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Islamic Principles for Verifying Religious Information on Social Media A Study of Pakistani Youth

Dr Ghulam Sarwar

Assistant Professor, ICBS, Lahore

Dr Hafiz Muhammad Abid Noman

Assistant Professor, ICBS, Lahore

Email: drabidnoman@gmail.com

Dr Muhammad Ijaz

Assistant Professor, ICBS, Lahore

Dr Qismat Khan

Assistant Professor, ICBS, Lahore

Abstract

Social media has become one of the most accessible sources of religious information for Pakistani youth. Qur'anic verses, Hadith, legal opinions, scholarly statements and religious advice are frequently circulated through Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok and other digital platforms. These platforms have created valuable opportunities for religious learning, but they have also made it easier for fabricated Hadith, incorrect Qur'anic quotations, false scholarly statements and religious claims without reliable evidence to reach large audiences. Islam does not permit information to be accepted or transmitted without verification. The Qur'an establishes tabayyun and tathabbut as essential principles of responsible communication, while the science of Hadith developed detailed methods for determining the reliability of transmitted reports. This article examines these principles in relation to the contemporary social-media environment of Pakistani youth. It argues that religious information should be verified before it is believed, understood before it is interpreted, and authenticated before it is shared. The article further explains the importance of source evaluation, contextual understanding, consultation with qualified scholars and responsible digital communication. A practical verification process is proposed for young Muslims who encounter religious information

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online. The study concludes that developing a culture of verification is not merely a matter of digital responsibility; it is part of Islamic moral responsibility in the transmission of religious knowledge.

Keywords: Islamic Principles, Religious Information, Social Media, Verification, Pakistani Youth, Hadith, Tabayyun, Misinformation

Introduction

The development of social media has fundamentally changed the way religious information is received and communicated. In the past, religious knowledge was generally obtained through books, mosques, madrasas, schools, universities and direct interaction with scholars and teachers. Today, a young person can encounter hundreds of religious statements within a few minutes without deliberately searching for them. A Qur'anic verse may appear on a social-media timeline, a Hadith may be included in a short video, a fatwa may be circulated through a messaging group, and a statement attributed to a famous scholar may be forwarded repeatedly.

This development has significant advantages. Authentic religious knowledge can now reach people who have limited access to libraries or scholars. Universities, Islamic institutions and qualified scholars can communicate with young people through platforms they already use. Religious education can therefore become more accessible and immediate.

The same environment, however, has created a serious problem. Authentic and unauthenticated material often appears in almost identical forms. A fabricated Hadith may be presented in an attractive design, while an authentic Hadith may be quoted without its context. A Qur'anic verse may be translated incorrectly, while a personal opinion may be presented as an established Islamic ruling. The number of times a statement has been shared can create an impression of authenticity even when no reliable source is provided.

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UNESCO has emphasized the importance of media and information literacy, particularly the ability of young people to evaluate information critically and communicate responsibly in digital environments.¹

The problem therefore has both a technological and educational dimension.

For Pakistani youth, religious misinformation deserves particular attention because religious information influences belief, worship, ethical conduct and social interaction. HEC has previously warned students and faculty about false information circulating through social media and has encouraged verification through reliable sources.²

The solution is not to discourage young Muslims from using social media for religious learning. Rather, they need an intellectual and religious framework that enables them to distinguish reliable information from unsupported claims.

Islam provides such a framework. The principles of verification, truthful speech, responsible transmission, avoidance of conjecture and consultation with qualified people establish a comprehensive ethic for dealing with information.

The Islamic Foundation of Verification

The Qur'an establishes verification as a basic requirement before acting upon information:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْحَبُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ

“O believers! If an evildoer brings you any news, verify it, lest you harm people unknowingly and then regret what you have done.”³

Although the verse addresses a particular situation, its principle is broader: information should be examined before it becomes the basis of action. Al-Qurtubī explains the verse in relation to the necessity of establishing the truth of transmitted information before accepting its consequences.⁴

The concepts of tabayyun and tathabbut are particularly relevant to digital communication. Both indicate the need to establish the truth of information rather than responding to it immediately. Social media often encourages the opposite behavior. Users

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are encouraged to react, comment and forward quickly. Islam, however, places greater value on accuracy than speed.

This distinction is important in religious communication. A person may share a religious statement within seconds, but correcting a false statement after thousands of people have seen it may be extremely difficult. Verification must therefore precede transmission.

Truthfulness in Religious Communication

The Qur'an commands believers:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا

“O believers! Be mindful of Allah and speak words that are right.”⁵

Qawlan sadīdan indicates speech that is correct, upright and appropriate. In the digital environment, this principle applies equally to written posts, captions, comments, audio messages and videos.

A common misconception is that a person is responsible only for information that he personally creates. Islam presents a broader understanding of responsibility. A person who transmits information also has a responsibility regarding what he transmits. If a person receives an unverified religious quotation and forwards it to others, he contributes to its circulation even if he did not originally invent it.

This is why caution is particularly important when a statement is attributed to Allah, the Prophet ﷺ, the Companions or recognized scholars. Religious attribution carries greater responsibility than ordinary conversation.

Verification in the Transmission of Hadith

The Islamic concern with accurate transmission is especially evident in the discipline of Hadith. The Prophet ﷺ warned:

مَنْ كَذَبَ عَلَيَّ مُتَعَمِّدًا فَلْيَتَّبِعُوا مَقْعَدَهُ مِنَ النَّارِ

“Whoever deliberately lies about me should take his place in Hell.”⁶

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The warning demonstrates the seriousness of attributing words to the Prophet ﷺ without establishing their authenticity. Muslim scholars consequently developed detailed principles for examining chains of transmission, narrators and texts.

This scholarly tradition offers an important lesson for contemporary digital communication. Technology has dramatically increased the speed of transmission, but it has not reduced the responsibility of the transmitter. If anything, the greater speed and reach of social media make verification more important.

When a Hadith appears on social media, several questions should be asked. Is the source identified? Is the Hadith found in a recognized collection? Has its authenticity been established? Is the Arabic text accurate? Is the translation faithful to the original? Has part of the Hadith been removed in a way that changes its meaning?

These questions do not require every young person to become a specialist in Hadith. They require users to recognize the limits of their knowledge. If authenticity cannot be established, the safer course is not to present the statement as an established saying of the Prophet ﷺ.

Avoiding Unverified Claims

The Qur'an states:

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ

“Do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge.”⁷⁷

This principle is highly relevant to religious content circulated online. Many posts contain statements such as “Whoever recites this will receive a particular reward,” “This act is definitely forbidden,” or “The Prophet ﷺ said...” without providing a reliable source.

Such statements should not automatically be accepted. Religious information is not made authentic by attractive presentation, large numbers of views or repeated forwarding.

The same principle applies to claims about what is halal and haram. The Qur'an warns against making unsupported declarations concerning lawful and unlawful matters. A

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social-media user who is uncertain about a ruling should not convert personal opinion into a religious verdict.

This is particularly important for young people because short videos and posts often remove the qualifications and conditions attached to legal rulings. An issue that requires detailed explanation may be reduced to a single sentence. Verification must therefore include not only checking whether a quotation exists but also determining whether it has been understood correctly.

Consulting Qualified Scholars

The Qur'an directs people to consult those possessing knowledge:

فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“So ask the people of knowledge if you do not know.”⁸

This principle remains important despite the enormous amount of religious information available online. Access to information does not automatically produce understanding.

A young person may find different opinions on the same issue through a search engine. Without sufficient knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence, Hadith methodology and the principles of interpretation, it may be difficult to determine which explanation is stronger or applicable to a particular situation.

The appropriate response is therefore not to assume that the most popular answer is correct. Qualified scholars can identify the relevant evidence, explain differences of opinion and clarify the circumstances in which a ruling applies.

This does not mean that every ordinary religious question requires personal consultation with a scholar. Basic established teachings can be learned through reliable educational resources. However, matters involving conflicting evidence, personal legal circumstances, belief, serious accusations or significant social consequences should be referred to qualified scholarship.

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Context and Complete Understanding

One of the major problems with social-media religious content is the removal of context. A statement may be authentic but misleading when presented without the circumstances in which it was made.

This issue is especially significant in relation to Qur'anic verses and Hadith. A verse may address a specific situation, while a Hadith may contain conditions that are not included in a short quotation. A scholar's statement may have been given in response to a particular question but may later be circulated as a universal ruling.

Verification therefore involves more than checking whether words exist in a source. It requires understanding their meaning and context.

A responsible reader should ask: What was the original question? To whom was the statement addressed? What is the surrounding text? Are there conditions or exceptions? How have qualified scholars understood the passage?

This approach prevents the common mistake of using an authentic source to support an incorrect conclusion.

Social Media and the Speed of Religious Misinformation

The structure of social media encourages rapid circulation. Posts that generate strong emotional reactions are often shared more quickly than carefully explained material. Religious misinformation can therefore become popular before its accuracy is examined. The problem is not limited to fabricate Hadith. It includes false stories about the lives of prophets and Companions, inaccurate statements attributed to scholars, misleading translations, invented virtues of particular practices and unsupported claims concerning religious occasions.

A further problem is the authority created by repetition. When a statement appears on several pages, a user may assume that it must be authentic. In reality, all of those pages may have copied the same original error.

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Therefore, the number of times information is repeated cannot establish its truth. The source and evidence remain decisive.

UNESCO's work on media and information literacy emphasizes critical evaluation and responsible participation in digital communication. Pakistan has also held national discussions on media and information literacy in response to growing concerns regarding misinformation and disinformation.⁹

For religious information, these skills must be combined with Islamic principles of verification.

Religious Misinformation and Pakistani Youth

Pakistani youth constitute a large and active part of the country's digital population. Religious content is regularly exchanged in student groups, family messaging groups and social-media communities. University students may encounter religious information not only from scholars but also from peers, influencers and anonymous pages.

This diversity of sources makes source evaluation essential. A person with thousands of followers is not necessarily a qualified religious scholar, just as a person with a small online audience is not necessarily unreliable. Digital popularity and religious authority are separate matters.

HEC and PTA have recognized the need for greater awareness concerning religiously sensitive material on social media, particularly within university communities.¹⁰

This demonstrates that responsible digital communication is not merely a private matter; it has institutional and social importance.

Universities can play an important role by teaching students how to evaluate online information. Islamic Studies departments can contribute by explaining basic principles of Qur'anic interpretation, Hadith authentication, legal reasoning and scholarly authority in ways that are relevant to contemporary digital life.

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A Practical Islamic Method for Verifying Religious Information

The Islamic principles discussed above can be translated into a practical process. Before believing or sharing religious information, a young person should ask seven basic questions:

Step	Question
1. Source	Who originally produced this information?
2. Evidence	Is a Qur'anic verse, Hadith or recognized scholarly source provided?
3. Authenticity	If it is a Hadith, has its authenticity been established?
4. Context	Is the statement being presented in its complete context?
5. Meaning	Does the interpretation actually follow from the source?
6. Authority	If the issue is complex, has it been checked with a qualified scholar?
7. Sharing	Is there sufficient certainty to transmit it to others?

This process can be summarized through the principle:

Source before statement, authenticity before attribution, context before interpretation, and certainty before transmission.

The method is simple enough for ordinary social-media users but reflects important principles of Islamic scholarship.

The Difference between Information and Knowledge

A significant issue in the digital age is the assumption that having information is equivalent to possessing knowledge. Social media provides enormous quantities of information, but quantity does not establish reliability.

Knowledge requires understanding, evaluation and proper placement of information. A young person may know that a particular Hadith exists but may not know its grading. He may recognize a Qur'anic verse but misunderstand its application. He may find a legal opinion but remain unaware of the circumstances under which the opinion was given.

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Islamic scholarship has traditionally distinguished between merely transmitting words and possessing the knowledge necessary to understand them. This distinction should remain visible in digital religious education.

Consequently, young Muslims should be encouraged to use social media as an entry point to religious learning rather than as the sole authority for religious understanding. A short video may introduce an issue, but books, teachers and qualified scholars can provide the depth required for proper understanding.

Parents, Teachers and Universities

Verification habits should be developed through education. Parents can teach young people not to forward religious messages automatically. Teachers can demonstrate how a Qur'anic verse or Hadith is traced to a reliable source. Universities can provide students with basic skills for evaluating digital religious content.

This educational role is particularly important because young people are not merely consumers of religious information. They are also distributors. A student who forwards a Hadith to a class group or publishes a religious quotation on social media becomes part of its transmission.

UNESCO has emphasized the value of media and information literacy among religious leaders and educators because religious communication increasingly takes place in digital environments.¹¹

Islamic Studies departments can therefore connect traditional principles of source criticism with contemporary digital practices.

The objective should not be to create suspicion toward all online information. Excessive skepticism can also be harmful. The objective is disciplined verification: accepting reliable information on the basis of evidence and withholding judgment where evidence is insufficient.

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The Role of Islamic Scholars

The growth of digital religious content also creates responsibilities for Islamic scholars. Reliable scholarship should be made accessible through the platforms used by young people. If qualified scholars remain absent from digital spaces, young audiences may increasingly depend upon unqualified sources.

Scholars can address this problem by producing concise explanations, identifying reliable sources, correcting circulating misinformation and responding to common questions in language accessible to young people.

At the same time, scholars should avoid presenting every disagreement as a conflict. Where legitimate differences exist, they should explain the basis of those differences and guide young people toward responsible engagement.

Digital religious scholarship should therefore combine authenticity with accessibility. Accuracy without accessibility may fail to reach the intended audience, while accessibility without accuracy can spread misinformation.

Social Media, Religious Authority and Popularity

One of the most significant changes introduced by social media is the relationship between popularity and authority. Followers, views and likes can create the appearance of expertise. Yet these indicators have no necessary relationship with religious qualification. A viral religious video may be watched by millions without becoming more authentic because of its popularity. Conversely, a carefully researched scholarly explanation may receive limited attention while remaining more reliable.

Young Muslims should therefore learn to separate three things: visibility, popularity and authority. Visibility determines how easily content can be found. Popularity indicates how many people interact with it. Authority depends upon knowledge, evidence and qualification.

This distinction can protect young people from accepting religious claims merely because they are repeatedly presented by influential personalities.

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Responsible Sharing and Social Ethics

The Qur'an also warns believers about the consequences of circulating information without knowledge. Regarding the spread of rumors, it states:

إِذْ تَلَقَّوْنَهُ بِأَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَتَقُولُونَ بِأَفْوَاهِكُمْ مَا لَيْسَ لَكُم بِهِ عِلْمٌ وَتَحْسَبُونَهُ هَيِّئًا وَهُوَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَظِيمٌ

“When you passed it on with your tongues and said with your mouths what you had no knowledge of, thinking it insignificant while it is serious in the sight of Allah.”¹²

The verse presents an important social lesson: people may consider forwarding information a minor action because it requires only a few seconds. Yet information can produce consequences far beyond the moment of sharing.

The same applies to religious misinformation. A false quotation may be forwarded casually but may then be copied into another post, quoted in a lecture, included in an educational presentation and eventually accepted as established religious knowledge.

Responsible sharing therefore requires restraint. If the authenticity of a religious statement cannot be established, not sharing it is itself a responsible decision.

Verification and the Protection of Religious Knowledge

Verification serves another important purpose: it protects the integrity of Islamic knowledge. When fabricated statements are repeatedly circulated, the boundary between authentic and unauthenticated religious teaching becomes blurred.

This can create two opposite problems. Some people may accept fabricated material as part of Islam, while others may encounter so much misinformation that they begin to distrust religious information altogether.

A culture of verification protects against both extremes. It teaches young people neither to accept everything nor to reject everything. Instead, they learn to ask for evidence.

This approach is consistent with the historical development of Islamic scholarship. Muslim scholars did not treat every transmitted statement as equally reliable. They examined transmitters, chains, texts and meanings. The contemporary Muslim does not

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need to reproduce the entire technical apparatus of Hadith criticism for ordinary social-media use, but the underlying principle remains relevant:

Religious attribution requires evidence.

Toward a Culture of Responsible Sharing

A successful response to religious misinformation requires cooperation between families, educational institutions, scholars and digital users. Each has a distinct role.

Parents can develop habits of careful communication. Teachers can introduce students to reliable sources. Universities can strengthen digital and religious literacy. Islamic scholars can provide accessible and authoritative online content. Young people themselves must accept responsibility for what they circulate.

The objective should be to establish a social norm in which users ask, “What is the source?” before asking, “How many people have shared it?”

Such a change may appear small, but it can have significant consequences. A person who verifies one Hadith before forwarding it prevents the possible circulation of an error to dozens or hundreds of people. If the same habit is adopted by thousands of young people, the quality of religious communication can improve substantially.

The principles examined in this study demonstrate that Islamic teachings provide a strong ethical basis for dealing with religious information in the digital age. Tabayyun establishes verification; tathabbut requires careful examination; truthful speech regulates communication; the warning against speaking without knowledge limits unsupported claims; and consultation with qualified scholars provides a means of resolving matters beyond ordinary knowledge.

These principles are especially important because social media has removed many of the traditional barriers between producer and audience. Previously, the publication of religious material generally involved books, publishers, teachers or institutions. Today, almost anyone can create and distribute religious content instantly.

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This democratization of communication has benefits, but it also increases individual responsibility. The user is no longer merely an audience member. By forwarding, reposting or commenting, he becomes a participant in the circulation of knowledge.

For Pakistani youth, the most useful approach is therefore neither complete dependence upon social media nor complete rejection of it. Social media should be used as a means of accessing religious knowledge, while authenticity and authority should be established through reliable sources and qualified scholarship.

The central issue is the development of a responsible habit: pause before forwarding, verify before believing, understand before interpreting, and consult before issuing a religious judgment.

Conclusion

Social media has created unprecedented access to religious information for Pakistani youth. It allows authentic Islamic knowledge to reach large audiences quickly, but it also enables fabricated Hadith, inaccurate quotations, incomplete explanations and unsupported religious claims to spread with equal speed.

Islam provides clear principles for addressing this problem. The Qur'anic command of *tabayyun*, the requirement of truthful speech, the prohibition against following what one does not know, the warning against unsupported religious claims and the instruction to consult qualified people collectively establish a comprehensive culture of verification.

The science of Hadith further demonstrates that responsible transmission of religious information is a longstanding Islamic principle. Modern technology has changed the means of transmission but not the responsibility of the transmitter.

Pakistani youth therefore need not withdraw from digital religious spaces. They need the knowledge and discipline to use them responsibly. Every religious message should be assessed according to its source, evidence, authenticity, context and meaning. Where uncertainty remains, consultation with qualified scholars is preferable to confident transmission.

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The fundamental principle can be stated simply: religious information should be verified before it is believed, understood before it is interpreted, and authenticated before it is shared.

Developing this habit among Pakistani youth can strengthen religious literacy, protect the integrity of Islamic knowledge and reduce the spread of misinformation. Verification is therefore not merely a modern media skill. In the transmission of religious knowledge, it is an expression of Islamic responsibility, truthfulness and trust.

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