



From Narrator Criticism to Digital Identity Criticism: A Reconstruction of the Principle of *al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl*

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Abstract

Digital information verification has thus far been confined to content assessment, neglecting the authenticity of source identity, precisely the element currently being fabricated by deepfake technology. This gap underlies the present study's attempt to reconstruct the principle of *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* into a digital identity criticism model. To address this gap, a qualitative method using a grounded theory approach is employed to develop a conceptual framework for the transformation of *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* from a method of narrator credibility criticism into a framework for digital identity criticism in verifying deepfake hoaxes. Data were collected through documentation techniques, namely inventorying, closely reading, recording, classifying, and comparing documents according to themes relevant to the research focus, and were subsequently analyzed using the interactive model of Miles et al., encompassing data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Findings indicate that the reconstruction of *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* broadens the scope of hadith criticism, extending it from evaluating narrator credibility to criticizing source authenticity and credibility within an artificial-intelligence-based digital information ecosystem. *ʿAdālah* and *qabṭ* are shown to possess a more fundamental epistemological function, extending beyond their conventional role as classical criteria for the acceptance of narrators (*rāwī*). This function further signals a fundamental shift in the structure of informational authority, which in turn gives rise to a model of digital identity criticism grounded in the principles of *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl*. As its principal contribution, digital identity criticism is formulated as a conceptual and methodological development within hadith studies, repositioning the function of *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* from criticizing narrator credibility toward an epistemological framework for evaluating synthetic sources in the deepfake era.

Keywords: Digital Identity Criticism; Principles of *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl*; Verification Methods; Deepfake Hoaxes

Abstrak

Verifikasi informasi digital selama ini berhenti pada penilaian konten dan mengabaikan autentisitas identitas sumber, yang justru saat ini dipalsukan oleh *deepfake*. Kesenjangan tersebut mendorong penelitian ini untuk merekonstruksi



prinsip *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* menjadi model kritik identitas digital. Untuk itu, penelitian ini menerapkan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan *grounded theory* guna menyusun konstruksi konseptual mengenai transformasi *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl*, dari metode kritik kredibilitas perawi menjadi kerangka kritik identitas digital dalam konteks verifikasi hoaks *deepfake*. Data dihimpun melalui teknik dokumentasi, yakni dengan menginventarisasi, mengkaji secara mendalam, mencatat, mengklasifikasikan, serta membandingkan dokumen sesuai tema yang relevan dengan fokus penelitian, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles et al. yang mencakup kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa rekonstruksi *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* mampu memperluas cakupan kritik hadis, dari evaluasi kredibilitas periwayat menuju kritik atas autentisitas dan kredibilitas sumber dalam ekosistem informasi digital berbasis kecerdasan artifisial. *'Adālah* dan *ḍabt*, dalam kajian ini, terungkap memiliki fungsi epistemologis yang lebih mendasar, melampaui sekadar kriteria klasik penerimaan periwayat. Fungsi ini turut menandai adanya pergeseran fundamental dalam struktur otoritas informasi, yang pada gilirannya melahirkan sebuah model kritik identitas digital berbasis *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl*. Sebagai kontribusi, penelitian ini merumuskan kritik identitas digital sebagai pengembangan konseptual dan metodologis ilmu hadis, yang mengalihkan fungsi *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* dari kritik kredibilitas periwayat menuju kerangka evaluasi sumber sintesis di era *deepfake*.

Kata kunci: Kritik Identitas Digital; Prinsip *Al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl*; Metode Verifikasi; Hoaks *Deepfake*.

Introduction

Advances in generative artificial intelligence have transformed the issue of hoaxes from content forgery into a crisis of identity authenticity. Deepfakes enable a person's face, voice, and gestures to be manipulated, meaning that a figure appearing to speak or act in the digital space is not necessarily the genuine source. Ramadhani et al. demonstrate that deepfakes can realistically forge personal representations and extend the risks from privacy breaches to evidence manipulation, fraud, and the erosion of public trust (Ramadhani et al., 2025). AI-generated text, images, audio, and video also produce synthetic material that is difficult to verify and undermines the authority of information sources (Meerangani, Harun, et al., 2025). Consequently, AI governance requires the principles of fairness, transparency, accountability, protection of dignity, and ethical oversight (Kannike & Fahm, 2025). A comparative study in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates confirms that digital ethics must evolve in tandem with technological acceleration, as privacy, reputation, and data security become increasingly vulnerable (Gorian & Osman, 2024). These changes are intertwined with a shift in religious authority brought about by technological mediation, as open access allows traditional sources to be bypassed and authority is no longer solely attached to established figures or institutions (Cloete, 2016). This situation means that audiovisual evidence, once considered robust, can no longer be accepted without scrutiny of its

origin, identity and production process. Consequently, deepfakes have sparked a global debate on how identity, source and information can be verified simultaneously.

In the Indonesian context, this issue is becoming increasingly significant as the digitalisation of religion has transformed the way people acquire and trust religious knowledge. Ichwan et al. demonstrate the erosion of clerical authority as the public increasingly relies on digital media offering quick and seemingly convincing answers, even though the scholarly depth of the sources is not always guaranteed (Ichwan et al., 2024). More recent findings indicate that social media has become an arena for contesting religious authority, where established organisations and new actors compete to gain legitimacy through digital visibility (Hermansah et al., 2026). Similar trends are evident in Aceh, where new media are fragmenting traditional authority and expanding the reach of new religious actors (E. Saputra & Fadhli, 2020). In the realm of hadith, digitisation has broadened access to hadith texts and sources; however, digital files can also be deliberately altered, thereby calling into question the authenticity of the information and the accuracy of the data (Istianah & Wahyuningsih, 2019). The distribution of hadith via memes demonstrates the emergence of a new transmission channel that is fast, visual, concise, and easily modified (Usman et al., 2023). Al-Ayyubi had previously linked social media hoaxes to the credibility of information providers from a hadith perspective, but his focus remained on media ethics and conventional fake news, rather than on synthetic identity forgery (Al-Ayyubi, 2018). This situation indicates that Indonesia's challenges extend beyond the sheer volume of religious information in the digital sphere. Rather, it moves towards a more fundamental question regarding who is actually speaking, who holds authority, and how the identity of the source can be verified.

The gap in the literature becomes increasingly apparent when studies on digital hadith, post-truth and misinformation are compared with those on deepfakes. Ilmiyah and Hussin found that *fabricated* hadiths within the digital ecosystem are increasingly influenced by algorithmic visibility rather than scientific verification, meaning that hadith forgery has developed into an epistemic crisis linked to literacy, the speed of circulation, and the legitimacy of sources (Ilmiyah & Hussin, 2025). Saputra and Suryadilaga demonstrate that in the post-truth era, the use of hadiths can be influenced by the political and commercial interests of content providers. Meanwhile, access via apps and social media allows hadiths to be used without adequate verification processes (T. A. Saputra & Suryadilaga, 2020). In the context of Indonesia and Malaysia, Graf and Muslimin argue that content-based fact-checking alone is insufficient because misinformation circulates within fragmented social networks shaped by users' emotional and normative contexts (Graf & Muslimin, 2022). The digital *tabayyun* framework subsequently integrates the principles of Qur'anic verification with artificial intelligence to assess and filter social media information before it is disseminated (Meerangani, Nor, et al., 2025). Although they make an important contribution, these studies generally still proceed from the assumption that digital sources can first be identified and then assessed for credibility. Deepfakes challenge this assumption because the identity of the source itself can be synthesised, imitated, or falsely attributed to the content. This shift widens the gap between digital visibility and

epistemic credibility. Consequently, the gap still evident in the literature concerns not merely how false information is verified, but how the authenticity of the identity claiming to be the source of the information must be tested before the credibility of the content is assessed.

The literature on hadith studies actually provides a robust methodological groundwork for tackling this issue, though this groundwork has not yet been systematically reconfigured for verifying synthetic identities. Employing an *isnad*-based approach alongside a comparative examination of Muslim and Western scholarship, Amin identifies transmission reliability and authentication methods as core concerns in establishing hadith validity (Amin, 2005). Chandra and Buchari M. show that *isnad* in *sahih* hadith obliges narrators to be both '*adil and dabit*—that is, to possess moral integrity together with the capacity to preserve information accurately from reception through to transmission (Chandra & Buchari, 2016). Through comparative analysis, Ilahi et al. reveal that *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* functions as a mechanism for evaluating narrator reliability, with critics applying varying degrees of stringency (Ilahi et al., 2023). Ulum draws on historical criticism and content analysis to reassess the concept of '*adālah al-ṣaḥābah* by applying '*adālah al-rāwī* to questions of integrity (Ulum, 2022). Amrulloh, meanwhile, applies the *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* framework to show that a narrator's ideological affiliation does not inherently undermine the credibility of their narration (Amrulloh, 2019). Idri frames hadith criticism as an inquiry into identity, biography, trustworthiness, transmission, *isnad*, and *matn*; one that must remain receptive to contemporary technological concerns (Idri, 2010). Fahimah maps external and internal criticism as complementary instruments for authenticating both *isnad* and *matn* (Fahimah, 2014). Siswanto finds that hadith criticism is capable of undergoing both internal and external transformation as historical conditions evolve (Siswanto, 2020). Firdaus and Suryadilaga further demonstrate that integrating contemporary scholarship into hadith criticism can strengthen tests of authenticity (Firdaus & Suryadilaga, 2019). Taken together, these studies illustrate the adaptive capacity of hadith criticism methodology, even as its analytical focus remains anchored in narrators, *isnad*, *matn*, and historical transmission.

Based on this map, the research gap lies in the absence of a model that translates *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* (from the critique of a narrator's credibility) into a critique of digital identity to address deepfakes. Previous research has examined the ethics of hoaxes, the digitisation of hadith, post-truth, digital religious authority, AI-based *tabayyun*, AI ethics, and the authenticity of *sanad*; however, it has not yet brought all these areas together within a framework that distinguishes between identity authenticity, source integrity, transmission reliability, digital provenance, and content validity. Deepfakes demand a new verification sequence because, before assessing whether a source is truthful and accurate, it must first be ascertained whether the figure appearing is genuinely the source claimed (Ramadhani et al., 2025). On this basis, the novelty of this research lies in the reconstruction of the principles of '*adālah* and *dabt*, *jarḥ* and *ta'dīl*, the identification of narrators, and the traceability of transmission into a set of parameters for assessing the authenticity of identity and the credibility of digital

sources. The research questions focus on three areas: how *'adālah* and *ḍabt* form the foundation of narrator credibility criticism within the hadith tradition; how source authority is transformed from narrators to digital identities in the era of deepfakes; and how the principles of *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* can be contextualised to serve as parameters for verifying the credibility of digital sources. This research aims to reconstruct the principle of *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* into a model of digital identity criticism as an epistemological framework for verifying deepfake hoaxes from the perspective of hadith studies.

This study employs a qualitative method using a grounded theory approach (Turner, 1983; Wolfswinkel et al., 2013) to construct a conceptual framework regarding the transformation of the principle of *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* from a method of criticising the credibility of narrators into a framework for digital identity criticism in the verification of deepfake hoaxes. The grounded theory approach was chosen because the research aims not only to describe classical concepts in the science of hadith but also to develop a conceptual formulation arising from the process of identifying, comparing, categorising and interpreting data relevant to the credibility of sources, the authenticity of identity, the transmission of information, and digital manipulation. The research data sources consist of secondary literature comprising scientific articles, Islamic literature, academic publications, and other materials directly related to the research subject. Sources were selected based on substantive relevance, academic authority, the recency of the publication, and their contribution to the formation of the study's conceptual categories.

Data collection was carried out using documentation techniques, namely by cataloguing, conducting in-depth reading, taking notes, classifying, and comparing documents based on themes related to the research focus. The documentation process focused on three main data groups: the principle of narrator credibility within the *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* tradition; the transformation of source authority and identity within the digital information ecosystem; and the characteristics of deepfake manipulation that impact the authenticity of sources. The collected data was then analysed using Miles et al.'s interactive analysis model, which comprises data condensation, data presentation, and concluding (Miles et al., 2014). During the data condensation stage, relevant information was selected, simplified, coded, and grouped into categories such as source integrity, transmission reliability, identity authenticity, source traceability, and indicators of strengthened and weakened credibility. The data presentation stage is carried out through thematic analyses, comparison matrices, and the mapping of relationships between the classical concepts of *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* and issues of digital identity. The final stage involves drawing and verifying conclusions through source triangulation and theoretical triangulation. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing findings from the literature on hadith studies, research on authority and the transmission of digital information, and studies on deepfakes, synthetic identities and digital provenance. Meanwhile, theoretical triangulation is carried out by testing the functional compatibility between the concepts of *'adālah*, *ḍabt*, *jarḥ*, *ta'dīl* and the continuity of the sanad with the concepts of source integrity, information reliability, identity authenticity and the traceability of digital transmission. Each category is

retained if it receives support from independent sources, whilst divergent or conflicting findings are used to refine, review and improve the formulation of concepts. To ensure the traceability of the analysis, the entire process of coding, source comparison, category formation and changes in interpretation is documented in an analytical matrix. This procedure resulted in the formulation of a critique of digital identity as an epistemological reconstruction of *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* to assess the authenticity of identity and the credibility of sources in deepfake hoaxes.

Result and Discussion

'Adālah and Ḍabṭ as the Foundations of Criticism of Narrator Credibility in the Hadith Tradition

The credibility of the narrator occupies a central position in the structure of hadith authentication, as hadiths were transmitted to the generations following the Prophet through a chain of individuals who received, preserved and conveyed the information. This issue became increasingly serious as transmission extended across generations, regions and socio-political conflicts. The history of hadith criticism shows that the need to scrutinise narrators intensified once the source could no longer be directly verified, particularly when political conflicts, group fanaticism and the forgery of hadiths increased the likelihood of information being distorted. Umar demonstrates that the tradition of clarification and verification had developed from the earliest generations, later evolving into a discipline of criticism as the chain of transmission grew longer (Umar, 2011). Mahmud also shows that following *al-fitnah al-kubra*, selectivity regarding narrators became increasingly stringent, as political and sectarian interests could influence both the production and transmission of narrations (Mahmud, 2014). This situation prompted scholars to develop criteria for an unbroken chain of transmission (*sanad*), 'adil narrators, *ḍabīṭ* narrators, and narrators free from *shudhudh* and 'illah, as seen in the practice of *sanad* criticism examined by Siregar (M. Siregar, 1994). A similar need is evident in the scholars' efforts to classify the quality of hadith in order to distinguish acceptable information from that which is dubious (Suhendra, 2014). Thus, the critique of narrators arose not as a personal judgement separate from the text, but as an epistemological response to the risks of error, manipulation and uncertainty in transmission. Amin even emphasises that the reliability of methods of authentication and evaluation of forms of transmission is a fundamental issue in determining the trustworthiness of hadith (Amin, 2005). This historical fact demonstrates that from the very beginning, the authentication of hadith has been based on questions regarding who the source of the information is and to what extent the information they convey can be trusted.

At the first level, 'adālah can be interpreted as a dimension of the narrator's integrity, rather than merely a label of piety. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi defines the 'adil narrator as someone trustworthy in their religious practice, whilst the acceptance of a narration remains linked to their character and personal suitability as a bearer of information (Chandra & Buchari, 2016). However, such integrity is not accurately defined if reduced to uniformity of social or theological identity. Ulum's critique of the generalisation of 'adālah al-ṣaḥābah highlights the need to test the concept of justice

through evidence of behaviour and integrity, rather than treating it merely as a status accepted without evaluation (Ulum, 2022). A similar tension is evident in the Sunni–Shia debate regarding the standards of *‘adālah*, which demonstrates that assessments of integrity can be influenced by social context and inter-group conflict (Mahmud, 2014). Consequently, criticism of narrators fulfils its epistemic function precisely when it is able to distinguish between a person’s affiliations and their quality as a source. Isnaeni found that some narrators accused of heresy were still assessed more objectively based on their honesty and the quality of their narrations (Isnaeni, 2016). Amrulloh’s findings regarding ‘Abbad b. Ya‘qub also indicate that his identity as a Rafidah Shia does not in itself negate his status as a narrator in several Sunni hadith collections (Amrulloh, 2019). Indeed, Husin’s research reveals the presence of dozens of Shia narrators in Sahih al-Bukhari and confirms that theological affiliation was not used as the sole criterion for the acceptance of a narration, whilst the elements of *sidq*, *thiqah*, *‘adālah*, and the quality of transmission were still taken into account (Husein, 2021). Based on these findings, *‘adālah* can be epistemologically reconstructed as the integrity of the source—that is, the quality that renders the bearer of information trustworthy based on honesty, consistency, reputation, and responsibility in transmission.

The second layer is *ḍabṭ*, which, in the epistemological interpretation of this article, is positioned as the dimension of reliability in the transmission of information. Whilst *‘ad* is concerned with the source’s credibility, *ḍabṭ* addresses the source’s ability to retain information accurately. Chandra and Buchari M. explain *ḍabṭ* as the condition whereby information is preserved from the moment the narrator receives it until they convey it again (Chandra & Buchari, 2016). Siregar elaborates on this through the ability to preserve information in memory (*ḍabṭ al-ṣadr*) and in written records (*ḍabṭ al-kitāb*), to recognise changes in meaning when narrating, and to demonstrate consistency with the transmissions of other trustworthy narrators (M. Siregar, 1994). Therefore, reliability is not merely a matter of memory, but rather the capacity to minimise alterations to information during the transmission process. Ilahi et al. demonstrate that the reliability of a *sanad* is assessed through a multi-layered critique of its transmitters, although critics may apply varying degrees of rigour in conducting *jarḥ* and *ta’dīl* (Ilahi et al., 2023). Idri also demonstrates that the personal abilities and intellectual qualities of the narrators determine the acceptance of a hadith, as transmission is subject to the risks of faulty memory, error and forgery (Idri, 2012). Even narrators who appear trustworthy may still be subject to *wahm*; consequently, *‘ilal* criticism has developed to detect flaws that are not apparent on the surface (Ansori et al., 2020). This dimension is reinforced by Alwi HS’s study on the Azami method, which utilises comparison and fact-checking of narrators to test the authenticity of the *sanad* (HS, 2020). Thus, *ḍabṭ* represents not merely individual capability, but a principle of information reliability—namely, the ability to maintain the consistency, precision and integrity of the message throughout the chain of transmission.

The relationship between *‘adālah* and *ḍabṭ* thus forms a complementary structure of credibility. A source with integrity is not automatically reliable if it is unable to maintain the accuracy of information, just as a source with high transmission

capacity is not automatically credible when its integrity is in question. The framework of hadith criticism safeguards both dimensions simultaneously through the investigation of the *isnad*, the biographies of the narrators, the comparison of narrations, and the examination of transmission defects. Fahimah demonstrates that hadith authentication brings together external criticism of the *sanad* with internal criticism of the *matn*, such that truth is not determined by a single indicator (Fahimah, 2014). Idri regards *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* as positive and negative criticism of the quality of narrators, which operates through identification, biography, evaluation, hierarchy, and the manner of receiving and transmitting narrations (Idri, 2010). Zaman also positions the continuity of the *sanad*, *'adālah*, *ḍabt*, freedom from *shādh*, and freedom from *'illah* as interrelated tools in determining authenticity (Zaman, 2018). On this basis, this article offers a new interpretation that the credibility of a source is shaped by two fundamental dimensions, namely the integrity of the source, represented by *'adālah*, and the reliability of transmission, represented by *ḍabt*. This formulation is not intended to replace the classical meanings of these two terms, but rather to extract their epistemological functions. This transformation shifts *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* from merely a tool for classifying narrators towards an epistemology of credibility—that is, a framework for determining why a source and its information are worthy of trust. It is at this point that the critique of narrators provides a conceptual foundation for the development of credibility criticism within the digital information environment, where the integrity of the source and the reliability of the message once again become the two primary issues that must be verified.

From Narrators to Digital Identity: The Transformation of Authority in Information Sources in the Age of Deepfakes

In the tradition of transmitting religious knowledge, the authority of information was originally attached to human figures who were relatively recognisable, whose backgrounds could be traced, and whose competence and reputation could be assessed. This structure changed when religion entered the digital sphere. Data from various studies indicate that the media are no longer merely a channel for conveying messages from traditional authorities to the public, but are also reshaping the way in which authority is formed and recognised. Cloete points out that technological mediation allows traditional religious structures to be bypassed, as people obtain information from a variety of online sources, meaning that institutional figures are no longer the sole holders of legitimacy (Cloete, 2016). In Indonesia, similar changes are evident as the ease and speed of the internet lead some members of the public to prefer digital sources over direct interaction with ulama possessing in-depth scholarly knowledge (Ichwan et al., 2024). In Aceh, new media have given rise to both fragmentation and contestation between local ulama and ustaz who have gained cross-regional reach through digital platforms (E. Saputra & Fadhli, 2020). Recent findings show that social media have even become an arena for the contestation of symbolic capital and religious legitimacy, involving both established and new actors (Hermansah et al., 2026). However, these changes do not necessarily signify the disappearance of traditional authority. Traditional religious leaders can rebuild their popularity through social

media and new social networks (Naim & Kurniawan, 2025). Meanwhile, Sufi figures can utilise cyberspace to strengthen the charismatic authority that previously grew through direct relationships (Hidayati, 2022). This body of data indicates that the primary transformation is not the loss of authority, but rather a shift in the mechanisms by which an individual or source is deemed authoritative.

This change is influenced by the convergence of open access, the democratisation of information production, the logic of platform popularity, and the increasingly blurred boundaries between producers and consumers of knowledge. Akmaliah demonstrates that the failure of established religious organisations to master the digital space can result in their voices being less heard compared to new figures who are more active on Instagram and YouTube (Akmaliah, 2020). However, established institutions can also reclaim this space by developing digital communication strategies to challenge the dominance of these new authorities (Akmaliah, 2022). This means that legitimacy in the digital sphere does not stem solely from scholarly lineage, institutional standing, or depth of knowledge, but also from the ability to construct a digital presence. Salma et al. found that the presentation of interpretations through Instagram narratives can generate emotional engagement, epistemic trust, communal bonds, and the reinforcement of interpretative authority (Salma et al., 2025). More broadly, Zhorabek et al. demonstrate that digital platforms decentralise authority and enable users to shape their religious repertoires through content that has undergone algorithmic selection (Zhorabek et al., 2025). On the other hand, such environments also accelerate the distribution of information that does not always undergo adequate scrutiny. Research on fabricated hadiths indicates that algorithmic visibility can take over some of the functions of scholarly selection, as popular content is more likely to gain recognition than content that has undergone academic authentication (Ilmiyah & Hussin, 2025). Graf and Muslimin also emphasise that misinformation and disinformation on social media cannot be separated from the social and emotional contexts, as well as the community networks, in which information is produced and received (Graf & Muslimin, 2022). Consequently, the cause of this shift in authority is not merely a transition from offline to online spaces, but a change in the architecture of trust distribution, from personal legitimacy to legitimacy increasingly mediated by accounts, networks, audiovisual formats, user interactions, and algorithms.

This shift reaches a more radical level when artificial intelligence not only distributes information but is also capable of producing representations of the source. Deepfakes make the issue of credibility distinct from conventional hoaxes because a person's face, voice, gestures, and actions can be manipulated to create the impression that a particular figure is genuinely saying or doing something. Ramadhani et al. demonstrate that face-swapping technology is capable of creating realistic representations using the victim's identity. Meanwhile, fake accounts and various other channels can be used to amplify their dissemination. The consequences extend beyond false information to include identity theft and the undermining of the integrity of public information (Ramadhani et al., 2025). This risk is exacerbated by the fact that AI systems can automatically generate text, audio and video, whilst algorithms determine

their visibility. Meerangani et al. identified the production of synthetic and unverified material as one of the factors undermining the authority of information, including the use of deepfakes for identity spoofing (Meerangani, Harun, et al., 2025). Keskin demonstrates that AI-generated religious content can shape the way audiences understand religious figures, narratives and authority, although audiences also identify errors and accuracy issues in these representations (Keskin, 2025). Meanwhile, the integration of AI and big data exacerbates issues of privacy, information manipulation and moral responsibility (A. Saputra & Asbi, 2025). Similar issues drive the need for data protection, ethics and accountability in AI governance (Gorian & Osman, 2024), as well as the development of the principles of justice, trustworthiness, transparency and accountability from an Islamic ethical perspective (Kannike & Fahm, 2025). The epistemological implications are significant: what appears to be a person can no longer automatically be treated as proof that that person is indeed a source of information.

Contextualising *al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl* in Deepfake Verification: Formulating Credibility Parameters for Digital Sources

Much of the literature indicates that the principle of *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* possesses epistemological elements that can be reconstructed without detaching them from the methodological roots of hadith criticism. In the hadith tradition, authentication does not stop at the content of the report, but encompasses the identity of the narrator, their personal integrity, their ability to preserve the information, the continuity of transmission, and comparison with other accounts. Ilahi et al. demonstrate that the assessment of *the sanad* depends on a systematic evaluation of the narrators' reliability, although the rigour of the critics may vary (Ilahi et al., 2023). Within al-Khatib al-Baghdadi's framework, *'adālah* and *ḍabt* are essential criteria in determining a narrator's suitability and the quality of their transmission (Chandra & Buchari, 2016). However, research into narrators with specific theological identities shows that evaluation should not be based solely on group labels. A narrator's biography still requires an individual assessment of quality (Amrulloh, 2019; Isnaeni, 2016; Ulum, 2022). This critical approach demonstrates that *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* essentially functions as a mechanism for screening credibility, rather than merely a narrator's biography. Amin emphasises the importance of examining transmission methods and comparing chains of transmission as part of hadith authentication (Amin, 2005). Meanwhile, Fahimah highlights the relationship between the *isnad* system, external criticism, and the authenticity of information (Fahimah, 2014). It is these principles that form the basis of reconstruction, namely the identification of sources, *'adālah*, *ḍabt*, reputation, continuity of transmission, indicators of weakened and strengthened credibility, and corroboration. Thus, what is transformed is not the historical form of the narrator's assessment, but rather its epistemological function in examining who the source of the information is, how the information is transmitted, and how strong the grounds are for trusting it.

The need for this functional translation arises because the structure of digital information has shifted the locus of authentication risks. In the post-truth era, open access means that hadiths can be consumed and disseminated via websites,

applications, and social media without always being subject to quality checks; indeed, their use may be influenced by political and commercial interests (T. A. Saputra & Suryadilaga, 2020). Digitalisation does indeed facilitate access, but hadith files in PDF format or as digital data can also be modified, thereby raising issues regarding their authenticity and accuracy (Istianah & Wahyuningsih, 2019). The dissemination of hadiths via memes highlights a further shift, as religious texts can be redesigned, cropped, reproduced and circulated rapidly through user networks (Usman et al., 2023). At a more serious level, the authority of hadith on social media can be shaped by algorithmic visibility and virality, rather than by scholarly verification (Ilmiyah & Hussin, 2025). Al-Ayyubi has, in fact, demonstrated the relevance of critiquing the credibility of news sources in responding to social media hoaxes (Al-Ayyubi, 2018), whilst Digital *Tabayyun* has developed the principle of verification into a framework for filtering information with AI support (Meerangani, Nor, et al., 2025). However, deepfakes take the problem a step further because what is being falsified is not merely a proposition, but the identity of the source appearing to convey that proposition. Ramadhani et al. demonstrate that deepfake manipulation can transfer a person's face onto another audiovisual representation and is amplified through fake accounts and distribution networks (Ramadhani et al., 2025). Generative systems are also capable of producing text, audio, and video that appear authentic, whilst algorithms help determine their dissemination (Meerangani, Harun, et al., 2025). Keskin demonstrates that AI-generated religious representations can even influence the audience's perception of religious figures and authorities (Keskin, 2025). Therefore, the focus of verification must shift from merely the credibility of the information provider to the authenticity of the digitally represented identity.

Table 1. Seven Critical Parameters of Digital Identity

No.	Parameter	Brief Description	Purpose of Verification
1.	Identity Authenticity	To verify the authenticity of the face, voice, account, or figure displayed.	To ensure the source's identity is genuine and not a synthetic representation or false attribution.
2.	Source Integrity	Assessing the reputation, transparency, consistency and track record of the content producer or uploader.	Assessing the source's credibility.
3.	Content Reliability	Checking the accuracy, consistency, and likelihood of changes to the information during production or reproduction.	Assessing the stability and accuracy of the information.
4.	Digital Provenance	Tracing the source, the upload process, file modifications, and the context in which the content appeared.	Identifying the origin and digital transmission path.

5.	Corroboration and Independence of Supporting Sources	Verifying independent supporting evidence that functionally corresponds to <i>al-shawāhid wa al-mutāba‘āt</i> , rather than merely being a repetition from the same network.	Avoiding spurious support or false corroboration.
6.	Digital <i>Jarḥ</i> Indicators (Credibility Weakening)	Identifying evidence that undermines credibility, including identity discrepancies, unclear attribution, contradictions, audiovisual manipulation, as well as anomalies or hidden flaws that functionally correspond to <i>‘illah</i> .	Flagging potential manipulation and the invalidity of sources or content.
7.	Digital Credibility Reinforcement (<i>Ta‘dīl</i>)	Identifying confirmation of the source, consistency across evidence, clear provenance, and independent corroboration.	Providing an epistemological basis for strengthening the acceptance of information.

The seven parameters in Table 1 constitute a mapping based on the equivalence of epistemological functions, rather than a literal transposition of classical terminology. Authenticity of identity, integrity of the source, reliability of content, and *digital provenance* stem from the functions of narrator identification, *‘adālah*, *ḍabt*, and continuity of transmission. The fifth parameter adapts the functions of *al-shawāhid wa al-mutāba‘āt* to assess the independence of corroboration, whilst the sixth parameter links *jarḥ* to anomaly detection, including hidden defects that are functionally akin to *‘illah*. All evidence is then integrated via the digital *ta‘dīl* parameter to determine the source’s credibility. This framework positions source verification, authenticity, and distribution context as prerequisites for the assessment of digital information (Graf & Muslimin, 2022; Istianah & Wahyuningsih, 2019; Meerangani, Nor, et al., 2025).

By way of illustration, the model was applied to a post on the Threads account “bogoyunior” (1 March 2026) claiming that China would protect Iran if the United States were to attack. MAFINDO found no credible media coverage or official sources to support this claim and classified it as *fabricated content*. An image falsity score of 62 per cent from the automated detection tool is treated as an initial indicator, not conclusive forensic evidence (Fmprc.gov.cn, 2026; Turnbackhoax.id, 2026).

Table 2. Illustration of the Application of Digital Identity Criticism

No.	Parameter	Application and Assessment
1.	Identity Authenticity	The automated detection tool indicates a 62% probability of forgery, but metadata, the original file, and comparative forensic examination are not available. Status: requires technical confirmation.
2.	Source Integrity	The claim originates from an unofficial Threads account, not a Chinese government channel; the creator and source of the image are not transparent. Status: weak source credibility.

3.	Content Reliability	No credible media outlets or official documents have been found to support China's pledge to protect Iran from a US attack. Status: content unverified.
4.	Digital Provenance	Quotations and images cannot be traced back to official statements, original files, or an auditable production history. Status: provenance unclear.
5.	Independent Corroboration	No independent sources are corroborating the claim. China officially supports Iran's sovereignty and security and has called for a cessation of military operations and negotiations, rather than promising protection. Status: corroboration not met.
6.	Digital Jarḥ Indicators	Untraceable attribution, the transformation of diplomatic support into a promise of protection, missing provenance, and signs of image manipulation constitute evidence of weakening. Functional distortion of meaning is analogous to <i>'illah</i> . Status: strong indicators of weakening.
7.	Digital Credibility Reinforcement	There are no sources or independent evidence for <i>ta'dil</i> ; official documents do not contain such a promise. Status: credibility reinforcement not met.

The accumulation of these seven parameters results in the epistemic decision "Rejected": the authenticity of the source is uncertain, provenance is broken, the content is uncorroborated, and the indicators of weakening are dominant. The decision applies to the claim; the status of the image as a deepfake remains a presumption until the original file has been forensically examined.

These seven parameters are then organised into a Digital Identity Criticism Model based on *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* through seven sequential stages: identity verification → evaluation of source integrity → testing of content reliability → provenance tracing → independent corroboration → identification of indicators of weakening and strengthening → epistemic decision. The outcome is not presented as a binary result, but is categorised into Accepted, Requires Confirmation, Weak Credibility, and Rejected. A graded model is necessary because the tradition of hadith criticism itself demonstrates variations in evaluation and the rigour of critics (Ilahi et al., 2023). In the digital realm, the need for caution is even greater because AI systems can produce synthetic material that is difficult to verify. Previous studies have proposed digital literacy to tackle fabricated hadiths (Ilmiyah & Hussin, 2025), a contextual approach to misinformation (Graf & Muslimin, 2022), legal protection for the identities of deepfake victims (Ramadhani et al., 2025), and ethical guidelines for the use of AI within religious authorities (Rahim et al., 2025). Studies on AI for fatwas also emphasise that the technology is useful for information retrieval and processing, but cannot replace human judgement, contextual assessment, and epistemic authority (Meerangani et al., 2026). The distinction in this research lies in its object of study and the results of its reconstruction. Previous studies primarily assessed information once the source was assumed to exist, whereas this model positions identity authentication as the first layer before the credibility of the source and its content is assessed. In this

way, *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* is expanded from a critique of human narrators to an epistemological mechanism for evaluating synthetic sources within the AI ecosystem.

This contextualisation nevertheless requires clear boundaries. The Digital Identity Criticism model is not a technical tool for detecting deepfakes and does not replace digital forensics, metadata examination, audiovisual artefact analysis, or other authentication technologies. The role of hadith scholarship lies at the epistemological level, namely in providing the logic for evaluating sources, transmission, supporting evidence, and degrees of acceptance, whilst technical evidence continues to require technological expertise. These boundaries are crucial because the use of AI in the religious sphere must uphold human authority and responsibility (Rahim et al., 2025) and must not delegate normative decisions entirely to algorithmic systems (Meerangani et al., 2026). From a policy perspective, the management of AI requires the principles of justice, trustworthiness, transparency, accountability and the protection of human interests (Kannike & Fahm, 2025), whilst issues of privacy and data protection demand a governance framework capable of safeguarding individual rights (Gorian & Osman, 2024). The maqashid sharia perspective also supports the formulation of digital media policies that protect religion, life, reason, lineage and property (Rosidi et al., 2022). As the digital space is an ethical arena that is constantly being negotiated, policies must not merely restrict users, but must establish a governance framework that is responsive to technological structures (M. H. Siregar et al., 2025). This is relevant to the need to develop a proactive Islamic digital ethics to address AI and big data (A. Saputra & Asbi, 2025), and given the expanding scope of AI research within religious studies, which demands interdisciplinary methodological dialogue (Andriansyah, 2023).

Conclusion

Reconceptualising the principle of *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* extends the domain of hadith criticism beyond the assessment of narrators' credibility to encompass the critique of authenticity and reliability of sources within an AI-driven digital information ecosystem. The first finding demonstrates that *'adālah* and *ḍabt*, while traditionally serving as classical criteria for accepting narrators, also carry a more foundational epistemological significance: *'adālah* denotes the integrity of the source, whereas *ḍabt* denotes the reliability of information transmission. Together, these two elements constitute a credibility framework requiring that a source be simultaneously trustworthy and capable of preserving informational accuracy. The second finding points to a fundamental transformation in the structure of informational authority. Whereas the transmission tradition evaluated a human narrator with a traceable identity, the digital ecosystem allows identity to be represented through accounts, images, audio, video, platforms, and distribution networks; even to be artificially synthesised through deepfake technology. This transformation redirects the epistemological focus from merely appraising the honesty of the information bearer towards a more essential scrutiny of the authenticity of identity representation, before any assessment of source credibility. The third finding yields a Digital Identity Criticism Model grounded in *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl*, comprising seven parameters (identity

authenticity, source integrity, content reliability, provenance traceability, the reputation and independence of corroborating sources, indicators of digital jarḥ, and reinforcement of digital credibility) operationalised through stages of identity verification, source integrity assessment, content reliability testing, information-origin tracing, independent corroboration, and identification of weakening or strengthening indicators, culminating in a multi-tiered epistemic decision: "Accepted," "Requires Confirmation," "Weak Credibility," or "Rejected."

The principal contribution of this study lies in formulating digital identity criticism as a conceptual and methodological advancement within hadith scholarship, repositioning *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl* from a narrator-credibility critique towards an epistemological framework for evaluating synthetic sources amid the deepfake era. Nonetheless, the proposed model remains conceptual in nature and is not intended to supplant digital forensic instruments, metadata analysis, audiovisual manipulation detection, or cryptographic authentication mechanisms. Accordingly, further research is warranted to empirically validate this model against diverse deepfake cases, to develop measurable operational indicators, and to integrate it with digital forensic methodologies and AI-based detection technologies, thereby establishing a more comprehensive, interdisciplinary verification protocol.

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