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Hadith Authority in Late Modern Islamic Ethics: Reframing Transmission, Rational Deliberation, and Normative Moral Reasoning

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Abstract

Hadith authority remains a central issue in contemporary Islamic thought because late modern Muslim societies increasingly encounter Prophetic traditions within conditions shaped by moral pluralism, historical criticism, digital circulation, biomedical and technological change, and intensified debates over religious authority. This article examines how hadith authority can be reframed in late modern Islamic ethics without reducing it either to formal transmission-based authenticity or to unrestricted rational reinterpretation. Employing a qualitative textual-hermeneutical method, the study analyzes selected reports from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, and *al-Arbaʿūn al-Nawawīyyah*, supported by relevant Qur'anic ethical principles and modern scholarship in hadith studies, Islamic hermeneutics, and normative Islamic ethics. The findings show, first, that transmission functions as epistemic continuity by securing responsible attribution to the Prophet through *isnād*, *matn* awareness, and scholarly verification. Second, rational deliberation provides interpretive coherence by clarifying the domain, context, purpose, and applicability of authenticated reports. Third, normative moral reasoning ensures ethical accountability by evaluating hadith application in relation to intention, non-harm, mercy, proportionality, public welfare, and broader Islamic moral objectives. The article argues that hadith authority is best understood as layered normativity, in which transmission, rational deliberation, and normative moral reasoning operate as mutually constitutive dimensions of responsible Islamic ethical judgment. This integrative model contributes to hadith studies, Islamic hermeneutics, and contemporary Islamic ethics by moving beyond the binary between traditionalist authentication and modernist critique.

Keywords: Hadith authority; Islamic ethics; rational deliberation; normative moral reasoning; Islamic hermeneutics

Abstrak

Otoritas hadis tetap menjadi isu sentral dalam pemikiran Islam kontemporer karena masyarakat Muslim modern-lanjut semakin sering berhadapan dengan tradisi kenabian dalam kondisi yang dibentuk oleh pluralisme moral, kritik historis, sirkulasi digital, perubahan biomedis dan teknologi, serta meningkatnya perdebatan mengenai otoritas keagamaan. Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana otoritas hadis dapat dirumuskan ulang dalam etika Islam modern-lanjut tanpa mereduksinya pada autentisitas formal berbasis transmisi maupun pada reinterpretasi rasional yang tidak terbatas. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif tekstual-hermeneutis, penelitian ini menganalisis sejumlah riwayat terpilih dari *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, dan *al-Arbaʿūn al-Nawawīyyah*, dengan didukung oleh prinsip-prinsip etis Al-Qur'an yang relevan serta kajian modern dalam studi hadis, hermeneutika Islam, dan etika Islam normatif. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan, pertama, bahwa transmisi berfungsi sebagai kesinambungan epistemik dengan menjamin atribusi yang bertanggung jawab kepada Nabi melalui *isnād*, kesadaran terhadap *matn*, dan verifikasi keilmuan. Kedua, deliberasi rasional menyediakan koherensi interpretatif dengan memperjelas domain, konteks, tujuan, dan keberlakuan riwayat yang telah diautentikasi. Ketiga, penalaran moral normatif menjamin akuntabilitas etis dengan mengevaluasi penerapan hadis dalam kaitannya dengan niat, prinsip non-harm, rahmat, proporsionalitas, kemaslahatan publik, dan tujuan moral Islam yang lebih luas. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa otoritas hadis paling tepat dipahami sebagai normativitas berlapis, di mana transmisi, deliberasi rasional, dan penalaran moral normatif bekerja sebagai dimensi yang saling membentuk dalam menghasilkan penilaian etis Islam yang bertanggung jawab. Model integratif ini berkontribusi pada studi hadis, hermeneutika Islam, dan etika Islam kontemporer dengan melampaui oposisi biner antara autentikasi tradisional dan kritik modernis.

Kata kunci: otoritas hadis; etika Islam; deliberasi rasional; penalaran moral normatif; hermeneutika Islam.

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INTRODUCTION

Hadith authority remains one of the most consequential questions in contemporary Islamic thought because it concerns not only the authenticity of Prophetic reports but also the ways in which Muslims construct normativity, moral responsibility, and interpretive legitimacy. Alongside the Qur'an, hadith has shaped legal reasoning, ritual practice, ethical formation, communal identity, and the institutional authority of Muslim scholarship. In the classical Islamic tradition, the authority of hadith was embedded in a sophisticated epistemic culture involving transmission, *isnād* criticism, narrator evaluation, *matn* analysis, juristic interpretation, and scholarly reception. The hadith sciences developed rigorous mechanisms for distinguishing reliable from unreliable reports, thereby protecting the attribution of words, actions, and approvals to the Prophet through disciplined forms of verification.¹ Yet hadith authority has never been reducible to textual preservation alone. Even when a report was transmitted through a reliable chain, its normative force still required interpretive mediation through law, theology, language, ethics, and communal practice. Hadith authority, therefore, has always operated at the intersection of transmission and interpretation rather than through transmission alone.

In late modern Muslim societies, this inherited structure of authority has entered a more complex socio-intellectual environment. Modernity has changed the conditions under which religious knowledge is produced, circulated, contested, and applied. Historical criticism, secular rationality, moral pluralism, human rights discourse, biomedical technologies, gender debates, ecological concerns, digital religious platforms, and transnational fatwa networks have altered how Muslims encounter and evaluate hadith. The contemporary question is no longer limited to whether a particular report is authentic according to classical technical criteria; it also concerns how authenticated reports should function within moral reasoning, public ethics, and applied normative deliberation. This does not make authenticity irrelevant. Rather, it shows that authenticity does not exhaust authority. A hadith may be transmitted through an accepted chain and still raise questions concerning contextual scope, legal generalization, moral consequence, ethical proportionality, and contemporary applicability. The academic urgency of the topic lies precisely in this expanded problem: how can hadith remain normatively authoritative in late modern Islamic ethics without being reduced either to formal transmission or to unrestricted rational reinterpretation?

Modern scholarship on hadith authority has developed through several major trajectories. One important body of research examines the historical development of hadith criticism, canon formation, and the epistemological assumptions of *isnād*-based authentication. These studies have shown that hadith authority emerged through the interaction of scholarly institutions, transmission networks, juristic practice, and communal recognition.² More recent work has further emphasized the role of scholars in sustaining hadith authority, particularly through methodologies of verification, teaching, interpretation, and the formation of communal understanding.³ This trend has contributed substantially to clarifying the scholarly infrastructure behind hadith transmission. Its limitation, however, is that it often treats authority primarily as a problem of authenticity and preservation, while giving less attention to how authenticated reports become ethically meaningful in contemporary moral debates.

A second trajectory examines modern challenges to hadith authority, especially reformist, modernist, Qur'anist, and post-traditional approaches to the Prophetic Sunna. Daniel Brown's work

¹ Jonathan A C Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009); Aisha Y Musa, *Hadith as Scripture: Discussions on the Authority of Prophetic Traditions in Islam* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

² Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*.

³ H Monady, M Hasan, and A Sagir, "Building Hadith Authority: The Pioneering Role of Malay Archipelago Scholars," *AlBayan* 23, no. 1 (2025): 73–100, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-20250167>; A Sagir et al., "Indonesian Hadith Scholars' Contribution To The Establishment Of Hadith Authority In Malay Archipelago," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 18, no. 2 (2024): 532–57, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2024.18.2.532-557>.

demonstrates that modern disputes over hadith are inseparable from broader debates about religious authority, legal reform, and the impact of modernity on Muslim intellectual life.⁴ Later discussions of Qur'an-only approaches and modernist critiques show that some contemporary movements challenge the authority of hadith by emphasizing the sufficiency of the Qur'an or by subordinating hadith to broader scriptural and ethical principles.⁵ Karagözoğlu's analysis of post-classical Sunni hadith criticism adds historical depth to this discussion by showing that hadith criticism was not static; while early criticism often cantered on *isnād*-oriented elite practice, later developments increasingly reflected practical, communal, and interpretive concerns.⁶ These studies are valuable because they demonstrate that debates over hadith authority are historically layered rather than merely modern. Nevertheless, the literature has not yet fully theorized how transmission-based authority, rational deliberation, and ethical accountability can be integrated into a coherent model for late modern Islamic ethics.

A third body of scholarship shifts the debate from hadith authentication to broader questions of Islamic law, hermeneutics, and interpretive authority. Hallaq's account of authority, continuity, and change in Islamic law shows that Islamic normativity historically depended on a dynamic relation between inherited authority and juristic reasoning, rather than on static textualism alone.⁷ Abou El Fadl argues that interpretive authority requires moral restraint, intellectual honesty, and resistance to authoritarian closure.⁸ Rahman's hermeneutical approach similarly insists that scriptural interpretation must move between historical particularity and general moral principles if Islamic thought is to respond responsibly to modern challenges.⁹ This line of scholarship is important because it reframes authority as an ethical and hermeneutical problem, not simply a technical question of textual validation. It also resonates with contemporary hermeneutical proposals that emphasize values-based interpretation, foundational *ijtihād*, justice, equality, public welfare, and non-discriminatory resolutions in modern Islamic thought.¹⁰ Yet the specific place of hadith authority within such hermeneutical models remains insufficiently elaborated.

A fourth scholarly trend has emerged within contemporary Islamic ethics. Scholars in this field increasingly distinguish Islamic law as a normative-legal tradition from Islamic ethics as a broader domain of moral reasoning, virtue, responsibility, and applied deliberation. Work on bioethics, disability, environmental ethics, economic ethics, gender ethics, and technological ethics demonstrates that contemporary Muslim moral reasoning cannot rely solely on direct textual extraction; it requires interpretive negotiation between scriptural sources, juristic principles, empirical knowledge, public welfare, and ethical theory.¹¹ Debates on *maqāṣid* and *maṣlaḥah* further show that Islamic ethics often

⁴ Daniel W Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁵ D W Brown, *The Wiley Blackwell Concise Companion to the Hadith*, *Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Hadith*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118638477>; E Hamdeh, "Prophetic Hadith and the Qur'an-Only Movement: The Response of Muslim Scholars," *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 7, no. 2 (2022): 107–19, <https://doi.org/10.2979/ims.2022.a896982>.

⁶ M M Karagözoğlu, "Contested Avenues in Post-Classical Sunni Hadith Criticism: A Reading through the Lens of Al-Mughnī 'an Al-Hifz Wa-l-Kitāb," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 29, no. 2 (2018): 149–80, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etx079>.

⁷ Wael B Hallaq, *Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁸ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001).

⁹ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity* (University of Chicago Press, 1982).

¹⁰ A Duderija, "A Case Study of Patriarchy and Slavery: The Hermeneutical Importance of Qur'anic Assumptions in the Development of a Values-Based and Purposive Qur'an-Sunna Hermeneutic," in *Maqasid Al-Shari'a and Contemporary Reformist Muslim Thought: An Examination*, 2014, 219–45, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137319418_10; H Mavani, "Two Shi'i Jurisprudential Methodologies to Address Medical and Bioethical Challenges: Traditional Ijtihād and Foundational Ijtihād," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 42, no. 2 (2014): 263–84, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jore.12056>.

¹¹ Mohammed Ghaly, *Islamic Perspectives on the Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2015); Mohammed Ghaly, *Islam and Disability: Perspectives in Theology and Jurisprudence* (London: Routledge, 2010);

mediates between divine command, public benefit, moral consequence, and principled obligation, producing hybrid forms of reasoning that cannot be described simply as consequentialist or deontological.¹² The growing interest in virtue ethics, trusteeship, and the ethical philosophy of Ṭāhā ‘Abd al-Raḥmān also indicates that contemporary Islamic ethics is increasingly concerned with moral subject formation, responsibility, and the critique of modernity.¹³

The tension between textual authority and rational deliberation has deep roots in Islamic intellectual history. Classical theological debates between Mu‘tazilite and Ash‘arite approaches to moral knowledge illustrate different ways of relating reason, revelation, and normativity. While Mu‘tazilite thought gave greater weight to independent rational knowledge of moral value, Ash‘arite theology emphasized revelation as the decisive ground of obligation.¹⁴ This debate continues to influence Islamic hermeneutics because the question of hadith authority cannot be separated from the broader issue of how reason participates in moral judgment. In late modernity, however, the problem is intensified by new ethical infrastructures: secular institutions, human rights regimes, scientific expertise, digital publics, and competing models of modernity. Some scholars therefore argue for alternative modernities in which Islamic ethics engages contemporary realities without surrendering its metaphysical and normative foundations.¹⁵ The significance of this debate for hadith studies is clear: hadith authority must be examined not only through the lens of transmission, but also through the conditions of rational and ethical deliberation under late modernity.

The transmission of religious knowledge also has a social history that complicates narrow models of authority. Hadith was transmitted not only as text but as part of scholarly networks, pedagogical practices, ethical sensibilities, and communal formations. Studies of Islamic education and knowledge transmission show that Muslim scholarly cultures historically cultivated not merely doctrinal content but also habits of discipline, authority recognition, and moral formation.¹⁶ At the same

Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur’an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence*, Revised edition (London: Oneworld, 2016); M Shefer-Mossensohn, “Modern Islamic Eco-Religion: Historical Contexts,” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 19, no. 2 (2025): 237–64, <https://doi.org/10.1558/jsmc.27632>.

¹² K Abdur-Rashid, S W Furber, and T Abdul-Basser, “Lifting the Veil: A Typological Survey of the Methodological Features of Islamic Ethical Reasoning on Biomedical Issues,” *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 34, no. 2 (2013): 81–93, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11017-013-9251-7>; M Nekroumi, “Islamic Contributions to the Universal Conception of the Common Good in Multiconfessional Societies: Hermeneutical Foundations,” in *Public Theology, Religious Diversity, and Interreligious Learning: Contributing to the Common Good Through Religious Education*, 2018, 40–54, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429506390-5>; E Elmahjub, “Islamic Jurisprudence as an Ethical Discourse: An Enquiry into the Nature of Moral Reasoning in Islamic Legal Theory,” *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 10, no. 1 (2021): 16–42, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ojlr/rwaa023>.

¹³ Mohammed Hashas and Mutaz al-Khatib, *Islamic Ethics and the Trusteeship Paradigm: Taha Abderrahmane’s Philosophy in Comparative Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); S A Ayash, A A G Saged, and A Z Abidin, “Alternative Modernity Between Taha Abdurrahman And Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: A Comparative Descriptive Study,” *Afkar* 26, no. 2 (2024): 567–604, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol26no2.16>; C Rois, A Irfan, and H Anam, “ISLAMIC HIERARCHY OF VALUE: Abdullah Saeed’s Progressive Interpretation of the Qur’an,” *Miqot: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 49, no. 1 (2025): 205–21, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v49i1.1125>.

¹⁴ K Aramesh, “Normativity in Islamic Bioethics,” in *Advancing Global Bioethics*, vol. 14, 2020, 13–29, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-30432-4_3; M Javadi, “Three Interpretations of the Moral Good and Bad in Islamic Philosophy and Theology and Their Impact on Legal Hermeneutics,” *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 8, no. 1–2 (2024): 146–72, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685542-20240007>.

¹⁵ M Kohantorabi, “The Role Of History And Akhlāq In Reconciliation Between Jurisprudence And Modernity,” *Jurnal Fiqh* 18, no. 2 (2021): 243–62, <https://doi.org/10.22452/fiqh.vol18no2.1>; I Agustono, J Arroisi, and N S S Zain, “The Qur’anic Concept Of Mithāq In The Critique Of Modernity: A Comparative Study Of Al-Attas And Taha Abdurrahman,” *Afkar* 27, no. 1 (2025): 259–94, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol27no1.7>; Ayash, Saged, and Abidin, “Alternative Modernity Between Taha Abdurrahman And Bediuzzaman Said Nursi: A Comparative Descriptive Study.”

¹⁶ R W Hefner, “Islamic Knowledge and Education in the Modern Age,” in *The New Cambridge History of Islam: Muslims and Modernity Culture and Society Since 1800*, 2010, 497–520, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521844437.021>.

time, modern Muslim contexts have increasingly required reinterpretation, contextualization, and adaptation of inherited knowledge to new social realities.¹⁷ This dual movement continuity through transmission and responsiveness through contextualization forms one of the central tensions of contemporary hadith authority. The challenge is not simply to preserve the past or adapt to the present, but to determine how preservation and adaptation can be methodologically related.

Despite these important contributions, a conceptual gap remains. Existing scholarship often treats transmission, reason, and ethics as separate analytical domains. Classical hadith studies tend to foreground authentication, *isnād* reliability, and the preservation of Prophetic reports. Modernist and reformist studies often focus on reason, historical criticism, and the challenge of modernity. Islamic ethics studies frequently draw on Qur'anic values, *maqāṣid*, virtue theory, or applied moral reasoning, but they do not always explain how hadith authority itself should be theoretically reframed within contemporary ethical deliberation. Consequently, the relationship between hadith transmission and normative moral reasoning remains under-theorized. The unresolved issue is not whether hadith should remain authoritative for Muslims, but how that authority can be understood without falling into either rigid transmissionism, which treats formal authenticity as sufficient for ethical application, or unrestricted rational subjectivism, which detaches moral reasoning from the discipline of tradition.

This article addresses that gap by reassessing hadith authority within the framework of late modern Islamic ethics. The phrase "late modern Islamic ethics" refers here to a socio-intellectual condition in which Muslim ethical reasoning operates amid intensified pluralism, institutional fragmentation, global moral debates, scientific specialization, and expanded access to religious knowledge. In this condition, religious authority is no longer mediated exclusively by traditional scholarly institutions; it is also shaped by universities, digital platforms, transnational fatwa bodies, public intellectuals, activists, and lay interpretive communities. This transformation does not abolish classical authority, but it changes the conditions of its reception, contestation, and application. Hadith authority must therefore be re-examined as a layered normative structure involving epistemic continuity, interpretive coherence, and ethical accountability.

The central research problem of this article is the theoretical tension between transmitted authority and rational moral deliberation in contemporary Islamic ethics. Classical hadith epistemology rightly insists that Prophetic authority cannot be separated from disciplined transmission. Without *isnād* criticism, narrator evaluation, and inherited methods of hadith verification, hadith discourse risks losing its connection to the historical memory of the Prophet. Yet late modern ethical challenges require more than the classification of reports as *ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḥasan*, or *ḍa'īf*. Ethical application requires attention to moral purpose, contextual meaning, human consequence, social harm, and the relation between reports and broader Islamic values. The problem, therefore, is how to preserve the epistemic integrity of hadith transmission while also allowing rational deliberation and normative moral reasoning to guide responsible interpretation.

Accordingly, this article asks three focused research questions. First, how has hadith authority been constructed through the epistemic logic of transmission in classical and modern scholarship? Second, what theoretical tensions emerge when transmission-based authority encounters late modern forms of rational and ethical deliberation? Third, how can hadith authority be reframed as an integrative model that combines transmission, rational deliberation, and normative moral reasoning without reducing one dimension to another? These questions are designed not to reject classical hadith methodology, but to clarify its continuing role within a broader ethical and hermeneutical framework.

The objective of this study is to develop a conceptual model of hadith authority suitable for contemporary Islamic ethics. More specifically, the article aims to analyze the epistemic function of transmission in preserving continuity with Prophetic authority, examine the role of rational deliberation in securing interpretive coherence, and formulate the role of normative moral reasoning in ensuring ethical accountability. The study argues that hadith authority in late modern Islamic ethics

¹⁷ J Berglund, "Islamic Religious Education in Muslim Schools: A Translation of Islam to the Swedish School System," in *Boundaries of Religious Freedom: Regulating Religion in Diverse Societies*, vol. 4, 2016, 109–21, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32289-6_7.

should not be understood as a binary opposition between tradition and reason. Rather, it should be understood as a layered authority in which transmission preserves the historical and epistemic link to the Prophet, rational deliberation mediates meaning across contexts, and normative moral reasoning evaluates the ethical responsibility of interpretation and application.

The theoretical framework of this article combines three analytical perspectives. The first is hadith epistemology, especially the concepts of *isnād*, *matn*, narrator reliability, authenticity, and the distinction between transmission and interpretation. This perspective is necessary because any reassessment of hadith authority must remain grounded in the internal logic of the hadith tradition itself. The second is Islamic hermeneutics, which understands meaning as emerging through a disciplined interaction between text, interpreter, context, and moral purpose. This framework enables the study to move beyond literalist or purely formalist models of authority. The third is normative Islamic ethics, which treats Islamic moral reasoning as a process involving textual fidelity, ethical judgment, virtue, public welfare, accountability, and the prevention of harm. Together, these perspectives provide the basis for what this article calls an integrative model of hadith authority.

The novelty of this study lies in theorizing hadith authority as a tripartite structure: transmission, rational deliberation, and normative moral reasoning. Unlike approaches that reduce hadith authority to authentication alone, this article argues that authentication is necessary but not sufficient for ethical application. Unlike approaches that privilege autonomous reason at the expense of tradition, it argues that rational deliberation must remain anchored in the epistemic discipline of transmission. Unlike applied ethics approaches that use hadith only as supporting evidence, it places hadith authority itself at the centre of theoretical inquiry. In doing so, the article contributes to hadith studies, Islamic hermeneutics, and contemporary Islamic ethics by offering a framework through which Prophetic traditions can remain authoritative, interpretable, and ethically accountable in late modern Muslim life.

The academic significance of the study is therefore twofold. First, it contributes to the ongoing reassessment of hadith authority by shifting the debate from a narrow concern with authenticity toward a broader account of normative authority. Second, it contributes to Islamic ethics by clarifying how Prophetic traditions can function as sources of moral reasoning in contemporary contexts without being reduced either to textual formalism or to modern ethical subjectivism. The principal scholarly contribution of the article is the proposed integrative model of hadith authority, which reframes the relationship between transmission, reason, and ethics as mutually constitutive rather than mutually exclusive.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative textual-hermeneutical research design. It is qualitative because it interprets meanings, epistemic structures, and normative arguments rather than measuring statistical variables. It is textual because its main data consist of selected Qur'anic verses, hadith reports, classical hadith collections, and modern scholarship on hadith authority, Islamic hermeneutics, and Islamic ethics. It is hermeneutical because it examines how authoritative religious texts are interpreted, mediated, and applied within changing historical and moral contexts. This design is appropriate because the article addresses a conceptual and interpretive problem: the tension between hadith transmission, rational deliberation, and normative moral reasoning in late modern Islamic ethics.

The methodological basis of the study draws on qualitative inquiry, documentary analysis, and hermeneutical interpretation. Qualitative inquiry is used to explore meanings and interpretive processes within a particular scholarly-textual field.¹⁸ Documentary analysis treats written sources as data that must be selected, contextualized, interpreted, and critically evaluated.¹⁹ Hermeneutical theory

¹⁸ John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (Sage Publications, 2018).

¹⁹ Glenn A Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40.

further supports the study by emphasizing the interaction between text, interpreter, historical context, and horizon of meaning.²⁰

The primary sources consist of selected reports from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Sunan Ibn Mājah, and al-Arbaʿūn al-Nawawīyyah, supported by Qurʾanic verses related to justice, mercy, moral responsibility, and public welfare. These sources were selected because they correspond to the article's three analytical dimensions. Reports such as Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī no. 108 and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Introduction no. 3 are used to examine transmission as an epistemic and ethical obligation. Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim no. 2363, concerning date-palm pollination and worldly expertise, is used to analyze rational and empirical judgment. Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī no. 39, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī no. 6125, and Sunan Ibn Mājah no. 2340 are used to examine ease, non-harm, moral proportionality, and ethical accountability.

The selection of primary texts followed four criteria: relevance to the concepts of transmission, rational deliberation, or normative moral reasoning; inclusion in widely recognized hadith collections or influential ethical-legal compilations; relevance to contemporary debates on authority, interpretation, and ethical application; and suitability for comparing classical epistemic concerns with late modern ethical questions. This purposive selection is consistent with qualitative textual research, in which sources are chosen for their relevance, richness, and explanatory value rather than statistical representativeness.²¹

The secondary sources consist of modern academic works on hadith studies, Islamic legal theory, Islamic hermeneutics, and Islamic ethics. Works by Jonathan A. C. Brown, Daniel W. Brown, Aisha Musa, Harald Motzki, Wael B. Hallaq, Khaled Abou El Fadl, Fazlur Rahman, Mohammed Ghaly, Ebrahim Moosa, and Kecia Ali are used to map major debates on hadith authority, authenticity, interpretation, legal reasoning, and ethical normativity. These sources are treated not merely as supporting references but as scholarly interlocutors through which the article identifies existing contributions and remaining conceptual gaps.

Analytically, the study uses an integrative hermeneutical framework consisting of three interrelated dimensions. First, hadith epistemology examines how transmission, *isnād*, *matn*, authenticity, and scholarly reception establish the epistemic credibility of Prophetic reports. Second, Islamic hermeneutics examines how transmitted texts are interpreted through language, context, purpose, and interpretive responsibility. Third, normative Islamic ethics evaluates hadith-based interpretation in relation to justice, mercy, non-harm, public welfare, human dignity, and moral accountability. This framework is necessary because the article's research problem cannot be answered by authenticity analysis alone; it requires an approach that explains how transmitted reports become ethically meaningful in contemporary contexts.

The interpretive procedure was conducted in four stages. First, the selected primary texts were identified and classified according to their dominant analytical function: transmission, rational deliberation, or ethical accountability. Second, each text was examined in relation to its immediate meaning, thematic relevance, and role within broader Islamic normativity. Third, the primary textual findings were placed in critical conversation with secondary scholarship in hadith studies, Islamic legal theory, hermeneutics, and Islamic ethics. Fourth, the analysis was synthesized into a conceptual model of hadith authority as layered normativity, in which transmission secures epistemic continuity, rational deliberation secures interpretive coherence, and normative moral reasoning secures ethical accountability.

This study does not employ quantitative analysis, fieldwork, interviews, surveys, or computational corpus analysis. It also does not claim to survey all ethical hadiths exhaustively. Its purpose is conceptual and theoretical: to develop an analytical model for understanding hadith authority in late modern Islamic ethics. The selected texts function as representative and analytically significant cases rather than as a complete corpus. This study adopts a qualitative textual-hermeneutical

²⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 2004); Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

²¹ Michael Q Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (Sage Publications, 2015); Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method."

method grounded in primary Islamic sources and modern academic scholarship. By combining hadith epistemology, Islamic hermeneutics, and normative Islamic ethics, the study offers a methodologically accountable way to examine hadith authority without reducing it either to textual formalism or to unrestricted rational subjectivism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Transmission as Epistemic Continuity: Hadith Authority beyond Mere Textual Citation

The most fundamental finding of this study is that transmission constitutes the epistemic ground of hadith authority, yet its function cannot be reduced to the mechanical preservation of textual reports. In the classical hadith tradition, transmission operated as a disciplined system of epistemic continuity through which Prophetic speech, action, and approval were connected to later Muslim communities by means of *isnād*, narrator evaluation, *matn* comparison, documentation, and scholarly verification. The *isnād* was not simply a bibliographical apparatus attached to a report; it functioned as a critical mechanism for tracing the route of knowledge, testing the integrity of transmitters, and determining whether a report could be responsibly attributed to the Prophet.²² This makes transmission a foundational category in hadith authority: it safeguards continuity with Prophetic normativity while simultaneously placing limits on arbitrary attribution.

The primary textual evidence for this finding appears most forcefully in the Prophetic warning against false attribution. In *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Anas b. Mālik reports that the Prophet said: “Whoever tells a lie against me intentionally, let him occupy his seat in Hellfire”. A similar warning is preserved in Muslim’s introduction, indicating that early Muslim consciousness of hadith transmission was deeply shaped by anxiety over truthful attribution.²³ Analytically, this report does more than condemn fabrication. It establishes the moral seriousness of transmission itself. The danger addressed by the hadith is not simply textual error but the distortion of Prophetic representation. To transmit hadith is therefore not merely to pass on information; it is to assume responsibility for the preservation of religious memory, communal trust, and Prophetic authority.

This textual evidence reveals an important pattern: hadith authority begins with a moral demand for accurate attribution before it becomes a legal or theological argument. The report against fabrication shows that the early hadith tradition regarded transmission as an ethically charged act. This is why classical hadith scholarship developed elaborate criteria for evaluating the continuity of the chain, the reliability of narrators, the integrity of memory, and the compatibility of reports with stronger transmissions. The reliability of a hadith depended not only on the existence of a chain but also on the credibility and integrity of its transmitters and the continuity of the *isnād*.²⁴ In this sense, *isnād* criticism was not a purely technical science detached from moral concerns; it was a method for protecting the truth-claim of Prophetic attribution.

A second primary datum strengthens this interpretation: the hadith of intention, “Actions are judged by intentions”.²⁵ Its significance lies not only in its ethical content but also in its canonical placement. Al-Bukhārī’s decision to open his collection with this report suggests that the entire

²² U M Noor and M N Sahad, “The Salafis and the Preservation of Isnād Tradition,” *Kemanusiaan* 27, no. 2 (2020): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.21315/KAJH2020.27.2.1>; T Abdullaieva et al., “Problems of Interpreting the Main Types of Hadith in Terms of Their Correct Understanding,” *Scientific Herald of Uzhhorod University. Series Physics*, no. 55 (2024): 1687–95, <https://doi.org/10.54919/physics/55.2024.168em7>; P Pavlovitch, “Inna Hādihā ‘L-‘ilma Dīnun Fa-‘Nzurū ‘amman Ta’khudhūna-Hu: Religion, Knowledge Of Transmitters, And The Tyranny Of The High Isnād,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2022, no. 52 (2022): 211–71, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85153743314&partnerID=40&md5=9ebe5da0c6a3f0fe6997d4d369632306>.

²³ Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, ed. Muhammad Fu’ad Abd al-Baqi (Beirut: Dar Ihya’ al-Turath al-Arabi, n.d.).

²⁴ Abdullaieva et al., “Problems of Interpreting the Main Types of Hadith in Terms of Their Correct Understanding.”

²⁵ Muhammad ibn Ismail Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, ed. Muhammad Zuhayr ibn Nasir Al-Nasir (Beirut: Dar Tawq al-Najah, 2002); al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*.

enterprise of hadith preservation is framed by moral intentionality. Transmission is therefore not value neutral. The act of collecting, narrating, verifying, interpreting, and applying hadith must be governed by sincerity, accountability, and disciplined purpose. When read alongside the warning against fabrication, the hadith of intention indicates that transmission is both epistemic and ethical: it verifies the past while regulating the moral posture of those who speak in the name of the Prophet.

The broader hadith tradition confirms this dual structure of epistemology and ethics. The science of hadith did not rely on *isnād* alone, even though the chain of transmission remained central. It also employed *matn* analysis, comparison of textual variants, evaluation of anomalous reports, and examination of possible defects. The combined use of *isnād* and *matn* analysis shows that hadith authenticity was constructed through a dual concern for both the route of transmission and the content of the report.²⁶ This is important because it prevents a simplistic reading of classical hadith authority as mere chain formalism. While *isnād* provided the primary route of verification, the tradition also recognized that reports had to be examined through broader criteria of coherence, reliability, and scholarly judgment.

The concept of elevated *isnād* further illustrates the intellectual culture of transmission. The pursuit of shorter chains between a scholar and the Prophet gained prominence because fewer intermediaries were perceived to reduce the possibility of error and intensify proximity to the Prophetic source.²⁷ This practice demonstrates that *isnād* was not merely an archival technique; it was also a scholarly ideal shaped by proximity, precision, and disciplined continuity. At the same time, the pursuit of elevated *isnād* should not be mistaken for a guarantee of authenticity by itself. A shorter chain still required reliable transmitters and textual scrutiny. The pattern that emerges, therefore, is not a naïve veneration of chains, but a layered epistemology in which proximity, reliability, continuity, and content all contributed to authority.

This finding refines modern scholarship on hadith authority. Jonathan Brown argues that hadith authority in Muslim civilization was constructed through interrelated processes of authentication, canon formation, legal usage, and scholarly reception rather than through isolated textual proof alone.²⁸ Aisha Musa similarly shows that debates over the scriptural status of hadith are rooted in earlier contestations concerning the relationship between Qur'anic authority and Prophetic reports, not simply in modern disputes.²⁹ Motzki's *isnād-cum-matn* approach further demonstrates that transmission cannot be dismissed as fictive or historically meaningless, since chains and texts can be analyzed together to reconstruct earlier layers of transmission.³⁰ These contributions support the central claim of this subsection: transmission is a serious epistemological category, not merely a traditional claim to legitimacy.

At the same time, the present study extends these discussions by emphasizing the ethical dimension of epistemic continuity. Transmission does not only answer the historical question of whether a report can be traced to the Prophet; it also answers the moral question of whether later Muslims may responsibly speak in his name. This point is reinforced by studies that describe *isnād* as a form of intellectual and spiritual lineage linking contemporary scholars to the Prophetic tradition.³¹ Such a view does not require romanticizing *isnād* as a mystical guarantee of truth. Rather, it shows that transmission functioned simultaneously as verification, pedagogy, authority, and scholarly belonging. The *isnād* preserved not only data about narrators but also an inherited discipline of accountability.

²⁶ Abdullaieva et al., "Problems of Interpreting the Main Types of Hadith in Terms of Their Correct Understanding"; P Pavlovitch, "Dating," in *Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Hadith*, 2019, 113–33, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118638477.ch6>.

²⁷ T Günaydın, "The Result of the Search for Elevated Isnād: Al-Sābiq Wa'l-Lāhiq," *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* 26, no. 2 (2022): 903–15, <https://doi.org/10.18505/cuid.1156465>.

²⁸ Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*.

²⁹ Musa, *Hadith as Scripture: Discussions on the Authority of Prophetic Traditions in Islam*.

³⁰ Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*.

³¹ J.-J. Thibon, "Transmission of the Hadith and Prophetic Model in Early Sufism," *Archives de Sciences Sociales Des Religions* 178, no. 2 (2017): 71–87, <https://doi.org/10.4000/assr.29414>.

The same point can be seen in the way modern scholarship describes the preservation of Islamic knowledge. Rigorous documentation of *isnād* has been presented as a means of maintaining epistemic continuity across generations, ensuring that Prophetic teachings were transmitted through recognizable and accountable channels.³² The system reinforced Prophetic authority by validating reports through a traceable chain of transmission and by embedding the Prophet's words and practices within a recognized scholarly order.³³ The authority of the Prophet in Islamic law and theology, therefore, was not mediated by text alone but by a tradition of verification that connected narration, scholarship, and communal recognition.³⁴

This finding is especially important for the research problem of the present article because it clarifies why hadith authority cannot be responsibly reframed in late modern Islamic ethics by bypassing transmission. Some modern reformist trends question the continuing relevance of *isnād* or subordinate hadith to broader principles in ways that risk weakening the epistemic discipline of Prophetic attribution.³⁵ Such critiques raise legitimate concerns about contextual interpretation and ethical application, but they cannot erase the basic problem that hadith authority depends on responsible mediation between the Prophet and later communities. Without transmission, appeals to hadith become vulnerable to selectivity, fabrication, ideological appropriation, and uncontrolled moral projection.

Yet the finding also challenges any approach that treats transmission as self-sufficient. The epistemic continuity secured by *isnād* establishes the ground of hadith authority, but it does not by itself determine the full meaning or ethical application of a report. From the perspective of hadith epistemology, transmission answers the question of attribution. From the perspective of Islamic hermeneutics, however, attribution must be followed by interpretation. From the perspective of normative Islamic ethics, interpretation must then be assessed in relation to moral purpose, consequence, justice, mercy, and accountability. Transmission is therefore foundational, but not exhaustive. It gives hadith its epistemic anchor, but it does not eliminate the need for rational deliberation and ethical judgment.

Late modern conditions sharpen this issue. Hadith now circulates widely through digital platforms, popular preaching, social media, translation databases, algorithmic search tools, and fragmented publics. This expanded circulation has democratized access but also intensified the risk of decontextualized citation, weak attribution, mistranslation, polemical use, and selective moral deployment. The classical warning against false attribution thus acquires renewed relevance. It is no longer only a warning against deliberate fabrication in oral transmission; it also speaks to the ethics of quotation, verification, and circulation in digital religious culture. Recent advances in natural language processing and computational hadith analysis have introduced new possibilities for analyzing *isnād* and *matn* patterns, but these tools do not replace the epistemic and ethical logic of transmission; they merely provide new technical means for examining it.³⁶

³² A Daud et al., "The Contribution Of Indonesian Hadiths Scholar Mahfuz Al-Termasi On Tsabat: A Study of Kifayat Al-Mustafid," *Miqot: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 49, no. 1 (2025): 248–68, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v49i1.1381>.

³³ A A Allawi, "The Spiritual Meaning of Muhammad and the Prophets of Islam," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Islamic Spirituality*, 2022, 183–201, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118533789.ch10>; Noor and Sahad, "The Salafis and the Preservation of Isnād Tradition."

³⁴ Abdullaieva et al., "Problems of Interpreting the Main Types of Hadith in Terms of Their Correct Understanding."

³⁵ Brown, *The Wiley Blackwell Concise Companion to the Hadith*.

³⁶ F Haque, A H Orthy, and S Siddique, "Hadith Authenticity Prediction Using Sentiment Analysis and Machine Learning," in *14th IEEE International Conference on Application of Information and Communication Technologies, AICT 2020 - Proceedings*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1109/AICT50176.2020.9368569>; F Binbeshr, A Kamsin, and M Mohammed, "A Systematic Review on Hadith Authentication and Classification Methods," *ACM Transactions on Asian and Low-Resource Language Information Processing* 20, no. 2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1145/3434236>.

The theoretical implication is that any contemporary model of hadith authority must begin with transmission as epistemic continuity while recognizing its limits as an interpretive category. Transmission protects the integrity of attribution, disciplines the production of religious knowledge, and links contemporary Muslim reasoning to the Prophetic source. However, transmission alone does not settle questions of contextual scope, moral application, or ethical consequence. Methodologically, this means that hadith-based ethical analysis should first examine provenance, narrator reliability, chain continuity, textual variants, and scholarly reception; only then can it responsibly proceed toward hermeneutical and ethical evaluation. This sequence prevents hadith from being reduced either to isolated textual citation or to free-floating moral reasoning detached from tradition.

Thus, the core significance of this finding is that transmission establishes the epistemic continuity of hadith authority, but its authority becomes academically and ethically meaningful only when accurate attribution is joined to responsible interpretation. Hadith authority begins with reliable transmission, yet it cannot remain at the level of citation; it requires a disciplined movement from transmitted report to interpreted meaning and from interpreted meaning to accountable moral judgment.

Rational Deliberation and the Limits of Formal Authentication

The central debate addressed in this subsection is whether rational deliberation should be understood as a threat to hadith authority or as an internal condition for its responsible interpretation. The findings of this study support the second position: rational deliberation is not an external modern intrusion imposed upon the hadith tradition, but a necessary interpretive process through which authenticated reports are situated, specified, and ethically applied. Formal authentication establishes that a report may be attributed with a particular degree of reliability to the Prophet, but it does not by itself determine the report's domain, scope, purpose, or contemporary moral implication. The unresolved issue, therefore, is not whether authentication matters, but whether authentication alone is sufficient for normative judgment.

This debate has often been framed through an opposition between inherited textual authority and modern rationality. One strand of modern hadith scholarship has emphasized how Muslim reformists, modernists, and traditionalists have disputed the authority of transmitted reports in response to modern intellectual pressures, including historical criticism, legal reform, and the demand for rational coherence.³⁷ Another strand, represented by broader Islamic hermeneutical theory, argues that religious texts must be interpreted through movement between historical specificity and general moral principle, rather than treated as self-applying legal fragments.³⁸ A third strand focuses on the ethics of interpretation itself, warning that religious authority becomes authoritarian when textual claims are detached from moral responsibility, interpretive humility, and accountability.³⁹ These trends share an important insight: reason is not simply the opponent of tradition. It is part of the disciplined process by which tradition becomes intelligible in changing contexts.

The primary evidence analyzed in this study strengthens that position. The report concerning date-palm pollination in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* no. 2363 is particularly important because it distinguishes between Prophetic religious authority and technical expertise in worldly affairs. When the Prophet's comment on agricultural practice was followed by a poor yield, he clarified: "You have better knowledge of the affairs of your world".⁴⁰ The significance of this report is not that it weakens Prophetic authority, but that it differentiates the domains in which that authority operates. It indicates that empirical knowledge, practical expertise, and human experience have legitimate epistemic force in matters that are technical rather than revelatory. This finding supports a model of rational deliberation in which reason does not compete with revelation but helps identify the domain, function, and applicability of a report.

³⁷ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*.

³⁸ Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*.

³⁹ Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women*.

⁴⁰ al-Hajjaj, *Saḥīḥ Muslim*.

This evidence also complicates literalist assumptions about hadith application. If a Prophetic report is treated as normatively binding without asking whether it is legislative, advisory, pedagogical, contextual, technical, or exemplary, then formal authentication may be mistaken for full ethical determination. The date-palm report shows that hadith interpretation requires domain analysis. It is not enough to know that a report exists; one must also ask what kind of guidance the report provides. In this respect, the finding resonates with contemporary discussions of rational deliberation in Islamic thought, where reason is often understood as operating in coordination with revelation rather than independently from it.⁴¹ It also intersects with broader philosophical debates on deliberation and agency, including the claim that rational deliberation can remain meaningful even within frameworks that affirm strong divine determination or metaphysical dependence.⁴²

A second layer of evidence comes from hadiths that present ease and facilitation as interpretive principles. The Prophet's instruction, "Make things easy and do not make things difficult; give glad tidings and do not repel people",⁴³ does more than recommend pastoral kindness. It establishes a principle for assessing the effects of religious communication and application. Likewise, the report "Religion is ease".⁴⁴ provides a broad ethical-hermeneutical orientation. These reports do not abolish obligation, nor do they authorize arbitrary relaxation of norms. Rather, they show that Prophetic normativity includes attention to human capacity, proportionality, and moral consequence. The pattern that emerges is that hadith authority requires interpretive judgment about how a norm is communicated and applied, not merely whether a text can be cited.

This is where the article's finding both supports and refines previous scholarship. It supports Rahman's claim that interpretation must move from textual-historical instances toward broader moral principles before returning to contemporary application.⁴⁵ It also supports Abou El Fadl's insistence that interpretive authority must be constrained by moral responsibility rather than textual possession alone.⁴⁶ However, this study refines those approaches by locating rational deliberation after, not against, transmission. The argument is not that modern reason should overrule hadith when a report appears ethically difficult; nor is it that authenticated transmission automatically resolves all moral questions. Rather, rational deliberation functions as the bridge between attribution and application. It asks what the report means, how its meaning is delimited, how it relates to other scriptural and juristic evidence, and what consequences follow from its use.

Matn analysis further demonstrates that deliberation has long been internal to hadith evaluation. Classical hadith criticism did not only ask whether a chain was formally continuous; it also examined whether the content of a report cohered with Qur'anic teachings, stronger hadiths, established principles, and linguistic plausibility. Recent scholarship has emphasized that the relationship between *matn* and *isnād* is central to authenticity and interpretive coherence, rather than secondary to chain criticism alone.⁴⁷ Comparative studies of Salafi and Sufi approaches to *matn* criticism also suggest that different traditions may disagree over the scope of reason, yet still share certain criteria, such as rejecting reports that contradict the Qur'an or more firmly established hadith

⁴¹ F Khaleel and A Avdukić, "Exploring the Epistemology of Utility Function in Islamic Economics: Foundation of Islamic Finance," in *Islamic Finance Practices: Experiences from South Eastern Europe*, 2020, 23–40, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-34420-7_2; M Rasekh, "To Be Rational or Not to Be an Explication and Appraisal of the Shi'i Correlation Principle Controversy," *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 7, no. 1 (2021): 69–93, <https://doi.org/10.30965/23642807-bja10008>.

⁴² Y Cohen, "Deliberating in the Presence of Manipulation," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 48, no. 1 (2018): 85–105, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2017.1339177>.

⁴³ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*.

⁴⁴ Al-Bukhari.

⁴⁵ Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*.

⁴⁶ Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women*.

⁴⁷ N.M.A.M. Razak et al., "Evolution of Hadith Textual Criticism: From Classical to Contemporary Approaches," *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah*, 2025, 15–29, <https://doi.org/10.7187/GJATSI122025-2>.

evidence.⁴⁸ This shows that rational deliberation is not a modern invention; what has changed in late modernity is the range of questions and evidentiary fields that deliberation must address.

Modern methods of *matn* analysis expand this point without replacing the classical framework. Linguistic tools, contextual analysis, and computational methods—including machine learning—are increasingly used to examine textual patterns, transmission relationships, and semantic features in hadith corpora.⁴⁹ These approaches can enhance accuracy and pattern recognition, especially when dealing with large corpora, but they do not eliminate the need for human interpretive judgment. Computational tools may identify recurring phrases, narrator links, or textual similarities, yet they cannot by themselves determine legal scope, ethical proportionality, or moral purpose. The methodological implication is therefore twofold: hadith studies can benefit from new analytical techniques, but formal or computational authentication must still be integrated into hermeneutical and ethical reasoning.

The debate over rational deliberation is also inseparable from *maqāṣid* and *maṣlaḥah*. Islamic jurisprudence has long employed rational principles to align legal and ethical decisions with divine guidance and social welfare. Contemporary scholarship on *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* and public good argues that contextual reasoning is necessary for adapting rulings to new circumstances while preserving normative coherence.⁵⁰ Recent discussions similarly emphasize that independent reasoning must balance textual fidelity with contextual sensitivity, often requiring interdisciplinary engagement with modern sciences and social realities.⁵¹ This supports the article's claim that rational deliberation is not an optional supplement to hadith authority but a condition for preventing decontextualized or ethically incoherent applications.

The relevance of worldly expertise is especially clear in applied ethics. In bioethical questions, for instance, scriptural evidence cannot be responsibly applied without knowledge of medical procedures, risk, benefit, patient vulnerability, and institutional practice.⁵² This does not subordinate revelation to medicine; it recognizes that ethical judgment requires accurate knowledge of the reality being judged. The date-palm report provides a Prophetic basis for this distinction by acknowledging the epistemic authority of human expertise in worldly matters. More broadly, Islamic intellectual history has often treated religious and worldly knowledge as complementary, a perspective that contributed to the development of medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and other fields in Muslim

⁴⁸ N.M.A.M. Razak, M A Nazri, and L A Majid, "Textual Criticism of Hadith in Contemporary Islamic Thought: A Comparative Analysis of Salafi and Sufi Approaches," *AlBayan* 23, no. 3 (2025): 578–601, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-12342309>.

⁴⁹ S Aftar et al., "RoBERT2VecTM: A Novel Approach for Topic Extraction in Islamic Studies," in *EMNLP 2024 - 2024 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing, Findings of EMNLP 2024*, 2024, 9148–58, <https://doi.org/10.18653/v1/2024.findings-emnlp.534>; J Alghamdi, A Albukhari, and T Al-Dala'in, "Pretrained Models Against Traditional Machine Learning for Detecting Fake Hadith," *Electronics (Switzerland)* 14, no. 17 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.3390/electronics14173484>; M Shaaban, A Elshenawy, and S Gamal El-Din, "Prophetic Authorial Style Modeling for Detecting Fabricated Hadiths Using AraBERT," *Journal of Computing and Biomedical Informatics* 10, no. 2 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.56979/1002/2026/1315>.

⁵⁰ A B Sajoo, "Negotiating Virtue: Principlism and Maslaha in Muslim Bioethics," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 43, no. 1 (2014): 53–69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0008429813513234>; Elmahjub, "Islamic Jurisprudence as an Ethical Discourse: An Enquiry into the Nature of Moral Reasoning in Islamic Legal Theory"; Abdur-Rashid, Furber, and Abdul-Basser, "Lifting the Veil: A Typological Survey of the Methodological Features of Islamic Ethical Reasoning on Biomedical Issues."

⁵¹ A Junaidi, M Khusna Amal, and M Waeno, "Transcending Boundaries Of Rationality And Spirituality: Ibn 'Arabi's Holistic Vision In Islamic Legal Interpretation," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 14, no. 2 (2024): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2024.14.2.1-24>; R M Fatkhi and H Firdausy, "Stagnant Textualism and Epistemological Crisis: Revisiting Hadith Scholarship in Indonesia's Islamic Universities," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 27, no. 1 (2026): 303–26, <https://doi.org/10.14421/gh.v27i1.6727>; A Ahmad, E Hafid, and A B Fatmal, "The Development of Hadith Studies in Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 15, no. 2 (2025): 227–55, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v15i2.227-255>.

⁵² O Qureshi and A I Padela, "When Must A Patient Seek Healthcare? Bringing The Perspectives Of Islamic Jurists And Clinicians Into Dialogue," *Zygon* 51, no. 3 (2016): 592–625, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12273>.

societies.⁵³ Contemporary rejection of beneficial worldly education by extremist movements only makes this point more urgent: rational and technical knowledge can be a collective obligation when required for public welfare.⁵⁴ The Islamisation of knowledge movement reflects another attempt—though contested to reformulate modern sciences within an Islamic worldview and ethical framework.⁵⁵

The article's findings therefore challenge two methodological reductions. The first is rigid textualism, which assumes that once a hadith is authenticated, its application is self-evident. The primary sources discussed here show otherwise: the date-palm report requires domain differentiation, while the ease reports require attention to consequence and proportionality. The second reduction is unrestricted rationalism, which treats modern ethical judgment as independent of transmitted authority. The findings also reject this approach, because rational deliberation in this model operates within the discipline of transmission and scriptural accountability. In this sense, the article supports hybrid models in Islamic jurisprudence that combine deontological fidelity to divine command with consequentialist attention to welfare, harm, and moral outcome.⁵⁶

This position has direct implications for interpretive coherence. If hadith authority is exercised without rational deliberation, reports may be applied selectively, literally, or polemically in ways that fragment the moral structure of Islamic normativity. If deliberation is detached from transmission, interpretation becomes vulnerable to subjective preference or ideological reconstruction. Interpretive coherence requires harmonizing corroborative evidence, linguistic indicators, contextual features, juristic principles, and ethical objectives.⁵⁷ Recent attempts to integrate traditional and modern methodologies in hadith studies and legal reasoning point in the same direction: the goal is not to dissolve tradition into modernity, but to preserve normative continuity while addressing contemporary problems with intellectual responsibility.⁵⁸

The principal contribution of this subsection is thus to clarify the article's critical position within the debate over reason and hadith authority. Rational deliberation is neither a rival to authenticated transmission nor a license to override tradition. It is the process through which transmitted reports become interpretable, coherent, and ethically applicable. This strengthens the originality of the study by moving beyond the familiar binary between traditional authentication and modern rational critique, and by proposing instead that reason functions within hadith authority as the necessary mediator between reliable attribution and responsible moral judgment.

Normative Moral Reasoning and the Ethical Accountability of Hadith Application

The methodological contribution of this study lies in showing that hadith authority becomes analytically intelligible only when textual authentication and hermeneutical interpretation are extended into normative moral reasoning. The article's integrative method—moving from transmission to interpretive clarification, to ethical evaluation—reveals a dimension of hadith authority that is often obscured when hadith is treated either as a formally authenticated text or as a source of isolated legal

⁵³ H Suleimān et al., "Learning Beneficial Worldly Knowledge: Between Islamic and Boko Harām Perspectives," *Intellectual Discourse* 32, no. 2 (2024): 459–81, <https://doi.org/10.31436/id.v32i2.1979>.

⁵⁴ Suleimān et al.

⁵⁵ A M Drammeh, "Islamisation of Knowledge: A Critical Integrated Approach," in *Supporting Modern Teaching in Islamic Schools: Pedagogical Best Practice for Teachers*, 2022, 198–208, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003193432-19>.

⁵⁶ Elmahjub, "Islamic Jurisprudence as an Ethical Discourse: An Enquiry into the Nature of Moral Reasoning in Islamic Legal Theory"; Abdur-Rashid, Furber, and Abdul-Basser, "Lifting the Veil: A Typological Survey of the Methodological Features of Islamic Ethical Reasoning on Biomedical Issues."

⁵⁷ K Rajabi and A Saadat, "The Foundations, Components, and Approximate Capacity of the Theory of Meaning Expertise in Comparative Interpretation," *Manchester Journal of Transnational Islamic Law and Practice* 21, no. 1 (2025): 104–18, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-105005730201&partnerID=40&md5=fb4c6964a9257e063b521f89218d5632>.

⁵⁸ Ahmad, Hafid, and Fatmal, "The Development of Hadith Studies in Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama."

proof. This approach does not subject hadith to external moral preference; rather, it examines how transmitted reports become ethically accountable within the moral grammar of Islam itself: intention, mercy, justice, non-harm, public welfare, human dignity, and responsibility before God.

The value of this method becomes clear in the analysis of the hadith-based maxim, “There should be neither harm nor reciprocating harm”.⁵⁹ Although the individual routes of this report have been debated, its reception within Islamic legal reasoning has been extensive, and it became the basis for the legal maxim *al-ḍarar yuzāl*, “harm must be removed.” Methodologically, this case demonstrates why formal authentication alone cannot exhaust the meaning of hadith authority. The significance of the report lies not only in its attribution, but in its function as a normative criterion for evaluating application. If a particular interpretation of hadith generates unjustified harm, humiliation, disproportionality, or social injury, the principle of non-harm requires renewed scrutiny of that application. In this sense, the study’s method reveals that ethical accountability is not an external supplement to hadith interpretation but one of its internal conditions.

This finding also clarifies how normative ethics helps illuminate hadith-based moral reasoning without displacing Islamic categories. Normative ethics is concerned with articulating and justifying principles that guide moral action and evaluation, including questions of what ought to be done and how human life should be morally ordered.⁶⁰ Moral reasoning, in turn, evaluates action through duties, consequences, motives, rights, justification, excuse, praise, and blame.⁶¹ These categories help explain why the hadith of non-harm operates not simply as a legal rule, but as a framework of accountability. Its relevance lies in its capacity to evaluate the moral consequences of applying religious norms in concrete circumstances. This does not transform hadith into secular ethics; rather, it shows that hadith application already involves forms of moral judgment that are comparable to broader traditions of normative reasoning.

The hadith of intention provides a second example of what the method reveals. The report, “Actions are judged by intentions”,⁶² indicates that moral action cannot be evaluated solely by its outward form. Intention, purpose, and moral orientation are part of the ethical structure of action itself. This is particularly important in contemporary contexts where the same hadith may be invoked toward divergent ends: compassion or exclusion, justice or domination, reform or control. A purely citation-based approach cannot adequately assess these competing uses. By contrast, the integrative method asks not only whether a report is being cited, but why it is being cited, how it is being interpreted, and what kind of moral effect its use produces. The hadith of intention therefore reveals that ethical accountability includes the moral posture of the interpreter, not merely the textual form of the evidence.

This insight resonates with broader debates in normative ethics. Virtue ethics, consequentialism, and proceduralism offer different accounts of moral evaluation: virtue ethics emphasizes character, consequentialism evaluates outcomes, and proceduralism stresses fairness and justified processes.⁶³ The hadith evidence analyzed here does not fit neatly into only one of these models. The hadith of intention foregrounds moral interiority and resembles virtue-oriented reasoning; the non-harm maxim requires attention to consequence; and the need for disciplined interpretation involves procedural accountability. The methodological strength of this article is precisely that it does not force hadith ethics into a single modern ethical theory. Instead, it shows that hadith application

⁵⁹ Muhammad ibn Yazid Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, ed. Muhammad Fu’ad Abd al-Baqi (Cairo: Dar Ihya’ al-Kutub al-Arabiyyah, n.d.); Yahya Al-Nawawi, *Al-Majmu’ Sharh Al-Muhadhdhab* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1996).

⁶⁰ J Driver, “Normative Ethics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy*, 2007, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199234769.003.0002>.

⁶¹ H Von Kriegstein, “A Primer on Moral Concepts and Vocabulary,” *Teaching Philosophy* 46, no. 3 (2023): 379–400, <https://doi.org/10.5840/teachphil2022722176>.

⁶² Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*; al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*.

⁶³ C R Sotomayor and M N Sheehan, “Medical Professionalism from a Virtue Ethics Perspective,” in *International Library of Bioethics*, vol. 98, 2022, 161–75, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-09733-1_7; S Pellé, “Process, Outcomes, Virtues: The Normative Strategies of Responsible Research and Innovation and the Challenge of Moral Pluralism,” *Journal of Responsible Innovation* 3, no. 3 (2016): 233–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23299460.2016.1258945>.

involves a layered pattern of moral reasoning in which intention, consequence, and interpretive responsibility interact.

The analysis of Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim no. 2664, which states that “the strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, though there is good in both,” further illustrates the ethical breadth of hadith authority. This report is often read spiritually, but its wording also contains a broader moral anthropology. It links faith with agency, resilience, benefit-seeking, and responsible action. The instruction to pursue what is beneficial, seek divine assistance, and avoid destructive regret suggests that Islamic moral life is not passive submission to circumstances but disciplined ethical agency. Through the article’s method, this hadith is not reduced to an individual exhortation; it becomes evidence that hadith-based ethics includes the cultivation of capacity, responsibility, and constructive action. This supports Moosa’s view that Islamic thought contains rich resources for moral imagination and ethical subject formation.⁶⁴

The reports on ease and facilitation reinforce the same methodological point. The hadith “Religion is ease”⁶⁵ and the instruction “Make things easy and do not make things difficult; give glad tidings and do not repel people”⁶⁶ show that Islamic normativity is not indifferent to human capacity. These reports do not abolish religious obligation, but they prevent obligation from being interpreted in a way that produces excess, alienation, or moral distortion. Here the method reveals that ethical accountability includes proportionality. A hadith-based ruling or moral instruction must be examined not only for textual grounding but also for its human effects. This is consistent with ethical discussions in which accountability requires the recognition of harm, the justification of decisions, and the willingness to address the causes of moral injury.⁶⁷

The methodological significance becomes more evident when these reports are read together rather than separately. Non-harm, intention, strength, ease, and facilitation form an ethical constellation that directs hadith application toward moral responsibility. The pattern that emerges is not merely legal minimalism, but an ethical teleology: Prophetic guidance aims to cultivate truthful, merciful, responsible, and socially beneficial action. This finding aligns with scholarship in Islamic ethics that resists reducing Islamic normativity to legal formalism. Ghaly’s work on applied Islamic ethics, especially in bioethical contexts, shows that contemporary Muslim moral reasoning requires the integration of scripture, juristic principles, expert knowledge, and ethical consequences.⁶⁸ Ali’s work on gender, ethics, and Islamic law similarly demonstrates that inherited textual and legal traditions require moral evaluation when applied to contemporary questions of personhood, embodiment, and justice.⁶⁹

The approach also reveals why mercy and compassion are not secondary moral sentiments but central criteria in ethical application. In broader ethical theory, mercy and compassion are often linked to humaneness, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and relational care, especially in healthcare and palliative contexts.⁷⁰ Ethics of care approaches likewise emphasize relational responsibility and compassion as

⁶⁴ E Moosa, “Qur’anic Ethics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, 2020, 464–71, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199698646.013.10>.

⁶⁵ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*.

⁶⁶ Al-Bukhari.

⁶⁷ S Kagan, *Normative Ethics, Normative Ethics*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429498657>; D Wallace, “Practitioner Accountability and Decision-Making Technology,” in *International Symposium on Technology and Society, Proceedings*, 2010, 292–99, <https://doi.org/10.1109/ISTAS.2010.5514625>.

⁶⁸ Ghaly, *Islamic Perspectives on the Principles of Biomedical Ethics*; Ghaly, *Islam and Disability: Perspectives in Theology and Jurisprudence*.

⁶⁹ Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur’an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence*.

⁷⁰ C Furstenberg, “Responsibility, Compassion and Ethics,” *Revue de l’Infirmiere* 2016-August, no. 223 (2016): 42–43, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.revinf.2016.06.012>; M Drickamer, “Ethical Issues in Older Adults,” in *Principles and Practice of Geriatric Surgery: Third Edition: With 261 Figures and 155 Tables*, 2020, 299–311, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-47771-8_19.

necessary complements to principle-based theories such as utilitarianism and deontology.⁷¹ Within the hadith evidence analyzed in this article, ease and facilitation function similarly: they orient religious interpretation toward human receptivity and moral care. This does not make hadith ethics sentimental or subjective; it shows that compassion belongs to the normative structure through which Prophetic guidance is responsibly applied.

The Qur'anic moral horizon strengthens this conclusion. Qur'an 16:90 commands justice, excellence, and generosity while prohibiting immorality, wrongdoing, and transgression. Qur'an 21:107 describes the Prophet as mercy to the worlds. These Qur'anic principles do not replace hadith, nor do they function as external standards imposed upon it. Rather, they establish the broader moral horizon within which hadith must be interpreted. The method used in this article therefore avoids two methodological errors. The first is textual formalism, in which a hadith is applied without adequate attention to purpose, consequence, and ethical proportionality. The second is ethical subjectivism, in which contemporary moral preference overrides transmitted authority without disciplined argument. By triangulating textual authentication, hermeneutical analysis, and ethical evaluation, the study treats moral reasoning as tradition-guided rather than tradition-free.

The strength of this approach is that it places hadith authority itself at the center of the ethical discussion. Many studies in Islamic ethics use hadith as supporting evidence, but they do not always explain how hadith authority should operate when transmitted reports and contemporary moral reasoning appear to be in tension. This study addresses that limitation by showing that the tension should not be resolved either by dismissing hadith or by suspending moral judgment. Instead, hadith authority should be understood as layered: transmission confirms attribution, rational deliberation clarifies meaning, and normative moral reasoning evaluates application. This methodological sequencing makes it possible to preserve the epistemic integrity of hadith while still requiring ethical accountability in its use.

The limits of the approach should also be acknowledged. Because this article is conceptual and textual rather than empirical or computational, it does not provide a comprehensive mapping of every ethical hadith across the corpus, nor does it measure contemporary Muslim reception of hadith in actual communities. Its contribution is analytical rather than statistical. It identifies a methodological pattern within selected primary sources and uses that pattern to construct a model of hadith authority for late modern Islamic ethics. Future studies could expand the model through corpus-based analysis, legal case studies, fatwa comparison, or ethnographic research on how hadith is invoked in contemporary ethical debates. Thus, the methodological contribution of this subsection is to show that hadith authority is not only epistemic and interpretive, but also ethically accountable. The article's integrative approach advances the discussion by demonstrating that authenticated transmission becomes a source of contemporary Islamic ethics only when its application is evaluated through the moral purposes embedded in the Prophetic and Qur'anic tradition itself.

Toward an Integrative Model of Hadith Authority in Late Modern Islamic Ethics

The main theoretical implication of this study is that hadith authority in late modern Islamic ethics should be understood as layered normativity, in which transmission, rational deliberation, and normative moral reasoning function as mutually dependent rather than competing dimensions of authority. This model moves beyond two familiar reductions in modern hadith debates: the reduction of hadith authority to formal authentication and the reduction of ethical interpretation to autonomous rational judgment. The findings show that hadith authority is neither exhausted by the chain of transmission nor dissolved into contemporary ethical preference. It emerges through a disciplined relation between attribution, interpretation, and moral application.

The primary textual evidence analyzed in the previous subsections provides the basis for this integrative model. The warning against falsely attributing statements to the Prophet establishes

⁷¹ Drickamer, "Ethical Issues in Older Adults"; J Gather and M Scholten, "Theoretical Foundations of Clinical Ethics Consultation in Psychiatry," *Der Nervenarzt* 95, no. 11 (2024): 1026–32, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00115-024-01730-5>.

transmission as an ethical-epistemic obligation, not merely a technical procedure.⁷² The date-palm pollination report demonstrates that rational and empirical judgment has a legitimate role in worldly and technical affairs.⁷³ The reports on ease and facilitation establish proportionality as an interpretive principle rather than a marginal pastoral concern.⁷⁴ The non-harm maxim grounds ethical accountability as an internal criterion of Islamic legal and moral reasoning.⁷⁵ The hadith of intention shows that moral interiority and purpose are indispensable to evaluating action.⁷⁶ Taken together, these reports do not produce a loose collection of ethical themes; they disclose a layered structure of authority in which reliable attribution, interpretive judgment, and moral accountability are analytically inseparable.

The model proposed here can therefore be formulated through three sequential but interrelated questions. First, transmission asks whether a statement or practice can be responsibly attributed to the Prophet. This dimension secures epistemic continuity and protects hadith discourse from arbitrary attribution. Second, rational deliberation asks what the report means in relation to language, context, domain, corroborative evidence, juristic reasoning, and human knowledge. This dimension secures interpretive coherence and prevents the movement from authenticity to application from becoming automatic. Third, normative moral reasoning asks how the report should be applied in a way that remains faithful to the moral purposes of Islam. This dimension secures ethical accountability and prevents formally authenticated texts from being deployed in ways that generate harm, incoherence, or moral distortion. The model is integrative because none of these dimensions is sufficient in isolation.

This synthesis extends existing theories of hadith authority and Islamic normativity. Brown's account of hadith canonization and authority explains why transmission remains indispensable to Muslim normativity.⁷⁷ Hallaq's account of Islamic legal authority shows that continuity and change have historically operated together within Islamic law rather than as mutually exclusive alternatives.⁷⁸ Abou El Fadl's theory of interpretive authority demonstrates that textual authority becomes ethically dangerous when separated from moral restraint and responsibility.⁷⁹ Rahman's hermeneutical method emphasizes the movement from historical particularity to general moral principle and contemporary application (Rahman, 1982). The present study synthesizes these insights but revises their application by placing hadith authority itself, rather than Islamic normativity in general, at the center of the theoretical model. Its contribution is to show how transmission, reason, and ethics can be coordinated within a single account of hadith authority.

The model also complicates assumptions within debates between traditionalist authentication and modernist critique. Traditionalist approaches rightly insist that Prophetic authority cannot be detached from disciplined transmission. Yet when authentication is treated as sufficient for ethical application, hadith authority risks becoming formalist. Modernist and reformist approaches rightly insist that inherited reports must be interpreted considering changing historical and moral contexts. Yet when rational or ethical interpretation is detached from transmission, hadith authority risks becoming unstable or dependent on external preference. The integrative model challenges both tendencies by arguing that authority is not located exclusively in the chain, the interpreter's reason, or contemporary moral intuition. It is produced through the disciplined interaction among all three.

This theoretical claim has broader relevance because late modernity has reconfigured the conditions of religious authority. Hadith no longer circulates only through madrasa systems, juristic manuals, scholarly commentaries, or controlled pedagogical settings. It now circulates through social

⁷² Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*; al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*.

⁷³ al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*.

⁷⁴ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*.

⁷⁵ Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*; Yahya ibn Sharaf Al-Nawawi, *Al-Arba'un Al-Nawawiyah* (Jeddah: Dar al-Minhaj, n.d.).

⁷⁶ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*.

⁷⁷ Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*.

⁷⁸ Hallaq, *Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Law*.

⁷⁹ Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women*.

media, translation platforms, digital hadith databases, online fatwa services, political discourse, activist rhetoric, and algorithmically mediated religious content. Such circulation expands access but also fragments interpretive authority. In this respect, the findings resonate with theories of reflexive authority in late modern societies, which emphasize the interaction between individual agency and institutional frameworks under conditions of social transformation.⁸⁰ The acceleration and fragmentation of social life also create new ethical tensions that require integrative paradigms rather than single-source models of authority.⁸¹ Hadith authority in late modernity must therefore be reflexive without becoming arbitrary, and institutionally grounded without becoming closed to ethical deliberation.

The relevance of the model is especially clear in digital Islamic contexts. Digital access to Qur'anic, hadith, and legal materials has expanded dramatically, but access does not automatically produce interpretive competence. In digital tafsir and AI-assisted Islamic interpretation, authority is increasingly contested between traditional scholars, lay users, algorithmic tools, and automated systems, creating a need for layered oversight to preserve methodological integrity.⁸² The model proposed in this study provides a conceptual structure for such oversight. Transmission corresponds to verification of source and attribution; rational deliberation corresponds to contextual and methodological interpretation; normative moral reasoning corresponds to evaluating consequences, harm, justice, and public benefit. Digital tools may assist retrieval, comparison, and classification, but they cannot replace the layered accountability required for responsible religious interpretation.

The model also contributes to Islamic hermeneutics by clarifying how textual interpretation becomes ethical application. Contemporary hermeneutical approaches have increasingly argued that Islamic reasoning must integrate classical principles with modern disciplinary knowledge. Mavani's distinction between traditional and foundational *ijtihād*, for instance, shows how theology, ethics, linguistics, anthropology, and modern sciences may be brought together to produce just and non-discriminatory resolutions.⁸³ Progressive hermeneutical approaches, including Abdullah Saeed's hierarchy of values, similarly prioritize universal ethical objectives over rigid textualism when interpreting ethical-legal materials.⁸⁴ The present model does not simply adopt these approaches; it narrows and specifies their relevance for hadith authority. It shows that hadith interpretation requires not only contextual sensitivity, but a sequence of epistemic verification, hermeneutical clarification, and ethical accountability.

The broader relevance of this model extends into applied Islamic ethics. Contemporary issues such as bioethics, gender ethics, environmental ethics, digital finance, and artificial intelligence ethics cannot be resolved through isolated proof-texting. They require a layered method capable of relating scriptural evidence, expert knowledge, juristic principles, and moral objectives. Recent discussions of *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, justice, public welfare, trust, AI ethics, and digital finance demonstrate that Islamic ethical reasoning increasingly operates across multiple domains of knowledge and governance.⁸⁵ The

⁸⁰ M Hoogenboom and R Ossewaarde, "From Iron Cage to Pigeon House: The Birth of Reflexive Authority," *Organization Studies* 26, no. 4 (2005): 601–19, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840605051475>.

⁸¹ P J D'Ambrosio, "From Present to Presentation: A Philosophical Critique of Hartmut Rosa's 'Situational Identity,'" *Time and Society* 28, no. 3 (2019): 1061–83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X18787059>.

⁸² Haris Azhar, "Warga Miskin Masi Sulit Mendapat Akses Keadilan Hukum," (Universitas Gajah Mada, 2025); A Sati et al., "The Digital Transformation of Tafsir and Its Implications for Islamic Legal Derivation in the Contemporary Era," *MILRev: Metro Islamic Law Review* 4, no. 1 (2025): 389–415, <https://doi.org/10.32332/milrev.v4i1.10425>.

⁸³ Mavani, "Two Shi'i Jurisprudential Methodologies to Address Medical and Bioethical Challenges: Traditional Ijtihād and Foundational Ijtihād."

⁸⁴ Rois, Irfan, and Anam, "Islamic Hierarchy Of Value: Abdullah Saeed's Progressive Interpretation of the Qur'an."

⁸⁵ H Ahyani et al., "Gender Justice In The Sharing Of Inheritance And Implementation In Indonesia," *Asy-Syari'ah* 24, no. 2 (2022): 285–304, <https://doi.org/10.15575/as.v24i2.2.14640>; N Akhter, "Integrating Islamic Ethical Principles With Innovative Approaches to Address Contemporary Social Research Challenges," in *Innovative Approaches to Social Research Challenges*, 2026, 255–74, <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-6410-0.ch009>; S B Abu

integrative model contributes to this development by clarifying the specific role of hadith within such reasoning. Hadith does not function merely as a repository of citations; it provides normativity that must be authenticated, interpreted, and ethically applied.

This model also has methodological significance for future hadith studies. It suggests that research on hadith authority should not proceed only by identifying the authenticity grade of a report or by tracing its reception history. Nor should it begin from contemporary ethical concerns and then select hadith evidence retrospectively. A more robust method moves through four analytical stages: authentication, contextual interpretation, ethical evaluation, and contemporary application. This sequence is not meant to be rigid or exhaustive, but it provides a safeguard against two recurrent errors: textual formalism and ethical subjectivism. Textual formalism treats hadith citation as self-sufficient. Ethical subjectivism treats contemporary moral preference as sufficient. The integrative model avoids both by treating moral reasoning as tradition-guided and transmission as ethically accountable.

The model's limits should also be acknowledged. It does not provide a universal algorithm for resolving every conflict between hadith and contemporary ethical judgment. Nor does it eliminate disagreement among scholars, jurists, ethicists, or Muslim communities. Rather, its value lies in clarifying the conditions under which disagreement can become methodologically accountable. It identifies the questions that must be asked before a hadith can be responsibly applied: whether the report is attributable, what kind of guidance it provides, how it relates to broader Islamic norms, what consequences its application produces, and whether its use remains aligned with the moral purposes of the Prophetic tradition. In this sense, the model is not a shortcut to consensus but a framework for disciplined disagreement.

The theoretical contribution of this subsection is therefore to reframe hadith authority as an integrative structure of layered normativity. Transmission without ethical reasoning risks formalism. Reason without transmission risks detachment from Prophetic normativity. Ethics without methodological discipline risks subjectivism. By coordinating these dimensions, the article extends hadith studies beyond the binary of authentication and critique, contributes to Islamic ethics by clarifying how hadith functions as a source of moral reasoning, and advances Islamic hermeneutics by showing that interpretation is not only linguistic or historical but also morally accountable. This tripartite model constitutes the article's central originality and provides the conceptual bridge to the conclusion: hadith authority in late modern Islamic ethics remains viable precisely when it is transmitted with discipline, interpreted with reason, and applied with ethical accountability.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined how hadith authority can be reframed in late modern Islamic ethics through the interaction of transmission, rational deliberation, and normative moral reasoning. It concludes that hadith authority cannot be adequately understood either as mere formal authentication or as unrestricted rational reinterpretation. Rather, it functions as a layered normative structure in which each dimension performs a distinct but interdependent role. The first finding shows that transmission secures epistemic continuity. Through *isnād*, narrator evaluation, *matn* awareness, and scholarly reception, the hadith tradition preserves responsible attribution to the Prophet and protects religious discourse from arbitrary citation. However, transmission alone does not determine the ethical meaning of a report. The second finding demonstrates that rational deliberation is necessary for interpretive coherence. Authenticated reports require contextual analysis, domain differentiation, reconciliation with other evidence, and attention to purpose before they can be responsibly applied. The third finding shows that normative moral reasoning provides ethical accountability. Hadith application must be assessed in relation to intention, non-harm, mercy, proportionality, public welfare, and the broader moral horizon of Islamic normativity.

Bakar et al., "Reconstructing Artificial Intelligence Ethics through Qur'anic Values of Ihsan and Amanah Using Thematic Exegesis," *Quranica* 17, no. 2 Special Issue (2025): 429–46, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-105018618823&partnerID=40&md5=29ebeeee3975037160cb31710640f3ba>.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its proposed integrative model of hadith authority. This model moves beyond the binary between traditionalist authentication and modernist critique by showing that transmission, reason, and ethics are not rival sources of authority but mutually constitutive dimensions of responsible Islamic moral judgment. Academically, the study contributes to hadith studies by expanding the discussion of authority beyond authenticity; to Islamic hermeneutics by emphasizing interpretation as a morally accountable act; and to Islamic ethics by clarifying how Prophetic traditions can function as sources of contemporary moral reasoning. The broader implication is that hadith authority remains viable in late modern contexts when it is transmitted with discipline, interpreted with reason, and applied with ethical responsibility. Future research may test this model through specific case studies in bioethics, gender ethics, environmental ethics, digital religious authority, or AI ethics, as well as through comparative analyses of contemporary fatwas and digital hadith usage.

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