



Al-Ahnaf: Journal of Islamic Education, Learning and Religious Studies

Vol. 2 No. 3 (2025)	ISSN: 3063-3389
DOI: https://doi.org/10.61166/ahnaf.v2i3.34	pp. 326-336

Research Article

The Ḥadīth al-Ifk and the Contemporary Challenge of Hoaxes: A Study of Fakhruddin al-Razi's Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb

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Received : November 6, 2025

Revised : November 13, 2025

Accepted : November 8, 2025

Available online : Desember 10, 2025

How to Cite: Baehaki, A., & Mubarak, M. L. The Ḥadīth al-Ifk and the Contemporary Challenge of Hoaxes: A Study of Fakhruddin al-Razi's Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb. *Al-Ahnaf: Journal of Islamic Education, Learning and Religious Studies*, 2(3), 326–336. <https://doi.org/10.61166/ahnaf.v2i3.34>

Abstract

This article explores the relevance of classical Qur'anic exegesis to contemporary challenges of misinformation, focusing on Fakhruddin al-Razi's interpretation of Q.S. al-Nūr [24]:11–20 concerning the ḥadīth al-ifk the slander against Aisyah r.a. In Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb, al-Razi not only defends Aisyah's honor but also constructs a moral and epistemological framework for assessing news and allegations. He differentiates between ordinary lies (*kidhb*), fabricated accusations (*iftirā'*), and *ifk* as a specific form of falsehood with greater psychological and social impact. Al-Razi criticizes the believers of his time for failing to uphold ethical standards when dealing with unverified information, highlighting the importance of *ḥusn al-ẓann* (positive presumption), *tathabbut* (verification), and *bayyina* (clear evidence) as Qur'anic imperatives. Through a thematic and analytical reading of al-Razi's tafsir, this study argues that his exegetical approach combines theological depth, rational inquiry, and contextual awareness offering timeless ethical guidance. In the digital age, where hoaxes and slander proliferate rapidly, the ethical principles derived from al-Razi's interpretation serve as a crucial reminder of Islam's emphasis on justice, restraint, and the preservation of human dignity in all forms of communication. This study concludes that reviving Qur'anic ethics in dealing with

information is vital for fostering an intellectually responsible and morally upright Muslim society in the face of modern challenges.

Keywords: Hoax; al-Razi; Hadith al-Ifk; Mafāṭīḥ al-Ghayb.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information technology is a defining feature of the modern era. In Indonesia, the wave of globalization has accelerated digital transformation across various sectors of life, including how people access and disseminate information. Social media has become a popular communication tool, reaching diverse segments of society and enabling message exchange within seconds.¹ However, this convenience also brings significant negative consequences, one of which is the rampant spread of false information or hoaxes.

The phenomenon of hoaxes has become a serious challenge in the digital age. Unverified information often spreads widely, and even educated individuals are not immune to misleading narratives that are difficult to distinguish from facts or advertorials. The dissemination of hoaxes without proper clarification often has legal implications and contributes to social division.² The impact of hoaxes is not only felt on an individual level but also leads to social disintegration, particularly affecting specific groups.³

Technological tools like smartphones have greatly facilitated the rapid distribution of information, yet they also open vast avenues for the spread of hoaxes. Instant accessibility allows hoaxes to be consumed and shared easily, often without control.⁴ Alarmingly, hoaxes are not confined to online media. Even mainstream media is not entirely immune. Reports show that hoaxes have also been spread through print media (5%), television (8.70%), and even radio (1.20%).⁵

In Indonesia, the dissemination of hoaxes increased significantly in intensity during the 2014 presidential election.⁶ Political polarization between the two main candidates, Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto, in both the 2014 and 2019 elections, marked a significant moment in the massive spread of hoaxes in digital spaces. Political competition in this context has reinforced communication practices rooted in the post-truth era, where emotions and personal opinions tend to outweigh

¹ Ismail Koto, *Hate Speech Dan Hoax Ditinjau Dari Undang-Undang Iti Dan Hukum Islam*, 2, no. 1 (2021): 47.

² Dedi Rianto Rahadi, "Perilaku Pengguna dan Informasi Hoax di Media Sosial," *JURNAL MANAJEMEN DAN KEWIRAUSAHAAN* 5, no. 1 (2017): 59, <https://doi.org/10.26905/jmdk.v5i1.1342>.

³ Nur Aksin and Sunan Baedowi, "Berita Bohong (Hoax) Perspektif Hukum Islam," *Jurnal Informatika Upgris* 6, no. 1 (2020): 79, <https://doi.org/10.26877/jiu.v6i1.6792>.

⁴ Irfan Afandi, *HOAX DALAM SEJARAH ISLAM AWAL (KAJIAN KRITIS TENTANG QS. AN-NUR: 11-20)*, no. 1 (2018): 145.

⁵ Anissa Rahmadhany et al., "Fenomena Penyebaran Hoax dan Hate Speech pada Media Sosial," *Jurnal Teknologi Dan Sistem Informasi Bisnis* 3, no. 1 (2021): 31, <https://doi.org/10.47233/jteksis.v3i1.182>.

⁶ Lukman Hakim et al., "HOAX DALAM ILUSTRASI JEAN BAUDRILLARD," *Jurnal Penelitian Komunikasi* 02, no. 02 (2022): 42.

objective facts.⁷ A similar pattern reemerged during the 2024 presidential election. The spread of hoaxes increased even more sharply than in 2019.⁸ The Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs reported that throughout 2024, as many as 1,923 hoaxes, false news items, and misleading information were identified and clarified.⁹ These figures suggest that the challenges of navigating information in the digital era are becoming increasingly complex and require a more systematic ethical response.

This phenomenon, however, is not new in history. In early Islamic society, the spread of misleading information also occurred and had serious consequences—most notably in the incident of *ḥadīth al-ifk*, a slanderous accusation directed at the Prophet Muhammad's wife, 'Ā'ishah. This event is recorded in Q.S. al-Nūr [24]:11–20 as a spiritual and social lesson for Muslims, emphasizing the importance of verification, maintaining good assumptions, and refraining from hastily spreading news.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's commentary on these verses in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* is highly relevant for contemporary reflection. Al-Rāzī does not merely explain the textual context of the verses; he also offers a rational, theological, and ethical framework for responding to slander and false information. Through this exploration, the article aims to highlight how the intellectual heritage of classical Islam can contribute to addressing the modern-day challenge of hoaxes, while also advocating for the revival of the Qur'anic values of *tabayyūn* (careful verification), *tathabbut* (seeking certainty), and *ḥusn al-ẓann* (positive assumption) in today's digital society.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach in the form of library research. The primary object of study is Fakhrudin al-Rāzī's interpretation of Q.S. al-Nūr [24]:11–20, as found in his monumental exegesis *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. A thematic (*mawḍū'ī*) method of tafsir is used to explore the deeper meanings of these verses, particularly in relation to the issue of hoaxes and disinformation.

The main data source is the text of *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, while secondary sources include relevant scholarly works such as books, journal articles, and previous research that discuss hoaxes, Islamic information ethics, and al-Rāzī's exegetical methodology. The data analysis technique applied is descriptive-analytical, involving contextual and critical interpretation of the text and connecting it to the contemporary phenomenon of false information dissemination.

This study also positions al-Rāzī's interpretation within the broader context of modern social challenges using the framework of Islamic information ethics. As such, the analysis not only presents the characteristics and content of al-Rāzī's

⁷ Sugeng Bayu Wahyono et al., "Audience Reception of Hoax Information on Social Media in the Post-Truth Era," *Jurnal Komunikasi Indonesia* 9 (2020): 111.

⁸ Adrian Fajriansyah, "Penyebaran Berita Hoaks Meningkat Selama Pemilu 2024," Kompas.id, May 2, 2024, <https://www.kompas.id/baca/nusantara/2024/05/02/penyebaran-berita-hoaks-meningkat-selama-masa-pemilu-2024>.

⁹ Humas Komdigi, "Komdigi Identifikasi 1.923 Konten Hoaks Sepanjang Tahun 2024," KOMDIGI, August 1, 2025, <https://www.komdigi.go.id/berita/siaran-pers/detail/komdigi-identifikasi-1923-konten-hoaks-sepanjang-tahun-2024>.

interpretation but also highlights its relevance in fostering ethical and critical awareness among Muslims in facing the growing threat of hoaxes in the digital age.

Results and Discussion

Biography of Imam Fakhrudin al-Rāzī

Fakhrudin al-Rāzī was one of the leading scholars in the classical Islamic intellectual tradition, widely known for his monumental Qur'anic exegesis, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. His full name was Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Taymī al-Bakrī al-Qurashī, with his lineage traced back to the Prophet's companion, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq.¹⁰ He was born in the city of Rayy in 544 AH / 1149 CE, a significant town located in the Daylam region near Khurāsān—now within the modern-day borders of Iran. Thus, the title “al-Rāzī” refers to his place of birth.¹¹

His father, Ḍiyā' al-Dīn 'Umar, was a prominent scholar in Rayy and a disciple of Imam al-Baghawī. Under his father's guidance, al-Rāzī began his early education. Through his father, al-Rāzī's intellectual lineage connected directly to Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī in theology (*uṣūl al-dīn*) and to Imām al-Shāfi'ī in jurisprudence (*furū' al-fiqh*).¹² This intensive early education shaped al-Rāzī's scholarly character as a strong representative of the Shāfi'ī school in jurisprudence and the Ash'arī school in theology. After his father's death, al-Rāzī continued his pursuit of knowledge with other prominent scholars such as Kamāl al-Dīn al-Simnānī, a disciple of Imam al-Bāqillānī, and Majd al-Dīn al-Jilī, a student of Imam al-Ghazālī.¹³ This combination of intellectual lineages contributed to al-Rāzī's rational, theological, and spiritual approach.

Al-Rāzī lived during the latter half of the 6th century AH, a period marked by critical socio-political turmoil. The Islamic world at the time was experiencing various upheavals, from the decline of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate and the Crusader invasions in the Levant to the Mongol attacks in the East. In Rayy itself, there were intense sectarian conflicts among the Shāfi'īs, Ḥanafīs, and Shī'a communities. Theological debates between various sects such as the Mu'tazilah, Murji'ah, Bāṭiniyyah, and Karrāmiyyah dominated the intellectual landscape. Amid this deeply divided context, al-Rāzī emerged as an engaged scholar actively participating in scholarly debates and polemics.¹⁴

In this climate of intense debate and division, al-Rāzī grew and became deeply involved. Imam al-Subkī, in his *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah*, notes that after mastering various disciplines, al-Rāzī traveled to Khwārazm. There, he clashed with the Mu'tazilah, which forced him to leave the city. Similar incidents occurred in several other cities he visited. As Ibn Khaldūn later observed in his *Muqaddimah*, al-Rāzī's

¹⁰ Thaha Jabir al-Alwani, *Al-Imam Fakhr al-Diin Wa Musannafatuhu* (Daar al-Salaam, 2010), 31.

¹¹ al-Alwani, *Al-Imam Fakhr al-Diin Wa Musannafatuhu*, 34; Khalil al-Mays, *Muqaddimah Mafaatih Al-Ghaib* (Daar al-Fikr, 1981), 3.

¹² al-Mays, *Muqaddimah Mafaatih Al-Ghaib*, 4.

¹³ Anas Shafwan Khalid, “Metodologi Tafsir Fakhr al-Din al-Razi : Telaah Tafsir QS. Alfatihah Dalam Mafatih al-Ghayb,” *Al-Tadabbur* 3, no. 1 (2018): 99.1

¹⁴ al-Mays, *Muqaddimah Mafaatih Al-Ghaib*, 4.

era also coincided with the flourishing of various sciences such as astronomy, architecture, geometry, and music, especially in regions like Iraq.¹⁵

Al-Rāzī's intellectual contribution spans a wide range of disciplines. He authored works in jurisprudence such as *al-Ṭarīqah al-'Alā'iyah* and *Sharḥ al-Wajīz*; in legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) such as *al-Maḥṣūl*; in theology (*kalām*) such as *Ta'sīs al-Taqdīs* and *Asrār al-Tanzīl wa Anwār al-Ta'wīl*; in philosophy such as *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, *Lubāb al-Ishārāt*, and *al-Mulakhkhaṣ fī al-Falsafah*; and even in medicine, including *Masā'il al-Ṭibb*, *al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr fī al-Ṭibb*, and others.¹⁶

However, his intellectual pursuits were not free from hostility. He faced fierce opposition particularly from groups such as the Hāshāwīyah, Karrāmiyyah, and other sectarians. He was often verbally attacked and slandered—even his family was falsely accused—during the scholarly gatherings he led. On one occasion, members of the Hāshāwīyah accused his family of adultery. The Karrāmiyyah even attempted to poison him by conspiring with his enemies.¹⁷

Al-Rāzī spent his final days in the city of Herat, where he sought refuge from the mounting pressures. He died on a Monday in the month of Shawwāl, 606 AH / 1210 CE, allegedly poisoned by the Karrāmiyyah who had slipped poison into his drink.¹⁸ Despite his tragic death, al-Rāzī's intellectual legacy lives on and remains a vital reference in the fields of Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic theology, and philosophy.

Analysis of *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*

a. Background of the Writing

Fakhruddin al-Rāzī, in the introduction to his commentary on *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*, explicitly reveals the background that motivated him to write his monumental work *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. He stated that *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* contains profound meanings and benefits, even claiming that it could give rise to as many as ten thousand scientific issues. However, this assertion was not well received by certain groups. Al-Rāzī referred to them as envious and ignorant individuals for doubting and dismissing his claim as exaggerated and irrational.¹⁹

In response to such skepticism and accusations, al-Rāzī wrote an in-depth commentary on *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* as a form of proof to support his statement. He began his *tafsīr Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* by dedicating an entire volume—approximately 300 pages to the discussion of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* alone.

b. Systematics of the Writing

The *tafsīr Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* by Fakhruddin al-Rāzī is one of the most influential encyclopedic works in the history of Islamic exegesis. It has been published in various editions ranging from eight to sixteen, even up to thirty-two volumes, indicating the breadth of its interdisciplinary exploration of Islamic sciences. However, a debate has emerged among scholars regarding whether al-Rāzī truly completed the entire commentary.

¹⁵ al-Mays, *Muqaddimah Mafaatih Al-Ghaib*, 6.

¹⁶ al-Mays, *Muqaddimah Mafaatih Al-Ghaib*, 8.

¹⁷ al-Alwani, *Al-Imam Fakhr al-Diin Wa Musannafatuhu*, 69.

¹⁸ Sayyid Imron, *Muqaddimah Mafaatih Al-Ghaib* (Daar Hadits, 2012), 7.

¹⁹ Fakhr al-Din Muhammad bin Umar Al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir Aw Mafatih al-Ghaib* (Daar Ihya al-Turatas al-Araby, 1420), 1:11.

Figures such as Ibn Qāḍī, al-Yāfi'ī, and Ibn Khallikān claimed that al-Rāzī did not finish writing his tafsīr, asserting that he only completed the exegesis up to *Sūrat al-Anbiyā'*. This view was acknowledged by Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusain al-Dhahabī in *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssirūn*, where he cites Ibn Ḥajar and the author of *Kashf al-Zunūn*. According to them, the subsequent parts were completed by two successors: Shihāb al-Dīn al-Khū'ī and Najm al-Dīn al-Qamūlī. Nonetheless, al-Dhahabī himself admitted that this conclusion is not definitive. He observed that the writing style and argumentation throughout the tafsīr appear consistent, making it difficult to ascertain precisely which parts were authored by al-Rāzī and which may have been completed by others.²⁰

On the other hand, there are scholars who firmly reject the notion that the work was incomplete. Among them is Muḥammad al-Fāḍil Ibn 'Ashūr, who in his work *al-Tafsīr wa Rijāluhu* affirmed that al-Rāzī completed the entire writing of *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. This perspective is also supported by Sayyid Muḥsin 'Abd al-Ḥamīd in his dissertation *al-Rāzī Mufasssiran*, where he asserts that the entire content of the tafsīr is the original work of al-Rāzī without any later completion by other scholars.²¹

c. Sources, Method, and Hermeneutical Orientation

The tafsīr *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* by Fakhruddin al-Rāzī is categorized as a work of tafsīr bi al-ra'y al-jā'iz, a type of exegesis based on reason and logic that is permitted within the bounds of Islamic jurisprudence.²² This approach is also referred to as *bi al-ra'y al-mamdūḥ*, meaning rational interpretation that adheres to legitimate scholarly disciplines and avoids speculative or ego-driven readings. It is characterized by proportional use of logic supported by mastery of Arabic grammar, principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), ḥadīth sciences, and other branches of Islamic knowledge.²³

In terms of its exegetical method, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* employs the taḥlīlī (analytical) method, which interprets the Qur'an verse by verse in sequence, while exploring supporting interpretive elements such as *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), difficult vocabulary (*gharīb*), ambiguous expressions (*mujmal*), inter-verse coherence (*munāsabah*), as well as rhetorical and miraculous aspects (*balāghah* and *i'jāz*).²⁴

The dominant hermeneutical orientation of *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* is theological, dialectical (*kalām*), or philosophical (*falsafī*). Nevertheless, al-Rāzī also incorporated other interpretive dimensions in his tafsīr, such as linguistic analysis (syntax, morphology, rhetoric), Qur'anic variant readings (*qirā'āt*), Islamic jurisprudence, and its foundational principles (*fiqh and uṣūl*).²⁵

²⁰ Muhammad Husein Adzdahabi, *Al-Tafsīr Wa al-Mufasssirun* (Maktabah Wahbah, 1976), 208.

²¹ al-Alwani, *Al-Imam Fakhr al-Diin Wa Musannafatuhu*, 155.

²² Adzdahabi, *Al-Tafsīr Wa al-Mufasssirun*, 205.

²³ Rendi Fitra Yana et al., "Tafsir Bil Ra'yi," *Pena Cendekia* 2, no. 1 (2020): 3.

²⁴ Musaiid Sulaiman Al-Thayyar, *Fushul Fii Ushul Al-Tafsīr* (Daar al-Nasyr al-Dauli, 1993), 19.

²⁵ Sayyid Imron, *Muqaddimah Mafaatih Al-Ghaib*, 7–8.

Analysis or Discussions

Definition of Hoax

According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian Dictionary), the term "hoax" is translated as hoaks and has several meanings. A hoax can be defined as:

1. a word that signifies the falsehood of certain information, and
2. fake news or information without a legitimate source (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2016).²⁶

Historically, the term hoax was first popularized by Curtis D. MacDougall in his book *Hoaxes* (1958), where he defined a hoax as:

"Deliberately fabricated falsehood made to masquerade as truth"
meaning, a lie that is deliberately fabricated to appear as truth.²⁷

Meanwhile, Lynda Walsh in her book *Sins Against Science* (1971) explained that the term hoax began to be widely used in the English language during the Industrial Revolution, around the year 1808. However, its etymology can be traced back to the 17th century, from the phrase *hocus pocus*—which is apocryphally believed to be a corruption of the Latin phrase *hoc est corpus* ("this is the body [of Christ]"), uttered by Catholic priests during the Eucharist ritual as the host undergoes transubstantiation.²⁸

In the Qur'an, the word "hoax" is not explicitly mentioned, but is represented through several terms signifying lies or deception. The word *ifk* is used to refer to a great lie, as in the story of *Ḥadīth al-Ifk*. Other terms include *kazāba* (to lie), *fitnah* (sedition or misguidance), *buhtān* (baseless accusation), *iftarā* (fabrication), *tahrīf* (distortion), and *ghurūr* (deception).²⁹

The Ḥadīth al-Ifk and the Context of Revelation of Surah An-Nur Verses 11–20

Surah An-Nūr verses 11–20 were revealed in response to the spread of a false rumor historically known in Islam as the *Ḥadīth al-Ifk* (The Lie Event). This incident refers to the accusation of adultery directed at ʿĀ'ishah (RA), the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, with Ṣafwān ibn al-Muʿaṭṭal as-Sulamī. This rumor spread by word of mouth in the Madinan community, causing a major upheaval among Muslims.

The story of the *Ḥadīth al-Ifk* is comprehensively narrated in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (no. 4750) and also appears in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (17:102). It is also documented in the works of At-Tirmidī (4/155), Aḥmad (6/59), ʿAbd al-Razzāq (5/410), and Ibn Jarīr (18/90), indicating its wide transmission in classical hadith literature.³⁰

In his exegesis, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī cites the narration from al-Zuhrī through the chain of Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab, ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubayr, Alqamah ibn Abī Waqqās, and ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUtbah ibn Masʿūd, sourced directly from

²⁶ Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, *KBBI VI Daring*, 2016, kkbi.kemdikbud.go.id.

²⁷ MacDougall, Curtis D, *Hoaxes* (Dover Publication, 1958), vi.

²⁸ Lynda Walsh, *Sins Against Science: The Scientific Media Hoaxes of Poe, Twain, and Others* (State University of New York Press, 1971), 17.

²⁹ Danu Aris Setiyanto, "Hoaks; Teks Dan Konteks Dalam Al-Quran," *Indonesian Journal of Religion and Society* 1, no. 1 (2019): 10.

³⁰ Afandi, *HOAX DALAM SEJARAH ISLAM AWAL (KAJIAN KRITIS TENTANG QS. AN-NUR : 11-20)*, 147.

‘Ā’ishah (RA).³¹ This narration strengthens the historical context behind the revelation and forms the basis of interpreting the relevant verses.

Fakhrudin al-Razi's Exegesis of Surah An-Nur Verses 11–20 and Strategies to Face Hoaxes

1. Positive Assumption (*Ḥusn al-Ẓann*) and Critical Thinking Towards News: Ethical Foundation of Al-Razi's Exegesis of Verse 11

Fakhrudin al-Razi explains that verse 11 of Surah An-Nūr begins by affirming that the accusation against ‘Ā’ishah was ifk—a lie more severe than just a falsehood (*kidhb*) or fabricated slander (*iftirā’*). He notes that ifk is a major lie that initially may not be perceived as false, but is later revealed as an outright deception. Scholars agree that this verse was revealed as a defense for ‘Ā’ishah, who was falsely accused of indecency with Ṣafwān ibn al-Mu‘aṭṭal.

Al-Razi asserts that the accusation was irrational for several key reasons. First, ‘Ā’ishah was the wife of the Prophet, known for her purity, making such an accusation implausible. Second, she had always been known for her piety and chastity. Third, the rumor was spread by known hypocrites, whose words were not trustworthy. Therefore, the claim was invalid from the outset, even before divine revelation confirmed her innocence.³²

Al-Razi not only defends ‘Ā’ishah but also emphasizes how Muslims should respond to unverified news. He criticizes the tendency of some Muslims at the time to carelessly react to rumors without clarification, contributing to their spread. He advocates that believers should reject baseless claims and maintain *ḥusn al-ẓann* (positive assumptions) toward fellow Muslims.

This interpretation is highly relevant in today's digital age. Just like ifk, modern hoaxes are often presented convincingly, spread by seemingly authoritative sources, and target individuals or groups to damage reputations. Most hoaxes go viral not due to malice, but due to failure in verification and inability to distinguish fact from fiction.

Al-Razi's principles of *ḥusn al-ẓann* and the need for *bayyina* (clear evidence) before accepting any allegation serve as ethical cornerstones in today's media landscape. Ignoring these principles leads to a fractured society vulnerable to false information that fosters hate, stigma, and even violence. Acting hastily in accepting or spreading unverified news is not just unethical, but a direct violation of Qur'anic values of justice, caution, and human dignity.

2. Threats Against Hoax Spreaders: Al-Razi's Exegesis of Verses 13–20 of Surah An-Nur

In his continued interpretation of verses 13–20 of Surah An-Nūr, Imam Fakhrudin al-Razi underscores the legal and moral dimensions of false accusations against ‘Ā’ishah. He explains that these verses contain stern warnings against those who disseminate unproven accusations, emphasizing the requirement of four

³¹ Fakhr al-Din Muhammad bin Umar Al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir Aw Mafatih al-Ghaib* (Daar Ihya al-Turatas al-Araby, 1420), 23:339.

³² Al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir Aw Mafatih al-Ghaib*, vol. 23.

credible witnesses in cases concerning personal honor.³³ The absence of such witnesses in the ifk incident proves the accusation was fabricated, and the accusers are branded as liars by Allah.

Further, al-Razi explains that Allah's delayed punishment of the hoax spreaders was not due to their innocence, but rather due to His mercy and grace—offering them a chance for repentance. Thus, the divine warning is not only punitive but also serves as moral education and a call to reform.

Al-Razi identifies three main offenses committed by the hoax spreaders in the ifk incident, which also mirror the current dynamics of hoax dissemination:

1. Mass distribution of the rumor, from mouth to mouth, so that no household remained unaware of it. This parallels how digital hoaxes today go viral rapidly through social media, without regard for time or location.
2. Sharing without knowledge, where people pass on information without verifying its truth. In today's terms, this is known as "sharing before thinking"—a moral failure equivalent to intentionally spreading known falsehoods.
3. Underestimating the gravity of the sin, treating it as trivial. Al-Razi emphasizes that spreading false information is a *kabīrah* (major sin), not a minor error.³⁴

The subsequent verses (Q.S. An-Nūr: 16–20) reinforce this ethical framework by asserting that Allah's warnings target not only the initiators of the lie but also passive recipients who fail to challenge or verify the information. Al-Razi notes that while the primary sin lies with the original spreader, those who passively accept the rumor are also morally accountable.³⁵ This underscores the need for active social responsibility in combating disinformation. Society must not only consume information but must also develop the capacity to critically assess and reject suspicious content.

Normatively, Al-Razi's tafsir shows that hoax dissemination is not merely unethical, but a serious violation of Islamic principles of justice and honor. The divine punishments, both in this world (such as lashing for slander) and the Hereafter, reflect the severe social and moral consequences of disinformation. Applied to the modern context, the spread of hoaxes—especially those involving character assassination or sectarian provocation—can be classified as *fasād fī al-arḍ* (corruption on earth), warranting legal and ethical intervention.

Thus, Al-Razi's exegesis not only provides a historical commentary on the ifk incident but also offers normative and strategic guidance for navigating today's challenges of misinformation. He centers verification, moral responsibility, and awareness of social impact as key principles in dealing with the information age. This aligns with *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law), particularly in protecting individual honor (*ḥifẓ al-ʿird*) and maintaining social stability.

³³ Al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir Aw Mafatih al-Ghaib*, vol. 23.

³⁴ Al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir Aw Mafatih al-Ghaib*, vol. 23.

³⁵ Al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir Aw Mafatih al-Ghaib*, vol. 23.

CONCLUSION

The incident of ḥadīth al-ifk, as recorded in Qur'an Surah An-Nūr [24]:11–20, is not merely a historical event but also a moral and epistemological lesson that remains highly relevant to the contemporary challenges of misinformation in the digital era. Through his Mafāṭīḥ al-Ghayb, Imam Fakhruddin al-Razi not only affirms the defense of 'Ā'ishah's honor but also outlines an ethical and theological framework for responding to information: that every report must be critically examined with good faith, caution, and clear evidence.

Al-Razi condemns the spread of false information as a major sin, especially when it is done without verification and with a dismissive attitude. He explains that both the primary perpetrators and those who help spread falsehoods are equally subject to divine punishment in this world and the Hereafter—except for those who sincerely repent. In this perspective, al-Razi offers a tafsir approach that is not only textual but also rational and contextual, reflecting the spirit of classical Islamic scholarship that remains relevant to the challenges of today's Muslim society.

Amid the overwhelming flow of digital information often clouded by disinformation, the Qur'anic principles elaborated by al-Razi serve as vital guidance for building a just society that is morally sound and intellectually discerning. His interpretation teaches that protecting the honor of others, refraining from sharing unverified information, and upholding the value of verification are integral to a Muslim's spiritual and social responsibility. By reviving the Qur'an's ethics of information through al-Razi's tafsir, the Muslim community can be better equipped to confront the increasingly complex waves of hoaxes and slander in our time.

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