facilitated by the process of religious mediatization in the digital realm (Rozen & Hadiyanto, 2025). Digital media serves not just as a conduit for disseminating religious information but also actively influences cognitive patterns, emotional responses, religious practices, and societal evaluations of religious authority. This transformation is apparent in the evolving behavior of audiences who are gravitating towards religious engagement characterized by interactivity, hypermedia, and virtual communities, wherein digital congregations are no longer reliant on physical worship spaces, but rather on a da'wah ecosystem influenced by platform algorithms and individual religious consumption preferences. The digitization of religious authority has engendered novel forms of legitimacy that eschew traditional scholarly validation, instead depending on algorithmic visibility, symbolic popularity, and the persuasive rhetoric of celebrity preachers, Islamic da'wah influencers, and unverified da'wah channels. This discovery aligns with the growing production and dissemination of religious content that employs selective or inaccurate quotes of verses and hadiths to establish immediate religious authority, which is challenging for the public audience to differentiate from genuine religious sources (Raya, 2024).

Under these circumstances, online media fosters a fragmented, competitive, and contested vernacular religious authority via daily digital encounters, obscuring the distinction between religious study and personal religious thought. This transition is bolstered by the psychological dynamics of misinformation consumption, in which individuals are predisposed to embrace religious material that aligns with group identity, emotional connection, and moral impetus, regardless of its accuracy. This technique reduces the psychological burden associated with endorsing and disseminating unsubstantiated religious information, thereby facilitating the proliferation of religious hoaxes inside digital social networks. As a result, the criteria for accepting religious truth have evolved: emotionally resonant, succinct, easily disseminated, and rhetorically appealing religious narratives are more readily accepted than extensive, contentious scientific explanations that need greater cognitive engagement. This transformation has established a novel "space of belief" in digital religiosity, where religious legitimacy is now influenced not only by scientific sanad and scholarly authority but also by the principles of virality, emotional resonance, and social legitimacy derived from algorithmic communities that govern the production and dissemination of religious discourse in the modern digital landscape (Ergen, 2023).

However, thus far, there has been no comprehensive analytical framework that systematically integrates the information disorder model with the epistemology of Islamic communication, grounded in the concepts of tabayyun, amanah, islah, and hikmah. Numerous research have demonstrated the feasibility of such integration. For example, Islamic value-based digital literacy helps people improve their critical thinking abilities when it comes to filtering religious content. The Tabayyun.id portal is thought to be useful for helping Muslim internet users verify information. However, clarifying methods that are solely technical and factual frequently neglect the affective-spiritual aspect of the message recipient, resulting in the continuation of hoaxes in the emotionally charged digital religious realm. From the standpoint of Ethical Pragmatism in Islamic Communication, ethical values like sidq (honesty), amanah, tabayyun, and islah are perceived not merely as norms but as moral imperatives when individuals choose to disseminate religious messages on WhatsApp, scrutinize unverified digital fatwas, or engage with provocative da'wah posts.

Consequently, the research gap in the examination of digital Islamic communication is attributed to the lack of a comprehensive model that systematically integrates Islamic normative-ethical concepts with modern digital communication tactics to combat religious hoaxes. So far, Islamic communication principles like tabayyun, tabligh, amanah, hikmah, and mau'izhah hasanah have

mostly been seen as guidelines for normative da'wah, not as practical methods to deal with the fast rising problem of information disorder on social media. This article presents a comprehensive conceptualization of the Anti-Hoax Islamic Communication Strategy Model, which amalgamates the fundamental principles of Islamic communication with strategic digital communication mechanisms. These include: **(1) tabayyun**, which enhances the information verification model as a method for validating the accuracy of religious information; **(2) tabligh**, which employs a counter-narrative strategy to refute misleading religious narratives in a manner that is both argumentative and educational; **(3) amanah**, which incorporates digital accountability as an ethical standard of responsibility in the dissemination of religious messages; and **(4) hikmah and mau'izhah hasanah**, which advocate for peaceful and persuasive communication that alleviates and diminishes social polarization. This model aims to enhance modern Islamic communication theory and act as a practical framework for governments, da'wah institutions, educators, and Muslim communities to fortify the resilience of religious information in the digital realm and establish a genuine, civilized public communication ecosystem aligned with Sharia principles.

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1 Research Design*

This research employs a qualitative methodology utilizing a document-based case study framework to investigate the creation and dissemination of religious hoaxes within Indonesia's digital environment. This design perceives documents as social constructs of epistemic significance in knowledge production, facilitating a credible, methodical, and scientifically verifiable data-based validation process. Data sources comprise news archives, fact-checking databases, hoax monitoring reports, and digital footprints from WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and X/Twitter platforms. The analysis utilizes the information disorder framework, which differentiates between misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation, with the principles of news values and the emulation of journalistic domains in digital hoax content.

### *2.2 Data Sources and Document Curation*

Documents are chosen through a curated process that assesses authority, authenticity, thematic relevance, and source traceability. Priority is assigned to official publications from reputable organizations such as the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology of the Republic of Indonesia (Kominfo), the Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs (KOMDIGI), the Indonesian Anti-Slander Society (MAFINDO), the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). Furthermore, news sources from mainstream media outlets such as Kompas, Tempo, Republika, CNN Indonesia, and BBC Indonesia are employed as supplementary verification references, alongside pertinent academic publications in the disciplines of digital communication, information literacy, and religious disinformation. Documented digital footprints, such as web archives or screenshot recordings, are examined when the original content has been removed or restricted on digital platforms.

### *2.3 Data Collection Procedures*

Data collection was conducted using document analysis and digital tracking employing keywords such as: "religious hoaxes," "jihad hoaxes," "fraudulent religious teachers," "misguided fatwas," "religious WhatsApp broadcasts," and "religious slander." The investigation was carried out using the MAFINDO hoax database, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology's Hoax Database, search engines, and public discourse on pertinent digital platforms. All data was

documented on an extraction sheet comprising information on: (1) case setting, (2) year of occurrence, (3) dissemination platform, (4) hoax form, and (5) resultant social impact.

#### 2.4 Data Analysis

This study employs Thematic Analysis for data analysis, characterized as a flexible and systematic qualitative method aimed at uncovering patterns of meaning in empirical data. Hendry's review of Braun and Clarke's book, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*, indicates that this approach has become the principal reference in modern qualitative research. The analytical process was executed through iterative and reflective phases, commencing with familiarization via an exhaustive review of the documents and preliminary documentation of analytical insights, constituting the initial step in the thematic analysis framework as outlined in the practical guide by Maguire and Delahunt. The subsequent phase is open coding, characterized by initial coding devoid of pre-established categories to identify units of meaning pertinent to the research focus. This methodology is also articulated in Kabir's review, which underscores that Braun and Clarke's guidebook offer systematic technical guidance for researchers to adhere to sequentially. The codes are further arranged into thematic groupings to establish more structured categories, consistent with the theme searching and reviewing phases outlined by Maguire and Delahunt in their depiction of the steps for identifying and evaluating themes. The method involves the identification and definition of themes to create a conceptual framework that encapsulates the primary patterns in the data, prior to the researcher engaging in the interpretation phase to derive theoretical significances and practical ramifications of the research outcomes. This study optionally employs software tools like NVivo or ATLAS.ti during the analysis process to enhance data organization, coding, and mapping of interrelationships among themes, as recommended by Maguire and Delahunt regarding the efficacy of qualitative analysis tools in managing codes and research outcomes. The implementation of Thematic Analysis in this study adheres to a methodical, credible, and auditable framework, consistent with the attributes outlined in the three publications.

### 3. Results

Based on document analysis covering news archives, fact-checking databases, national and regional hoax monitoring reports, and digital traces from TikTok, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X/Twitter, this study identified three main clusters of religious hoax narratives circulating on Indonesian social media:

- (1). **Prohibition on greeting certain groups** (Appendix A, links 1–15),
- (2). **Calls for jihad based on specific hadiths** that are interpreted problematically and associated with violence or hatred (Appendix B, links 16–57).,
- (3). **Threat of punishment for those who do not spread certain messages** “If you don't share it, you will be punished/suffer misfortune” (Appendix C, link 58–70).

The three clusters were utilized as empirical data for the primary unit of analysis to examine and comprehend the patterns of message construction, dissemination logic, and public reception dynamics in the digital realm. This study refrained from doing legal or fiqh evaluations of particular individuals or accounts, instead framing the content within the context of religious hoaxes in Indonesia's digital media landscape. Utilizing thematic analysis, the codes derived from the three-story clusters (A, B, C) and additional data from official hoax reports by Kominfo, JalaHoaks, and other pertinent state entities were then categorized into four primary connected themes, as detailed in Table 1. Coherent Thematic Framework.

**Table 1 Integrated Thematic Structure**

Tema Utama (Hasil Penelitian)	Subtema Tematik	Deskripsi	Kode Data
1. Pola Narasi Hoaks Keagamaan dalam Format Video Pendek	1.1 Dalil Parsial	Potongan ayat/hadis tanpa konteks membingkai larangan salam & ajakan jihad.	A1–A15, B16–B57
	1.2 Pembingkai Identitas Kelompok	Dikotomi “kita- mereka” Eksklusivisme salam, Klaim moralitas Kelompok	A4, A7, A10
	1.3 Estetika Visual religius	Latar Masjid, Voice-over Ustad, efek video religious	A8, B16–B57
2. Viralitas Emosional dan Logika Call-to-Forward	2.1 Tekanan Emosional & Ancaman Azab	Rasa takut musibah, Klaim pahala, ancaman Spiritual	C58–C70, B21
	2.2 Call-to-Forward	Instruksi eksplisit untuk Menyebarkan (“Sebarkan!”, “jangan Berhenti!”).	A3, C58–C70
	2.3 Emosi identitas Dan Rasa ber Salah	Penyebaran karena Menyelamatkan orang lain “guilt pressure”	K-C/WA-2024
3. Ekologi otoritas Keagamaan berbasis algoritma	3.1 Viralitas sebagai Kredibilitas	Narasi dianggap benar karena viral bukan karena valid	B17, B25, C61
	3.2 Simbol Religius Sebagai otoritas	Estetika religious, menciptakan otoritas instan	B16–B57, A8
	3.3 Fragmentasi Otoritas digital	Akun non-ulama Membangun otoritas dakwah instan	A5, B35, C62
4. Normalisasi Penyebaran & Keterbatasan Klarifikasi Teknis	4.1 Replikasi otomatis di Ruang	Forward WA tanpa verifikasi	WA/2024, C58–C70
	4.2 Penghambatan Sikap Kritis	Kritik dianggap kurang iman; tabayyun disingkirkan	B18, C66
	4.3 Penyebaran sebagai Amal Jariah Digital	Forward dianggap ibadah atau dakwah	C58–C70
	4.4 Debunking Tidak Efektif	Klarifikasi tidak memutuskan arus hoaks	C60, B40
	4.5 Minim Pendekatan Etika–Spiritual	Klarifikasi teknis kurang menyentuh moralitas	Dokumen 2023–2024

### 3.1 Narrative Patterns of Religious Hoaxes in Short Video Format

The initial subject addresses the construction of religious frauds, primarily using easily consumable, scrollable, and shareable short video formats. Religious hoaxes on TikTok typically

amalgamate three components: fragmented arguments, group identification framing, and religious visual aesthetics. The three sub-themes together establish an authoritative impression, obviating the necessity for verification.

### *3.1.1 Partial arguments as narrative legitimization*

The first sub-theme demonstrates that a lot of the films in Appendices A and B show parts of passages or hadiths without any context. These reasons are used to explain why it is wrong to greet specific groups or call for jihad in a confrontational way (codes: A1–A15, B16–B57). In certain videos, hadiths are shown on the screen in only one or two phrases, and they often don't say who said them, when they were revealed, or what scholars have said about them. After this brief phrase, the story comes to an end with a clear moral lesson, such as:

*“Don't just say hello to anyone! There are groups of people who should not be greeted according to Islamic law. ...”* (code: A-7, TikTok).

The analysis shows that religious content on social media often cuts out arguments and context. This makes it easier to understand, but it also makes it harder to understand because it oversimplifies complex ideas and reduces the range of scholars' views to black-and-white messages that are easy to understand but not true. This kind of simplification turns fiqh discussions, which are actually full of subtleties, into hard claims of fact that make people embrace one interpretation without thinking about it. This practice not only influences theological comprehension but also exerts a social impact by perpetuating prejudice, fostering the exclusive delineation of group identities, and facilitating intolerant attitudes in interactions among Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims. So, taking away context from arguments has become one of the main ways that biased and possibly contentious religious content is made in the internet environment.

### *3.1.2 Exclusive framing of group identity*

The second sub-theme highlights how hoax narratives construct group identity only through the "us-them" dichotomy. In the greeting video cluster (codes: A4, A7, A10), the content creators say that greetings are only for groups that are seen as righteous or representatives of Ahlus Sunnah. Other groups are seen as unworthy of greetings and even suspected of being Ahlul Bid'ah or heretics. In the jihad invitation cluster (codes: B21, B31), the same identity framing process is used. People who answer the call are called "fighters" or the righteous group, whereas others who are reluctant, critical, or call for tabayyun are called weak in faith or lacking courage..

As directly cited from one of the films, “It is time for jihad!” This hadith is unequivocal; it merely depends on your willingness to implement it. (code: B-21, TikTok) highlights the method in which arguments are edited and showcased confrontationally to strengthen in-group identity. This approach is bolstered by the replication of videos across multiple accounts employing a similar pattern, which includes snippets from lectures, passages or hadiths displayed on screen, and emotive voice narrations that provoke combative action. This trend indicates that religious texts are employed not to foster understanding, but to establish moral validity for the in-group while undermining the out-group. Consequently, the findings of this study validate that religious hoax tales not only streamline arguments but also serve as instruments for cultivating exclusive group identities, which may exacerbate prejudice and incite social disintegration in the digital realm.

### *3.1.3 Religious Visual Aesthetics*

The third sub-theme emphasizes the utilization of religious visual aesthetics as a means of symbolic legitimacy (codes: A8, B16–B57). Numerous movies are presented with (1) a mosque or

majelis taklim (Islamic study group) backdrop, (2) traditional ustaz attire (gamis, turban, peci), (3) recitations of Qur'anic verses or extracts from lectures, and (4) layered Arabic calligraphy text. These visual features foster the perception that the given message have authentic religious authority, leading viewers to accept it without scrutinizing the validity of the reasons and interpretations. Within the realm of hoaxes, this religious aesthetic functions as a "amplifier" that enhances the perception of the message's sanctity, complicating the ability of recipients to differentiate between scientific and deceptive information.

### *3.2 Emotional Virality and Call-to-Forward Logic*

The second theme indicates that the primary strength of religious hoaxes resides in their emotional appeal and the mechanism of chain dissemination (call-to-forward), rather than in the robustness of scientific reasoning.

#### *3.2.1 Emotional Pressure and Threat of Punishment*

The sub-theme of punitive threats is most prominently illustrated in the video cluster in Appendix C (links 58–70; codes: C58–C70), wherein religious hoaxes are presented through a narrative structure that amalgamates quotations from verses or hadiths regarding punishment with accounts of individuals asserting they have endured misfortune for failing to disseminate the message, culminating in overt threats. In certain instances, the message is bolstered by pseudo-authoritative assertions, such as references to "esteemed scholars" or "genuine experiences" that lack verifiability. The most illustrative example is found in the assertion: "Do not cease at yourself!" "Failure to disseminate this message may result in a catastrophe within the forthcoming seven days." (code: C-60, TikTok). This pattern leverages fear, spiritual unease, guilt, and apprehension of supernatural repercussions to motivate the audience to disseminate the message, not due to its veracity, but because of the psychological coercion engendered by the threat framework. This cluster illustrates that the principal strategy employed by hoaxes regarding divine punishment is the manipulation of unpleasant emotions to influence receivers' behavior and expedite the spread of deceptive religious teachings.

#### *3.2.2 Call-to-Forward as Distribution Logic*

Another manifestation of emotional pressure is evident through specific directives to disseminate communications (call-to-forward), such as "Distribute this to 10 individuals!", "Do not halt with yourself!", or "Do not be miserly with rewards, share it immediately!" Code: A3, C58–C70. These directives transform the dissemination of hoaxes into a quasi-religious ritual. Forwarding messages is regarded as a virtuous act that may provide benefits or prevent repercussions, so compelling recipients to adhere to the story directive without taking the time to check its veracity.

#### *3.2.3 Emotions of Identity and Guilt*

Analysis of audience feedback indicates that religious hoaxes operate not just via visual content but also through the psychological pressure generated in digital interaction environments. Numerous comments in response to information advocating punishment and inciting jihad reveal a narrative characterized by uncertainty intertwined with guilt, exemplified by statements such, "I doubt this is true, but I also fear the repercussions of not disseminating it." Code: K-C/WA-2024, study group. This pattern illustrates how hoaxes employ religious moralistic terminology, including faith-unbelief, sunnah-bid'ah, and reward-punishment, to generate social pressure, compelling recipients to disseminate the message to preserve their religious reputation within the community. Fear, spiritual worry, the will to assist others, and apprehension of supernatural repercussions are emotional motivators that compel the act of forwarding, notwithstanding the lack of epistemic validation of the information's veracity. Consequently, the act of disseminating messages serves not only as a reaction to content but also as a performative expression of piety in the digital realm, where individuals feel

compelled to exhibit their devotion through sharing, despite the risk of perpetuating religious misinformation.

### *3.3 Algorithm-Based Religious Authority Ecology*

The third theme delineates the transition in religious authority within the digital media landscape, from conventional scholarly authority to algorithm-driven vernacular authority and virality..

#### *3.3.1 Viralitas sebagai Kredibilitas*

Analysis of audience comments indicates that within the religious digital ecosystem, virality frequently serves as the primary metric of truth, whereby the quantity of views, likes, comments, and shares is regarded as the epistemic legitimacy of a content item. One commenter stated, “If it is not true, how could millions of individuals view and disseminate it?” (code: K-B/TK-2023), numerous users regard public visibility as evidence of the legitimacy of the teachings or arguments presented. This phenomenon transpires irrespective of the account type generating the content, be it an individual account, a religious channel, a news account, or an entertainment account that incorporates religious teachings. The audience prioritizes digital interaction metrics and symbolic displays, such as religious attire, mosque settings, or sound snippets from prominent religious figures, over the legitimacy of the source.

This trend establishes what is termed digital vernacular authority, a novel form of religious authority that depends on visibility, visual religious impressions, and online communal endorsement, rather than formal scientific validity or credible interpretive procedures. The virality of jihadist content (Appendix B) and threats of punishment (Appendix C) has significant implications, as it prompts lay audiences to regard the most disseminated narratives as truth, despite their frequent contradictions of interpretative rules, fiqh principles, and Islamic communication ethics. Consequently, these findings validate that platform algorithms and the culture of virality significantly influence perceptions of reality in the digital realm, while simultaneously facilitating the dissemination of religious hoaxes.

#### *3.3.2 Religious Symbols as Insta Authority*

This sub-theme illustrates the utilization of religious symbols (clerical attire, mosque settings, recitations of scripture, voice-overs of lectures) to establish immediate authority in preaching (codes: B16–B57, A8). Numerous accounts not affiliated with clerics or official institutions employ audio-visual editing techniques to create the illusion of legitimacy, resembling scientific research or official fatwas, while the original content has been manipulated, distorted, or amalgamated with deceptive narratives.

#### *3.3.3 Digital Authority Fragmentation*

Alongside sermons by religious leaders, there exist secular narratives and entertainment content that repurpose religious themes as clickbait, humor, or motivational material, while still incorporating calls for jihad, threats of retribution, or prohibitions against greeting others (codes: A5, B35, C62). This scenario engenders a fragmentation of digital authority, obscuring the distinction between religious authority with academic credentials and algorithmic authority derived from follower metrics. For the general populace, these two forms of authority are sometimes indistinguishable, hence heightening the risk of exposure to deceptive religious narratives.

### *3.4 Normalization of Hoax Dissemination and Limitations of Technical Clarification*

The fourth theme illustrates that religious hoaxes extend beyond the public domain of TikTok and similar platforms, becoming normalized and perpetuated in private settings, particularly within family WhatsApp groups, religious study groups, and school or religious organization communities, while official clarification mechanisms frequently neglect to tackle the underlying ethical and emotional concerns.

#### *3.4.1 Automatic Replication in Private Rooms*

This study's findings indicate that a significant portion of religious content from TikTok and other platforms is disseminated as forwarded messages among family WhatsApp groups, religious study groups, educational communities, and diverse religious organizations (code: WA/2024; C58–C70). The diffusion process is swift and nearly automatic: once a film is seen to address emotional themes or contain pertinent religious messages, group members promptly share it with other groups without any vetting. This trend suggests that forwarding is predominantly motivated by emotional resonance and a perceived religious urgency to distribute the message quickly, rather than by an assessment of the soundness and truthfulness of the arguments or sources within the message's content. This process demonstrates that closed communication platforms like WhatsApp operate as echo chambers that expedite the dissemination of religious content, particularly when such content is simplistic, easily comprehensible, and motivated by dread, spiritual anxieties, or pressing moral exhortations. Consequently, automatic replication emerges as a primary mechanism facilitating the extensive proliferation of religious hoaxes in private spheres, as the act of transmission is predominantly shaped by emotional dynamics and communal solidarity rather than epistemic thinking.

#### *3.4.2 Inhibition of Critical Thinking*

The study revealed that critical perspectives on religious content frequently lack sufficient representation at the message reception level. In several discussions (codes: B18, C66), expressions surfaced indicating that efforts to challenge the validity of arguments or information sources were regarded as manifestations of "lack of faith," "excessive critical thinking," or even disrespect towards religious educators. Statements such, "Why should it be re-evaluated? This is a religious issue; do not be overly critical" (code: C-WA/2024) illustrate societal conventions that obstruct the use of *tabayyun* as the cornerstone of Islamic epistemology. Opposition to this critical perspective affects the community's capacity to judiciously evaluate information, as the veracity of a message is frequently assessed through terror, the esteem of the *ustaz*, or the presumption that religious messages are above scrutiny. This scenario indicates that barriers to *tabayyun* arise not only from insufficient digital literacy but also from religious values and authority dynamics that perceive criticism as a deviant rather than an aspect of scientific rigor. Consequently, enhancing a culture of critical thinking and comprehending the ethics of *tabayyun* is essential for addressing religious deception grounded in psychological and symbolic dynamics inside the digital realm.

#### *3.4.3 Spreading as Digital Charity*

This sub-theme emphasizes the religious-affective aspect that compels certain people to disseminate religious content without evaluating its authenticity. Many users view forwarding as a type of "digital charity" (code: C58–C70), believing that disseminating any message deemed religious will yield rewards, whilst failing to do so may "close the door of reward for others." Expressions like "make this share a charitable deed" or "if you don't share it, you are hindering others from doing good" indicate that the act of disseminating the message is perceived as an act of worship, irrespective of the veracity of the message's substance. Within this context, forwarding is perceived

not merely as a communicative act, but as a digital ritual linked to moral and spiritual virtue. This conviction bolsters the internal legitimacy of disseminating any message that seems religious, thereby perpetuating the ongoing proliferation of religious hoaxes despite the lack of epistemic verification of their content. Consequently, the perception of digital philanthropy is a crucial aspect that perpetuates the cycle of hoax propagation in the digital realm.

#### *3.4.4 Debunking Ineffective Techniques*

Documents from Kominfo, JalaHoaks, and other hoax monitoring organizations indicate that factual clarifications are consistently disseminated via government websites and social media to counter misleading assertions propagating on WhatsApp, Facebook, and other platforms. Nonetheless, persistent trends in monthly reports indicate that hoaxes exhibiting analogous formats and patterns repeatedly resurface, despite multiple clarifications. This suggests that mere technical debunking is inadequate to stop the spread of hoaxes, particularly when they are associated with religious sentiments, incentives, sanctions, and collective identities.

#### *3.4.5 The Lack of an Ethical-Spiritual Approach in Clarification*

The concluding sub-theme emphasizes that the majority of official clarification documents concentrate on fact-checking, institutional explanations, or data rectifications, yet infrequently incorporate ethical-spiritual language that encourages users to contemplate their moral obligations and responsibilities in disseminating religious information (code: Document 2023–2024). The disparity between the administrative language of governmental clarifications and the emotive religious language of hoaxes has significantly widened. Hoaxes manifest as messages that evoke dread, aspirations for reward, and religious identity, whereas clarifications present as "cold" texts that are instructive yet lack emotional resonance with the audience.

### *3.5 Discussion*

This study's findings indicate that religious hoaxes on Indonesian social media operate not merely as "misinformation," but as a religious communication practice that integrates argument manipulation, emotional regulation, and algorithmic authority, subsequently normalized through a culture of sharing in private contexts. Three primary clusters—prohibitions on greeting specific groups, exhortations for jihad derived from selective hadiths, and threats of retribution for failing to disseminate the message—exemplify the interconnection between information disorder and the ecology of digital media alongside Islamic communication ethics in quotidian practice. Each issue will be examined reflectively in relation to the theoretical framework and contemporary literature.

#### *3.5.1 Short Video Narrative Patterns: From Information Disorder to Hermeneutic Violence*

This research indicates that the prevalence of short video formats like TikTok facilitates the construction of religious hoaxes through three primary components: incomplete argumentation, group identification framing, and religious visual aesthetics. This pattern conceptually extends Wardle and Derakhshan's model of information disorder (misinformation, disinformation, malinformation) from simple factual inaccuracies to a manifestation of hermeneutic violence: religious texts are excerpted, decontextualized, and employed to bolster exclusive and adversarial assertions.

Studies on religious hoaxes among students and university attendees indicate that religious material conveyed in a straightforward and authoritative fashion is more readily internalized, particularly when associated with identity and apprehension of moral or spiritual repercussions. This finding aligns with research indicating that several users accept narratives like "prohibition of

greeting” or ‘jihad’ not due to their comprehension of fiqh and ushul fiqh traditions, but because the arguments are framed as “final truths” that allow little scope for interpretation.

This pattern indicates a divergence from the concepts of tabayyun and hikmah within the context of Islamic communication. Research on Islamic communication ethics in social media underscores that tabayyun necessitates the verification of sources, context, and scholarly authority prior to the dissemination of religious material. In the findings of this study, religious texts are regarded as “rhetorical weapons”: elements that bolster exclusive narratives are emphasized, while contexts necessitating care are disregarded. This work significantly contributes by presenting a typology of religious hoax narratives derived from short films pertinent to the Indonesian context: the prohibition of greetings cluster, the problematic jihad cluster, and the chain-message-based threat of punishment cluster. This typology enhances prior research that examines religious hoaxes broadly, without a detailed analysis of their narrative structure and visual logic.

### *3.5.2 Emotional Virality, Call-to-Forward, and Performativity of Piety*

The second theme emphasizes that the potency of religious hoaxes resides in the exploitation of emotions and chain letter reasoning (call-to-forward), particularly via threats of retribution and assurances of reward. Psychologically, this pattern is similar to the phenomenon of chain letters and chain messages on WhatsApp that exploit fear, anxiety, and guilt to encourage recipients to forward messages without critical thinking. In a religious environment, this reasoning is heightened: forwarding is regarded not merely as a social reaction, but as “digital charity.” Statements like “I doubt this is true, but I also fear not to share it” illustrate an internal struggle between the logical imperative to ascertain truth and the emotional compulsion to exhibit devotion within the society. These findings align with research on religious hoaxes, indicating that religiosity and fear of retribution are frequently significant predictors of the propensity to disseminate unsubstantiated religious messages.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings enhance our comprehension of information disorder by introducing the concept of “ethical pragmatism”: the act of disseminating a message is a moral-performative decision, rather than solely the consumption of information. Religion-based digital literacy that solely stresses “verify facts before disseminating” frequently neglects this dimension, as evidenced by recent research on TikTok literacy and the efficacy of brief video interventions in diminishing the propensity to propagate misinformation. In the context of Islamic Communication Ethical Pragmatism, these findings affirm that the ideals of *sidq*, *amanah*, and *tabayyun* must be comprehended not merely as cognitive standards, but as ethical conduct when an individual presses the forward button. This study provides a conceptual contribution by demonstrating that religious hoaxes expose the disparity between ideal ethics (*tabayyun*) and actual practices (propagation driven by fear of punishment), thereby creating opportunities for the development of Islamic communication strategies focused on the reconstruction of emotions and intentions, rather than merely rectifying message content.

### *3.5.3 Algorithms, Vernacular Authority, and the Mediatization of Religion*

The third subject, concerning the ecology of algorithmic religious authority, illustrates how the rapid mediatization of religion in Indonesia is transforming the basis of authority from scientific *sanad* to digital vernacular authority. This aligns with research on digital religion and mediatization, indicating that social platforms provide a “third space” where religious authority is redefined through exposure, participation, and religious symbols. Recent research on the evolution of Indonesian Muslim religious practices in the digital realm indicates that algorithms, recommendation systems, and the principles of virality significantly contribute to the emergence of new authoritative figures,

often outside of formal organizations. The results of this investigation corroborate this perspective, specifically emphasizing religious hoax content:

- Virality is often used as an indicator of truth (“if it's not true, how could millions of people watch it”)
- Religious symbols (mosque background, religious teacher's clothing, calligraphy) create an aura of instant authority
- The non-religious and entertainment accounts also produced and reassembled narratives of jihad, salvation, and punishment.

Investigations into TikTok algorithms and religious material indicate that recommendation systems might generate religious filter bubbles, perpetuating similar content and exacerbating view polarization [53]. This study's findings on the fragmentation of digital authority enhance the discourse by demonstrating that religious hoaxes are a tangible result of the interplay of algorithms, religious aesthetics, and the attention economy. This study provides a distinct contribution by mapping how algorithms and religious symbols create opportunities for innovative da'wah while also enabling the formation of authority structures susceptible to argument misuse and hoax proliferation, in contrast to prior literature that broadly addresses the opportunities and challenges of digital da'wah.

#### *3.5.4 Normalization in Private Spaces and Technical Clarification Limitations*

The fourth element illustrates that the cycle of religious hoaxes extends beyond public material, manifesting in private spheres such as family WhatsApp groups, religious assemblies, and internal communities. This finding aligns with global studies on WhatsApp chain messages, indicating that forwarding within restricted groups significantly contributes to the virality of information, despite the platform's several forwarding indicators. This study introduces a significant aspect: among religious groups, the culture of reverence for religious educators and the norm of refraining from excessive criticism in matters of faith impede the practice of tabayyun. This aligns with research regarding the susceptibility of the Indonesian populace to ethnic and religious misinformation, emphasizing the diminished propensity to challenge symbolic authorities in the digital realm.

Conversely, official reports and scholarly articles on religious digital literacy affirm that fact-checking and technical clarification interventions are beneficial; however, their effectiveness is frequently constrained as they fail to consider the emotional and religious norms influencing sharing behavior. The conclusions of this study regarding the linguistic disparity between hoaxes (characterized by themes of punishment, reward, and identity) and official clarifications (noted for their administrative, detached, and legalistic tone) elucidate why debunking frequently fails to halt the proliferation of hoaxes, despite its logical sufficiency. The discourse on digital akhlaq and Islamic platform projects like Tabayyun.id presents a more holistic model: digital literacy is conceptualized as integral to upholding faith, trust, and the ethics of content dissemination, rather than only a technical proficiency in fact-checking. This study's findings offer empirical evidence that a spiritual ethical approach to hoax clarification is both a normative goal and a practical necessity for understanding the emotional and moral rationale behind forwarding activities. This research facilitates a paradigm change from "combating hoaxes with data" to "cultivating a culture of trustworthy and tabayyun communication" within the digital private sphere, an area that has been comparatively overlooked in other investigations of religious deception.

#### *3.5.5 Theoretical Contributions: Integration of Information Disorder, Media Ecology, and Islamic Communication Ethics Theoretically, this study offers at least three contributions:*

- This study expands the model of information disorder by illustrating how religious hoaxes operate through the manipulation of arguments, identity framing, and religious aesthetics, thereby shifting the emphasis from merely assessing the truthfulness of information to examining the process of religious meaning production within the contexts of mediatization and algorithmization. This enhances the examination of hoaxes, which has primarily concentrated on content and effects rather than on the underlying story structures and religious practices.
- Implementing Islamic communication principles in digital practices: This study illustrates how the values of *tabayyun*, *amanah*, and *mau'izhah hasanah*, or their absence, manifest in tangible decisions, such as terminating arguments, categorizing other groups, advancing out of fear of repercussions, or disregarding official clarifications. This aligns with contemporary research trends that seek to operationalize Qur'anic principles and Islamic ethics as a framework to combat misinformation. This study enhances the conversation with empirical evidence from the Indonesian social media landscape.
- Determining the function of media ecology and digital religion in religious deceptions: This study concretely connects media ecology and digital religion theory to the phenomena of religious hoaxes through the integration of algorithmic analysis, visual symbols, and private spaces. The digital vernacular authority presented herein reflects the conclusions of research regarding the evolution of religious authority in the digital realm, specifically emphasizing the ramifications of religious disinformation that jeopardizes societal cohesiveness.

### *3.6 Researcher Reflections and Scientific Social Implications*

The researcher's affiliation with the Muslim community and academic status implies that the interpretation of data is not totally objective, as it is informed by the perspective of Islamic communication. Cultural and religious proximity aids academics in comprehending the subtleties of terminology, symbolism, and emotional sensitivities present in hoax narratives. For instance, the terms “*jihad*,” “*salaf*,” and the implications of punitive threats are interpreted variably by distinct groups. Conversely, there exists a risk of making hasty normative judgments regarding both the makers and recipients of content. The document-based case study method and systematic thematic analysis facilitate reflective distance; however, the interpretation must be recognized as one of many potential interpretations that could arise if researchers from diverse denominational backgrounds, social classes, or geographical locations conducted the research. Investigations of the normalizing of hoaxes within familial groups may exhibit distinct configurations when analyzed in religious minority communities or in areas with varying political structures.

This study affirms that religious hoaxes pose a significant threat not just to the veracity of information but also to intergroup connections, familial cohesion, and religious authority in the digital era. This aligns with the findings of other research regarding the polarization of religious issues in Indonesian social media and its effects on social cohesiveness and the risk of radicalization [52]. This study advocates for a shift in the examination of Islamic communication within the digital realm from a “normative-defensive” stance—merely advocating for a return to communication etiquette—to a “analytical-transformative” approach. This entails a critical analysis of how Islamic values are mediated through algorithms, emotions, and emerging authority structures. Furthermore, it aims to develop an anti-hoax Islamic communication strategy model that not only identifies the flaws in content but also explores the reasons behind the dissemination of misinformation by well-intentioned individuals, while seeking to revitalize Islamic ethics as a practical application rather than a mere slogan.

#### 4. Conclusions

This study reveals how faith hoaxes on Indonesian social media operate through a confluence of decontextualized religious narratives, emotional coercion, and a transition in religious authority towards an algorithm-driven paradigm. Three categories of hoaxes—prohibitions on salutations, contentious calls to jihad, and threats of retribution—demonstrate that hoaxes not only disseminate misinformation but also influence users' religious identities, sentiments, and behaviors in the digital realm. The results of four primary themes—short video production, emotional virality, digital vernacular authority, and the normalization of dissemination in private spheres—indicate that message forwarding transcends mere information sharing; it constitutes a performative act of digital piety motivated by fear, guilt, and the anticipation of reward. This expands the comprehension that religious hoaxes are integral to the dynamics of digital religiosity shaped by computational logic and emotional resonance, rather than only a deficiency in literacy.

Theoretically, this study enriches the study of information disorder, media ecology, and Islamic communication by showing the gap between tabayyun ethics and digital religious practices. Although this study is limited to document analysis without in-depth interviews, it opens up new space for understanding how truth, authority, and identity are negotiated in platform-based religious ecosystems.

##### 4.1 Implications

These findings have important implications for the development of strategies to mitigate religious hoaxes. The approach to handling hoaxes cannot rely solely on technical clarification and regulation, but must include communication strategies that touch on the emotional, identity, and spiritual dimensions of users. The government, religious institutions, educators, and digital communities need to develop counter-narratives based on Islamic values of tabayyun, amanah, and hikmah, packaged with aesthetics and rhetoric in line with social media logic. In addition, this study emphasizes the need to strengthen critical culture in private spaces such as WhatsApp groups, where hoaxes are often normalized as digital charity. The academic implications encourage further research through in-depth interviews, digital ethnography, or cross-regional comparative studies to broaden understanding of the motivations behind the spread of hoaxes and to test the effectiveness of the Anti-Hoax Islamic Communication Strategy model in various community contexts..

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