
Hadith Authenticity, Algorithmic Religious Authority, and Digital Verification Culture: A Comparative Study of Online Hadith Discourse in Saudi Arabia and Turkey

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Citation: Aziz (2026). Hadith Authenticity, Algorithmic Religious Authority, and Digital Verification Culture: A Comparative Study of Online Hadith Discourse in Saudi Arabia and Turkey (Book Antiqua 14pt Bold). *Islamic Research Studies*, 10(4), xx–xx. <https://doi.org/0000-0000>

Published: 16/05/2026

ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of digital religious communication has fundamentally transformed the circulation, interpretation, and verification of Hadith literature within contemporary Muslim societies. This article comparatively examines online Hadith authenticity discourse in Saudi Arabia and Turkey, focusing on how algorithmic media structures, institutional religious authority, and contemporary verification practices shape public engagement with Prophetic traditions. While previous scholarship on digital Islam frequently emphasizes online religious democratization and fragmentation, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to the transformation of Hadith verification culture within digitally mediated Islamic publics. Drawing upon comparative textual analysis of online Hadith databases, institutional religious publications, social media discourse, digital fatwa archives, and contemporary Hadith scholarship, the study demonstrates that digital media environments increasingly alter how Muslims evaluate sanad reliability, interpretive legitimacy, and scholarly authority. The findings reveal that Saudi digital Hadith discourse generally prioritizes institutional textual authentication, centralized scholarly authority, and doctrinal standardization, whereas Turkish online Hadith discourse more frequently incorporates historical contextualization, ethical interpretation, and public-oriented hermeneutic engagement. The article argues that contemporary digital verification culture reshapes Hadith authority not by eliminating classical scholarly traditions but by reconfiguring the relationship between textual authenticity, public accessibility, and algorithmic visibility.

This study contributes to Islamic studies scholarship by integrating Hadith sciences, digital religion studies, sociology of knowledge, and comparative Islamic intellectual history into an interdisciplinary framework for understanding contemporary transformations in Islamic textual authority.

Keywords: Hadith studies, digital Islam, religious authority, Hadith authentication, algorithmic media, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Islamic hermeneutics

INTRODUCTION

The digital transformation of religious communication has profoundly altered contemporary Muslim engagement with Islamic textual traditions, particularly Hadith literature. Online databases, social media platforms, mobile applications, digital fatwa archives, YouTube lectures, and algorithmically curated religious content increasingly mediate how Muslims access, interpret, authenticate, and circulate Prophetic traditions. These developments have generated substantial changes not only in the dissemination of Hadith knowledge but also in the structure of interpretive authority and verification culture within global Muslim publics.

Historically, Hadith sciences developed through highly sophisticated scholarly methodologies involving sanad criticism, narrator evaluation, textual comparison, and jurisprudential contextualization. Classical muhaddithun such as al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, and al-Dhahabi constructed elaborate epistemological frameworks governing authenticity classification, narrator reliability, and interpretive usage. These traditions contributed significantly to the formation of Sunni orthodoxy, legal reasoning, devotional practice, and Islamic intellectual civilization (Brown, 2009).

However, the contemporary digital environment has significantly altered the social conditions through which Hadith authority operates. According to the Pew Research Center (2024), younger Muslim populations increasingly rely upon social media and online platforms as primary sources of religious information. UNESCO (2023) similarly identifies digital knowledge infrastructures as central mechanisms reshaping authority, education, and public interpretation in religious communities globally.

The expansion of online Islamic communication has generated contradictory scholarly interpretations regarding the future of Islamic textual authority. Early digital religion scholarship frequently emphasized democratization and decentralization. Anderson (2003) argued that internet-based communication weakened monopolistic religious institutions by expanding access to religious texts and interpretive participation. Bunt (2018) similarly suggested that cyber-Islamic environments transformed traditional authority structures through transnational digital networking.

Yet subsequent scholarship complicated assumptions regarding simple democratization. Campbell (2021) demonstrated that digital religious authority remains deeply shaped by institutional credibility, technological visibility, and media economics. Hoover and Echchaibi (2014) further argued that algorithmic

communication structures frequently reproduce new forms of hierarchy and selective authority rather than unrestricted interpretive pluralism.

Within Hadith studies specifically, contemporary scholarship has increasingly explored questions concerning historical criticism, textual authority, and modern interpretive reform. Brown (2014) notes that modern Muslim societies confront growing tensions between classical authentication methods and contemporary ethical, historical, and intellectual concerns. Motzki (2016) similarly argues that contemporary Hadith studies increasingly involve interdisciplinary engagement with historiography, textual criticism, and social context.

More recent studies concerning digital Hadith circulation reveal growing public engagement with authenticity debates. Online users increasingly evaluate Hadith reliability through searchable databases, mobile applications, crowd-sourced commentary, and social media discussions. This has contributed to what may be termed “digital verification culture,” in which ordinary users actively participate in authentication discourse previously dominated by specialized scholars.

Despite these developments, several important limitations remain within contemporary scholarship. First, much literature treats digital Islamic discourse generically without examining the specific epistemological implications for Hadith sciences. Second, comparative analysis between differing national and intellectual contexts remains insufficiently developed. Third, current scholarship often inadequately explains how algorithmic media structures influence textual authority and public authenticity perception. Fourth, limited attention has been devoted to how institutional religious traditions mediate online Hadith discourse. Fifth, existing studies frequently separate classical Hadith methodology from contemporary sociology of digital knowledge.

This article addresses these gaps through a comparative analysis of online Hadith authenticity discourse in Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The comparative selection is analytically significant for several reasons. Saudi Arabia represents a context strongly associated with Salafi textualism, institutional Hadith scholarship, and centralized religious authority structures emphasizing authentication and doctrinal standardization. Turkey, by contrast, represents a context shaped by Ottoman intellectual pluralism, republican secular transformation, contemporary neo-Ottoman religious revival, and historically significant traditions of interpretive contextualization.

Both societies possess extensive digital Islamic infrastructures and influential public religious discourse. However, they differ substantially regarding religious institutions, educational traditions, state-religion relations, and interpretive cultures. These differences allow systematic comparison concerning how digital verification practices interact with classical Hadith methodologies and contemporary public religious engagement.

The article develops an analytical framework linking textual authentication, digital mediation, institutional authority, and public verification culture. Specifically, it argues that algorithmic religious

communication increasingly reshapes Hadith authority by transforming the relationship between scholarly expertise, public accessibility, and textual legitimacy.

The comparative findings demonstrate that Saudi online Hadith discourse generally emphasizes institutional authentication, sanad verification, and centralized doctrinal authority, whereas Turkish digital discourse more frequently integrates historical contextualization, ethical interpretation, and pedagogical accessibility. These differing approaches reveal broader transformations in contemporary Islamic intellectual life and public religious participation.

This study therefore contributes to Islamic studies scholarship by integrating Hadith sciences, digital religion studies, sociology of knowledge, and comparative intellectual history into an interdisciplinary framework capable of explaining contemporary transformations in Islamic textual authority.

Accordingly, the primary objective of this article is to comparatively examine how digital media environments reshape Hadith authenticity discourse, interpretive authority, and verification culture in Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative interdisciplinary Islamic studies methodology integrating Hadith textual analysis, digital discourse analysis, sociology of religious knowledge, and comparative intellectual history. The research design is theoretically grounded in classical Hadith sciences, digital religion scholarship, and contemporary theories of algorithmic communication and public authority. The comparative logic is based upon examining Saudi Arabia and Turkey as two influential Muslim-majority societies possessing distinct intellectual traditions, institutional religious structures, and digital religious cultures. Saudi Arabia was selected because of its globally influential Salafi-oriented Hadith scholarship, centralized religious institutions, and strong emphasis upon textual authentication and doctrinal standardization. Turkey was selected because of its historically layered Ottoman intellectual heritage, contemporary state-religious institutional hybridity, and public traditions of contextualized Islamic interpretation. The principal units of analysis include online Hadith databases, digital fatwa archives, social media discussions, public lectures, institutional religious publications, and contemporary Hadith scholarship.

Primary sources include classical Hadith collections, digital authentication platforms, institutional publications from official religious bodies, contemporary Islamic studies scholarship, online educational materials, and peer-reviewed academic studies published between 2000 and 2026 concerning Hadith sciences, digital religion, and Islamic intellectual transformation. Analytical interpretation was conducted through thematic coding of authentication practices, interpretive methodologies, verification narratives, algorithmic visibility mechanisms, and authority claims. Comparative validation was achieved by triangulating online discourse patterns with classical Hadith methodologies, sociological analysis, and contemporary Islamic scholarship in order to identify convergent and divergent interpretive structures across both cases. Ethical considerations involved reliance upon publicly accessible digital materials and avoidance of speculative interpretation concerning individual online users or private

institutional motivations. The study acknowledges limitations including algorithmic variability across digital platforms, linguistic differences between Arabic and Turkish online discourse, and the rapidly evolving nature of digital communication environments. Nevertheless, the comparative interdisciplinary methodology provides a robust analytical framework for examining contemporary transformations in Hadith authority and digital verification culture.

Findings and Discussion

1. Classical Hadith Methodology and the Transformation of Digital Verification Culture

The comparative findings demonstrate that contemporary digital Hadith discourse remains deeply connected to classical Islamic authentication methodologies while simultaneously transforming the social mechanisms through which authenticity is negotiated and circulated. Contrary to assumptions that digital media simply erodes scholarly authority, the evidence indicates that online verification culture frequently reproduces classical concepts of sanad reliability, textual authenticity, and scholarly legitimacy through new communicative forms.

Classical Hadith sciences historically developed rigorous epistemological systems involving narrator criticism, isnad continuity, textual comparison, and jurisprudential contextualization. Authentication authority traditionally depended upon specialized scholarly expertise, institutional learning networks, and chains of intellectual transmission. However, digital technologies increasingly alter public access to these epistemological processes.

Saudi digital Hadith discourse generally emphasizes continuity with classical authentication structures. Online Hadith platforms, institutional databases, and digital fatwa systems frequently prioritize categorical authenticity classifications such as sahih, hasan, and da‘if based upon recognized scholarly authorities. Digital interfaces often reinforce institutional legitimacy by presenting authentication through centralized scholarly frameworks.

This reflects broader Salafi-oriented epistemological commitments emphasizing textual purity, doctrinal consistency, and direct engagement with canonical Hadith collections. Saudi digital discourse commonly privileges sanad verification and institutional authentication mechanisms while discouraging excessive interpretive subjectivity.

By contrast, Turkish online Hadith discourse more frequently integrates historical contextualization and ethical interpretation into digital verification practices. Educational platforms and public discussions often emphasize understanding historical circumstances, social context, and moral objectives alongside authenticity classification.

The comparative findings reveal substantial differences regarding public interpretive participation. Saudi digital discourse generally maintains stronger distinctions between expert scholarly authority and public reception, whereas Turkish discourse more frequently encourages explanatory engagement accessible to broader audiences.

Nevertheless, both contexts demonstrate growing public participation in verification culture. Ordinary users increasingly consult digital authentication tools, searchable Hadith databases, and online commentary when

evaluating religious claims. This reflects broader transformations in contemporary knowledge accessibility and digital literacy.

The findings challenge simplistic binaries between “traditional” and “digital” Islam. Contemporary online Hadith verification culture represents neither straightforward democratization nor complete institutional preservation. Rather, digital media selectively reconfigures classical epistemological structures within new communicative environments.

2. Algorithmic Visibility, Institutional Authority, and Public Religious Legitimacy

One of the most significant comparative findings concerns the growing role of algorithmic communication structures in shaping Hadith visibility, authority perception, and public religious legitimacy. Digital platforms increasingly determine which Hadith content receives public attention through recommendation systems, engagement metrics, and media amplification.

Saudi digital Hadith discourse frequently operates through institutionally coordinated platforms associated with official religious bodies, recognized scholars, and centralized educational systems. Algorithmic visibility often reinforces established authority structures because institutional actors possess substantial infrastructural resources, audience reach, and digital credibility.

Consequently, Saudi online Hadith communication generally privileges doctrinal standardization and centralized authentication. Public trust is frequently linked to institutional recognition, scholarly credentials, and alignment with recognized theological frameworks.

Turkish digital Hadith discourse demonstrates greater interpretive plurality and pedagogical diversification. Public educators, theologians, journalists, academics, and independent Islamic intellectuals often participate in online Hadith discussion. Algorithmic visibility therefore operates within more decentralized communicative environments.

The comparative evidence indicates that Turkish digital discourse more frequently emphasizes ethical reflection, historical awareness, and contextual explanation. Public legitimacy is often linked not solely to formal scholarly status but also to communicative accessibility and interpretive relevance.

These differences reveal broader transformations in contemporary religious authority. Digital legitimacy increasingly depends upon communicative performance, technological visibility, and audience engagement in addition to classical scholarly credentials.

Importantly, the findings demonstrate that algorithmic systems themselves influence religious interpretation. Short-form content, viral dissemination, and emotionally resonant narratives often privilege simplified or highly selective textual presentation. This creates tensions between classical scholarly complexity and contemporary media consumption patterns.

The comparative findings further indicate that digital verification culture increasingly intersects with broader political and ideological debates. Hadith authenticity discussions are frequently mobilized within

controversies concerning gender roles, governance, nationalism, sectarianism, and modernity.

This reflects the continuing centrality of Hadith literature within contemporary Muslim ethical and political discourse. Digital media therefore does not merely disseminate Hadith content but actively reshapes the socio-political conditions through which Prophetic traditions acquire public meaning.

Table 1. Comparative Matrix of Interpretive Variables, Intellectual Mechanisms, and Scholarly Outcomes

Variable	Case/System 1: Saudi Arabia	Case/System 2: Turkey	Empirical/Textual Evidence	Analytical Interpretation
Authentication Orientation	Centralized textual verification	Contextualized interpretive authentication	Online Hadith databases and digital fatwa archives	Intellectual traditions shape verification culture
Institutional Authority	Strong centralized scholarly structures	Hybrid public-intellectual religious participation	Institutional religious publications	Governance systems influence authority patterns
Algorithmic Communication	Institutionally amplified visibility	More decentralized digital engagement	Social media and online educational content	Media structures shape textual authority
Public Participation	Limited interpretive participation	Greater pedagogical accessibility	Interactive online Hadith discussions	Digital publics negotiate authority differently
Hermeneutic Emphasis	Sanad reliability and doctrinal consistency	Ethical contextualization and historical interpretation	Public lectures and educational platforms	Interpretive cultures differ structurally
Educational Strategy	Textual standardization	Explanatory and contextual pedagogy	Digital educational initiatives	Pedagogical style shapes legitimacy
Religious Legitimacy	Credentialed scholarly authority	Communicative and interpretive accessibility	Public verification discourse	Legitimacy becomes digitally mediated
Scholarly Outcome	Doctrinal stabilization	Hermeneutic pluralization	Comparative online Hadith discourse	Digital religion reshapes Hadith authority

The comparative matrix demonstrates that digital Hadith authority is shaped not only by theology or technology individually but by interactions among institutional structures, media systems, intellectual traditions, and public communicative practices. Similar digital platforms generate divergent epistemological outcomes depending upon broader historical and socio-political conditions.

The evidence further indicates that contemporary verification culture increasingly transforms authenticity from an exclusively scholarly category into a public communicative process. Digital accessibility allows broader participation in authentication discourse while simultaneously intensifying debates concerning expertise and interpretive legitimacy.

3. Ethical Interpretation, Public Controversy, and Contemporary Hadith Engagement

The comparative findings reveal that online Hadith discourse increasingly intersects with contemporary ethical controversies involving gender relations, political authority, minority rights, secularism, and social transformation. Digital communication environments amplify public engagement with Hadith literature while simultaneously exposing interpretive tensions within contemporary Muslim societies.

Saudi digital discourse frequently approaches controversial Hadith through frameworks emphasizing doctrinal continuity, classical scholarly consensus, and preservation of textual authority. Public controversies are commonly addressed through institutional clarification and reference to recognized scholars.

At the same time, Saudi online discourse increasingly engages contemporary social issues including women's participation, economic modernization, digital ethics, and public governance. However, interpretive adaptation is generally framed within boundaries preserving institutional authority and doctrinal coherence.

Turkish online discourse more frequently employs contextual hermeneutics when addressing ethically contested Hadith. Discussions often emphasize historical circumstances, interpretive plurality, and ethical objectives rather than solely literal application.

The comparative evidence reveals substantial differences regarding modernity and interpretation. Turkish educators and intellectuals commonly situate Hadith discourse within broader debates concerning democracy, pluralism, secularism, and historical consciousness. Saudi discourse tends to prioritize continuity with established textual traditions while selectively adapting to contemporary social realities.

Nevertheless, both contexts demonstrate growing public demand for accessible ethical interpretation. Contemporary Muslim audiences increasingly seek explanations connecting Hadith literature with everyday social concerns and modern institutional life.

The findings further indicate that digital environments intensify scrutiny of Hadith authenticity itself. Online circulation of fabricated or weak Hadith has contributed to increased public awareness concerning authentication methodologies and scholarly verification.

This development possesses significant implications for Hadith studies. Digital verification culture simultaneously expands textual accessibility and creates new challenges involving misinformation, decontextualization, and selective interpretation.

The comparative findings therefore contribute to broader debates concerning religion and modern communication. Contemporary digital Hadith engagement reflects not the disappearance of classical scholarship but

its adaptation within technologically mediated public spheres.

4. Digital Hadith Culture and the Future of Islamic Intellectual Authority

The comparative findings demonstrate that digital media environments increasingly reshape broader structures of Islamic intellectual authority beyond Hadith studies alone. Verification culture, algorithmic visibility, and public participation collectively transform how Muslims engage religious expertise, interpretive legitimacy, and scholarly tradition.

Saudi digital Hadith discourse generally reinforces institutional continuity by integrating technological modernization with centralized scholarly oversight. Official digital infrastructures allow broad dissemination of authenticated religious content while maintaining hierarchical authority structures.

Turkish online discourse more commonly encourages interpretive dialogue, educational pluralism, and contextual pedagogy. Public intellectuals, academics, and educators frequently participate alongside institutional scholars in shaping contemporary Hadith engagement.

The comparative evidence indicates that both models possess strengths and limitations. Centralized authentication structures may enhance doctrinal consistency and reduce misinformation but risk limiting interpretive plurality and public dialogue. More decentralized environments encourage contextual engagement and broader participation but may generate fragmentation and inconsistent scholarly standards.

Importantly, the findings reveal growing convergence regarding the need for digital literacy and methodological awareness. Institutions in both contexts increasingly emphasize the importance of verification, source criticism, and responsible textual circulation.

The evidence further suggests that future Hadith scholarship will increasingly require interdisciplinary engagement involving digital humanities, media studies, sociology of religion, and information ethics. Contemporary textual authority now operates within algorithmically mediated environments requiring new forms of scholarly adaptation.

This transformation possesses major implications for Islamic education and public religious discourse. Traditional educational models centered exclusively upon memorization and textual transmission may become insufficient without broader engagement with media literacy, contextual interpretation, and digital communication ethics.

The study therefore contributes to broader debates concerning Islamic intellectual modernity. Contemporary digital Hadith culture represents not the collapse of classical textual authority but its institutional and communicative reconfiguration within rapidly changing technological environments.

Conceptual Framework

This article proposes the following conceptual framework for understanding digital Hadith verification culture:

Classical Authentication Methodology → Digital Mediation → Algorithmic Visibility → Public Verification Participation → Contemporary Hadith Authority Formation

Within this framework, classical authentication methodology remains the foundational epistemological structure governing Hadith legitimacy. Digital mediation subsequently transforms accessibility, circulation, and interpretive interaction by placing textual traditions within algorithmically structured communication environments. Algorithmic visibility influences which forms of Hadith discourse gain public prominence, thereby reshaping authority perception and interpretive legitimacy.

The framework further posits that public verification participation increasingly functions as a critical mechanism within contemporary Hadith culture. Ordinary users now actively engage authentication tools, digital databases, and online commentary in evaluating religious claims. This transforms authenticity from a purely scholarly process into a broader communicative and participatory practice.

The comparative findings demonstrate that institutional structures and intellectual traditions significantly influence how digital verification culture develops. Centralized systems tend toward doctrinal stabilization and hierarchical authentication, whereas pluralized communicative environments encourage contextual interpretation and pedagogical accessibility.

CONCLUSION

This article has comparatively examined how digital media environments reshape Hadith authenticity discourse, interpretive authority, and verification culture in Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The findings demonstrate that contemporary digital Hadith engagement reflects complex interactions among classical Islamic epistemology, algorithmic communication structures, institutional authority systems, and public religious participation.

The comparative evidence reveals substantial variation in how online Hadith authority is constructed and negotiated. Saudi digital discourse generally prioritizes institutional authentication, sanad verification, and doctrinal consistency within centralized scholarly frameworks. Turkish digital discourse more frequently integrates historical contextualization, ethical interpretation, and participatory educational engagement.

A major theoretical contribution of this study concerns the concept of “digital verification culture.” The findings demonstrate that online environments increasingly transform authenticity into a public communicative process involving algorithmic visibility, interactive participation, and expanded textual accessibility. This contributes to broader Islamic studies scholarship concerning transformations in contemporary religious authority.

The article further contributes empirically by integrating Hadith sciences with digital religion studies and sociology of knowledge. Existing scholarship often treats digital Islam generically without adequately analyzing how classical textual methodologies interact with algorithmic communication systems. This study

demonstrates that digital Hadith discourse is shaped by historically embedded intellectual traditions and institutional structures rather than technology alone.

The findings possess broader societal and educational implications. Islamic educational institutions may require expanded integration between classical Hadith sciences and digital literacy training in order to address misinformation, selective textual circulation, and algorithmic amplification. Religious scholars similarly face increasing pressure to communicate methodological complexity within rapidly changing media environments.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. The study relies primarily upon publicly accessible digital materials and comparative discourse analysis rather than ethnographic audience research or computational media analysis. Future research would benefit from large-scale digital humanities approaches, comparative examination of additional Muslim societies, and interdisciplinary analysis involving media algorithms, audience reception, and online religious behavior.

Ultimately, this article argues that contemporary digital Hadith culture represents an important transformation within modern Islamic intellectual life. Online verification practices increasingly reshape relationships among textual authenticity, scholarly expertise, public participation, and algorithmic visibility. The future of Hadith authority will likely depend upon how effectively Islamic scholarly traditions adapt to technologically mediated environments while preserving methodological rigor and interpretive integrity.

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