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Mufliẖūn as an Ethical-Social Paradigm: A Qur'anic Framework for Religious Authority and Digital Da'wah

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Abstract

Digital platforms have reconfigured religious authority by altering how religious knowledge is produced, circulated, received, and legitimized. In this environment, scholarly competence and institutional legitimacy increasingly interact with communicative performance, audience trust, algorithmic visibility, and engagement, raising a normative question about how the quality of religious legitimacy should be evaluated. This study reconstructs the Qur'anic concept of *mufliẖūn* as an ethical-social paradigm and examines its relevance to religious authority and digital da'wah. Using qualitative library research, the study applies thematic exegesis (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) to thirteen Qur'anic verses containing the forms *mufliẖūn*/*mufliẖīn*, compares classical and contemporary interpretations, and employs a sociological approach at the contextualization stage. The analysis identifies five interrelated value structures: epistemic-transcendental orientation, moral accountability, moral-communal agency, social-distributive solidarity, and self-interest restraint. These structures are reconstructed into a *mufliẖūn-based religious legitimacy* framework that evaluates the use of authority through epistemic validity, communicative accountability, orientation toward social good, audience welfare, and limits on personal interests. The framework further generates five principles for digital da'wah: epistemic validation, communicative contextualization, distributional accountability, corrective participation, and welfare evaluation. The study argues that visibility, popularity, and engagement may contribute to the formation and expansion of religious authority, but they do not by themselves determine the quality of religious legitimacy or the success of digital da'wah.

Info Artikel

Kata Kunci:
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;

Abstrak

Platform digital telah merekonfigurasi otoritas keagamaan dengan mengubah cara pengetahuan agama diproduksi, disirkulasikan, diterima, dan dilegitimasi. Dalam lingkungan ini, kompetensi keilmuan dan legitimasi institusional semakin berinteraksi dengan performa komunikatif, kepercayaan audiens, visibilitas algoritmik, dan engagement, sehingga memunculkan persoalan normatif mengenai bagaimana kualitas legitimasi keagamaan harus dievaluasi. Penelitian

ini merekonstruksi konsep Qur'ani mufliḥūn sebagai paradigma etik-sosial dan mengkaji relevansinya bagi otoritas keagamaan dan dakwah digital. Dengan penelitian kepustakaan kualitatif, studi ini menerapkan tafsir tematik (tafsīr mawḍū'ī) terhadap tiga belas ayat Al-Qur'an yang memuat bentuk mufliḥūn/mufliḥīn, membandingkan penafsiran klasik dan kontemporer, serta menggunakan pendekatan sosiologis pada tahap kontekstualisasi. Analisis menghasilkan lima struktur nilai yang saling berhubungan: orientasi epistemik-transendental, akuntabilitas moral, agensi moral-komunal, solidaritas sosial-distributif, dan pengendalian kepentingan diri. Struktur tersebut direkonstruksi menjadi kerangka mufliḥūn-based religious legitimacy yang mengevaluasi penggunaan otoritas melalui validitas epistemik, akuntabilitas komunikatif, orientasi pada kebaikan sosial, kemaslahatan audiens, dan pembatasan kepentingan personal. Kerangka ini selanjutnya menghasilkan lima prinsip dakwah digital: validasi epistemik, kontekstualisasi komunikatif, akuntabilitas distribusi, partisipasi korektif, dan evaluasi kemaslahatan. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa visibilitas, popularitas, dan engagement dapat berkontribusi pada pembentukan dan perluasan otoritas keagamaan, tetapi tidak dengan sendirinya menentukan kualitas legitimasi keagamaan atau keberhasilan dakwah digital.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has reshaped how religious knowledge is produced, distributed, and received. Campbell (2007) demonstrates that online religious authority is not monolithic but comprises multiple layers of hierarchy, structure, ideology, and text. An analysis of one hundred religious blogs found that digital actors more often reinforced traditional sources of authority than challenged them (Campbell, 2010a). Subsequent developments have shown that online and offline religious practices, identities, and authorities have become increasingly intertwined Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). Digitalization, therefore, is better understood as a reconfiguration of religious authority rather than its replacement.

Within Muslim contexts, this reconfiguration has become evident through the emergence of new actors. Solahudin & Fakhruroji (2020) demonstrate that social media in Indonesia has become a productive space for Islamic learning as well as religious populism. Zaid et al. Zaid et al., 2022)find that Muslim influencers challenge traditional authority through narratives and identities that resonate with younger generations. Drawing on 9,801 Instagram posts from three Indonesian religious influencers, Febrian (2024) shows that authority is also constructed visually through a combination of perceived closeness and strategic distance. Rachman et al. (2025) identify a shift toward popularity-based authority, accompanied by instant fatwas, fragmented religious teachings, and the commodification of religion.

Recent studies have increasingly identified platforms as structural determinants of religious authority. Sulfikar & Yasmine (2025) conceptualize platformized religious authority as a form of legitimacy negotiated among knowledge-based authority, charisma, and platform dynamics, with algorithmic visibility and engagement metrics functioning as gatekeeping mechanisms. Based on a synthesis of 88 studies, AlMazaedh et al. (2026) demonstrate that platform design, actor strategies, and audience participation jointly shape religious authority and social cohesion. In Qur'anic studies,

Syukron et al. (2026) find that exegetical authority is no longer determined solely by scholarly transmission (*sanad*) and institutional affiliation but also by media visibility, communication styles, audience trust, and algorithmic circulation. Taken together, these findings indicate that visibility and legitimacy are not synonymous.

However, these studies have limitations that warrant explicit consideration. Sociological approaches and digital religion research offer strong explanations of how authority emerges, is maintained, and becomes contested. Nevertheless, their primary orientation remains descriptive and explanatory. Sulfikar & Yasmine's (2025) framework explains why certain actors gain acceptance, but not whether they exercise their authority responsibly. Febrian (2024) study maps the strategies through which authoritative images are constructed, but does not assess the accuracy of the religious content being communicated. Rachman et al. (2025) identify problems such as simplification and commodification, yet they do not systematically derive evaluative criteria from normative Islamic sources. Kalwar et al. (2026) further observe that research on digital religious authority in Indonesia remains dominated by sociological and media perspectives, with limited attention to Islamic legal and theological paradigms. Their attempt to address this gap draws on jurisprudential concepts such as *tabayyun*, *amāna*, and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿa*, rather than on a value structure developed through a thematic reading of specific Qur'anic verses. Consequently, standards for evaluating the responsible exercise of religious authority in digital spaces still lack an explicit Qur'anic foundation.

Studies of *al-falāḥ* and *mufliẖūn*, meanwhile, have generated important insights into the Qur'anic conception of success. Through a semantic analysis, Rifaldi (2022) demonstrates that *al-falāḥ* is grounded in an appropriate process, a well-defined objective, and a profound understanding. Emra et al. (2024) identify five characteristics of the *mufliẖūn* in Q. 2:5: belief in the unseen, consistency in obedience, fulfillment of social obligations, belief in the Hereafter, and belief in the revealed scriptures. Abd Jalil et al. (2022) examine all Qur'anic verses containing forms derived from the root *f-l-ḥ* and identify thirty personality traits associated with *al-falāḥ*. Nevertheless, these studies generally remain oriented toward cataloguing meanings, characteristics, and lists of virtues. They have yet to conceptualize the relationships among these characteristics as an ethical-relational structure connecting sources of truth, accountability for actions, social engagement, the distribution of benefits, and the restraint of self-interest. Within the corpus reviewed, studies of *mufliẖūn* have also not addressed the question of digital religious authority legitimacy.

Accordingly, the research gap does not stem from the absence of theories of digital authority or studies of *mufliẖūn*. Rather, it lies at the intersection of these two fields, particularly in their normative and evaluative dimensions. Once legitimacy has been established through the interaction of knowledge, charisma, performativity, audiences, and platforms, what Qur'anic principles can be used to evaluate how that authority is exercised? This question matters because visibility, popularity, and engagement can expand an actor's influence without necessarily ensuring epistemic quality, accountability, or benefits for audiences.

This article makes three contributions. First, it reconstructs *mufliẖūn* from a category of Qur'anic success into an ethical-social paradigm comprising five value structures: epistemic-transcendental orientation, moral accountability, communal moral agency, social-distributive solidarity, and restraint of self-interest. Second, it develops these five structures into a framework of *mufliẖūn*-based religious legitimacy. Third, it translates this framework into five principles for digital daʿwa methodology. The article adopts a complementary position: rather than replacing theories of how digital authority is formed, it adds an evaluative framework grounded in the Qur'anic construction of values.

This study examines the value structures of *mufliḥūn* in the Qur'an through a thematic reading of relevant verses and classical and contemporary exegetical works. More specifically, it pursues three objectives. First, it conceptualizes the relationships among the values associated with *mufliḥūn* as an ethical-social paradigm that explains the principles of Qur'anic success in both individual and social dimensions. Second, it analyzes the relevance of this paradigm as a normative-evaluative foundation for assessing the ethical quality of religious authority in digital spaces. In particular, it distinguishes social recognition generated through knowledge, charisma, popularity, and platform visibility from accountability for the exercise of that authority. Third, it explains the implications of the *mufliḥūn* paradigm for developing digital daʿwa methodology, particularly in guiding the production, communication, distribution, and evaluation of religious messages toward epistemic validity, moral responsibility, and social welfare.

This study contributes by reconstructing *mufliḥūn* as an ethical-social paradigm that integrates five Qur'anic value structures. It develops this paradigm into a framework of *mufliḥūn*-based religious legitimacy for evaluating the ethical quality of religious authority and establishing a foundation for digital *daʿwa* methodology oriented toward epistemic validity, moral responsibility, and social welfare.

RESEARCH METHOD

Methodologically, this study employs qualitative library research combining thematic Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr mawḍūʿī*) with a sociological approach at the stage of contextualization. The primary Qur'anic corpus consists of thirteen verses containing the forms *mufliḥūn*/*mufliḥīn*: Q. 2:5, 3:104, 7:8 and 7:157, 9:88, 23:102, 24:51, 28:67, 30:38, 31:5, 58:22, 59:9, and 64:16. The Qur'anic analysis draws on classical and contemporary exegetical works, particularly those of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, M. Quraish Shihab, while secondary literature encompasses studies of *al-falāḥ*, *mufliḥūn*, digital religion, religious authority, and digital da'wah. The analysis proceeded in five stages: identifying and classifying the verses; conducting contextual readings and comparing exegetical interpretations of the foundational verses; thematically categorizing recurring patterns into five value structures; synthesizing their relationships into an ethical-social paradigm; and contextualizing the findings to develop an evaluative framework for religious legitimacy and methodological principles for digital daʿwa.

The study maintains a distinction between the textual meanings of the verses and their application to contemporary phenomena. The verses containing mufliḥūn are not treated as texts that address social media, algorithms, or digital platforms. The value structures are first reconstructed from the Qur′ anic corpus and exegetical tradition and are then brought into dialogue with the sociology of digital religion. The Qur′ anic framework operates at the normative-evaluative level, whereas sociology explains the social and technological conditions in which religious authority is formed Sulfikar & Yasmine (2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital Religion and the Reconfiguration of Religious Authority

Research on digital religion has developed alongside scholarship on religious authority. Early debates centered on whether the internet weakens or replaces established forms of religious authority. Campbell **(**2007**)** challenges this homogeneous understanding by distinguishing four dimensions, hierarchy, structure, ideology, and text, whose relationships with digital media may develop in different ways. An analysis of one hundred religious blogs shows that digital actors more often reinforce than challenge traditional sources of authority Campbell (2010). Andok (2024)

interpretive analysis further supports this finding by demonstrating that the effects of online media are not uniform. In some cases, online media weaken traditional ecclesiastical authority, whereas in others they strengthen it. In this process, users gain greater agency in choosing which authorities to follow.

The field has since moved beyond the distinction between online and offline religion. Campbell and Campbell & Evolvi, **(**2020) describe the relationship between these domains as bridged, blended, and blurred. Rohmawati et al. (2025) show that, in Indonesia, mediatization and hypermediation create hybrid spaces for religious practice while also challenging traditional authority through the emergence of popular figures. Zaid et al. (2022) introduce the concept of liquid authority. They argue that religious credibility emerges from trust, relational proximity, and algorithmic visibility, while social media tend to complement rather than replace traditional religious practices. This perspective understands digitalization as the integration of technological mediation into existing religious structures, rather than the creation of a separate religious sphere.

In Muslim contexts, social media have expanded opportunities for actors outside conventional institutions to perform functions traditionally associated with religious leadership. Solahudin & Fakhruroji (2020**)** show that Indonesian social media have become spaces for Islamic learning and religious populism, where established and emerging actors negotiate authority. Zaid et al. Zaid et al. (2022) demonstrate that Muslim influencers challenge traditional authority by constructing narratives and identities that resonate with younger generations. However, Muzayana's study of TikTok finds that emerging daʿwa figures do not claim to be *ulama*. Their presence is better understood as a continuation of and complement to established forms of authority. From the audience perspective, Askar et al. **(**2025**)** find that Muslim university students in Indonesia regard online sources of Islamic knowledge as new forms of authority. Berger & Golan (2024) show that learners evaluate sources through social affiliation networks and considerations of accessibility and prestige. Scholarly credentials and institutional affiliations remain important, but they now interact with communicative competence and affective proximity. Research on visual communication adds further complexity to this process. Drawing on 9,801 Instagram posts from three Indonesian religious influencers, Febrian (2024) shows that authority is communicated not only through doctrinal claims or credentials but also projected visually. Informal expressions of proximity are combined with strategic distance through visual and textual contrasts, backgrounds, and focal points. This finding is important because it distinguishes the social construction of an authoritative image from the epistemic quality of religious knowledge. A figure may appear authoritative through communicative and visual mechanisms, but these mechanisms do not, in themselves, establish the validity of the religious claims being conveyed.

This distinction becomes increasingly important when digital religious communication intersects with popularity and platform infrastructure. Arief Rachman et al. (2025) identify a shift toward popularity-based authority, accompanied by risks of fragmented religious teachings, instant fatwas, and the commodification of religion. Virga (2025) shows that established organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah maintain their authority on Instagram through public figures and references to fatwas. NU relies on prominent figures and institutional coalitions, whereas Muhammadiyah relies on systematic official statements.

Recent scholarship has therefore shifted from examining individual actors to investigating the structural role of platforms. **S**ulfikar & Yasmine (2025) formulate the concept of platformized religious authority through the interaction of three dimensions: knowledge-based authority, charisma, and platform dynamics. The third dimension highlights algorithmic visibility, engagement metrics, and the attention economy. Platforms thus do more than distribute messages; they also shape which actors and communication styles gain visibility. Empirically, Wahyudi et al. (2025)

analyze 1,250 video observations across 25 test YouTube accounts and identify indications of increased personalization based on viewing history. They argue that this development may reduce information diversity and facilitate a shift in authority toward actors who adapt to algorithmic visibility.

AlMazaedh et al. **(**2026**)** strengthen this structural approach through a synthesis of 88 digital religion studies published between 2010 and 2025 . They conceptualize digital religion as a sociotechnical ecosystem shaped by platform infrastructure, actor strategies, discourse, and audience participation. A similar transformation is taking place in the production of Qur'anic knowledge. Through an examination of YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis websites, Syukron et al. **(**2026**)** show that *sanad*, scholarly credentials, pesantren affiliations, and institutional recognition remain important. However, these sources of authority now interact with media visibility, communication styles, affective proximity, audience trust, and algorithmic circulation.

These studies provide increasingly sophisticated explanations of how religious legitimacy is socially produced. Knowledge, institutional credentials, charisma, visual performance, audience recognition, and platform infrastructure constitute distinct but interacting sources of authority. Nevertheless, this body of scholarship remains predominantly descriptive and explanatory and has yet to provide a Qur'anic normative framework for evaluating how religious authority is exercised once social legitimacy has been established. The distinction between the formation of authority and the ethical evaluation of its exercise therefore provides the starting point for this study.

Reconstructing *Mufliẖūn* as an Ethical-Social Paradigm

The root *f-l-ḥ* occurs forty times in the Qur'an, comprising 27 verbal forms of *aflaḥa* and its derivatives and 13 active participle forms of *mufliẖūn*/*mufliẖīn* (Badawi). Abd Jalil et al. (2022) likewise identify forty Qur'anic verses containing words derived from the root *falaḥ*. This study focuses on the active participle forms because they designate subjects to whom the predicate of *falaḥ* is attributed, making it possible to analyze their attributes, actions, orientations, and social relationships. These thirteen occurrences appear in Q. 2:5, 3:104, 7:8, 7:157, 9:88, 23:102, 24:51, 28:67, 30:38, 31:5, 58:22, 59:9, and 64:16. Their distribution indicates that the predicate *mufliẖūn* is not confined to a single type of religious conduct. Rather, it appears in contexts involving guidance and faith, accountability for deeds, daʿwa, the distribution of benefits, solidarity, and self-restraint.

Previous studies have mapped the meanings and characteristics of this form of success. Rifaldi (2022) shows that *al-falaḥ* rests on an appropriate process, a well-defined objective, and a profound understanding. Emra et al. (2024) identify five characteristics of the *mufliẖūn* in Q. 2:5, while Abd Jalil et al. (2022) compile thirty personality traits associated with *al-falaḥ*. Azhari et al. (2026), through their examination of verses concerning *mufliẖūn* in *Tafsir al-Misbah*, relate success to the quality of human relationships with God, other people, and the purpose of life. These studies explain *what* characterizes Qur'anic success. This section asks how those characteristics relate to one another by examining foundational verses through the interpretations of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, and M. Quraish Shihab.

This comparative reading reveals both fundamental points of convergence and differences. All four exegetes understand *falaḥ* as attaining what one seeks. Al-Ṭabarī defines it as *al-munjiẖūn al-mudrikūn mā ṭalabū ʿinda Allāh* (those who succeed in attaining what they seek from God) (al-Ṭabarī, 2001). Ibn Kathīr defines it as *nayl al-maṭlūb wa al-salāmah min al-marhūb*, meaning the attainment of what is desired and deliverance from what is feared (Ibn Kathīr, 1999). Al-Qurṭubī portrays the successful as those who have overcome various difficulties to reach their goal (al-Qurṭubī, 2003).

Their differences concern the temporal scope of success. Ibn Kathīr repeatedly identifies *falāḥ* with success *fī al-dunyā wa al-ākhirah* (in this world and the Hereafter) (Q. 2:5, 7:157, 30:38, and 31:5), while Shihab (2002) interprets the success described in Q. 30:38 as encompassing both worldly and otherworldly attainment. Al-Ṭabarī more often concludes his interpretations by referring to eternal residence in Paradise (Q. 3:104, 9:88, and 59:9), whereas al-Qurṭubī, in his commentary on Q. 30:38, emphasizes the reward of the Hereafter. Accordingly, this section does not derive the relational dimensions of *mufliḥūn* from definitions of the final outcome. Instead, it examines the Qur'anic contexts and the exegetes' explanations of the conditions attributed to those designated as *mufliḥūn*. The reconstruction of *mufliḥūn* comprises five elements.

First, Q. 2:5 and Q. 31:5 both describe the *mufliḥūn* as being *ʿalā hudā min rabbihim* (upon guidance from their Lord), making divine guidance the foundation of this predicate. Al-Ṭabarī explains Q. 31:5 through the expression *ʿalā bayān min rabbihim wa nūr* (upon an explanation and a light from their Lord), which he then connects to the reward they anticipate on the Day of Resurrection (al-Ṭabarī 2001). Ibn Kathīr gives this guidance a more explicit epistemic dimension: they stand *ʿalā baṣīrah wa bayyinah wa manhaj wāḍiḥ wa jalī* (upon insight, clear evidence, and an evident and manifest path) (Ibn Kathīr 1999). Al-Qurṭubī does not elaborate further but refers readers back to his commentary on Sūrat al-Baqarah (al-Qurṭubī 2003). Shihab (2002) reads Q. 2:5 as the culmination of a series of characteristics of the God-conscious: belief in the unseen and revelation, establishing prayer, giving in charity, and certainty in the Hereafter. In his interpretation of Q. 31:5, he emphasizes conviction free from doubt. The difference is subtle but significant. Ibn Kathīr emphasizes the clarity of the foundations of knowledge (*baṣīrah*, *bayyinah*, and *manhaj*), whereas Shihab stresses the firmness of conviction and the constellation of qualities associated with it.

In Q. 7:157, al-Ṭabarī identifies *alladhīna yafʿalūna hādhihi al-afʿāl* (those who perform these actions) as the people who attain what they seek (al-Ṭabarī 2001). This phrase refers to belief, support for the Messenger, and adherence to the *nūr* mentioned in the verse. Al-Qurṭubī situates the verse within the continuation of the mercy ordained for the God-conscious and emphasizes that this divine favor is granted to this community (al-Qurṭubī 2003). Shihab's interpretation of this verse, meanwhile, centers on the knowledge possessed by the Children of Israel about the Prophet in their own scriptures (Shihab 2002). Thus, this structure is most firmly grounded in Q. 2:5 and Q. 31:5, while Q. 7:157 reveals two interpretive directions: the acceptance of revelation as a form of action (al-Ṭabarī) and access to knowledge of the prophetic message (Shihab). This study categorizes their convergence as an epistemic-transcendental orientation, in which *falāḥ* rests on a source of divine guidance and a clear foundation of belief.

Second, Moral Accountability (Q. 7:8, 23:102, 28:67, and 24:51). Q. 7:8 and Q. 23:102 attribute the predicate *mufliḥūn* to those whose deeds are weighed. Ibn Kathīr emphasizes that deeds are weighed on the Day of Resurrection and that this weighing is conducted with *al-ḥaqq* (justice), because God *lā yaẓlimu aḥadan* (does not wrong anyone) (Ibn Kathīr 1999). Al-Qurṭubī explains the mechanism by which deeds are weighed through the *mīzān* (scale) (al-Qurṭubī, 2003). In his commentary on Q. 23:102, he adds that good deeds outweigh bad deeds (al-Qurṭubī 2003). Shihab (2002) further explains that the scale of the Hereafter differs from worldly scales: it cannot be manipulated and can measure even the slightest movement of the heart. He also relates the lightness of the scale to the loss of one's capital of good deeds through unwillingness to follow Qur'anic guidance. Ibn Kathīr emphasizes divine justice (*lā yaẓlimu*), al-Qurṭubī focuses on the

mechanism of weighing, and Shihab highlights the relationship between guidance, deeds, and their consequences.

Q. 28:67 reveals a substantive difference among the exegetes. Ibn Kathīr maintains that the word *ʿasā* when used by God has an *mūjibah* sense, indicating the certainty of a promise (Ibn Kathīr, 1999). Shihab (2002), by contrast, translates it as an expression of hope ("may") for those who repent, believe, and demonstrate their faith through righteous deeds. Al-Qurṭubī connects this verse with the fulfillment of obligatory duties and the performance of additional voluntary acts of worship (al-Qurṭubī 2003). Although the exegetes differ in how they interpret the certainty of the outcome, they agree that repentance, faith, and deeds constitute necessary conditions. Q. 24:51 reveals another dimension. According to Shihab (2002), believers respond to the call of God and His Messenger with *samiʿnā wa aṭaʿnā* (we hear and we obey), without restricting their obedience according to who issues the call or which ruling they are asked to follow. Al-Qurṭubī connects this response to the call to follow *kitāb Allāh wa ḥukm rasūlih* (the Book of God and the judgment of His Messenger) (al-Qurṭubī 2003). The verse thus translates normative acknowledgment into a willingness to submit to standards that lie beyond the individual subject. On the basis of this convergence, this study conceptualizes moral accountability as a dimension in which *falāḥ* is tied to actions that can be evaluated and for which individuals can be held accountable, rather than to claims of faith alone.

Third, Communal Moral Agency (Q. 3:104). Q. 3:104 provides the primary foundation for this structure because it attributes the predicate *mufliḥūn* to a group that calls others to goodness, enjoins what is right, and forbids what is wrong. The exegetical interpretations of this verse vary considerably. Ibn Kathīr cites al-Ḍaḥḥāk, who identifies this group as *khāṣṣat al-ṣaḥābah wa khāṣṣat al-ruwāh*, namely, the mujahids and scholars (Ibn Kathīr 1999). Al-Qurṭubī emphasizes scholarly qualifications: *al-āmirīn yajibu an yakūnū ʿulamāʾ* (those who enjoin right must be scholars), since not everyone possesses scholarly competence (al-Qurṭubī 2003). Shihab (2002) stresses exemplary conduct and continuity, describing a group toward whom the public looks for guidance and who persistently call others to goodness without tiring. He also provides social criteria for these concepts. Goodness refers to divine guidance; *al-maʿrūf* denotes noble values and customary practices recognized as good, provided they do not conflict with divine principles; and *al-munkar* refers to what is regarded as bad and rejected by the sound judgment of society. The available quotation from al-Ṭabarī on this verse only explains *mufliḥūn* as those who succeed in the sight of God and remain in Paradise (al-Ṭabarī 2001). His explanation of the group responsible for calling others to goodness should be added from the complete text before it is cited.

Secondary studies indicate that these differences concern the scope of the obligation. Ismail (2022) report that al-Qurṭubī understands *min* as *li al-tabʿīḍ* (indicating partiality), making daʿwa a collective obligation (*farḍ kifāyah*). They classify Ibn Kathīr, by contrast, among exegetes who regard this obligation as incumbent upon every Muslim according to their capacity. **Istiqomah (2022**) notes that Shihab also considers daʿwa an obligation for all Muslims, while recognizing the need for a specialized core group. The exegetes therefore differ in their understanding of the scope of the obligation, the competence required of those who undertake it, and the forms of organization through which it is carried out. Nevertheless, they agree that the predicate *falāḥ* is associated with an active role in producing social good. This finding provides the basis for the concept of communal moral agency. Al-Qurṭubī's requirement of scholarly competence also connects this structure to the epistemic orientation: social engagement does not operate independently of the qualifications grounded in knowledge. Q. 9:88, which Shihab (2002) interprets

as depicting the expenditure of wealth and the sacrifice of life in jihad, in contrast to the conduct of the hypocrites, further supports this reading by illustrating a form of engagement that entails sacrifice.

Fourth, Social-Distributive Solidarity (Q. 30:38 and 59:9**).** Q. 30:38 connects *falāḥ* with giving the rights due to relatives, the poor, and *ibn al-sabīl* (the wayfarer). The available classical exegetical passages primarily define *falāḥ*: al-Ṭabarī describes it as attaining what one seeks, Ibn Kathīr as success in this world and the Hereafter, and al-Qurṭubī as the reward of the Hereafter. The distributive dimension derives primarily from the wording of the verse (*ḥaqqahu*) and Shihab's explanation. According to Shihab, the verse follows the discussion of God's control over sustenance, reassuring people that they need not hesitate to give. Relatives are the most natural recipients of assistance; the poor should receive support whether or not they are related to the giver; and giving in this manner is better for those who seek God's pleasure. The difference in interpretive emphasis is clear: the available classical commentaries focus on eschatological outcomes, whereas Shihab presents giving as a social act that serves as a path to *falāḥ*.
Q. 59:9 reinforces this dimension through the concept of *īthār* (altruistic preference). Shihab (2002) explains that the Anṣār did not harbor any desire for what had been given to the Muhājirūn and gave them priority even when they themselves were in pressing need. Hidayatallah et al. (2025) provide secondary support for this interpretation by defining *īthār* as prioritizing the needs of others over one's own, a practice involving sacrifice, empathy, and social solidarity. Read together, Q. 30:38 and Q. 59:9 show that the distribution of benefits and the prioritization of others form part of the structure of *falāḥ*. This study conceptualizes this dimension as social-distributive solidarity.

Fifth, Restraint of Self-Interest (Q. 59:9 and 64:16). The fifth structure centers on *shuḥḥ al-nafs* (selfish greed). In his commentary on Q. 59:9, Ibn Kathīr states this principle explicitly: *man salima min al-shuḥḥ faqad aflaḥa wa anjaḥ* (whoever is protected from greed has indeed attained success) (Ibn Kathīr 1999). Al-Qurṭubī describes it as *wuqiya shuḥḥ nafsihi wa aflaḥa falāḥan lā khasāra baʿdahu* (being protected from the greed within oneself and attaining a success that is followed by no loss) (al-Qurṭubī 2003). Shihab (2002) explains that greed is inherent in human nature and that those who succeed are the ones whom God protects from it. In his commentary on Q. 64:16, al-Ṭabarī refers to *alladhīna wuqū shuḥḥa anfusihim* (those who are protected from the greed of their own souls) (al-Ṭabarī 2001), while Ibn Kathīr refers readers back to his commentary on Sūrat al-Ḥashr (Ibn Kathīr 1999).

Differences in interpretive scope emerge in the commentaries on Q. 64:16. Al-Qurṭubī confines *shuḥḥ* to reluctance to pay zakat and to fulfill non-obligatory social duties, such as maintaining kinship ties and extending hospitality to guests (al-Qurṭubī 2003). Shihab (2002), by contrast, interprets the verse in relation to children, spouses, and wealth, understanding greed as an attachment to material possessions that must be restrained through piety, obedience, and charitable giving. The passive expressions *wuqiya* and "is protected" in the interpretations of al-Qurṭubī and Shihab suggest that self-restraint involves both human effort and divine protection. Across these interpretations, *shuḥḥ* primarily concerns wealth and giving. Extending its meaning to the broader dominance of self-interest, including the pursuit of status and popularity, is an analytical step taken by this study and justified in the contextualization section; it is not an exegetical claim made by the commentators.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Classical and Contemporary Exegetical Interpretations of the Five *Mufliẖūn* Value Structures

Structure	Foundational Verses	Points of Convergence among Exegetes	Main Differences
Epistemic-Transcendental Orientation	Q. 2:5; 31:5; 7:157	*Falāḥ* is associated with guidance and normative sources.	Ibn Kathīr emphasizes clarity (*baṣīrah*, *bayyinah*, and *minhāj*), while Shihab emphasizes certainty of conviction. Regarding Q. 7:157, al-Ṭabarī emphasizes action, whereas Shihab emphasizes knowledge of the prophetic message.
Moral Accountability	Q. 7:8; 23:102; 28:67; 24:51	Deeds are subject to evaluation; repentance, faith, and righteous deeds constitute necessary conditions.	Ibn Kathīr emphasizes justice and certainty (*ʿasā mujibah*); Shihab interprets the expression as "may"; al-Qurṭubī emphasizes obligatory and recommended duties.
Communal Moral Agency	Q. 3:104 (supported by Q. 9:88)	*Falāḥ* is associated with an active role in calling others to goodness.	Ibn Kathīr identifies a specific group (following al-Ḍaḥḥāk); al-Qurṭubī emphasizes the requirement of knowledge; Shihab stresses exemplary conduct and social-divine criteria.
Social-Distributive Solidarity	Q. 30:38; 59:9	Giving and prioritizing the needs of others are associated with *falāḥ*.	Classical exegesis, in the passages cited, emphasizes the ultimate outcome; Shihab elaborates on rights and acts of giving.

Source: Compiled by the author based on a comparative analysis of the Qur'anic interpretations of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, and M. Quraish Shihab.

The table reveals two patterns. First, differences among the exegetes primarily concern the scope of interpretation, the qualifications required of those who carry out particular duties, and interpretive emphasis, rather than the fundamental connection between *falāḥ* and the qualities associated with it. Second, the foundational verses are interconnected. Q. 59:9 appears in two structures because the same practice, *īthār*, embodies both solidarity and evidence that *shuḥḥ* has been restrained. Shihab's interpretation of Q. 7:8 connects accountability with adherence to divine

guidance, while al-Qurṭubī's interpretation of Q. 3:104 links social engagement to scholarly qualifications. These relationships distinguish this reconstruction from a mere list of characteristics: epistemic orientation provides the foundation; accountability connects that foundation to action; communal agency channels action into collective life; solidarity directs its benefits toward others; and self-restraint limits the dominance of personal interests across these dimensions.

This reconstruction does not propose a new lexical definition of *mufliḥūn*, nor does it claim that classical exegetes or Shihab addressed digital religious authority. The five structures are analytical categories derived from textual patterns and exegetical interpretations, subject to the limitations already noted: the classical exegetical passages cited here consist largely of definitions of *falāḥ*, while extending the concept of *shuḥḥ* to encompass broader forms of self-interest represents an analytical move made by the author. On this basis, these value structures can serve as an evaluative framework in the following section.

Mufliḥūn-Based Religious Legitimacy in Digital Religious Authority

The reconstruction of *mufliḥūn* in the preceding section becomes relevant when situated within the transformation of contemporary religious authority. Research on digital religion shows that technological change does not eliminate established forms of authority. Rather, authority is reconfigured through interactions among inherited religious structures, communicative performance, audience recognition, and technological mediation (Campbell 2007; 2010). This reconfiguration has become increasingly complex on social media, where the acceptance of religious actors no longer depends solely on scholarly competence or institutional affiliation. Studies of Islamic learning, Muslim influencers, cyber-religion, and TikTok daʿwa in Indonesia show that new actors gain recognition through accessibility, interpersonal proximity, visual presentation, and affective connection without necessarily displacing established sources of authority add an audience perspective: learners evaluate sources through networks of social affiliation and considerations of availability and prestige (Muzayana, 2023; Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2020; Zaid et al., 2022). Such assessments signal recognition rather than evaluate the substance of religious knowledge.

The performative dimension is evident in Febrian's study of Indonesian religious influencers (Febrian, 2024). These influencers project authority through familiar and informal visual presentations, combined with strategic distance created through visual-textual contrasts, backgrounds, and framing. Doğan (2026) shows that influencers negotiate visibility, self-presentation, and audience relationships under platform pressures in the attention economy. These strategies can strengthen perceptions of credibility, but they do not, in themselves, establish the epistemic quality of religious claims. Social recognition of authority and the substantive quality of religious knowledge are related, but they are not identical.

Sulfikar & Yasmine (2025) provide a structural explanation through the concept of *platformized religious authority*. Digital religious legitimacy emerges from the interaction of knowledge-based authority, charisma, and platform dynamics. The first dimension rests on epistemic and scholarly capital; the second on performative capacity and affective appeal; and the third on algorithmic visibility, popularity metrics, and the attention economy. AlMazaedh et al. (2026) view digital religion as a sociotechnical ecosystem shaped by platform architecture, actor strategies, symbolic discourse, and audience practices. Syukron et al. (2026) identify a similar hybridization in Qur'anic knowledge production, where *sanad*, scholarly credentials, *pesantren* affiliations, and institutional recognition interact with media visibility and algorithmic circulation. Wahyudi et al. (2025) identify indications of YouTube recommendation personalization based on viewing history, which may reduce information diversity. (Fadilla & Indriyani, 2025) conclude that algorithms

prioritizing engagement can commodify daʿwa, transform its communication styles, and shape forms of trust constructed through algorithmic processes.

These studies provide a strong sociological account of how authority is produced and recognized. This study does not seek to replace them. Normative approaches have also emerged. Kalwar et al. (2026) propose a normative-analytical framework based on fiqh concepts such as *tabayyun*, *amānah*, and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*. Rochmad et al. (2026), meanwhile, formulate principles of *digital sanad*, including source traceability, scholarly accountability, methodological transparency, and the separation of visibility from legitimacy. The *mufliḥūn-based religious legitimacy* framework differs in that it derives from a Qur'anic value structure developed through thematic analysis and comparative exegesis in Section 4.2, while connecting its five dimensions relationally. Rochmad et al. (2026) themselves emphasize that what shifts in the digital era is visibility and perceived authority, not demonstrated epistemic legitimacy. This finding accords with the central distinction advanced in this article. Whereas *platformized religious authority* explains the sources and mechanisms through which legitimacy is produced, the *mufliḥūn* paradigm addresses the normative and evaluative question of how actors exercise the authority they have acquired.

This distinction matters because Sulfikar and Yasmine's three dimensions of authority explain why an actor gains recognition, but public recognition alone does not establish whether that authority is exercised responsibly. Sanna & Lagnado (2025) show that assessments of source reliability are shaped by both expertise and trust. Evaluating legitimacy therefore requires one dimension that examines the foundations of knowledge and another that assesses communicative accountability. The following section presents five evaluative dimensions, each accompanied by preliminary indicators and an illustrative application.

First, Epistemic Validity derives from the epistemic-transcendental orientation. This dimension engages with knowledge-based authority but is not identical to it, because it assesses whether the exercise of authority genuinely rests on knowledge that can be substantiated and held accountable. It comprises three indicators: source accuracy (whether references to Qur'anic verses, hadith, and scholarly opinions are traceable and accurate); evidentiary context (the adequacy of arguments, recognition of differences of opinion, and clear distinctions among religious sources, exegetical interpretations, and personal opinions); and interpretive competence (scholarly qualifications, *sanad*, or references to competent authorities, together with acknowledgment of the limits of one's own authority). Its exegetical basis is evident in Q. 31:5. Ibn Kathīr explains that these people stand *ʿalā baṣīrah wa bayyinah wa manhaj wāḍiḥ* (upon insight, evidence, and a clear (Ibn Kathīr, 1999), al-Qurṭubī emphasizes that those who enjoin goodness must possess knowledge, since not everyone is a scholar (al-Qurṭubī 2003). These interpretations provide a normative foundation for the proposed indicators; they do not imply that the verses address social media.

Second, Communicative Accountability develops from the concept of moral accountability. Digital religious messages can easily be excerpted, reframed, and circulated without context, meaning that responsibility extends beyond the original content. The primary indicator is the willingness to clarify and correct errors. Several cross-contextual studies, none of which focuses specifically on religion and which are therefore used here as indicative references, offer insights into the quality of corrections. Walter & Tukachinsky (2020)find that corrections are more effective when they are coherent, aligned with audience perspectives, delivered by the original source of misinformation, and issued without delay. Dobbs et al. (2026) show that clarifying the nature of an error,whether unintentional, deliberate, or uncertain, influences credibility judgments after correction. Zeng et al. (2024) find that peer corrections are more effective than algorithmic corrections in addressing misinformation from low-credibility sources. These findings inform four

indicators: the speed of response to errors, publication of corrections through the same channel as the original post, transparency about which parts were incorrect, and the provision of context for content that has been excerpted or recirculated.

Third, Orientation toward Social Good derives from communal moral agency. Evaluation shifts from an actor's ability to gain influence to the purposes for which that influence is used. Shihab (2002) interprets Q. 3:104 in terms of criteria that can be operationalized: *al-maʿrūf* refers to noble values recognized as good by society, provided they do not conflict with divine principles, whereas *al-munkar* refers to what society's sound judgment regards as bad. The indicators include the clarity of a content item's social purpose, the consistency of that purpose with normatively defensible values, and whether the content contributes to the common good or instead generates conflict to attract attention. Syukron et al. (2026) note a shift in digital daʿwa toward practical moral pedagogy. This shift creates opportunities for a positive social orientation, but it also requires evaluation.

Fourth, Audience Welfare develops from the concept of social-distributive solidarity. Platform metrics such as follower counts, views, and *engagement* indicate attention, not benefit. The indicators must therefore focus on message recipients: the quality of understanding (whether audiences can explain the message in their own words and distinguish credible sources), a reduction in misunderstandings, the diversity of references available to audiences, and protection of vulnerable groups from the exploitation of their anxieties. The indications of personalization reported by Wahyudi et al. (2025) demonstrate why information diversity should be included as a measure of audience benefit.

Fifth, Restraint of Personal Interests is rooted in the principle of self-restraint. Fadilla et al. (2025) and Doğan (2026) describe the pressures of monetization, self-branding, and visibility within the attention economy. Adapting to these dynamics is not inherently problematic. The problem arises when personal interests determine the substance, framing, or distribution of messages. The indicators include transparency about sponsorships and endorsements, a clear distinction between *daʿwa* content and promotional material, and consistency in substantive content regardless of whether engagement metrics rise or fall. As noted in Section 4.2, extending the meaning of *shuḥḥ* from material wealth to self-interest more broadly is an analytical step taken by this study.

Table 2. Evaluative Dimensions of Mufliẖūn-Based Religious Legitimacy and Their Illustrative Applications

***Mufliẖūn* Structure**	**Evaluative Dimension**	**Evaluative Question**	**Preliminary Indicators**	**Illustrative Application**
Epistemic-transcendental orientation	Epistemic validity	Is religious authority exercised on the basis of knowledge and sources that can be substantiated?	Source accuracy; evidentiary context and differences of opinion; interpretive competence.	Short fatwa videos that cite references, acknowledge differences of opinion, and distinguish personal views from established interpretations, rather than presenting decontextualized

				Qur'anic excerpts.
Moral accountability	Communicative accountability	Are the message, its context, corrections, and their consequences treated responsibly?	Willingness to clarify and correct; promptness and clarity of corrections; context for excerpted content.	Preachers attach corrections to the original post, identify the erroneous section, and adjust the title or thumbnail to match the content.
Communal moral agency	Orientation toward social good	What social purpose does the exercise of religious authority serve?	Clarity of social purpose; consistency with defensible *maʿrūf* values; tendency to foster social cohesion or division.	A series of lectures accompanied by calls for social action or referrals to relevant institutions, rather than conflict-oriented framing designed to attract attention.
Social-distributive solidarity	Audience welfare	Do the benefits genuinely reach and protect the audience?	Quality of understanding; reduction in misunderstandings; diversity of references; protection of vulnerable groups.	Supplementary materials for further study; audience feedback used to assess comprehension rather than relying solely on view counts.
Restraint of self-interest	Restraint of personal interests	To what extent are popularity, branding, and personal financial interests kept in check?	Sponsor transparency; separation of daʿwa content from promotion; consistency of substance despite changes in metrics.	Disclosure of paid partnerships; rejection of sponsors whose interests conflict with religious values; no alteration of content merely to satisfy algorithms.

Source: Developed by the author based on the reconstruction of the five Qur'anic value structures of mufliḥūn and relevant literature on digital religious authority.

This framework does not determine which religious actor possesses the greatest authority, nor does it serve as a ranking instrument. An actor may demonstrate strong knowledge-based authority but weak communicative accountability, while an actor with strong communication skills

and broad reach still requires evaluation in terms of epistemic validity and audience welfare. The five dimensions operate relationally rather than as substitutes for one another: strength in one dimension does not automatically compensate for weakness in another.

This relational approach also enables a proportionate interpretation of technology. Algorithms shape visibility, visual presentation strengthens perceptions of credibility, engagement reflects audience attention, and platforms expand the circulation of religious knowledge. These mechanisms have tangible sociological effects and cannot simply be dismissed. The contribution of the *mufliḥūn* paradigm lies in placing them within a broader evaluation of epistemic quality, communicative responsibility, social purpose, audience benefit, and the interests involved. Platformized religious authority explains how legitimacy is socially produced, whereas *mufliḥūn*-based religious legitimacy evaluates the ethical quality of its exercise. This framework provides the basis for reconstructing digital *daʿwa* methodology in the following section.

From Religious Legitimacy to a Mufliḥūn-Based Methodology of Digital Da'wa

The implications of *mufliḥūn*-based religious legitimacy extend beyond the evaluation of religious authority. They also encompass how digital daʿwa is produced, communicated, circulated, and evaluated. Religious actors use videos, images, audio, *storytelling*, personalization, and *personal branding* to build rapport and *engagement* with audiences (Zaid et al. 2022; Muzayana 2023). These strategies make religious messages more accessible and relevant, but they also situate daʿwa within the attention economy. In a study of urban daʿwa, Haq (2024) shows that its commercial success rests on branding that appeals to young people, scholarly specialization, and social networks built through media.

These conditions become more complex when circulation is mediated by platform infrastructure. *Engagement* metrics, algorithmic visibility, and the attention economy shape platform-based authority, while rankings, recommendations, and amplification influence which religious messages receive exposure (Sulfikar & Yasmine 2025); AlMazaedh et al. 2026); (Syukron et al. 2026). Algorithmic audits in non-religious contexts show that engagement-based rankings amplify emotionally charged content and intergroup hostility (Milli et al., 2025). Theoretical models indicate a trade-off: assigning greater weight to *likes* and *shares* increases *engagement*, but also increases misinformation and polarization (Germano et al., 2026). These cross-contextual findings do not establish that daʿwa operates in the same way. They nevertheless provide a strong reason to treat distribution logic as a methodological concern. Adapting daʿwa to technology, therefore, cannot be reduced to the ability to produce content. The five *mufliḥūn* structures yield five interconnected principles: epistemic validation, communicative contextualization, distributional accountability, corrective participation, and the evaluation of social benefit.

First, Epistemic Validation, derives from the epistemic-transcendental orientation. This principle requires messages to undergo scrutiny of their sources, arguments, exegetical contexts, and the competence of their interpreters before publication. The pressure to produce content quickly and respond to current issues can encourage speed at the expense of verification; a *mufliḥūn*-based methodology rejects this shift in standards. Algorithmic visibility can increase the social authority of an interpretation through views, shares, and emotional responses, but it does not establish its methodological validity. Concerns about instant fatwas and the simplification of religious messages on social media further underscore this need (Rachman et al. 2025). The indicators are source accuracy, evidentiary context, and interpretive competence. Practical implementation can draw on evidence from information literacy research. A meta-analysis of 64 experiments finds that source-credibility assessment interventions are effective (g = 0.42), with

lateral reading, checking a source against other references, producing the largest effect (Fendt et al., 2025). Kozyreva et al. (2024) identify nine types of individual-level interventions against misinformation, including lateral verification and source-credibility labels. At the institutional level. Rhafik et al. (2026) find that collective Qur'anic exegesis platforms derive authority from institutional credibility and editorial mechanisms, whereas individual platforms rely on charismatic figures. Such editorial review can be understood as an institutional form of epistemic validation.
Second, Communicative Contextualization

Second, Communicative Contextualization. This principle addresses the need to preserve substantive content while adapting messages to the characteristics of different media and audiences. Storytelling, multimodal communication, and accessible language can improve comprehension (Zaid et al. 2022). Problems arise, however, when adaptation of form leads to a reduction in substance. Syukron et al. (2026) show that digital Qur'anic discourse often transforms exegesis into advice, motivational messages, or moral reinforcement, while platform dynamics encourage selection, compression, and *affective framing*. This principle distinguishes communicative simplification, which facilitates understanding, from substantive reduction, which removes essential context or complexity. Its indicators include whether the central claim remains accurate when condensed and whether essential context remains available or is linked to a complete version. Visual presentation is also part of this process. (Febrian, 2024b) shows that visual proximity and strategic distance shape perceptions of authority. Visual elements may support communication, but they should not create an impression of authority that exceeds the communicator's actual competence.

Third, Distributional Accountability. This principle arises because digital content rarely remains confined to the initial relationship between the preacher and the audience. Content can be excerpted, recommended by algorithms, reshared, and delivered to audiences that were not anticipated at the time of its creation. Responsibility in daʿwa therefore extends beyond the accuracy of the original message to include how it is framed, titled, excerpted, and released into networked public spaces. Evidence from news contexts is relevant here. Mukherjee et al. (2022) find that emotionally charged headlines receive more shares in experimental settings. However, *clickbait* often prompts audiences to infer manipulative intent and perceive publishers as less competent, resulting in substantially fewer shares on average for clickbait articles. Carcioppolo et al., (2022) find that accurate headlines accompanied by full articles produce the highest levels of comprehension, while corrective information within an article is insufficient to neutralize the effects of a *clickbait* headline. These findings suggest that decisions about headlines, *thumbnails*, and video excerpts have epistemic significance, making prevention preferable to correction after publication. The indicators include consistency between the headline, *thumbnail*, and video clip and the actual content, as well as the availability of links to complete versions. Platform optimization remains possible, but it must be governed by epistemic and moral accountability.

Fourth, Corrective Participation. This principle arises from the ability of digital audiences to respond directly through comments, questions, criticism, and content reproduction. Rhafik et al. (2026) show that audiences of digital Qur'anic exegesis do not merely consume content; they also redistribute and reinterpret it as *prosumers*. Within the *mufliḥūn* paradigm, participation is assessed not by the volume of *engagement*, but by its role in identifying misunderstandings and correcting errors. Studies of community-based fact-checking offer practical insights, although their findings come from non-religious contexts. Drolsbach et al. (2024) find that community notes explaining the reasons behind their assessments are more trusted than simple labels and help users identify misleading posts. Chuai et al., (2026) find that community notes reduce the spread of misleading posts by an average of 61.2% and increase the likelihood of their removal. However, these notes

often appear too late and are less effective on influential accounts. Gao et al. (2026) show that publicly displayed notes accelerate voluntary retractions, largely because of reputational concerns and social pressure. The indicators include publishing corrections through the same channels as the original content, explaining the reasons and sources behind corrections, responding promptly to errors, and distinguishing source-based feedback from objections that are merely popular. The boundary remains clear: the popularity of an objection does not determine its truth.

Fifth, Evaluation of Social Benefit. This principle derives from social-distributive solidarity, which treats benefits to others as part of *falāḥ*. Platform metrics such as followers, views, and *engagement* indicate levels of attention, not the quality of impact. Evaluation must therefore shift from asking "how many people viewed the content" to asking "what happens to audiences after they receive the message." The indicators include the quality of audience understanding, their ability to distinguish credible information, reductions in misunderstanding, and the overall health of the learning environment. Measurement requires caution. In a large-scale national randomized trial (N = 2,666), media literacy interventions produced modest improvements, but after a two-week follow-up, the differences from the control group were no longer statistically distinguishable (Oswald et al. 2026). Fendt et al. (2025) suggest that repeated practice may improve effectiveness. Evaluating social benefit therefore requires repeated measurement rather than a one-time assessment.

Table 3. Methodological Principles for Digital *Daʿwa* Based on the Quranic Concept of *Mufliẖūn*

***Mufliẖūn* Value Structure**	**Methodological Principle**	**Digital Problems Addressed**	**Methodological Function**	**Preliminary Indicators**
Epistemic-transcendental orientation	Epistemic validation	Instant fatwas, misinformation, and authority based on visibility	Ensuring the accuracy of sources, evidentiary context, and arguments before publication	Source accuracy; evidentiary context; acknowledgment of differences of opinion; interpretive competence
Moral accountability	Message and distributional accountability	Clickbait, content excerpts, distorted framing, and decontextualized circulation	Ensuring responsibility for the content, its framing and distribution, and the correction of religious messages	Consistency between headlines, thumbnails, and video content; availability of complete versions; promptness and clarity of corrections
Communal moral agency	Participatory-communal daʿwa	Passive audiences, fragmented discourse, and unproductive digital interaction	Encouraging audience participation in learning, dialogue, clarification, and the production of shared goodness	Well-managed discussion spaces; fact-based participation; collaboration with communities and competent authorities; mechanisms for collective

				correction
Social-distributive solidarity	Orientation toward social benefit and audience protection	Dominance of popularity metrics, unequal access to information, and exploitation of vulnerable groups	Ensuring that daʿwa messages provide benefits and can be accessed and understood by diverse audience groups	Quality of understanding; content accessibility; reduction in misunderstandings; protection of vulnerable groups
Restraint of self-interest	Daʿwa independence and transparency of personal interests	Monetization, personal branding, concealed promotion, and attention-economy pressures	Controlling personal interests so that they do not dominate the substance and purpose of daʿwa	Sponsor transparency; separation of daʿwa content from promotion; disclosure of conflicts of interest; consistency of substantive content despite changes in metrics

Source: Developed by the author based on the five Qur'anic value structures of mufliḥūn and the synthesis of relevant literature on digital daʿwa and platform-mediated communication.

Table 3 shows that the five methodological principles of digital daʿwa derive from the five interconnected value structures of *mufliḥūn*. Epistemic validation establishes the basis of knowledge before a message is published, while message and distributional accountability ensure responsibility for both its content and circulation. Participatory-communal daʿwa positions audiences as participants in learning and the cultivation of the common good. The orientation toward social benefit then ensures that messages provide benefits and protect audiences, while daʿwa independence limits the dominance of personal interests in religious communication. These five principles are supported by communicative contextualization as a cross-cutting approach. This approach adapts language, visuals, and message formats to the characteristics of media and audiences without compromising the substance of religious teachings. Accordingly, a *mufliḥūn*-based digital daʿwa methodology seeks not only to communicate messages effectively but also to preserve epistemic validity, moral responsibility, social participation, social benefit, and integrity in the interests that shape daʿwa practices.

This methodology does not require rejecting technology, visual communication, personalization, algorithmic optimization, professionalization, or monetization. Instead, it evaluates whether these practices remain instruments of responsible communication or begin to determine the substance of daʿwa at the expense of epistemic validity and audience welfare. Transparency in paid partnerships provides a concrete indicator. Giuffredi-Kähr et al. (2022) show that sponsored content reduces trust only when sponsorship remains undisclosed; disclosure eliminates this negative effect. The meta-analysis by Liu & Zhao (2025) offers a more nuanced account: disclosure increases audiences' persuasion knowledge and reduces perceived credibility, while its effect on attitudes is not statistically significant. Transparency can therefore entail short-term reputational costs. Within this framework, such costs are understood as consequences of accountability, not as reasons to conceal commercial interests. A *mufliḥūn*-based digital daʿwa methodology thus shifts the focus from maximizing reach as an end in itself to managing reach responsibly. Success does not

depend on rejecting platform logic, but on using platform *affordances* without allowing algorithmic visibility and the attention economy to displace the epistemic and social orientation of daʿwa.

CONCLUSION.

This study re-examines the Qur'anic concept of *mufliḥūn* through a thematic analysis of thirteen verses and a comparison of classical and contemporary exegesis. The analysis identifies five interrelated dimensions: epistemic-transcendental orientation, moral accountability, communal moral agency, social-distributive solidarity, and restraint of self-interest. These dimensions demonstrate that Qur'anic success extends beyond individual faith or salvation in the Hereafter. It also encompasses how individuals act, fulfil their responsibilities, contribute to society, and restrain their personal interests. The five dimensions therefore constitute an ethical-social framework rather than a new lexical definition of *mufliḥūn*.

The study further demonstrates how these values can inform the evaluation of religious authority in digital spaces. The concept of *mufliḥūn-based religious legitimacy* distinguishes public recognition from the responsible exercise of religious authority. Knowledge, charisma, audience recognition, and platform visibility may enable religious figures to gain influence, but they do not necessarily establish the epistemic quality or ethical integrity of their messages and practices. The proposed framework evaluates the exercise of religious authority through five dimensions: epistemic validity, communicative accountability, orientation toward social good, audience welfare, and restraint of personal interests. These dimensions also provide the foundation for five principles of digital daʿwa: epistemic validation, communicative and distributional accountability, participatory-communal engagement, audience welfare and protection, and restraint of personal interests. Communicative contextualization serves as a cross-cutting principle for adapting messages to digital platforms without compromising their meaning or substantive content.

As a library-based conceptual study, this research has not empirically tested the proposed framework or its indicators. The framework should therefore not be treated as a validated measurement scale or used to rank religious figures. Further research could examine how the five evaluative dimensions and five daʿwa principles operate in the practices of digital preachers, religious influencers, online religious communities, and Qur'anic platforms, including those that use artificial intelligence. Such research would help establish the framework's practical applicability, identify its limitations, and assess its relevance to contemporary digital religious practices.

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