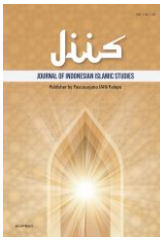
(cc) BY

e-ISSN 2808-8395

Journal of Indonesian Islamic Studies
Vol 6, No. 1, October 2026, pp. 219 - 228



JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAMIC STUDIES

https://ejournal.iainpalopo.ac.id/index.php/jiis/index

Contextualizing Tabayyun in Tafsir Al-Misbah as an Ethical Framework for Digital Information Verification

Diana Banurea✉[1], Idris Siregar[2]

[1,2]Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

Articles Information

History:
Received: Sept 01, 2026
Approved: Sept 27, 2026
Publish: October 01, 2026

Keywords:
tabayyun; Tafsir Al-Misbah; misinformation; social media; digital ethics

Abstract

Studies of tabayyun, Q. 49:6, Tafsir Al-Misbah, and misinformation on social media generally emphasize the obligation to verify information or describe its application to particular groups and platforms. However, these studies have not sufficiently reconstructed M. Quraish Shihab's interpretation into an integrated and operational framework for digital information ethics. This study analyzes the meaning of tabayyun in Tafsir Al-Misbah and formulates its principles as an ethical framework for receiving, evaluating, and disseminating digital information. It employs qualitative library research using a focused thematic-exegetical approach. The primary source is Tafsir Al-Misbah, particularly its interpretation of Q. 49:6, while secondary sources include academic books, journal articles, and conference proceedings on tabayyun, misinformation, disinformation, and digital communication. Data were collected through documentation and analyzed using qualitative content analysis involving textual reduction, coding, categorization, contextual comparison, and interpretive synthesis. The study identifies five principles: caution, selectivity regarding sources and content, avoidance of prejudice and backbiting, social responsibility, and proportionality. Its novelty lies in reconstructing these principles into three dimensions: epistemic verification, moral-discursive restraint, and social-pragmatic responsibility. The resulting framework positions tabayyun not merely as fact-checking but as an ethical process governing judgment, speech, action, and the social consequences of digital information.

✉ Email Correspondent:
dianabanurea96@gmail.com

Copyright © The Author(s)

Introduction

Social media has accelerated the production, exchange, and replication of information. Every user may simultaneously act as a recipient, interpreter, and disseminator of messages. Although this ease of access broadens opportunities to acquire knowledge, it also increases the circulation of information that is inaccurate, decontextualized, manipulated, or deliberately designed to mislead. The term fake news encompasses diverse forms, including fabrication, manipulation, misunderstood satire, and misleading content presented as news (Tandoc et al., 2018). Under these conditions, the problem of misinformation extends beyond the truth or falsity of a message to include source credibility, the emotional impulse to share, and the social consequences that follow dissemination. Research on online information diffusion demonstrates that false news can reach wider audiences and spread more rapidly than true news, primarily because of human sharing behavior (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Addressing misinformation therefore requires an interdisciplinary approach and habitual verification at the level of individual users (Lazer et al., 2018).

In Indonesia, interactions among social media users can accelerate the recirculation of misinformation when messages are accepted and forwarded without adequate scrutiny (Juditha, 2018). Research in information psychology likewise indicates that limited attention and insufficient analytical reasoning are associated with an inability to distinguish accurate information from falsehoods (Pennycook & Rand, 2021). These empirical problems suggest that digital literacy requires a foundation that not only teaches fact-checking techniques but also regulates the attitude adopted before judgment, the language used in correction, and responsibility for the consequences of disseminating information.

The Qur'an provides an ethical foundation for addressing this problem through the command of tabayyun in Q. 49:6. The verse connects the verification of news with the prevention of actions that may harm others. Its orientation is not merely epistemic—namely, the acquisition of accurate information—but also moral and social, because it seeks to prevent reckless decisions, defamation, conflict, and regret arising from action based on unverified information. Tabayyun can therefore be developed as a foundation for an ethics of digital information verification.

Previous studies have approached this theme from several perspectives. Jafar (2017) mapped the concept of news in the Qur'an and its implications for reporting systems on social media, emphasizing source transparency, truthfulness, and correspondence with facts. Reza (2021) examined forms of misinformation and the practice of tabayyun among Muslim university students, finding that verification practices had not been optimally implemented. Jenuri et al. (2021) investigated Islamic communication ethics in responding to misinformation, emphasizing tabayyun, the communication of valid information, and ethical conduct in oral and written discourse. Nur et al. (2022), meanwhile, specifically examined the meaning of tabayyun in relation to YouTube news through Q. 49:6 as interpreted in Tafsir Al-Misbah.

This body of scholarship confirms the importance of tabayyun, identifies relevant values in Islamic communication, and describes its application in particular contexts. Nevertheless, the principles embedded in M. Quraish Shihab's interpretation have not yet been formulated as a framework that demonstrates the relationship among truth verification, moral restraint in communication, and accountability for the social

consequences of information. Tabayyun is also frequently reduced to fact-checking, whereas the moral structure of Q. 49:6 requires caution before action and awareness of the harm that others may suffer. Moreover, few studies have translated these exegetical principles into ethical stages for determining whether digital information should be trusted, addressed, forwarded, corrected, or stopped.

Against this background, the study addresses two questions: How are the principles of tabayyun constructed in Tafsir Al-Misbah, and how can these principles be formulated as an ethical framework for digital information verification? The study aims to analyze the meaning of tabayyun in M. Quraish Shihab's interpretation and to reconstruct its five principles as an ethical framework for verifying digital information. Its novelty does not lie in claiming that tabayyun is relevant to misinformation, because this relationship has been widely discussed. Rather, the study synthesizes five principles of tabayyun into three ethical dimensions—epistemic, moral-discursive, and social-pragmatic—and translates them into indicators for action in digital environments.

Method

This qualitative library study employs a focused thematic-exegetical (maudhu'i) approach. The approach examines a single theme systematically by attending to key terms, interrelationships among verses, exegetical explanations, and the context of the problem under investigation (Al-Farmawi, 1977). The analysis centers on the command fatabayyanu in Q. 49:6. Q. 49:12 serves as a supporting moral context for explaining the relationship between news verification and the prohibitions against prejudice, fault-finding, and backbiting.

The study examines exegetical passages on tabayyun. Its units of analysis are words, phrases, and passages concerning news reception, source credibility, content verification, self-restraint, the consequences of action, and informational utility. The primary source is M. Quraish Shihab's Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an. Its analysis of Q. 49:6 appears in volume 13, pages 236–240 (Shihab, 2002). Secondary materials include academic books on thematic exegesis, journal articles, and conference proceedings on tabayyun, misinformation, disinformation, and digital communication ethics. Selection required relevance to the research questions, a traceable bibliographic identity, and an academic publisher. Each source also had to support conceptual or empirical comparison. Anonymous sources, online forums, personal blogs, and open encyclopedias were excluded.

Data were collected through documentation in five stages: (1) compiling Shihab's interpretation of Q. 49:6; (2) identifying the terms naba', fasiq, fatabayyanu, bi-jahalah, and nadimin; (3) recording units of meaning related to the reception, verification, dissemination, and consequences of information; (4) connecting the principal verse with Q. 49:12 as a supporting verse; and (5) comparing the reading with secondary literature. Documentation notes served as the research instrument. They recorded excerpts, initial codes, categories, sources, and the contexts in which the data were used.

The study used qualitative content analysis in four stages. First, textual reduction selected passages directly related to information ethics. Second, open coding assigned labels to ideas concerning caution, source credibility, content accuracy, the restraint of prejudice, social consequences, and informational utility. Third, the codes were grouped

into five main principles. Fourth, analytical contextualization paired each principle with corresponding digital communication risks and appropriate ethical actions. Interpretive trustworthiness was maintained through repeated readings of the primary source, comparison with previous studies, documentation of the coding trail, and a clear distinction between Shihab's exposition and the researchers' conceptual synthesis.

Results

The Meaning of Tabayyun in Q. 49:6

Q. 49:6 states:

يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْٓا اِنْ جَاۤءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌۢ بِنَبَاٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوْٓا اَنْ تُصِيْبُوْا قَوْمًاۢ بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْبِحُوْا عَلٰى مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نٰدِمِيْنَ

"O you who believe, if an evildoer brings you news, verify it carefully, lest you harm people out of ignorance or recklessness and later regret what you have done."

Linguistically, *tabayyun* denotes seeking clarification until a matter becomes evident. In the context of the verse, it means more than acquiring additional information; it requires establishing a sound basis of knowledge before forming a judgment or taking action. Shihab (2002, pp. 236–240) explains that the verse directs attention to consequential news that may affect others. The term *naba'* signifies weighty information with potential consequences, while the reference to an iniquitous bearer of news requires the recipient to examine the source's credibility. The command *fatabayyanu* prevents decisions based on ignorance or recklessness. The closing clause of the verse underscores that failure to verify news may lead to regret after harm has occurred.

The structure of the verse establishes a causal sequence: news is received; its source and content are examined; judgment is suspended until clarity is obtained; and action is then taken with due consideration of its consequences. Accordingly, *tabayyun* encompasses both source verification and content verification. Source verification evaluates the identity, competence, integrity, and proximity of the source to the event. Content verification assesses evidence, context, consistency, and correspondence with verifiable facts.

The Relevance of Tafsir Al-Misbah as the Primary Source

M. Quraish Shihab is an Indonesian Qur'anic exegete with academic training in Qur'anic studies and exegesis at Al-Azhar University. *Tafsir Al-Misbah* was selected because its interpretive method attends to Qur'anic language, coherence among verses, social context, and the application of Qur'anic teachings to contemporary life. These characteristics accord with the purpose of this study, which seeks not only to define *tabayyun* but also to formulate its implications for digital information ethics.

In his interpretation of Q. 49:6, Shihab (2002) does not require the same level of investigation for every item of information. The depth of verification should correspond to

the significance of the news, the credibility of its bearer, and the risks involved. This explanation is particularly relevant to digital environments characterized by information abundance. Users cannot scrutinize every message with equal intensity, but they should devote greater attention to information concerning personal dignity, public safety, social conflict, religion, health, or other decisions with far-reaching consequences.

Five Principles of Tabayyun

1. Caution in Receiving Information

The first principle is to withhold judgment and action until an adequate informational basis is available. Caution does not mean treating all information with suspicion; rather, it rejects haste. In digital communication, the impulse to react immediately is often intensified by provocative headlines, video excerpts, screenshots, or messages designed to evoke anger and fear. *Tabayyun* requires an ethical pause so that emotion does not displace rational judgment.

Such a pause enables recipients to read information in full, distinguish claims from opinions, recover missing context, and determine whether the information is sufficiently important to warrant further action. Caution thus becomes the initial safeguard against allowing the speed of information flows to dictate judgment.

2. Selectivity Regarding Sources and Content

The second principle is to evaluate both the quality of the source and the accuracy of the content. The number of people sharing a claim does not automatically increase its validity. Users should trace information to its original source, examine the source's competence and track record, compare the report with independent sources, and attend to the date, location, and context of publication. At the level of content, users should seek corroborating evidence, assess internal consistency, and verify that the headline accurately represents the substance of the report.

Selectivity also concerns the utility of information. Information may be classified as accurate, false because of deception or error, or devoid of meaningful benefit. This distinction indicates that the suitability of information for dissemination is determined not only by its truth value but also by its relevance and utility. Even accurate information should not necessarily be circulated if it violates privacy, humiliates others, or lacks a clear public interest.

3. Avoiding Prejudice and Backbiting

The third principle emerges from a thematic reading of the relationship between Q. 49:6 and Q. 49:12. Whereas verse 6 regulates the examination of news before action, verse 12 regulates motives and speech by prohibiting excessive suspicion, fault-finding, and backbiting. Information verification must therefore not become a pretext for exposing private faults or intensifying social condemnation.

In digital environments, this principle requires users to distinguish relevant facts from accusations, speculation, and personal attacks. Corrections of inaccurate information should address claims and evidence rather than demean the person conveying the message. The principle also restricts the dissemination of personal data, private recordings, or sensitive information that is unnecessary for the public interest.

4. Social Responsibility for the Consequences of Information

The fourth principle derives from the warning that believers must not harm a community by acting on information that remains unclear. The truth of information must be considered together with its foreseeable consequences. Every post, comment, and forwarded message can affect reputation, safety, social relationships, and even public decision-making. The freedom to communicate information is therefore accompanied by an obligation to prevent reasonably foreseeable harm.

Social responsibility includes a willingness to correct or withdraw information when an error is discovered. Users should do more than cease sharing a false message; they should correct the informational record in proportion to the message's previous reach. This orientation transforms *tabayyun* from an individual act into an ethics of participation aimed at safeguarding the quality of the digital public sphere.

5. Proportionality in Responding to Information

The fifth principle is to allocate attention and resources proportionately. Not all information requires the same degree of verification. Information capable of causing substantial harm demands more rigorous scrutiny, whereas trivial and unhelpful messages should not be amplified. The initial manuscript referred to this principle as efficiency; proportionality is a more precise term because it emphasizes correspondence among the significance of information, the level of risk, and the depth of verification.

Proportionality prevents two extremes: accepting all information without examination and expending attention on every message without regard to its significance. In a digital ecosystem marked by information overload, the ability to establish priorities is itself an ethical capacity. Refraining from sharing information that is unclear or unhelpful is a form of responsibility.

Discussion

An Ethical Framework for Digital Information Verification

The five principles identified in this study can be reconstructed into three complementary dimensions. The epistemic dimension comprises caution and selectivity regarding sources and content; it addresses whether the knowledge base supporting a judgment is sufficiently robust. The moral-discursive dimension positions the prohibitions against prejudice and backbiting as restraints on motives, language, and modes of correction; it addresses whether verification continues to respect human dignity. The social-pragmatic dimension comprises social responsibility and proportionality; it addresses whether disseminating information offers benefits commensurate with its social risks.

Table 1. A Tabayyun-Based Ethical Framework for Digital Information Verification

Principle	Interpretive Basis	Digital Risk	Ethical Action
Caution	Suspending judgment to avoid acting in ignorance	Emotional reactions; provocative headlines; impulsive sharing	Pause; read fully; distinguish fact from opinion; delay sharing
Selectivity regarding sources and content	Assessing the news bearer and the substance of *naba'*	Anonymous sources; contextual manipulation;	Trace the original source; verify credibility, date, context, and corroboration

		unsupported claims	
Avoiding prejudice and backbiting	Linking verification to restraint of prejudice and protection of dignity	Accusations; harassment; exposure of private faults; personal-data disclosure	Focus correction on the claim; protect privacy; use fair language
Social responsibility	Preventing harm to others and subsequent regret	Reputational damage; conflict; hate speech; misguided public decisions	Assess consequences; withhold high-risk content; correct errors publicly
Proportionality	Matching verification depth to informational significance and utility	Information overload; amplification of trivial content; verification fatigue	Prioritize high-impact claims; do not amplify messages lacking benefit

This framework demonstrates that *tabayyun* extends beyond fact-checking. Fact-checking primarily evaluates the accuracy of claims, whereas *tabayyun* also regulates inward disposition, modes of speech, decisions to circulate or stop information, and responsibility for consequences once a message has produced harm. This finding is consistent with research in the psychology of misinformation, which emphasizes the roles of reasoning, knowledge, attention, and user habits in the formation of false beliefs (Ecker et al., 2022; Pennycook & Rand, 2021). The *tabayyun* framework, however, adds a moral boundary centered on the protection of dignity and the prevention of social harm.

Operationally, the framework can be implemented in four stages. The first is pausing: withholding a response when information is unclear or provokes intense emotion. The second is verification: examining the source, content, evidence, date, and context. The third is ethical assessment: determining whether the information expresses prejudice, exposes private faults, violates privacy, or is likely to harm others. The fourth is responsible decision-making: choosing whether to share, correct, report, or stop the information in accordance with its significance and utility. When previously shared information proves inaccurate, the final stage also includes correction and remediation.

The pausing and verification stages are supported by contemporary research. Directing attention toward accuracy can improve the quality of information users share (Pennycook et al., 2020, 2021). Prebunking interventions that introduce users to manipulation techniques can likewise strengthen resilience to misinformation (Roozenbeek et al., 2022). The *tabayyun* framework extends these findings by positioning accuracy within an ethical decision-making process that also considers dignity, utility, and social consequences.

Positioning the Findings in Relation to Previous Studies

The findings are consistent with Jafar's (2017) emphasis on source transparency and correspondence between news and facts. The proposed framework extends this orientation by incorporating the restraint of prejudice, the protection of dignity, consideration of consequences, and verification priorities. Reza's (2021) finding that

tabayyun has not been optimally practiced demonstrates the need for more concrete indicators of action. The four operational stages formulated in this study may provide a basis for developing digital literacy materials, although their effectiveness remains to be tested empirically.

Jenuri et al. (2021) connected *tabayyun* with Islamic communication ethics, while Nur et al. (2022) focused on YouTube news from the perspective of *Tafsir Al-Misbah*. The present study does not merely repeat the conclusion that *tabayyun* is necessary for responding to misinformation. Its contribution lies in articulating the internal relationship among five principles within a framework that distinguishes epistemic, moral-discursive, and social-pragmatic dimensions. This distinction demonstrates that failures in digital information can arise not only from false claims but also from unreliable sources, improper motives, demeaning modes of communication, or disregard for social consequences.

Implications and Limitations

This ethical framework can inform digital literacy education, the teaching of contextual exegesis, organizational communication guidelines, and social media governance within religious communities. In education, the five principles can support exercises that evaluate sources, reconstruct context, identify prejudicial language, anticipate consequences, and select proportionate responses. In media management, the framework can complement fact-checking procedures with ethical considerations before and after publication.

This study is conceptual and based on library research. The proposed framework has not been tested through observations of user behavior, digital literacy experiments, or implementation within particular institutions. Because it focuses on *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, the study represents only one strand of contemporary Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis. These limitations constrain claims about the framework's effectiveness but do not diminish its value as a conceptual construction that can be examined in future research.

Conclusion

M. Quraish Shihab's interpretation of Q. 49:6 demonstrates that *tabayyun* is an ethical process connecting information verification with the prevention of reckless action and the protection of others from harm. The analysis yields five principles: caution, selectivity regarding sources and content, avoidance of prejudice and backbiting, social responsibility, and proportionality in responding to information.

These five principles constitute an ethical framework for digital information verification across three dimensions. The epistemic dimension ensures that judgments rest on adequate sources, evidence, and context. The moral-discursive dimension regulates motives and language so that verification does not devolve into prejudice, humiliation, or the exposure of private faults. The social-pragmatic dimension directs users to consider consequences, utility, priorities, and the obligation to correct inaccurate information. *Tabayyun* therefore extends beyond determining whether information is true or false; it functions as an ethical discipline for deciding when one should trust, address, disseminate, correct, or stop information.

The study contributes an operational formulation of five principles for digital information ethics. Because the framework has not been tested empirically and relies on a

single primary exegetical work, future research should compare it with other interpretations, develop measurement instruments, and test its application in digital literacy education, institutional communication, and social media user behavior.

References

Al-Farmawi, A. H. (1977). *Al-Bidayah fi al-tafsir al-mawdu'i*. Al-Hadarah al-Arabiyyah.

Ecker, U. K. H., Lewandowsky, S., Cook, J., Schmid, P., Fazio, L. K., Brashier, N., Kendeou, P., Vraga, E. K., & Amazeen, M. A. (2022). The psychological drivers of misinformation belief and its resistance to correction. *Nature Reviews Psychology, 1*, 13–29. https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-021-00006-y

Jafar, I. (2017). Konsep berita dalam Al-Qur'an: Implikasinya dalam sistem pemberitaan di media sosial. *Jurnalisa, 3*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.24252/jurnalisa.v3i1.3052

Jenuri, Suwarma, D. M., Parhan, M., Sartika, A., Ramdani, A. D., & Rahmah, F. A. (2021). Islamic communication ethics towards hoax phenomenon on social media. *Dialogia: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Sosial, 19*(2), 515–534. https://doi.org/10.21154/dialogia.v19i2.3446

Juditha, C. (2018). Interaksi komunikasi hoax di media sosial serta antisipasinya. *Jurnal Pekommas, 3*(1), 31–44. https://doi.org/10.30818/jpkm.2018.2030104

Lazer, D. M. J., Baum, M. A., Benkler, Y., Berinsky, A. J., Greenhill, K. M., Menczer, F., Metzger, M. J., Nyhan, B., Pennycook, G., Rothschild, D., Schudson, M., Sloman, S. A., Sunstein, C. R., Thorson, E. A., Watts, D. J., & Zittrain, J. L. (2018). The science of fake news. *Science, 359*(6380), 1094–1096. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aao2998

Nur, A., Fauziah, S., Halid, Y., Ni'matuzzuhrah, & Sukardi, A. (2022). Makna tabayyun terhadap berita dari media sosial YouTube perspektif QS. Al-Hujurat ayat 6 dalam Tafsir Al-Misbah. *Gunung Djati Conference Series, 8*, 61–71.

Pennycook, G., Epstein, Z., Mosleh, M., Arechar, A. A., Eckles, D., & Rand, D. G. (2021). Shifting attention to accuracy can reduce misinformation online. *Nature, 592*(7855), 590–595. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03344-2

Pennycook, G., McPhetres, J., Zhang, Y., Lu, J. G., & Rand, D. G. (2020). Fighting COVID-19 misinformation on social media: Experimental evidence for a scalable accuracy-nudge intervention. *Psychological Science, 31*(7), 770–780. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797620939054

Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2021). The psychology of fake news. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 25*(5), 388–402. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2021.02.007

Reza, I. F. (2021). Counteracting hoax in social media through tabayyun by Islamic student community. *Ta'dib, 24*(2), 269–280. https://doi.org/10.31958/jt.v24i2.4740

Roozenbeek, J., van der Linden, S., Goldberg, B., Rathje, S., & Lewandowsky, S. (2022). Psychological inoculation improves resilience against misinformation on social media. *Science Advances, 8*(34), eabo6254. https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abo6254

Shihab, M. Q. (2002). *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, kesan, dan keserasian Al-Qur'an* (Vol. 13). Lentera Hati.

Tandoc, E. C., Jr., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R. (2018). Defining "fake news": A typology of scholarly definitions. *Digital Journalism, 6*(2), 137–153. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143

Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science, 359*(6380), 1146–1151. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559.