

Eureka Journal of Humanities and Social Research (EJHSR)

ISSN 2760-4934 (Online) Volume 2, Issue 8, August 2026



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FABRICATED HADITHS IN THE MODERN ERA AND THEIR SPREAD THROUGH MASS MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

Fabricated hadiths (al-Aḥādīth al-Mawḍū‘ah) represent one of the greatest challenges to the preservation of the Prophetic Sunnah. Although Muslim scholars developed rigorous methods to identify and reject fabricated narrations, the rapid growth of digital communication has enabled these narrations to spread more quickly than ever before. Social media platforms, messaging applications, websites, and digital content creators have become major channels through which unauthenticated hadiths are circulated among Muslims. Many users share religious messages without verifying their authenticity, contributing to the widespread dissemination of fabricated traditions. This study examines the concept of fabricated hadiths, the factors behind their continued circulation in the modern era, the role of mass media and social media in accelerating their spread, and the methods proposed by contemporary scholars to combat this phenomenon. The research adopts an analytical and descriptive approach based on classical hadith literature and contemporary academic studies.

Keywords: Fabricated Hadith, Sunnah, Hadith Sciences, Social Media, Mass Media, Authentication, Islamic Studies.

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1. Introduction

The Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the second primary source of Islamic legislation after the Holy Qur'an. Since the earliest generations of Islam, Muslim scholars devoted tremendous efforts to preserving the authenticity of the Prophet's teachings. They established sophisticated sciences such as al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl (critical evaluation of narrators), isnād criticism, and matn criticism to distinguish authentic reports from weak or fabricated ones. These scholarly efforts contributed significantly to protecting the integrity of Islamic teachings.

Despite these historical efforts, fabricated hadiths continue to appear in modern societies through new technological means. Unlike earlier periods, in which fabricated reports spread mainly through oral transmission or handwritten manuscripts, today's digital environment allows false religious information to reach millions of users within minutes. Consequently, fabricated hadiths have become not only a religious issue but also an information and communication challenge.

The objectives of this research are to explain the meaning of fabricated hadiths, identify the reasons behind their persistence in the modern era, examine the influence of mass media and social media in spreading them, and discuss practical strategies for limiting their dissemination. The study also highlights the importance of digital literacy and verification before sharing religious content online.

2. Definition of Fabricated Hadith

A fabricated hadith (al-Ḥadīth al-Mawḍūʿ) is a statement that has been falsely attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) although he never said, approved, or practiced it. It is considered the weakest category of hadith because it is based on deliberate fabrication rather than accidental weakness in transmission. Muslim scholars unanimously agree that intentionally attributing

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false statements to the Prophet constitutes a grave sin. Citation: (Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 2006; Ibn al-Jawzī, 1997)

Classical hadith scholars identified fabricated narrations through careful examination of both the chain of transmission (isnād) and the text (matn). They evaluated the reliability of narrators, compared narrations with authentic reports, and analyzed contradictions with the Qur'an, established Sunnah, historical facts, and sound reasoning. These scientific methods became the foundation of hadith criticism and remain relevant for contemporary researchers. Citation: (al-Suyūṭī, 2001; Brown, 2009)

3. Historical Development of Fabricated Hadiths

The phenomenon of fabricated hadiths did not exist during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). After his death, especially following the political conflicts that emerged during the first century of Islam, some individuals deliberately fabricated narrations to support political groups, theological doctrines, tribal loyalties, or personal interests. This situation prompted Muslim scholars to establish strict principles for verifying narrations and preserving the authenticity of the Sunnah. Citation: (Brown, 2009; Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 2006) During the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, fabricated hadiths increased due to political rivalry, sectarian disputes, excessive ascetic movements, and the activities of storytellers who sought to attract audiences. In response, scholars such as al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn al-Madīnī, Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn, and later Ibn al-Jawzī devoted their efforts to identifying fabricated narrations and warning Muslims against accepting them without verification. Citation: (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1997; al-Suyūṭī, 2001)

The science of hadith criticism became one of the greatest scholarly achievements in Islamic civilization. It established objective standards for evaluating narrators, examining chains of transmission, and analyzing textual consistency. These

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methods continue to provide valuable tools for contemporary scholars dealing with false religious information. Citation: (Azami, 1992; Brown, 2009)

4. Fabricated Hadiths in the Modern Era

Although the classical period witnessed the compilation of authentic hadith collections and books dedicated to fabricated narrations, fabricated hadiths continue to circulate widely in the twenty-first century. Modern technology has transformed the methods of dissemination, allowing false narrations to spread rapidly through websites, blogs, messaging applications, and social networking platforms. Unlike earlier periods, information now reaches global audiences almost instantly. Citation: (UNESCO, 2021; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017) One reason for the continued spread of fabricated hadiths is the tendency of many internet users to forward religious messages without verifying their authenticity. Emotional content, promises of extraordinary rewards, or severe warnings often encourage users to share messages immediately. As a result, fabricated narrations can become widespread despite lacking any reliable scholarly basis. Citation: (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Brown, 2009)

Another contributing factor is the increasing dependence on unofficial religious websites and social media influencers who may lack formal training in hadith sciences. Some content creators unintentionally quote weak or fabricated narrations, while others deliberately publish sensational religious material to attract attention and increase audience engagement. Citation: (UNESCO, 2021; Brown, 2009)

Furthermore, artificial intelligence, image editing, and graphic design software have made it easier to create visually attractive religious posts containing fabricated hadiths. Such content often includes decorative calligraphy, images of mosques, or false claims that the narration is recorded in authentic collections, making it difficult for ordinary readers to distinguish between authentic and fabricated reports. Citation: (UNESCO, 2021)

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5. Major Causes Behind the Contemporary Spread of Fabricated Hadiths

Several factors contribute to the continued circulation of fabricated hadiths in contemporary society. The first is limited public knowledge of hadith sciences. Many Muslims possess sincere religious intentions but lack the academic skills required to verify narrations before sharing them. Citation: (Brown, 2009)

A second factor is the speed of digital communication. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, X, and Instagram enable users to forward messages to thousands of people within seconds. This rapid circulation often occurs without any process of scholarly verification. Citation: (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017) A third factor involves the psychological influence of emotionally appealing religious messages. Narrations promising enormous rewards for simple actions or threatening severe punishment for minor sins tend to attract greater public attention, even when they have no authentic basis in the Prophetic Sunnah. Citation: (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1997; Brown, 2009)

6. The Role of Mass Media and Social Media in the Spread of Fabricated Hadiths

Mass media and social media have become among the most influential tools for disseminating religious information in the modern world. Television channels, radio programs, websites, YouTube, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Telegram, and WhatsApp allow millions of users to access and share Islamic content instantly. While these platforms provide valuable opportunities for Islamic education, they also facilitate the rapid spread of fabricated hadiths when information is shared without verification. Citation: (UNESCO, 2021; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017)

One of the main characteristics of social media is the speed with which information circulates. A fabricated hadith may be reposted thousands of times within a few hours, especially if it contains emotional language, promises of extraordinary rewards, or warnings of severe punishment. Many users assume

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that the widespread circulation of a narration indicates its authenticity, although popularity is not evidence of reliability in hadith scholarship. Citation: (Brown, 2009; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017)

Another challenge is that many digital posts present fabricated hadiths without citing their original sources. Some posts even falsely attribute fabricated narrations to the authentic collections of al-Bukhārī or Muslim, misleading readers who may lack specialized knowledge in hadith sciences. Such practices weaken public confidence in authentic religious knowledge and create confusion regarding the teachings of Islam. Citation: (Ibn al-Jawzī, 1997; al-Suyūṭī, 2001)

The rise of artificial intelligence and automated content generation has also increased the possibility of producing attractive but inaccurate religious materials. Images, videos, and quotations can easily be designed and shared widely without scholarly review. Therefore, digital literacy and religious verification have become essential skills for contemporary Muslims. Citation: (UNESCO, 2021)

7. Religious and Social Consequences of Fabricated Hadiths

Fabricated hadiths have serious religious consequences because they distort the authentic teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). When Muslims practice acts of worship based on fabricated narrations, they may unknowingly introduce innovations into religious practice or neglect authentic Prophetic guidance. This weakens the integrity of Islamic knowledge and affects the proper understanding of religion. Citation: (Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 2006; Brown, 2009)

The social consequences are equally significant. Fabricated narrations may encourage intolerance, superstition, or division among Muslims. Some fabricated hadiths have historically been used to support political agendas, sectarian conflicts, or cultural traditions that have no basis in authentic Islamic teachings. Consequently, fabricated narrations may contribute to misunderstanding, social

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polarization, and the spread of misinformation. Citation: (Azami, 1992; Brown, 2009)

Furthermore, the widespread circulation of fabricated hadiths reduces public trust in religious discourse. When people discover that commonly shared narrations are false, they may become skeptical toward authentic hadiths as well. This highlights the responsibility of scholars, educators, and media professionals to ensure the accuracy of religious information before publication. Citation: (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; UNESCO, 2021)

8. Methods of Verification and Combating Fabricated Hadiths

Classical Muslim scholars established comprehensive methods for identifying fabricated hadiths through the critical examination of both the chain of transmission (isnād) and the textual content (matn). Contemporary researchers continue to rely on these principles while also utilizing digital databases and electronic hadith collections to verify narrations efficiently. Citation: (Ibn al-Šalāh, 2006; Azami, 1992)

Educational institutions should strengthen public awareness regarding hadith authentication by teaching the principles of hadith sciences and encouraging critical thinking before sharing religious content online. Religious literacy should become an essential component of digital literacy programs in Muslim societies. Citation: (UNESCO, 2021)

Religious organizations and qualified scholars should actively participate in social media by providing verified religious content, correcting fabricated narrations, and responding quickly to misinformation. Collaboration between scholars, educators, media organizations, and technology companies can significantly reduce the spread of fabricated hadiths and promote authentic Islamic knowledge.

Citation: (Brown, 2009; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017)

Finally, every Muslim bears an individual responsibility to verify religious information before forwarding it to others. Following the Qur'anic principle of

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verification and the scholarly methodology developed by the hadith experts helps preserve the authenticity of the Prophetic Sunnah and protects society from religious misinformation.

9. Conclusion

Fabricated hadiths have posed a serious challenge to the preservation of the Prophetic Sunnah throughout Islamic history. Although classical Muslim scholars established rigorous scientific methods to identify and reject fabricated narrations, the rapid development of digital communication has created new opportunities for their widespread circulation. Social media platforms, websites, and messaging applications have transformed the speed and scale with which religious information is shared, making verification more essential than ever before. Citation: (Brown, 2009; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017)

The findings of this study demonstrate that the continued spread of fabricated hadiths is influenced by several interconnected factors, including limited public knowledge of hadith sciences, emotional online content, the absence of source verification, and the rapid expansion of digital media. These challenges require cooperation between scholars, educational institutions, media organizations, and individual users to preserve the authenticity of Islamic teachings. Citation: (UNESCO, 2021; Azami, 1992)

The study concludes that the methodology developed by classical hadith scholars remains highly relevant in the digital age. Combining traditional principles of hadith criticism with modern digital verification tools can significantly reduce the circulation of fabricated narrations. Promoting religious literacy, responsible media practices, and public awareness will contribute to protecting the integrity of the Sunnah and strengthening authentic Islamic scholarship. Citation: (Ibn al-Şalāh, 2006; al-Suyūfī, 2001)

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