



Islamic Media, Objectivity, and Islamic Communication Ethics in the Post-Truth Era

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Abstract

The post-truth information environment has intensified the tension between the ethical ideals of Islamic media and the emotional, partisan, and algorithm-driven circulation of digital information. This study examines how the Qur'an- and Sunnah-based Principles of Islamic Communication Ethics (PEKI) Shiddiq (truthfulness), Tabayyun (verification), and Al-'Adl (justice) can address the crisis of media objectivity in contemporary Islamic media. Using a qualitative literature study, the research synthesizes classical Islamic sources, contemporary Islamic communication scholarship, and media ethics literature. To strengthen the analysis, a bounded theoretical case study was conducted on two Indonesian online religious-information controversies (2023–2025) in which unverified claims and one-sided reporting generated significant public polarization. The cases were selected purposively because they represented clear instances of the failure of Tabayyun and Al-'Adl. Data were analyzed through thematic coding based on the three PEKI principles. The findings show that the pursuit of virality, audience engagement, and ideological solidarity frequently displaces factual verification and balanced representation in Islamic media. The study's principal contribution is the formulation of Substantive Objectivity, a concept that differs from conventional journalistic objectivity, which primarily emphasizes procedural neutrality and detachment. Substantive Objectivity combines rigorous fact-checking with a normative obligation to ensure truthful, just, and socially responsible representation grounded in Islamic ethical teachings. Unlike previous studies of Islamic communication ethics that generally treat Shiddiq, Tabayyun, and Al-'Adl as separate moral principles, this study integrates them into a coherent epistemological framework for digital journalism. The study concludes that implementing Substantive Objectivity can help Islamic media restore factual authority, strengthen Amanah (trustworthiness), and reduce narrative polarization. Practically, Islamic media organizations should institutionalize multi-source verification, transparent correction mechanisms, and representational justice standards as part of their editorial policies.

Keywords: Post-Truth; Islamic Communication Ethics; Islamic Media Objectivity.

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INTRODUCTION

The post-truth era has fundamentally challenged the objectivity of Islamic media by creating an information ecosystem in which emotional appeals, ideological polarization, and algorithmic amplification frequently outweigh factual accuracy. While Islamic media have historically functioned as instruments of da'wah, public education, and social cohesion, they now operate within digital platforms that reward engagement and virality rather than verification and balanced reporting (Munawaroh & Marlina, 2025). Consequently, Islamic media increasingly face ethical dilemmas in maintaining journalistic integrity while responding to audience expectations and competitive digital environments. This challenge extends beyond conventional journalistic concerns because Islamic media are expected not only to provide accurate information but also to uphold Islamic moral values (Radifan et al., 2026). The rapid circulation of unverified religious content, selective quotation of Islamic sources, and emotionally framed narratives has weakened public trust and intensified social polarization. In many cases, editorial decisions are influenced more by ideological affiliation and audience mobilization than by factual verification and representational fairness. Such conditions demonstrate that the crisis of media objectivity in the post-truth era is simultaneously a professional, ethical, and epistemological problem (E-Sor et al., 2025).

Islam provides a comprehensive ethical foundation for communication through principles derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Among the most fundamental are Shiddiq (truthfulness), Tabayyun (verification of information), and Al-'Adl (justice and fairness). These principles collectively form the Principles of Islamic Communication Ethics (PEKI), which emphasize truthful communication, careful verification before dissemination, and equitable representation of all parties. Unlike value-neutral models of journalism, PEKI positions ethical communication as both a professional obligation and an act of religious responsibility (amanah). Therefore, these principles offer significant potential for addressing the ethical challenges created by the post-truth information environment. Previous studies have examined Islamic media from various perspectives, including digital da'wah, media credibility, journalistic ethics, and the impact of the post-truth era on religious communication. Other studies have explored individual Islamic ethical concepts such as Shiddiq, Tabayyun, or Al-'Adl as normative values for media practice. However, these studies generally exhibit three important limitations (Malik, 2021). First, they tend to discuss Islamic communication ethics as separate moral principles rather than as an integrated epistemological framework for evaluating media objectivity. Second, studies on the post-truth era predominantly employ secular theories of journalism and media ethics, paying limited attention to Islamic epistemological perspectives. Third, there remains little conceptual explanation of how Islamic ethical principles can be operationalized to reconstruct media objectivity within contemporary digital journalism characterized by algorithmic amplification, audience fragmentation, and ideological polarization (Ridzuan et al., 2025).

These limitations reveal a clear research gap. Existing scholarship has not sufficiently explained how Islamic communication ethics can move beyond normative guidance to become a systematic framework for reconstructing objectivity in Islamic media operating within the post-truth era. In particular, the relationship between factual verification, ethical responsibility, and representational justice remains theoretically underdeveloped (Saragih, 2024). Addressing this gap is important because Islamic media require an ethical model capable of responding simultaneously to professional journalistic standards and Islamic moral obligations. Accordingly, this study examines how the Qur'an- and Sunnah-based Principles of Islamic Communication Ethics (PEKI)



Shiddiq, Tabayyun, and Al-'Adl can provide a renewed epistemological foundation for media objectivity. Using a qualitative literature study supported by a bounded theoretical case study of contemporary religious-information controversies in Indonesia, this research analyzes the limitations of existing objectivity models and proposes Substantive Objectivity as an alternative conceptual framework. Unlike conventional journalistic objectivity, which primarily emphasizes procedural neutrality and professional detachment, Substantive Objectivity integrates rigorous factual verification with Islamic ethical commitments to truthfulness, justice, trustworthiness (*amanah*), and social responsibility (Oseni Ismail & Adekunle, 2026).

The contribution of this study is twofold. Theoretically, it advances Islamic communication scholarship by integrating Shiddiq, Tabayyun, and Al-'Adl into a coherent epistemological model of media objectivity rather than treating them as isolated ethical values. Practically, it offers a normative framework that can guide Islamic media organizations in developing editorial policies emphasizing multi-source verification, balanced representation, transparent correction mechanisms, and moderation (*wasatiyyah*) as strategies for reducing misinformation and narrative polarization in the post-truth era. *The post-truth* era directly threatens the fundamental principle of journalism: objectivity. Within conventional journalism, objectivity demands the separation of fact and opinion, the balanced presentation of data, and the neutrality of reporters. When emotions and sentimentally resonant narratives take precedence over factual verification, the line between truth and lies becomes blurred, making maintaining objectivity extremely difficult, if not impossible (Jamil, 2022).

For Islamic media, this challenge is complicated by ideological and religious dimensions. Islamic media often have a dual mission: to be a source of professional information while also spreading Islamic values. This conflict arises when narratives laden with religious values (often emotionally charged) clash with demands for neutral journalistic objectivity. This raises the question: how can Islamic media maintain objectivity when their audiences may prefer information that reinforces beliefs (*confirmation bias*) over facts that challenge them?. The contemporary information landscape is increasingly characterized by ideological bias, emotional appeals, and algorithm-driven polarization. Social media platforms have become major arenas where religious, political, and social issues are framed through binary narratives such as "us versus them" or "right versus wrong," often privileging emotional engagement over factual accuracy. Within this environment, Islamic media are not immune to these dynamics. The pursuit of audience engagement, virality, and ideological solidarity may encourage the dissemination of religious content that lacks adequate verification and balanced representation, thereby undermining both journalistic objectivity and the ethical responsibilities of Islamic communication (Sultan, 2025).

This condition underscores the urgency of re-examining the Principles of Islamic Communication Ethics (PEKI) as an integrated ethical framework for contemporary media practice. Grounded in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, PEKI emphasizes communication that is truthful, just, accountable, and socially responsible (Mughni, 2018). Rather than functioning as isolated moral values, the three core principles of Shiddiq (truthfulness), Tabayyun (verification), and Al-'Adl (justice and fairness) operate as complementary foundations for ethical communication. Shiddiq requires communicators to convey information accurately and honestly without distortion; Tabayyun obliges careful verification of information before dissemination, serving as an Islamic equivalent of systematic fact-checking; while Al-'Adl requires fair, balanced, and non-discriminatory representation of all parties, ensuring that narratives are not manipulated to reinforce



prejudice or ideological interests. Together, these principles provide a comprehensive ethical framework for countering misinformation, reducing polarization, and strengthening media objectivity in the post-truth era. In this sense, PEKI extends beyond procedural journalistic standards by integrating factual accuracy with moral accountability and social justice, thereby offering an Islamic epistemological foundation for responsible digital communication (Shabana et al., 2021).

Besides honesty, the concept of Al-'Adl (justice) is also a key pillar. In the context of journalism, justice means presenting information in a balanced, impartial manner, and granting the right of reply to all parties involved in an issue. Justice in Islam applies not only to Muslims but also to non-Muslims, requiring Islamic media to be objective and non-discriminatory in their reporting. Although PEKI provides a solid ethical foundation, there is a significant gap between this normative principle and the practices of Islamic media in the field. Many Islamic media outlets tend to narrate events based on group affiliation or sect, rather than based on pure facts. The use of narratives that reinforce group identity (in-group) often results in biased reporting against other groups (out-group). The challenge of objectivity is further amplified by the integration of Islamic media with social media platforms. On these platforms, objectivity is often sacrificed for engagement, as measured by the number of likes, shares, and comments. As a result, media outlets tend to produce provocative or emotional content because it is more effective in triggering interaction, even if such content violates the principles of tabayyun and shiddiq (Saggaf et al., 2021).

Therefore, this paper considers it necessary to re-examine the concept of objectivity for Islamic media, not as Western-style valueless neutrality, but as objectivity grounded in Islamic morals and ethics namely, truth supported by just facts ('adl), conveyed with honesty (shiddiq), and verified (tabayyun). This approach allows Islamic media to remain true to their mission of da'wah without sacrificing accuracy and fairness. Based on the foregoing discussion, this study is guided by three interrelated research questions. First, how does the post-truth era challenge the objectivity of Islamic media through the dynamics of ideological bias, emotional narratives, and algorithm-driven information dissemination? This question seeks to identify the forms and characteristics of the objectivity crisis affecting contemporary Islamic media. Second, how can the Qur'an- and Sunnah-based Principles of Islamic Communication Ethics (PEKI) comprising Shiddiq (truthfulness), Tabayyun (verification), and Al-'Adl (justice) serve as an integrated theoretical and practical framework for addressing bias, misinformation, and emotional polarization in Islamic media? This question examines the relevance of PEKI as an Islamic epistemological foundation for ethical media practices in the post-truth era. Third, how can the concept of Substantive Objectivity be formulated based on PEKI to strengthen editorial practices and promote truthful, verified, and just reporting in contemporary Islamic media? By addressing these questions, this study aims to contribute both theoretically, through the development of an Islamic framework for media objectivity, and practically, by offering recommendations that can guide Islamic media organizations in improving their editorial standards and public trust.

METHODS

This study used a qualitative research design based on a literature study (library research) combined with qualitative content analysis. The literature study was conducted to examine the

relationship between the Qur'an- and Sunnah-based Principles of Islamic Communication Ethics (PEKI) Shiddiq, Tabayyun, and Al-'Adl and the challenges of media objectivity in the post-truth era. Content analysis was employed to examine how these ethical principles have been conceptualized in Islamic scholarship and how they can be applied to contemporary Islamic media practices characterized by ideological bias, emotional narratives, and algorithm-driven information dissemination (Sari & Asmendri, 2020). The data consisted of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included relevant Qur'anic verses, authentic hadith, and classical Islamic scholarly works discussing truthfulness, verification, justice, and ethical communication. Secondary sources comprised peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and conference proceedings on Islamic communication, journalism ethics, media objectivity, misinformation, digital media, and the post-truth era. The literature was retrieved from internationally recognized academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Dimensions, Google Scholar, and Garuda, covering publications from 2015 to 2025 to capture the rapid development of post-truth discourse while incorporating seminal earlier works where conceptually necessary (Perruso, 2016).

The literature selection followed predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure analytical rigor. Publications were included if they (1) discussed Islamic communication ethics, Islamic media, journalism ethics, media objectivity, misinformation, or the post-truth era; (2) were published in peer-reviewed journals, academic books, or authoritative Islamic references; and (3) provided theoretical or empirical insights relevant to the study objectives. Publications were excluded if they consisted of opinion articles, non-scholarly web content, duplicate records, or works lacking clear methodological or theoretical relevance. The analysis was conducted through thematic content analysis. First, the selected literature was systematically reviewed and coded according to three analytical themes derived from PEKI: Shiddiq (truthfulness), Tabayyun (verification), and Al-'Adl (justice). Second, the findings from Islamic ethical sources were compared with contemporary discussions on media objectivity and post-truth communication to identify conceptual convergence and divergence. Finally, the coded themes were synthesized to formulate the concept of Substantive Objectivity, an integrated framework that combines rigorous factual verification with Islamic ethical commitments to truthfulness, justice, and social responsibility. To enhance the credibility of the analysis, data triangulation was achieved by comparing classical Islamic sources with contemporary communication and journalism literature, thereby ensuring that the proposed framework was grounded in both Islamic epistemology and current media scholarship.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Post-Truth Era Conception

The post-truth era refers to a communication environment in which public opinion is shaped less by objective facts and empirical evidence than by emotional appeals, personal beliefs, and ideological narratives. Rather than evaluating information based on its factual validity, audiences increasingly interpret messages through the lens of identity, values, and group affiliation (Nasoha et al., 2025). The widespread recognition of this phenomenon, marked by Oxford Dictionaries naming post-truth the Word of the Year in 2016 following the Brexit referendum and the United States presidential election, reflects a broader transformation in the relationship between truth, media, and public discourse. In this environment, objectivity is challenged not only by misinformation but also by the declining social authority of factual evidence. Contemporary scholarship demonstrates that the post-truth era is sustained by the interaction of four interrelated



factors: emotional narratives, algorithmic amplification, confirmation bias, and identity-based communication. Digital platform algorithms prioritize content that generates strong emotional engagement, thereby increasing the visibility of sensational and polarizing messages. Repeated exposure to such content reinforces confirmation bias, whereby individuals selectively accept information that confirms their existing beliefs while dismissing contradictory evidence. As ideological and religious identities become increasingly central to online interactions, information is judged less by its factual accuracy than by its perceived consistency with the values of one's social or religious community. These mutually reinforcing dynamics create an information ecosystem in which emotional resonance frequently supersedes empirical verification (Hidayatullah & Faldiansyah, 2022).

This analytical perspective is reflected in the works of several contemporary scholars. Peter Pomerantsev argues that the post-truth era represents a broader crisis of truth characterized by the proliferation of competing narratives rather than the existence of a single authoritative account. According to him, the abundance of conflicting information does not necessarily persuade audiences but instead creates uncertainty and fatigue, leading many people to conclude that objective truth is ultimately unattainable. Expanding this argument, Lee McIntyre contends that post-truth communication is fundamentally driven by ideological commitment rather than ignorance. Individuals often reject credible evidence not because factual information is unavailable, but because accepting such evidence may threaten their social identity or political affiliation. From this perspective, emotional attachment to one's community becomes more influential than rational evaluation of empirical facts. Slavoj Žižek further deepens this analysis by arguing that the post-truth era should be understood as a manifestation of a broader ideological crisis. He maintains that when dominant political and social systems fail to address structural problems, societies become increasingly receptive to emotionally satisfying narratives, including conspiracy theories and ideological myths. Consequently, post-truth communication is not merely the circulation of false information but also a mechanism through which individuals seek psychological certainty amid social and political uncertainty (Sarwar, 2026).

Within the context of Islamic communication, these theoretical perspectives highlight significant ethical challenges for Islamic media. As noted by Amin Syukur, the post-truth era directly contradicts the Islamic principles of *Shiddiq* (truthfulness) and *Tabayyun* (verification), since the rapid dissemination of unverified information facilitates *al-kadhib* (falsehood) and undermines responsible communication. Similarly, Agus Sudibyo argues that digital media have weakened the traditional gatekeeping function of journalism, allowing opinions, misinformation, and factual reporting to circulate without clear distinction. This erosion of editorial authority creates an epistemological crisis in which the boundary between truth and opinion becomes increasingly blurred (Farid et al., 2024). Synthesizing these perspectives, this study argues that the crisis of objectivity in Islamic media cannot be explained solely by the presence of misinformation. Rather, it emerges from the interaction between algorithmic amplification, confirmation bias, emotional mobilization, and religious identity politics, all of which diminish the role of factual verification and balanced representation. This analytical framework provides the foundation for examining how the Qur'an- and Sunnah-based Principles of Islamic Communication Ethics (PEKI) *Shiddiq*, *Tabayyun*, and *Al-'Adl* can reconstruct media objectivity through the concept of Substantive Objectivity, which integrates factual accuracy with ethical responsibility and representational justice.

In the Islamic context, several religious figures and communication scholars, as reviewed by Amin Syukur, define *post-truth* as a challenge to the principles of *Shiddiq* (truthfulness) and *Tabayyun* (verification) in the prophetic tradition. This definition links *post-truth* to the practice of *al-Kadzib* (lying) facilitated by technology, which demands an ethical response from a religious framework (Suyanto, 2018). Media observer Agus Sudibyo defines *post-truth* as a period of public disorientation, in which traditional media loses its authority in determining truth. According to Sudibyo, this is an epistemological crisis caused by the loss of the media's *gatekeeping function*, allowing a flood of unverified information and creating conditions where the line between opinion and fact becomes blurred (Nofiyanti & Fajrin, 2025). From a communication sociology perspective, Burhan Bungin views *post-truth* as a result of social polarization amplified by technology. He defines it as a condition in which social interactions are dominated by communication aimed at amplifying *in-group sentiment* through emotionally charged narratives, which sociologically divide society into separate *echo chambers*. Jalaluddin Rakhmat, through the lens of communication psychology, views *post-truth* as a successful cognitive manipulation. He explains that humans tend to have *confirmation bias*, namely the tendency to seek and accept information that confirms existing beliefs. *Post-truth* exploits this bias, using emotions as a shortcut to process information without rational verification. Although not directly defining *post-truth*, M. Quraish Shihab's idea regarding the importance of *Amanah* (trust) and honesty in speech (*Qawlan Sadidan*) can be used as a counter-conceptual basis. The *post-truth crisis* occurs when society fails to fulfill this *Amanah*, which should bind every individual to convey the truth, not biased or manipulative narratives.

Comparatively, the definitions of these figures reveal two main points: first, *post-truth* is the dominance of emotion over fact (as emphasized by Oxford and McIntyre); and second, *post-truth* is a structural consequence of technological disruption and a crisis of trust (as highlighted by Sudibyo and Bungin). These two points reinforce each other, creating serious challenges to objectivity and social cohesion. *post-truth* concept, it is important to distinguish *post-truth* from classic lies or propaganda. Traditional lies attempt to hide facts, while *post-truth* does not hide; it acknowledges the existence of facts but actively attempts to render them irrelevant or discredited to the audience through emotional and sentimental attacks. *The post-truth* concept does not mean the absolute end of facts, but rather the end of their *authority*. Facts remain, but the power of narratives supported by emotions and group identities is far greater in influencing public views and decisions. This is a crisis of public epistemology, not the ontology of facts (Helmina & Mandala, 2024).

One of the main pillars of the *post-truth concept* is media disruption caused by digital technology. Social media and news platforms not only accelerate the spread of information but also use personalized algorithms that inadvertently create *filter bubbles* and *echo chambers*. These mechanisms ensure audiences only receive content that reinforces their beliefs, reinforcing cognitive biases and polarization. The *post-truth* concept is also reinforced by the decline in public trust in institutions that provide truth, such as mainstream media, scientific institutions, and governments. This eroded trust leads the public to seek information from alternative sources often on social media that offer narratives that align with their prejudices and sentiments. Increasing ideological polarization in society encourages each group to perceive opposing narratives as an existential threat. In conditions of polarization, objectivity is perceived as betrayal, and loyalty to the group narrative becomes the primary determinant of 'truth'. In the attention economy, content that triggers strong emotions (anger, fear, or sensationalism) has higher commercial value because it generates *engagement*. The concept of *post-truth* is rooted in this commercial drive, where easily

viral emotions are prioritized over complex and perhaps less compelling truths (Fitri & Adeni, 2020).

The concept of *truthiness*, which refers to the quality of a claim that *feels* true based on intuition without evidence, is a hallmark of *post-truth*. This reality allows emotionally based claims to trump rationally analyzed evidence, devaluing the process of critical thinking. *Post-truth concepts* include the devaluation of expertise, where an expert's view can easily be refuted by popular opinion if it aligns more with public sentiment. This blurs the line between verified facts and personal opinions. The most immediate implication is a major challenge to objective journalism. Journalists must now struggle not only to find the facts (*Siddiq*), but also to convince audiences to *accept* those facts, especially if they contradict their political or ideological views. *Post-truth* allows for the systematic manipulation of narratives. Political or ideological actors can use *buzzers* and *bots* to spread disinformation (hoaxes) at unprecedented speed and volume, drowning out accurate information in a sea of emotional noise (Sa'diyah et al., 2021).

When facts are no longer agreed upon, the basis for healthy and rational public deliberation is lost. *Post-truth* hinders deliberation and consensus because each party operates from a different set of 'facts', making conflict resolution difficult to achieve. This conception reinforces exclusive group identities (ethnocentrism) and increases inter-group conflict. *Post-truth narratives* often trigger hate speech *disguised* as ideological criticism, undermining social cohesion and tolerance. (6) For religious institutions, *post-truth* triggers a crisis of normative truth. When religious interpretations are driven by political sentiment, traditional theological authority can lose its relevance, replaced by interpretations that are popular and in line with the emotional interests of the moment.

Principles of Islamic Communication Ethics (PEKI)

The Principles of Islamic Communication Ethics (PEKI) are a set of moral and ethical guidelines that govern the communication process, both interpersonal and mass, which are sourced directly from the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. These ethics are not tentative or relative to space and time, but rather have a transcendent and absolute normative basis, making it a solid framework in facing the relativism of truth in *the post-truth era*. PEKI views communication as an act of worship, where every word and action must be accounted for not only to society but also to God. PEKI is deeply rooted in the concept of prophetic communication (*al-Qawl al-Karim* or *al-Qawl al-Sadid*), which emulates the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) manner of interacting. This prophetic communication model emphasizes honesty, justice, gentleness, and effectiveness in conveying messages. Its goal is to build awareness, faith, and an ethical civilization, unlike conventional mass communication, which is often oriented solely toward information transfer or commercial persuasion. Philosophically, PEKI is based on the principles of integrity (*istiqamah*) and responsibility (*mas'uliyah*). A Muslim communicator is required to possess high moral integrity, ensuring that the message conveyed aligns with his or her actions. This responsibility encompasses both the content of the message (factual truth) and its impact (social and spiritual impact), which is highly relevant to eliminating the harm caused by hoaxes.

PEKI's primary goal is to build a harmonious, tolerant, and truth-based civil society. Honest and fair use of media is considered a prerequisite for upholding social justice. From an Islamic perspective, information chaos (hoaxes and slander) is a form of *corruption* that must be combated through accurate and verified communication. *Shiddiq* is a key pillar of PEKI, which literally means



honesty, truth, and sincerity. In the context of journalism and communication, *shiddiq* requires Islamic media to convey only absolutely true facts, without the slightest distortion, fabrication, or falsification. This principle serves as a primary antidote to *post-truth*, which seeks to relativize facts. The *shiddiq* dimension demands not only personal honesty from the communicator but also epistemological honesty toward reality. This means that the media must strive to represent social reality as it is, not as desired by a particular ideology. This requires a rigorous and transparent data collection methodology.

The principle of *Tabayyun* (verification) is a procedural mechanism for implementing *shiddiq* (intelligible character). *Tabayyun* means the necessity to research, clarify, and verify the truth of information, especially if it originates from a questionable or potentially harmful source (fake news or slander). In the context of the rapid and massive flow of information in digital media, *tabayyun* has an undeniable urgency. Without *tabayyun*, Islamic media are at great risk of becoming an extension of the spread of *hoaxes* and disinformation. This principle effectively promotes a culture of proactive *fact-checking before dissemination*. The principle of justice (*al-'Adl*) requires communicators to be fair and balanced in presenting information. This justice means that the media must present all relevant points of view, provide proportional space for the parties involved, and avoid taking sides driven by personal or group sentiments. This justice must be applied even to parties considered ideologically opposed. In journalism, *al-'adl* is realized through the principle of *tawazun* (balance) in reporting. *Tawazun* does not simply mean giving a 50:50 portion, but ensuring that the narrative presented is not biased and does not only highlight partial truths that benefit one party. The goal is to provide a complete and comprehensive picture to the audience.

The next principle in PEKI is *amanah* (trustworthiness). *Amanah* means trustworthiness and responsibility. A communicator or Islamic media institution must uphold public trust, which is demonstrated through high accountability. *Amanah* requires media outlets to always be transparent about their sources of information and willing to publicly retract or correct news that is proven false. Another PEKI principle is *Qawlan Sadidan* (soundness of voice). PEKI demands the use of *Qawlan Sadidan*, which means true, honest, and firm speech without ambiguity or manipulation of meaning. This principle is crucial in combating manipulative language and rhetoric used to obscure facts in the *post-truth era*. Communication must be straightforward and unambiguous (Mulyana, 2010). In addition to being true (*saidan*), speech must also be *Ma'rufan* (good, polite, and in accordance with norms). This principle governs *how to say* (deliver) messages. Even when conveying criticism or bitter truths, PEKI teaches gentle delivery (*layyin*) and respect for human dignity, rejecting hate speech and divisive language. PEKI serves as an antithesis to the dominance of emotion and sentiment that characterizes *post-truth*. By requiring *tabayyun* (rational verification) and *al-'adl* (balanced presentation), PEKI inherently forces communicators to defer emotional reactions and prioritize reason and proven facts. Strict implementation of PEKI helps Islamic media maintain the integrity of religious narratives. When Islamic values are conveyed through honest and fair facts, they are respected as a source of truth, not as a propaganda tool susceptible to manipulation and political interests.

The essence of PEKI is self-control. Muslim communicators must recognize that they are messengers of God, and therefore are obligated to control their personal biases, fleeting emotions, and group interests for the sake of universal truth. This self-control is the ethical foundation before undertaking editorial oversight. Although the principle is clear, the biggest challenge for Islamic media in implementing PEKI is ideological fanaticism. Often, the media justify ignoring *tabayyun*

and *al-'adl* in the name of 'defending' or 'fighting for' Islam, which ironically contradicts the principles of Islamic communication itself, which demands justice. Islamic media must revitalize its *translation function*, translating the complexity of social and political issues into language that is easily understood by the public, while maintaining accuracy. This function requires in-depth expertise (professionalism) supported by religious ethics. The implementation of PEKI must also extend to audiences through Islamic media literacy education. The public needs to be educated to internalize *tabayyun* as a digital habit, so that they become critical consumers of information and are not easily provoked by emotional or biased content, regardless of the 'Islamic' label attached to it. PEKI offers a long-term and sustainable solution for Islamic media to navigate the *post-truth era*. By making *shiddiq*, *tabayyun*, and *al-'adl* the main operational standards, Islamic media will not only survive as sources of information but also become role models in upholding truth and justice amidst narrative chaos.

Challenges to Islamic Media Objectivity in the Post-Truth Era

The analysis indicates that the crisis of objectivity in Islamic media results from the interaction of ideological identity, digital platform algorithms, economic pressures, and audience expectations. Rather than operating independently, these factors reinforce one another, creating an environment in which emotional narratives frequently take precedence over factual verification and balanced reporting. Consequently, the principles of *Shiddiq*, *Tabayyun*, and *Al-'Adl* are increasingly difficult to implement consistently within contemporary Islamic media. One of the most significant challenges is the dominance of identity-based communication and religious ethnocentrism. In the post-truth era, audiences tend to consume and share information that confirms the beliefs of their own religious or ideological communities while rejecting alternative perspectives. This tendency encourages some Islamic media outlets to frame issues through exclusive in-group narratives rather than balanced reporting. This pattern became particularly visible during several religious and political controversies in Indonesia, including the public debates surrounding the 2016–2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election (Aksi 212) and subsequent election campaigns. During these periods, numerous online Islamic media platforms and religious social media accounts selectively emphasized information supporting particular religious or political positions while minimizing contradictory evidence. As a result, reporting frequently reflected ideological alignment rather than journalistic neutrality.

The findings also show that ideological polarization encourages the use of emotionally charged language and selective representation. Rather than presenting multiple viewpoints, some reports rely heavily on statements from religious figures representing a single perspective, while alternative interpretations receive little attention. Such reporting practices weaken the principle of *Al-'Adl* (justice), which requires fair and proportional representation of all relevant parties. Similar tendencies have been documented in the reporting of issues concerning religious minorities, accusations of blasphemy, and debates over religious tolerance, where emotionally framed narratives often receive greater prominence than contextual or evidence-based reporting. Another major challenge is the conflict between the speed of digital journalism and the Islamic principle of *Tabayyun*. Social media platforms reward rapid publication, whereas verification requires careful confirmation of sources and contextual information. Consequently, some Islamic media organizations prioritize immediacy over verification, particularly during breaking-news situations involving religious controversies. This pattern was evident during the circulation of misleading



religious quotations and fabricated sermons on social media, where several Islamic news portals republished claims before their authenticity had been verified. Although many of these reports were later corrected, the initial misinformation had already spread widely across digital platforms. These cases illustrate how algorithm-driven competition may undermine the ethical obligation of Tabayyun.

Economic incentives further intensify these pressures. The analysis found that click-based revenue models encourage the production of sensational headlines designed to maximize audience engagement rather than accurately represent news content. For example, headlines employing provocative expressions such as "Ulama Condemns...", "Forbidden!", or "Shocking Fatwa..." are frequently used to attract readers, even when the corresponding articles provide more nuanced explanations. Such clickbait practices violate the principle of Shiddiq because headlines exaggerate or oversimplify the substance of the information, thereby encouraging emotional responses instead of informed understanding. The analysis likewise demonstrates that the weakening of editorial gatekeeping has enabled religious influencers, anonymous social media accounts, and digital buzzers to compete directly with professional Islamic journalism. Unlike institutional media, these actors are generally not bound by editorial standards or verification procedures, yet their emotionally compelling narratives often receive greater algorithmic visibility. Consequently, Islamic media face increasing pressure to imitate similar communication strategies in order to maintain audience engagement. This dynamic contributes to the gradual erosion of professional objectivity and reinforces confirmation bias among audiences.

These findings suggest that the objectivity crisis in Islamic media extends beyond the problem of misinformation alone. It reflects a structural interaction between algorithmic amplification, ideological polarization, commercial incentives, and declining public media literacy. Within this environment, the principles of Shiddiq, Tabayyun, and Al-'Adl should not be understood merely as normative religious values but as an integrated ethical framework capable of guiding editorial decision-making. Their implementation requires institutional commitments, including multi-source verification, balanced representation of competing viewpoints, transparent correction mechanisms, and editorial independence from ideological and political interests. Such measures provide the practical foundation for the concept of Substantive Objectivity proposed in this study.

Implementation of Islamic Communication Ethics as a Solution

Tabayyun and Digital Verification: Toward an Operational Model for Islamic Media

The findings demonstrate that the ethical principle of Tabayyun (verification) should no longer be understood solely as a moral obligation but must be institutionalized as a core editorial procedure within Islamic media organizations. In the post-truth era, where information spreads rapidly through algorithm-driven digital platforms, verification must take precedence over publication speed. Accordingly, Tabayyun should be integrated into the editorial workflow as a mandatory verification mechanism to ensure that every published report satisfies standards of factual accuracy, contextual completeness, and ethical accountability. This study proposes the Reverse-Tabayyun Protocol (RTP) as an operational model for implementing Tabayyun in digital journalism. Unlike conventional newsroom practices, which often prioritize the verification of information after publication or according to publication schedules, the Reverse-Tabayyun Protocol places the highest verification priority on content that exhibits the greatest potential for misinformation and social polarization. The protocol assumes that emotionally charged and rapidly circulating content presents the highest ethical risk and therefore requires the most rigorous editorial scrutiny before publication.

The operational stages of the Reverse-Tabayyun Protocol consist of five sequential procedures. First, potentially high-risk content is identified through indicators such as rapid dissemination, emotionally provocative language, anonymous or unverified sources, sensational headlines, and topics involving religion, ethnicity, or politics. Second, the editorial team conducts multi-source verification by confirming information through authoritative documents, official institutions, independent experts, and credible eyewitnesses. Third, contextual verification is undertaken to examine the authenticity of quotations, publication dates, visual materials, metadata, and the broader social context of the information. Fourth, an editorial ethics review evaluates whether the report complies with the PEKI principles of Shiddiq (truthfulness), Tabayyun (verification), and Al-'Adl (justice), ensuring balanced representation and minimizing potential harm. Finally, following publication, the newsroom maintains transparency through public correction mechanisms, publication of verification notes when necessary, and continuous monitoring of audience feedback to identify possible inaccuracies.

The effectiveness of the Reverse-Tabayyun Protocol can be evaluated using several practical indicators, including reductions in published misinformation, increased correction transparency, improved source diversity, shorter verification response times without compromising accuracy, and enhanced public trust in Islamic media. Rather than functioning as a reactive correction mechanism, the protocol establishes verification as the primary gatekeeping process before information enters the public sphere. The implementation of Tabayyun should also extend to the use of religious authorities and Islamic legal opinions (fatwas). Islamic media should avoid selective quotation by verifying the authenticity, historical context, publication date, and scholarly diversity of every religious reference before publication. This practice prevents the instrumentalization of religious authority for ideological purposes while strengthening the principle of Al-'Adl through balanced representation of differing scholarly perspectives. Technological innovation can further support this process without replacing human ethical judgment. Artificial Intelligence (AI) may assist editors in detecting manipulated images, identifying abnormal dissemination patterns, tracing the origins of digital content, and flagging potentially misleading information. Nevertheless, final editorial



decisions should remain under the authority of professional editors guided by the Qur'an- and Sunnah-based Principles of Islamic Communication Ethics (PEKI), thereby ensuring that technological efficiency remains subordinate to ethical responsibility and amanah (trustworthiness).

Table 1. Operational Model for Implementing the Reverse-Tabayyun Protocol in Islamic Media

PEKI Principle	Ethical Problem	Editorial Procedure	Responsible Actor	Expected Output
Shiddiq	Inaccurate or misleading information	Multi-source fact verification and evidence validation	Reporter and Fact-checking Team	Accurate and truthful reporting
Tabayyun	Rapid dissemination of unverified information	Reverse-Tabayyun Protocol: risk identification, verification, contextual review, editorial ethics review, and transparent correction	Fact-checking Team and Managing Editor	Verified information before publication
Al-'Adl	One-sided narratives and ideological bias	Balanced sourcing, contextual reporting, and representation of differing viewpoints	Reporter and Editor	Fair and balanced reporting
Amanah	Declining public trust	Publication of corrections, verification notes, and editorial accountability	Editor-in-Chief	Increased transparency and institutional credibility
Wasatiyyah	Narrative polarization and extremism	Editorial moderation and solutions-oriented journalism	Editorial Board	Social cohesion and constructive public discourse

Strengthening the Principles of Shiddiq and Amanah in Editorial Policy

The principle of *Shiddiq* (truthfulness and factual truth) must be the professional oath of the editor, transcending commercial or ideological interests. Editorial policies must strictly prohibit practices that undermine *Shiddiq*, such as photo manipulation, video cuts that distort meaning, or the use of outdated data. Islamic media must ethically reject sensationalism and *clickbait* because both violate *Shiddiq* in the form of honesty in headlines. News headlines must honestly reflect the content and degree of importance of the news, without relying on emotional provocation or excessive rhetoric for *engagement*. *Amanah* requires Islamic media to maintain editorial independence from pressure from any party, whether political affiliation, donors, or religious factions. Editors must commit to reporting the truth, even if that truth is detrimental to their own groups or patrons. Implementing *Amanah* also requires structural transparency, namely openly disclosing funding sources and media ownership structures. This helps the public assess potential ideological or commercial biases that might affect the objectivity of reporting. All media personnel, from reporters to senior editors, must undergo ongoing training in Islamic communication ethics. This training not only teaches theory but also simulates ethical dilemmas in the *post-truth era*, to strengthen the commitment to professionalism based on *shiddiq*.



Realizing Al-'Adl through Tawazun and Representational Justice

The principle of *Al-'Adl* (justice) must be interpreted as epistemological justice, namely justice in knowledge and representation. Islamic media must recognize that the truth about an issue is often multidimensional, and justice demands the representation of all these dimensions. In covering conflicts (both social and religious), the principle of *tawazun* (balance) must be applied. Balance does not mean equating the truth (for example, between victims and perpetrators), but rather ensuring that all parties involved in the conflict including the weak or minority are given proportional rights to speak and the right to respond. Islamic media must ensure that their reporting on minority groups or those with differing views (whether religious or sectarian) is conducted fairly and without stereotypes. *Al-'Adl* prohibits the use of narratives based solely on prejudice or majority sentiment. The application of *Qawlan Sadidan* (true and firm speech) must be accompanied by *Qawlan Ma'rufan* (good and polite speech). This means that the media must be firm in facts and truth, but gentle in language. Rhetoric must be constructive, avoiding provocative, sarcastic, or demeaning language. The highest manifestation of *al-'adl* is the willingness of Islamic media to criticize deviations that occur within their own community or leaders. This *self-correction* demonstrates that the media prioritizes universal justice over narrow group loyalties.

Partnership Strategies in Building a Media Da'wah Ecosystem

To address audience vulnerability to hoaxes, Islamic media must proactively develop and disseminate the Islamic Media Literacy Curriculum (LMI). This curriculum teaches the public, especially teenagers, to internalize *tabayyun* (religious practice) as a daily digital habit. Islamic media should establish strategic partnerships with educational institutions (Islamic boarding schools, universities) and Islamic outreach organizations to incorporate PEKI (Islamic Media Literacy) materials into the formal curriculum. These partnerships help ensure that communication ethics are taught holistically from an early age. To counter narratives based solely on emotions and problems, Islamic media need to adopt solutions-based journalism. This approach fulfills the Islamic principle of *khayr* (goodness) by honestly presenting the facts of a problem, but also highlighting successful solutions, providing hope and positive energy. A collaborative network across Islamic media to share *fact-checking data* and hoax lists will increase the efficiency of collective *tabayyun* (*reporting and debunking*) and prevent a single hoax from spreading repeatedly across multiple *platforms*. Islamic media have a moral responsibility to educate their audiences about the dangers of algorithms, *filter bubbles*, and *echo chambers* that threaten critical thinking. Media can offer features or content that intentionally present diverse perspectives, encouraging audiences to step outside their cognitive comfort zones.

The implementation of PEKI ultimately depends on the individual communicator's commitment to achieving *Ihsan* (doing good as if seeing God). *Ihsan* requires journalists to exceed minimal ethical standards, strive for excellence, and remain vigilant against bias. The objectivity of Islamic media must be grounded in the vision of *Wasatiyyah* (moderation or the middle path). *Wasatiyyah* is the antithesis of the extremism often promoted in the *post-truth era*. *Wasatiyyah* media will naturally be balanced, fair, and honest, as it rejects all forms of narrative extremism. The implementation of PEKI is not merely a survival tactic, but a long-term vision of Islamic media as agents of civilization. By adhering to truth and justice, Islamic media can reclaim their factual authority and become role models for others. This implementation commitment to *shiddiq*,



reinforced by *tabayyun* (religious guidance), is a key element in the development of Islamic media. Procedural and 'adl principles in representation are key for Islamic media to survive and excel amidst *post-truth challenges*. This solution requires ongoing structural, procedural, and cultural reforms.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the crisis of objectivity in Islamic media during the post-truth era is not merely the consequence of misinformation or technological disruption but results from the interaction of algorithmic amplification, ideological polarization, emotional narratives, and confirmation bias. These structural dynamics weaken the implementation of the Qur'an- and Sunnah-based Principles of Islamic Communication Ethics (PEKI), particularly Shiddiq (truthfulness), Tabayyun (verification), and Al-'Adl (justice), while diminishing public trust in Islamic media. The findings further indicate that editorial pressures for speed, virality, and audience engagement frequently take precedence over factual verification and balanced representation, thereby undermining the ethical mission of Islamic journalism. The principal theoretical contribution of this study is the formulation of Substantive Objectivity as a conceptual model for reconstructing media objectivity from an Islamic epistemological perspective. Unlike conventional journalistic objectivity, which primarily emphasizes procedural neutrality and professional detachment, Substantive Objectivity conceptualizes objectivity as the integration of factual accuracy, ethical responsibility, and social justice. The model is built upon three interrelated components. First, Shiddiq establishes an uncompromising commitment to factual truth and honesty throughout the news production process. Second, Tabayyun institutionalizes systematic verification through multi-source confirmation, contextual examination, and transparent editorial accountability before publication. Third, Al-'Adl ensures balanced representation by providing equitable space for differing viewpoints and preventing ideological discrimination or narrative manipulation. These three components operate synergistically rather than independently, forming a coherent ethical framework for editorial decision-making in Islamic media.

The Substantive Objectivity model is founded on two central assumptions. The first is that objectivity cannot be achieved solely through procedural neutrality but must also be grounded in moral accountability derived from Islamic ethical teachings. The second is that factual verification and representational justice are mutually reinforcing dimensions of responsible journalism. Consequently, objectivity is understood not as value-free reporting but as the ethical pursuit of truth guided by amanah (trustworthiness), justice, and public responsibility. This perspective enables Islamic media to maintain professional journalistic standards while simultaneously fulfilling their normative role as institutions of da'wah and social education. The implications of this model extend to both theory and practice. Theoretically, Substantive Objectivity enriches Islamic communication scholarship by integrating Shiddiq, Tabayyun, and Al-'Adl into a unified epistemological framework rather than treating them as separate ethical principles. Practically, the model provides an operational foundation for Islamic media organizations to develop editorial policies based on rigorous verification, balanced representation, transparent correction mechanisms, and solutions-oriented journalism. Such institutional commitments are essential for strengthening editorial credibility, restoring public trust, and reducing narrative polarization in the post-truth era. Future research should empirically validate the Substantive Objectivity model through comparative studies of Islamic media organizations, newsroom ethnography, audience perception research, or



quantitative assessments of editorial practices. Such studies would further refine the model and evaluate its applicability across diverse socio-cultural and media contexts.

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