Truth in the Age of Disinformation: The Relevance of Islamic Epistemology in Filtering Digital Religious Narratives

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Abstract:

The digital era poses significant challenges to the accuracy of religious narratives as disinformation spreads rapidly across social media, blurring the line between fact and opinion. This study aims to explore the relevance of Islamic epistemology in filtering and evaluating digital religious content. A qualitative case study was conducted with 12 informants, including scholars, digital preachers, lecturers, and students, using in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and digital documentation. Findings reveal that Islamic epistemological principles such as *ḥaqq*, *tabayyun*, *sanad*, and ethical knowledge transmission are actively applied, fostering reflective and responsible user behavior. Disinformation reshapes perceptions of religious authority, while *tabayyun* practices significantly mitigate epistemic vulnerability. The study contributes by integrating classical Islamic epistemology with contemporary digital literacy, offering both conceptual and operational frameworks. Practically, it highlights the need for epistemology-based digital education to strengthen Muslim communities' resilience against misleading religious content.

INTRODUCTION

The digital age has fundamentally transformed how religious truth is produced, circulated, and consumed within contemporary society. While digital platforms enable unprecedented access to religious knowledge, they also facilitate the rapid spread of disinformation that challenges established notions of truth and authority (Afif et al., 2024; Hidayatulah et al., 2025; Yazdani, 2026). This issue is socially significant because religious narratives do not merely shape individual belief systems but also influence social cohesion, ethical behavior, and intergroup relations. Empirical evidence shows that misleading religious content often gains wide circulation due to emotional appeal, algorithmic amplification, and the symbolic authority of religious language (Fithri & Putra, 2025; Muizza, Permatasari, & Luthfi, 2025; Yilmaz, 2025). As a result, truth is frequently overshadowed by popularity and ideological alignment rather than

epistemic validity. This condition underscores the urgency of developing robust frameworks for evaluating religious information. Therefore, beyond technological solutions, society requires normative and epistemological approaches to guide individuals in discerning religious truth in digital environments.

A central problem motivating this study is the growing inability of many digital media users to assess the authenticity and validity of online religious narratives critically. Field observations indicate that religious messages are often accepted and disseminated without careful verification of sources, scholarly authority, or contextual accuracy (Andayani et al., 2024; Suhermanto, 2023). This phenomenon is intensified by platform algorithms that prioritize engagement-driven content, frequently favoring sensational or polarizing religious messages. Within Muslim communities, digital religious disinformation has contributed to internal conflicts, ideological fragmentation, and the erosion of traditional scholarly authority (Addzaky, Hasanah, & Syarif Zain, 2024; Jones, 2025). Moreover, existing digital literacy initiatives tend to emphasize technical competencies while neglecting ethical and epistemological dimensions of knowledge evaluation. This gap between technological advancement and epistemological preparedness reveals a critical societal challenge that demands systematic scholarly attention, particularly within the framework of religious knowledge and truth verification.

Previous studies have extensively examined disinformation from perspectives such as media studies, political communication, and digital sociology. Rosie et al. (2020) and Khan (2025) conceptualized disinformation within the global information disorder framework, while Hu (2022) and Gonzalez et al. (2024) analyzed its behavioral and political consequences. In religious contexts, Sari et al. (2024) and Mohiuddin (2023) explored shifts in religious authority in digital media, and Hefner (2022) and Raya (2024) investigated ethical challenges of online religious practice. Despite these contributions, most studies remain grounded in secular analytical frameworks and rarely engage with religious epistemology as an evaluative tool. The primary limitation of the existing literature is the lack of a systematic integration of Islamic epistemology with contemporary digital challenges. This gap is significant because it leaves religious communities without a coherent epistemological framework to assess digital religious narratives.

The novelty of this research lies in repositioning Islamic epistemology as a practical framework for filtering and evaluating digital religious narratives rather than treating it solely as a classical theoretical system. Unlike previous studies that emphasize media literacy or general ethical principles, this research integrates core epistemological concepts in Islam, such as truth (ḥaqq), verification (tabayyun), scholarly authority ('ilm and sanad), and ethical transmission of knowledge into the analysis of digital disinformation (Iwayan, 2024; Ritonga et al., 2025). This approach represents a state-of-the-art contribution by bridging classical Islamic intellectual traditions with the realities of algorithm-driven communication environments. Addressing this issue is essential because technical literacy alone cannot resolve epistemic distortions in religious discourse (Arifin, 2025; Karim et al., 2025). By

grounding digital religious literacy in Islamic epistemology, this study advances a more comprehensive and culturally grounded response to the crisis of truth in the digital age.

Based on the preceding discussion, this study addresses the central research question: how is Islamic epistemology relevant to filtering and evaluating digital religious narratives in an era of widespread disinformation? This overarching question is further elaborated through several sub-questions: what are the dominant characteristics of religious disinformation in digital spaces, which principles of Islamic epistemology are most applicable to assessing such narratives, and how can these principles be operationalized in everyday practices of consuming and sharing religious content. These questions reflect both theoretical and practical concerns, engaging with normative conceptions of truth while addressing real-world digital behavior. By formulating these research problems, the study seeks to deepen understanding of how religious epistemology can inform responsible engagement with digital religious information.

This study argues that Islamic epistemology has substantial contextual relevance for addressing religious disinformation in digital environments when interpreted dynamically and applied. It is premised on the assumption that the contemporary crisis of truth is not merely technological but fundamentally epistemic and ethical. The original contribution of this research lies in developing a conceptual framework that systematically links Islamic epistemological principles with mechanisms for filtering digital religious narratives. In doing so, the study extends existing scholarship by offering an alternative epistemic model for digital religious literacy grounded in Islamic intellectual tradition. This contribution is both theoretical and practical, enriching academic discourse while providing normative guidance for religious communities. The originality of the research lies in its integrative approach, connecting classical Islamic epistemology with contemporary challenges posed by disinformation and digital communication.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with a case study approach (Kekeya, 2023). The qualitative design was selected because the research aims to explore meanings, interpretations, and epistemological processes underlying the construction and evaluation of digital religious narratives, rather than measuring variables or testing hypotheses. A case study design is appropriate as it enables an in-depth examination of a bounded phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly the interaction between Islamic epistemological principles and the circulation of religious information in digital media. This approach allows the researcher to capture the complexity of truth claims, authority, and verification practices as they are negotiated in contemporary digital religious spaces.

The research was conducted in the context of Islamic digital religious discourse on social media platforms, with a primary focus on YouTube and Instagram, the dominant channels for disseminating religious content. These platforms were chosen due to their high user engagement and significant influence on contemporary Muslim religious understanding. The informants consisted of 42 individuals selected through

purposive sampling, including Islamic scholars, preachers active on digital media, university lecturers in Islamic studies, and Muslim youth who regularly consume online religious content. The diversity of informant backgrounds was intended to capture multiple perspectives on digital religious narratives, authority, and verification practices. The number of informants was determined based on data saturation, ensuring sufficient depth and variation of insights.

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to enhance depth and triangulation (R. Cole, 2024). First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with all informants to explore their perceptions of truth, disinformation, and epistemological filtering in digital religious content. Second, digital document analysis was carried out on selected religious posts, videos, and comment threads to examine patterns of narrative construction and dissemination. Third, limited non-participant observation was employed to analyze interaction patterns between content creators and audiences in digital religious spaces. These combined techniques enabled the researcher to obtain rich, contextually relevant data that aligned with the research objectives.

Data analysis followed an interactive qualitative model consisting of data condensation, data reduction, data display, and data verification (R. E. Cole, 2024). During data condensation, interview transcripts and digital texts were organized and coded according to key epistemological themes, including truth, verification, authority, and ethical transmission. Data reduction involved selecting and focusing on information directly relevant to the research questions while eliminating redundant or irrelevant data. The reduced data were then displayed in thematic matrices and narrative descriptions to facilitate pattern recognition. Finally, data verification was conducted through iterative comparison between data sources, theoretical concepts, and emerging interpretations to ensure analytical consistency and coherence.

To ensure data validity and trustworthiness, several strategies were employed. Triangulation of data sources and methods was used to cross-check findings from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected informants to confirm the accuracy of representations. Additionally, prolonged engagement with the data and peer debriefing with academic colleagues helped minimize researcher bias. These validity checks strengthened the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings, ensuring that the conclusions drawn are methodologically sound and epistemologically grounded.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Result

This section presents the study's key findings, highlighting how Islamic epistemology serves as a framework for evaluating digital religious narratives, the impact of disinformation on perceptions of spiritual authority, and the role of tabayyun practices in mitigating epistemic vulnerability. The results integrate insights from interviews, observations, and digital documentation, revealing patterns of critical engagement, ethical filtering, and responsible online behavior among Muslim users.

Islamic epistemology strengthens digital religious filtering

This sub-finding refers to the application of Islamic epistemological principles as an operational framework for filtering and evaluating the truth of digital religious narratives. Operationally, digital religious filtering is defined as an active process in which individuals verify religious information based on Islamic epistemic principles, such as truth (ḥaqq), source verification (tabayyun), scholarly authority ('ilm and sanad), and ethical knowledge transmission. In the field, this practice is observed when Muslim users assess content before sharing it, compare it with classical references, and prioritize consistency between text, context, and Islamic teachings. This phenomenon reflects both critical reasoning skills and the integration of traditional epistemic values into contemporary digital interactions. Therefore, this sub-finding emphasizes that digital filtering grounded in Islamic epistemology is a combination of normative understanding, personal reflection, and practical action in online environments.

Interviews with two informants revealed how Islamic epistemology guides the evaluation of digital religious content. The first informant stated, "Before I share content on WhatsApp or Instagram groups, I always check who created it and whether there is a clear reference." The second informant added, "I trust content with a sanad or credible sources more than content that simply goes viral on social media." The researcher interpreted these responses as evidence that individuals actively internalize verification and scholarly authority as guiding principles when evaluating digital content. Both interviews indicate that epistemic criteria, rather than popularity or emotional appeal, underpin decision-making. This highlights the role of Islamic epistemology as a normative filter that guides users in selecting information and preventing the spread of religious disinformation online.

Informants three and four illustrated the practical implementation of filtering in daily digital interactions. Informant three explained, "When I am unsure, I usually compare videos or writings with classical literature or ask a scholar who is an expert in the field." Informant four stated, "I rarely share posts without tabayyun; this makes me more confident that the content complies with Islamic teachings." The researcher interpreted these statements as proof of the application of Islamic epistemology in reflective and evaluative actions. Individuals assess content based on scholarly authority, verification, and normative principles rather than trending topics. This pattern demonstrates consistency between epistemic awareness and digital behavior, emphasizing the internalization of Islamic values as both moral and intellectual foundations for filtering online religious narratives.

Observations of informants' digital activity confirmed the consistent application of epistemic filtering. Several participants cross-checked content using digital literature or official lecture recordings before responding to social media comments. The researcher interpreted this process as more than a technical habit; it reflects active engagement with the principles of truth, tabayyun, and ethical transmission of knowledge. Restating the findings, digital filtering based on Islamic epistemology involves three stages: source identification, content evaluation, and decision-making for

sharing. Observational data strengthen interview findings, indicating that individuals applying Islamic epistemology exhibit systematic, responsible, and critical online behavior. This practice effectively integrates traditional epistemic values into modern social interactions, minimizing the risk of spreading false or misleading religious information.

Based on interviews and observations, a clear pattern emerges in digital religious filtering practices. First, users consistently prioritize source verification before sharing content. Second, individuals emphasize scholarly authority and sanad when evaluating narratives. Third, a reflective process integrates normative Islamic knowledge with practical digital experience. This pattern is consistent across informants, including digital scholars, students, and general users, demonstrating that epistemic principles are applied both conceptually and practically. Digital filtering is proactive rather than reactive, with epistemic values taking precedence over popularity or virality. Overall, this pattern confirms that Islamic epistemology functions as an effective filter in digital religious spaces, fostering responsible, critical, and truth-oriented online behavior.

Disinformation reshapes authority perception in online religiosity

This sub-finding concerns observable changes in perceptions of religious authority in digital spaces driven by the circulation of disinformation. Operationally, authority perception in online religiosity refers to how digital audiences recognize, trust, and respond to religious figures, content creators, or religious posts, particularly when authenticity is ambiguous or misleading. In the field, this phenomenon manifests in patterns of engagement such as likes, comments, shares, and discussions, which reflect the audience's judgments of credibility and authority. The focus is on behavioral indicators rather than subjective interpretations: which accounts are followed, which content is amplified, and which messages are questioned or ignored. Observing these interactions enables researchers to identify how disinformation affects the legitimacy of both traditional scholars and emerging digital preachers, highlighting the dynamic reshaping of religious authority in online communities.

Table 1. Disinformation reshapes authority perception in online religiosity

Observation	Indicator
Users actively engage with viral religious posts	Number of likes, shares, and comments
Audiences question or ignore posts without credible sources	Presence of critical comments or minimal engagement
Traditional scholars receive mixed responses	Comparison of engagement metrics between traditional and digital figures
Comments express reliance on popularity or emotional appeal	Frequency of comments referencing viral status or trending content
Interaction between creators and followers observed	Creator replies, comment threads, and discussion length

The observation table reveals that online audiences often equate authority with popularity, frequently prioritizing viral content over traditional scholarly expertise. Restating the findings, the data indicate that engagement metrics such as likes, shares,

and comment activity serve as informal markers of perceived authority. Observations also show that posts lacking credible sources receive minimal attention or critical remarks, highlighting that some users apply tacit evaluative criteria. Comparisons between traditional scholars and digital preachers reveal that engagement patterns are shifting, with some non-traditional figures gaining influence based on visibility rather than epistemic credentials. Researcher interpretation confirms that disinformation reshapes the hierarchy of religious authority in digital spaces, producing hybrid patterns of legitimacy where popularity, narrative framing, and audience response interplay, fundamentally altering online religious dynamics.

From the observations, a clear pattern emerges in perceptions of online religious authority. First, digital audiences increasingly value visibility and popularity over traditional epistemic authority. Second, engagement patterns indicate selective attention, with content either amplified or ignored based on perceived credibility or entertainment value. Third, there is a hybrid authority structure in which traditional scholars maintain respect among informed users but often compete with viral digital preachers for broader attention. Finally, audience interactions reflect active negotiation of legitimacy, as users weigh content authenticity, author credibility, and social cues before responding. Overall, the pattern demonstrates that disinformation not only distorts understanding of content but also actively reshapes perceptions of authority, creating a dynamic, fluid, and socially mediated hierarchy of religious influence in digital environments.

Tabayyun practices mitigate epistemic vulnerability digitally

This sub-finding refers to the application of tabayyun, or verification practices derived from Islamic epistemology, to reduce vulnerability to disinformation in digital religious spaces. Operationally, tabayyun involves actively checking the authenticity of online religious content by examining sources, context, scholarly authority, and moral integrity before accepting or sharing information. In practice, this includes reviewing digital sermons, news articles, social media posts, and educational content to ensure alignment with Islamic knowledge traditions. The focus is on observable actions that demonstrate critical evaluation and responsible dissemination of religious content. This mechanism transforms digital users from passive consumers into informed participants, able to distinguish between authentic, verified knowledge and misleading or manipulated narratives, thereby strengthening digital religious literacy and epistemic resilience in online environments.

Source: https://probolinggokab.go.id/epistemologi-islam-jadi-kunci-menyaring-disinformasi-keagamaan-di-era-digital/

The implementation of tabayyun was documented through digital screenshots, online articles, and public posts that explicitly illustrate users verifying content before sharing. For example, an article published on Probolinggo's official site titled "Epistemologi Islam Jadi Kunci Menyaring Disinformasi Keagamaan di Era Digital" demonstrates the principles of tsiqah, sanad, and tabayyun applied to contemporary online content. The flow observed shows that users first identify the content source, cross-check against reputable scholarly references, evaluate context and integrity, and then decide whether to share. The researcher interpreted this sequence as a practical digital adaptation of classical epistemological methods, translating centuries-old verification practices into contemporary online behavior. This documentation provides concrete evidence that tabayyun is not theoretical but actively practiced in public digital spaces.

Observations of online users implementing tabayyun revealed consistent patterns: users hesitate to share content without clear authorship, reference verification, or credible context. Some users actively compare viral messages with authoritative lectures, academic records, or verified scholarly sources. The researcher interpreted these behaviors as a proactive filtering mechanism in which users apply epistemic criteria before dissemination. This observation reinforces the idea that tabayyun mitigates epistemic vulnerability by creating a self-regulated verification culture, reducing the spread of misinformation, and enhancing digital religious literacy. Users are seen acting deliberately and consistently, indicating that tabayyun is embedded as an operational principle rather than sporadic behavior, ensuring responsible interaction with online religious narratives.

Restating the data, the evidence shows that Tabayyun transforms digital audiences into critical evaluators who systematically assess content validity. Observed behaviors include source identification, context evaluation, and authority verification. The practice of cross-checking content with established Islamic scholarly sources prevents blind acceptance of popular or sensational narratives. Researcher interpretation confirms that tabayyun strengthens epistemic resilience, allowing users to maintain integrity in consuming and sharing religious content. This approach bridges classical Islamic knowledge traditions with digital literacy, ensuring that ethical, moral, and epistemic considerations guide online religious interactions. The observed practices demonstrate a coherent framework linking verification principles to practical online decision-making.

From the documentation and observation, a clear pattern emerges: first, users implement a systematic verification sequence, including source assessment, context evaluation, and credibility checks. Second, tabayyun practices are consistent across digital spaces, visible in news articles, social media, and public educational content. Third, users act proactively, filtering content before engagement rather than reacting to trending or viral material. Finally, the integration of classical epistemological principles, such as tsiqah, sanad, and ethical evaluation, into digital practices demonstrates a continuous translation of tradition into contemporary online behavior. Overall, the pattern indicates that tabayyun effectively mitigates epistemic vulnerability,

creating a digitally literate community capable of navigating online religious content responsibly, critically, and ethically.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Islamic epistemology serves as a crucial framework for filtering digital religious content, aligning closely with the conceptual arguments presented by Hazzan (2023), Brenner et al. (2024), and Prihatin et al. (2025) regarding the ethical and evaluative dimensions of online religious engagement. While previous literature emphasizes media literacy and general critical thinking, this study highlights the distinct role of epistemic principles such as ḥaqq, tabayyun, sanad, and ethical knowledge transmission in shaping user behavior. Unlike traditional media literacy models, which often prioritize technical skills, the operationalization of Islamic epistemology in digital filtering introduces a culturally grounded, normatively informed perspective that directly informs both comprehension and sharing of religious narratives (Saputra & Asbi, 2025; Serafini, 2023). This alignment underscores the relevance of integrating classical epistemic frameworks into contemporary digital practices.

The observation that disinformation reshapes perceptions of authority complements studies by Ilyas et al. (2025), Kanu (2025) and Azhari (2025), which emphasizes engagement-driven content as a driver of belief formation. However, this study extends these insights by specifying how epistemic credentials and scholarly authority are actively displaced by popularity metrics in online religious spaces. While prior research highlights the behavioral consequences of viral misinformation, the present findings illustrate a hybrid legitimacy structure in which traditional scholars maintain respect but compete with digital preachers for attention. Theoretically, this suggests that authority in digital religiosity is socially constructed and contextually mediated, not solely derived from epistemic or scholarly legitimacy (Aslan 2024; Hudri, 2025; Nisa, 2025). In practice, this implies that religious education initiatives should address not only technical literacy but also epistemic discernment to mitigate distortions of authority.

The implementation of tabayyun as observed in digital practices illustrates the applicability of Islamic verification methods to contemporary online behavior, supporting the normative claims in the literature regarding ethical knowledge transmission (Ilmiyah, 2025; Khusairi, 2025; Tsabitul'Azmi, Lutfi, & Nursikin, 2025). Whereas previous studies discuss tabayyun mainly in normative or theoretical terms, this research documents concrete user behaviors such as source verification, context evaluation, and cross-checking with scholarly references. Theoretically, it confirms that epistemic resilience is achievable through structured verification mechanisms; practically, it provides a roadmap for digital religious literacy programs that cultivate critical consumption and responsible sharing of online content (Dhuhri et al., 2025; Jannah, 2025; Prihantoro, 2023). This demonstrates that classical epistemological principles are not only historically significant but also operationally relevant in mitigating epistemic vulnerability

Taken together, these findings reveal a coherent pattern in which Islamic epistemology provides both normative guidance and practical strategies for navigating digital religious spaces. While prior research often treats religious disinformation as a purely technological or sociological problem, integrating epistemic values shows that the crisis of truth is fundamentally ethical and epistemological. Theoretically, this contributes to a model of digital religious literacy that bridges classical Islamic knowledge with contemporary media ecology. In practice, it suggests that stakeholders, including scholars, educators, and digital content creators, can leverage epistemological principles to foster informed engagement, reduce the circulation of misinformation, and strengthen public trust in credible religious authorities.

Finally, the implications of these findings extend beyond individual behavior to broader social and communal contexts. By reinforcing epistemic criteria such as tabayyun and scholarly verification, digital users collectively create norms for responsible interaction, shaping community standards and mitigating the risks of polarization, sensationalism, and extremist narratives. This study, therefore, demonstrates that applying Islamic epistemology in digital spaces not only preserves doctrinal integrity but also promotes ethical and critical engagement, offering a sustainable model for addressing the challenges posed by religious disinformation. Overall, the research highlights both the theoretical significance of epistemic frameworks and their practical potential to cultivate a digitally literate, morally conscious, and critically aware Muslim community.

CONCLUSION

The study's primary finding is that Islamic epistemology provides a robust, culturally grounded framework for evaluating and filtering digital religious narratives. By operationalizing principles such as ḥaqq (truth), tabayyun (verification), sanad (chain of authority), and ethical transmission of knowledge, digital users actively engage in critical evaluation before sharing or consuming content. This practice mitigates epistemic vulnerability, enhances responsible online behavior, and cultivates a reflective approach toward religious information. The practical lesson is that digital literacy alone is insufficient; integrating normative and epistemological values is essential to preserve doctrinal integrity and promote ethical engagement in online spaces. Overall, the study underscores that digital religious spaces require a blend of traditional epistemic guidance and contemporary media awareness to prevent the spread of misinformation and maintain credible, socially responsible discourse.

While the research contributes significantly to knowledge by demonstrating the operational relevance of classical Islamic epistemology in contemporary digital contexts, it has limitations. The study's scope is restricted to a purposive sample of 12 informants and selected social media platforms, limiting generalizability. Future research could expand to larger populations, include other digital media channels, or explore longitudinal patterns of epistemic practice. Additionally, comparative studies across different cultural and religious communities may enrich the understanding of digital epistemology and its practical application. Despite these constraints, the study

offers meaningful theoretical and practical contributions by bridging traditional Islamic knowledge with modern digital literacy practices.

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