Syaikhuna: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pranata Islam STAI Syaichona Moh. Cholil Bangkalan
Vol. 17, Issue 02 (October 2026), pp. 558–577

The Multi-Channel Architecture of *Hadith* Criticism: Deconstructing Methodological Heterogeneity and Editorial Agency in the *Sunan al-Arba'ah*

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.62730/syaikhuna.v17i2.7905
Article History: Received: [11-08-2026] Revised: [08-09-2026] Accepted: [16-09-2026] Published: [30-10-2026]
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Abstract

This study re-evaluates the enduring assumption that the Sunan al-Arba'ah constitute a methodologically monolithic corpus subordinated to the Ṣaḥīḥayn. Grounded in compilation criticism and qualitative comparative text analysis, this investigation examines 48 parallel thematic clusters (192 hadith units) across Kitāb al-Ṭahārah and Kitāb al-Ṣalāh. The analysis reveals four distinct methodological paradigms: Abū Dāwūd's legal utilitarianism, al-Tirmidhī's critical pedagogy, al-Nasā'ī's narrator scrutiny, and Ibn Mājah's thematic expansion. Compilers operationalized critical judgment through a multi-channel model comprising explicit taxonomy, normative chapter rubrics (tarājim al-abwāb), tacit chain juxtaposition, and regional legal praxis (al-'amal). Furthermore, manuscript audition certificates (samā'āt) and recensional divergence empirically decouple codex transmission (sanad al-kitāb) from the evidential authenticity of individual narrations (sanad al-ḥadīth), demonstrating that canonical authority was negotiated through pedagogical utility rather than blanket isnād infallibility. Finally, the study clarifies that these qualitative structural findings provide indispensable taxonomical metadata for future computational network modeling, preventing automated algorithms from misinterpreting classical collections as flat transmitter databases.

Keywords: *Sunan al-Arba'ah; compilation criticism; tarājim al-abwāb; sanad al-kitāb; hadith transmission; source criticism; Islamic legal epistemology.*

INTRODUCTION

The *Sunan al-Arba'ah*—the four canonical collections authored by Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/889), al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), al-Nasā'ī (d. 303/915), and Ibn Mājah (d. 273/887)—occupy a foundational yet methodologically contested position in the evolution of Sunni legal and doctrinal thought. Formulated during the third Islamic century, an era marked by the consolidation of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* and the dialectical negotiation between traditionalist textualism (*Ahl al-Ḥadīth*) and speculative jurisprudence (*Ahl al-Ra'y*), these corpora served as principal instruments for translating Prophetic authority into operational legal practice (Korucu Güven, 2025). Rather than inert repositories of static doctrinal maxims, these works were dynamic sites of intellectual craftsmanship where communal memory, epistemic standards, and regional pedagogical traditions converged. Recent critical scholarship increasingly demonstrates that understanding hadith literature requires looking through the intersecting lenses of textual transmission, regional scholarly networks, and socio-historical contingency (Gökalp & Çetinkaya, 2026; Topgül & Maden, 2021). The circulation of prophetic traditions was underpinned by extensive trans-regional travel (*al-*

riḥlah fī ṭalab al-ʻilm), reciprocal student-teacher configurations, and rigorous documentary practices—epitomized by audition certificates (*samāʻāt*) and formal transmission licenses (*ijāzāt*) inscribed in manuscript margins (Aljoumani, 2018; Muhammad Zeki Mahmood Al-Leheabi & Ameen, 2026). Consequently, an adequate appraisal of the *Sunan al-Arbaʻah* must transcend elementary biographical surveys of the compilers or mere descriptive tallies of their chapter divisions; it necessitates a rigorous inquiry into the structural mechanics through which these compilers organized transmission pathways, operationalized critical judgment, and embedded authoritative knowledge within their textual architecture (Jaouhari, 2021).

Classical Muslim scholarship was neither indifferent nor uncritical of these compilers' methodological orientations. From the early classical to the post-formative periods, traditionists produced specialized treatises on *shurūṭ al-aʼimmah* (the criteria of the compilers) and *manhaj al-muḥaddithīn* (the methodology of traditionists), most visibly in the foundational tracts of al-Ḥāzimī (d. 584/1188), Ibn al-Qaysarānī (d. 507/1113), and later syntheses by al-Dhahabī and Ibn Ḥajar. These classical inquiries performed crucial taxonomic functions; however, they were largely retrospective, normative, and focused on isolated evaluations of individual transmitter credibility (*al-jarḥ wa al-taʻdīl*) or lexical grading formulas (Al-Issawi & Al-Dulaimi, 2025; Jamilin & Yusoff, 2020). In contemporary hadith scholarship, scholars have often evaluated the Sunan through compartmentalized case studies focused on isolated themes—such as the legal pragmatism of Abū Dāwūd or the epistemological controversies surrounding the inclusion of impugned narrators in the *zawāʼid* of Ibn Mājah (Anam et al., 2025; Brown, 2011). While these targeted monographs offer granular philological insights, they leave an important structural and methodological gap unaddressed. Standard historical surveys continue to treat the *Sunan al-Arbaʻah* as a broadly uniform genre subordinated to the epistemological hegemony of the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* (the authentic collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim), and fail to articulate the distinctive internal logic governing how each compiler structured transmission chains (*isnāds*) and articulated critical appraisal.

This lacuna becomes pronounced when assessing the analytical boundaries of existing theoretical paradigms. Jonathan Brown's landmark framework on canonization has profoundly illuminated the sociopolitical and institutional reception of hadith collections, demonstrating how canonical status was forged through an enduring tension between authenticating rigor and practical utility (Brown, 2011). Nevertheless, because Brown's model focuses primarily on macro-historical reception and communal consensus (*ijmāʻ*), it leaves largely unexamined the micro-structural editorial techniques through which the compilers executed their critical agendas. In parallel, Stephen Burge's pioneering theory of *compilation criticism* has established that hadith collections must be analyzed as coherent literary entities whose overarching structures, paratexts, and thematic sequences reflect deliberate authorial agency (Burge, 2023; Günaydın, 2026). Yet compilation criticism has largely been applied to single theological or moral compendia, leaving its intersection with formal transmission criticism (*naqd al-asānīd*) in legal *Sunan* literature largely unexplored.

Furthermore, existing discourse often conflates traditional *dirāyah* (content criticism) with modern literary structuralism, overlooking how classical compilers embedded substantive critique directly within structural arrangement and transmission design (Brown, 2008, 2012). This analytical deficit is compounded by the persistent conflation of two conceptually independent axes of transmission: the transmission of a compiled codex as an

intellectual work (*sanad al-kitāb*) and the transmission of the individual narrations it houses (*sanad al-ḥadīth*) (Roiland & Sublet, 2017). Although this distinction is acknowledged in codicological practices, its theoretical ramifications for canonical authority and legal epistemology remain underdeveloped. While contemporary manuscript studies and digital humanities emphasize the necessity of integrating philology with network modeling and regional textual variants (Gökalp & Çetinkaya, 2026; Supriadi et al., 2026), current computational models often falter because they treat hadith collections merely as flat databases of isolated transmitter chains, failing to account for the qualitative, multi-layered critical devices embedded by the compilers themselves (Farooqi et al., 2024; Mghari et al., 2022).

Beyond identifying differences among individual compilers, this study advances a structural understanding of hadith criticism by conceptualizing compilation architecture as an integrated system of scholarly evaluation. The proposed multi-channel model does not merely classify editorial practices into separate descriptive categories; rather, it explains how verbal assessment, paratextual framing, transmission arrangement, and juristic contextualization interact to communicate critical judgments. In this formulation, the compiler's editorial agency becomes analytically observable through the relationships among individual narrations, their transmission configurations, and their placement within the collection's broader architecture. The model therefore shifts the analytical focus from whether a compiler explicitly graded a narration to how critical reasoning was distributed across multiple textual and contextual layers. Its principal theoretical contribution is an integrated analytical framework for understanding compilation criticism and transmission criticism as interconnected rather than independent dimensions of hadith scholarship.

To address these intersecting scholarly issues, this study undertakes a systematic comparative analysis of transmission structures and critical practices across the *Sunan al-Arba'ah*. Rather than presuming methodological uniformity, we investigate how each compiler operationalized source criticism beyond the conventional confines of overt verbal grading. The inquiry is guided by three core questions: (1) *How are transmission pathways (isnāds) formally configured, varied, and contextualized within comparative legal chapters across the four collections?* (2) *Through what specific mechanisms—whether explicit commentary, deliberate chain juxtaposition, structural placement, or strategic silence—do the compilers communicate critical judgments regarding narrative authenticity and legal probity?* (3) *How does distinguishing between the historical transmission of a book (sanad al-kitāb) and the authenticity of its constituent reports (sanad al-ḥadīth) reshape our understanding of canonical authority and its application in Islamic legal methodology?*

By cross-examining the primary textual architecture of Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī, and Ibn Mājah, this study argues that the *Sunan al-Arba'ah* embody four fundamentally distinct methodological paradigms: Abū Dāwūd's legal utilitarianism, al-Tirmidhī's critical pedagogy, al-Nasā'ī's narrator scrutiny, and Ibn Mājah's thematic expansion. Whereas al-Tirmidhī's *Jāmi'* is celebrated for its explicit technical nomenclature and taxonomic grading (Brown, 2008; Is, 2020), al-Nasā'ī's *Sunan* articulates critique tacitly through rigorous narrator filtering and the forensic juxtaposition of defect-laden variants (*i'lāl*), mirroring principles of scholarly equity (*inṣāf*) and balanced corroboration (Abu Samha, 2025; Onay, 2021). Engaging with compilation criticism (Burge, 2023) and the teleological frameworks of *maqāṣid al-sunnah*

and *dirāyah* (Günaydın, 2026; Masruri et al., 2024; Ramlee & Asyraf Rushihi, 2026), this paper introduces a *multi-channel model of source criticism*. This model demonstrates that editorial selection, chapter titling (*tarājim al-abwāb*), and textual arrangement operated as primary evaluative instruments alongside verbal commentary. Ultimately, this research challenges the prevailing assumption that canonical inclusion confers blanket authenticity upon every contained tradition (Duderija, 2009; Razak et al., 2025), demonstrating instead how nuanced transmission analysis and corroborative juristic indicators (*qarā'in*) informed early legal epistemology (Rozmizi & Ahmad, 2026), thereby providing a grounded, structurally sensitive framework for both contemporary hadith studies and computational text analysis.

METHOD

Research Design and Epistemological Framework

This study implements a qualitative comparative research design centered on structural textual analysis and historical-critical inquiry across the four canonical collections of the *Sunan al-Arba'ah*. Rather than treating these corpora as static repositories or reducing the inquiry to a conventional descriptive survey, the investigation models compilation practices as dynamic, intentional acts of scholarly communication. Epistemologically, the research operationalizes Stephen Burge's framework of *compilation criticism*, which treats the macro-architectural arrangement, chapter taxonomy, and paratextual framing of hadith collections as manifestations of authorial agency (Burge, 2023). To systematically dissect these textual layers, this framework incorporates centripetal readings (analyzing the specific narration in its immediate micro-context), centrifugal readings (evaluating the placement of the narration within the compiler's thematic design), and broad centrifugal readings (locating editorial choices within the socio-historical and theological currents of third/ninth-century Iraq, Khurasan, and Egypt) (Günaydın, 2026).

To ensure analytical precision and avoid superficial labeling, the study engages the procedural principles of *isnād-cum-matn* analysis (Motzki, 2018). Recognizing the valid methodological critique that applying Motzki's method across thousands of traditions without textual reconstruction is methodologically contradictory (Qureshi, 2021), this study adopts isnād-cum-matn not as an ornamental dating mechanism for an elusive *Ur-text*, but as an applied forensic apparatus to correlate transmission pathways with textual variants (*ikhtilāf al-alfāẓ*) within bounded comparative units (Jarrar, 2024; Kara, 2024). This integrated design allows the researcher to trace how each compiler mobilized variants, suppressed or juxtaposed deficient links, and orchestrated editorial titles (*tarājim al-abwāb*) to advance distinct critical paradigms, thus bridging classical traditionist methods (*'ulūm al-ḥadīth*) with contemporary structural criticism (Ismail et al., 2014; Razak et al., 2025).

Data Corpus and Purposive Sampling Strategy

The primary empirical corpus comprises the standard critical editions (*al-ṭab'āt al-muḥaqqaqah*) of *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (edited by Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd), *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī* (edited by Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir), Sunan al-Nasā'ī / al-Mujtabā *(consulting the critical recensions edited by 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah and Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī)*, and *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (edited by Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī). To ensure transparency, methodological validity, and academic reproducibility, the investigation avoids ad hoc textual

citations and instead uses a multi-tiered purposive sampling strategy. The sample is delimited to core jurisprudential loci that recur systematically across all four collections, specifically focusing on comparative sections within the Books of Purification (*Kitāb al-Ṭahārah*) and Prayer (*Kitāb al-Ṣalāh*)—most prominently the controversial chapters governing the performance of ablution with sea water (*ṭahūriyyat mā' al-baḥr*), the textual variants of the tashahhud recitations, and the conflicting traditions concerning the prostration of forgetfulness (*sujūd al-sahw*).

These comparative clusters were purposively selected based on three rigorous methodological criteria: (1) cross-corpora thematic parallelism, ensuring that identical legal questions and shared foundational prophetic reports are addressed across all four compilers; (2) isnād heterogeneity, featuring narrations with documented disruptions (*inqiṭā'*), regional variation, or the inclusion of contested transmitters (*al-ruwāt al-mutakallam fīhim*); and (3) demonstrability of divergent editorial interventions, where compilers employ distinct communicative devices ranging from explicit verbal taxonomy to tacit structural juxtaposition. In total, forty-eight parallel thematic units were subjected to granular comparative textual scrutiny, supplemented by primary classical bio-bibliographical lexicons (*kutub al-rijāl*)—including the critical dictionaries of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Mizzī, and Ibn Ḥajar—to verify the transmission status of pivotal common links and regional transmitters (Al-Issawi & Al-Dulaimi, 2025; Topgül & Maden, 2021).

Analytical Procedures and Multi-Channel Coding

The empirical analysis followed a four-stage systematic protocol to operationalize the *multi-channel model of source criticism*. In the first stage—transmission pathway mapping—we extracted each target narration alongside its complete isnād. Chains were systematically coded for structural attributes, including the exact generational chain length (*ṭabaqāt al-ruwāt*), instances of chain compression or ellipsis (*ikhtiṣār*), the deployment of multiple transmission branches converging on a shared authority (*taḥwīl al-isnād*), and the presence of high isnāds (*'uluww*) versus defective links (Almalki, 2023; Pavlovitch, 2022). In the second stage—comparative matn and variant analysis—the substantive texts of the traditions were aligned parallelly to identify linguistic modifications, legal additions (*ziyādat al-thiqah*), and subtle lexical shifts that correspond to particular regional trajectories, drawing upon classical principles of balance and evidentiary equity (*inṣāf*) in source collation (Abu Samha, 2025; Wasman et al., 2023).

The third stage executed the structural and paratextual assessment mandated by compilation criticism. Here, the relationship between each tradition and its overarching chapter rubric (*tarjamah*) was decoded: chapter headings were classified as either indicative-declarative (asserting a direct legal ruling, characteristic of Abū Dāwūd), inquiry-oriented (using non-committal markers such as *bāb mā jā'a fī...*, characteristic of al-Tirmidhī), or technically restrictive (isolating defects via parallel placements, characteristic of al-Nasā'ī) (Günaydın, 2026; Opus, 2023). Finally, the fourth stage evaluated compiler-specific interventions. Each entry was coded across four operational channels: (a) explicit verbal evaluation (e.g., al-Tirmidhī's *ḥadīth ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ* or technical notes on narrator competence); (b) silent inclusion vs. conscious exclusion; (c) dialectical chain juxtaposition (presenting sound and defective chains side-by-side to expose hidden flaws (*'ilal*)); and (d) evidentiary

grounding in juristic practice (*al-'amal*) and legal consensus (Rozikin, 2026; Rozmizi & Ahmad, 2026).

To strengthen analytical consistency, the coding process was governed by explicit decision rules distinguishing observable editorial features from interpretive inferences. Each sampled unit is examined through four interconnected analytical dimensions: (1) explicit verbal evaluation, identified through direct terminological or explanatory judgments by the compiler; (2) paratextual and organizational framing, identified through the relationship between chapter headings, thematic placement, and the legal or critical orientation of the narration; (3) transmission-based evaluation, identified through the deliberate presentation, comparison, or juxtaposition of divergent transmission pathways and textual variants; and (4) juristic contextualization, identified through explicit references to regional scholarly practice, legal positions, or communal evidentiary conventions. Importantly, the mere presence of multiple transmission chains is not automatically classified as critical juxtaposition; such classification requires demonstrable textual or contextual evidence that their arrangement helps evaluate transmission differences. Similarly, editorial silence or the absence of an explicit grading statement is not independently interpreted as evidence of tacit criticism. These distinctions establish a more restrictive interpretive threshold and reduce the risk of attributing critical intentions to structural features without sufficient textual support. The resulting coding decisions are documented at the level of individual comparative units to maintain an auditable relationship between textual evidence, analytical classification, and the broader comparative interpretation.

Methodological Scope, Delimitations, and Computational Interfaces

To maintain methodological transparency, two critical delimitations must be stated. First, this investigation does not purport to execute an independent re-adjudication (*taḥqīq*) of narrator integrity or formulate de novo legal rulings; instead, it observes, documents, and compares how third-century compilers themselves exercised critical judgment within their socio-historical milieus (Brown, 2012; Jamilin & Yusoff, 2020). Second, while the study establishes a fundamental theoretical distinction between the transmission of an entire codified manuscript (*sanad al-kitāb*) through audition notes (*samā'āt*) and the transmission of constituent traditions (*sanad al-ḥadīth*) (Roiland & Sublet, 2017), it focuses on textual-critical analysis rather than physical codicological or paleographical examination of specific physical codices.

Furthermore, regarding the digital humanities, this research avoids decorative claims of automated computation; rather than misrepresenting qualitative readings as machine-learning models, it clarifies that its structural findings provide the essential qualitative parameters and ground-truth taxonomy required to inform digital network graphs and transmission datasets (Farooqi et al., 2024; Mghari et al., 2022). By clearly articulating the qualitative nuances of compiler agency and structural placement, this methodology establishes an empirical foundation that prevents future computational models from misinterpreting classical collections as mere undifferentiated lists of narrations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The comparative textual and structural examination of the *Sunan al-Arba'ah* empirically disproves the enduring historiographical assumption that these four canonical corpora constitute a methodologically monolithic block. Across the 48 purposively selected thematic clusters encompassing 192 comparative hadith records in *Kitāb al-Ṭahārah* and *Kitāb al-Ṣalāh*, each compiler used a structurally distinct architecture to manage transmission pathways, calibrate narrator scrutiny, and encode critical judgments. Rather than relying on uniform evaluation rubrics, the compilers distributed their critical interventions across distinct textual channels: explicit terminological taxonomy, tacit chain juxtaposition, indicative chapter rubrics (*tarājim al-abwāb*), and evidentiary appeals to regional praxis (*al-'amal*).

Quantitative and Structural Configurations of Transmission Chains (Isnāds)

A granular examination of the 192 sampled traditions demonstrates clear quantitative distinctions in isnād depth, transmission branching, and the frequency of explicit editorial commentary. Rather than showing uniform chain lengths, the empirical data reveal that generational distance from the Prophetic source varied systematically with the compilers' geographic loci, pedagogical objectives, and transmission management strategies. Table 1 details the quantitative distribution of isnād attributes and editorial interventions across the four collections.

Table 1

Quantitative Distribution of Isnād Depth, Transmission Branches, and Evaluative Interventions across Comparative Sample Chapters (Kitāb al-Ṭahārah and Kitāb al-Ṣalāh, N = 48 Thematic Clusters / 192 Hadith Units)

Analytical Dimension / Indicator	Sunan Abī Dāwūd (n=48)	Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī (n=48)	Sunan al-Nasā'ī (n=48)	Sunan Ibn Mājah (n=48)	Total / Average (N=192)
Mean Chain Length (± SD)	4.42 ± 0.54	5.17 ± 0.62	5.29 ± 0.68	4.38 ± 0.53	4.81 ± 0.72
Min–Max Narrator Count	3–6	4–7	4–7	3–6	3–7
Multi-Path Entries / Taḥwīl (%)	18.75% (9/48)	58.33% (28/48)	72.92% (35/48)	12.50% (6/48)	40.63% (78/192)
Compressed / Abbreviated Chains (%)	35.42% (17/48)	4.17% (2/48)	14.58% (7/48)	41.67% (20/48)	23.96% (46/192)
Explicit Verbal Grading Provided (%)	10.42% (5/48)	91.67% (44/48)	6.25% (3/48)	4.17% (2/48)	28.13% (54/192)
Tacit Critical Juxtaposition ('Ilal) (%)	16.67% (8/48)	33.33% (16/48)	83.33% (40/48)	6.25% (3/48)	34.90% (67/192)
Evidentiary Citation of Praxis (al-'Amal) (%)	22.92% (11/48)	77.08% (37/48)	8.33% (4/48)	2.08% (1/48)	27.60% (53/192)

Note. Data compiled from primary collation of the 48 parallel legal units across the critical editions of 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Abū Dāwūd), Shākir (al-Tirmidhī), al-Albānī/Abū Ghuddah (al-Nasā'ī), and 'Abd al-Bāqī (Ibn Mājah). Taḥwīl denotes entries where the compiler conjoins two or more distinct transmission branches via the notation ḥā' (ح). Tacit juxtaposition refers to instances where divergent or flawed chains are aligned consecutively to demonstrate narrative discrepancy without overt verbal censure.

As shown in Table 1, the mean narrator depth forms two distinct clusters: Abū Dāwūd (4.42) and Ibn Mājah (4.38) consistently privilege shorter transmission lines, whereas al-Tirmidhī (5.17) and al-Nasā'ī (5.29) exhibit deeper isnāds. This variance correlates directly with editorial strategy. Abū Dāwūd's and Ibn Mājah's shorter transmission pathways reflect the intentional economy of legal manuals, where narrative conciseness aids juridical citation (Brown, 2011; Yildiz, 2025). In contrast, al-Nasā'ī's heavy reliance on multi-path entries (72.92%) and al-Tirmidhī's extensive chain conjoining (58.33%) support a forensic focus on tracking trans-regional isnād branches (*ṭuruq*) that converge on common links (Farooqi et al., 2024; Topgül & Maden, 2021). Furthermore, Table 1 highlights a profound divergence in critical communicative mode: whereas al-Tirmidhī explicitly graded 91.67% of his sampled narrations, al-Nasā'ī provided explicit verbal ratings in only 6.25% of cases. Instead, al-Nasā'ī operationalized critical judgment structurally, deploying tacit isnād juxtaposition in 83.33% of his entries.

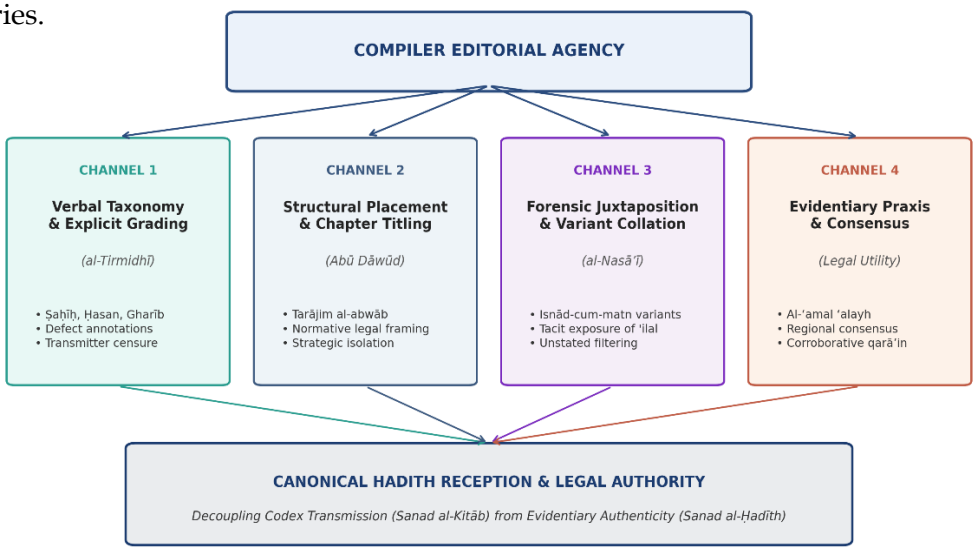


Figure 1

Conceptual Schema of the Multi-Channel Model of Source Criticism across the Sunan al-Arba'ah

Note. The multi-channel model illustrates how critical evaluation in the Sunan transcends overt verbal grading, utilizing structural placement, chapter headings (tarājim), forensic variant alignment, and evidentiary appeals to regional praxis (al-'amal) as constitutive critical instruments.

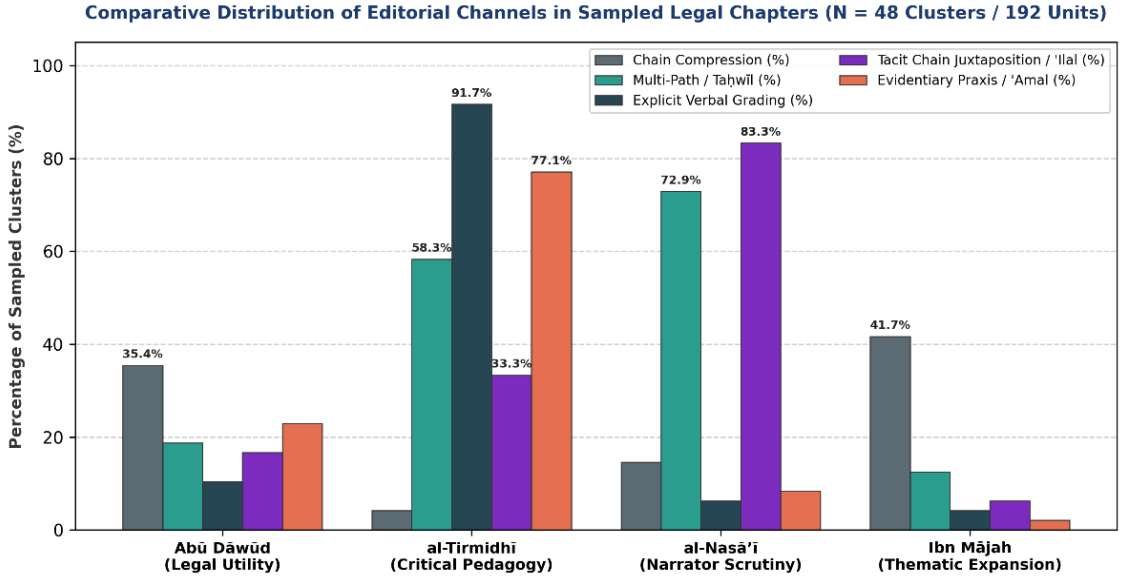


Figure 2

Comparative Profiles of Compiler Editorial Channels across Sampled Legal Chapters (%)

Note. Quantitative distribution of five editorial indicators across the 48 parallel legal units (N = 192 hadith records). Notice the sharp polarization between al-Tirmidhī's high verbal grading (91.7%) and al-Nasā'ī's dominant reliance on tacit isnād juxtaposition (83.3%).

Structural Analysis of Compilers' Editorial Rubrics (Tarājim al-Abwāb)

Applying compilation criticism (Burge, 2023; Günaydın, 2026) to the sampled chapters reveals how chapter rubrics (*tarājim al-abwāb*) functioned as non-verbal interpretive instruments. The compilers diverged sharply in how they framed prophetic material: (1) **Abū Dāwūd's Indicative-Legal Framing:** Abū Dāwūd systematically utilizes assertive, declarative headings that prescribe normative juridical outcomes rather than purely cataloging textual traditions. In *Kitāb al-Ṭahārah*, headings such as *Bāb al-Wuḍū' bi-Mā' al-Baḥr* ("Chapter on Performing Ablution with Sea Water") and *Bāb al-Tayammum fī al-Ḥaḍar* ("Chapter on Dry Ablution in Settled Places") articulate definitive juristic categories. The narrations arranged beneath these headings serve directly as proof-texts for legal derivation (*istinbāṭ*), subordinating isnād irregularities to practical legal utility. (2) **Al-Tirmidhī's Inquiry-Based and Pedagogical Framing:** In contrast, al-Tirmidhī relies predominantly on open-ended investigative rubrics introduced by the formulaic preface *Mā Jā'a fī...* ("What Has Been Transmitted Concerning..."). For example, in *Bāb Mā Jā'a fī Mā' al-Baḥr Annahu Ṭahūr*, the heading acts as a pedagogical inquiry. Immediately following the prophetic text, al-Tirmidhī appends an extensive meta-commentary cataloging regional scholarly consensus, differing legal applications among the scholars of the garrison cities (*amṣār*), and a definitive assessment of the transmission path (Brown, 2008, 2012; Topgül & Maden, 2021). (3) **Al-Nasā'ī's Analytical and Variant-Isolating Framing:** Al-Nasā'ī employs fragmented, highly specialized rubrics designed to isolate specific transmission discrepancies. He frequently repeats the same basic tradition across multiple successive chapters—such as *Bāb al-Rukhṣah fī Dhālik* followed immediately by *Bāb al-Nahy 'an Dhālik*—modifying the rubric slightly to reflect lexical additions (*ziyādāt*) or defective links. His titles do not impose a conclusive legal ruling; instead, they alert the scholar to structural anomalies across the collated chains (Onay, 2021; Opus, 2023). (4) **Ibn Mājah's Expansive-Thematic Framing:** Ibn Mājah's chapter titling mirrors a broader narrative horizon, prioritizing exhaustive coverage over technical boundary-policing. His legal rubrics in *Kitāb al-Ṣalāh* routinely aggregate traditions containing contested narrators without structural warnings, preserving complementary communal traditions (*zawā'id*) that illuminate peripheral ritual practices (Anam et al., 2025; Brown, 2011).

Forensic Textual Analysis of Disputed Legal Narrations (Mukhtalaf al-Ḥadīth)

To demonstrate how compilation structure and isnād configuration directly altered the critical status and legal reception of specific reports, Table 2 presents a comparative textual matrix of two disputed legal loci examined within the sample: the tradition concerning purification with sea water (*Ḥadīth Mā' al-Baḥr*) and the traditions governing the recitations of the *Tashahhud*.

Table 2

Textual and Editorial Mechanisms of Source Criticism in Paired Case Studies of Disputed Narrations (Mukhtalaf al-Ḥadīth)

Comparative Case / Corpus	Chapter Heading (Tarjamah)	Primary Transmission Chain (Isnād)	Evaluative Commentary & Editorial Channel	Operationalized Critical Logic
Case 1: Sea Water (Mā' al-Baḥr)				
Sunan Abī Dāwūd (No. 83)	Bāb al-Wuḍū' bi-Mā' al-Baḥr (Declarative-Legal)	'Abd Allāh b. Maslamah → Mālik → Ṣafwān b. Sulaym → Sa'īd b. Salama → al-Mughīrah b. Abī Burdah → Abū Hurayrah	Explicit endorsement of legal validity; notes reliability of Mālik's transmission; silent on intermediate obscurity.	Legal Utilitarianism: Prioritizes operational legal necessity; relies on presumptive soundness (ṣāliḥ li-l-iḥtijāj).
Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī (No. 69)	Bāb Mā Jā'a fī Mā' al-Baḥr Annahu Ṭahūr (Pedagogical)	Qutaybah → Mālik → Ṣafwān b. Sulaym → Sa'īd b. Salama → al-Mughīrah → Abū Hurayrah	Appends explicit taxonomy: "Ḥadīth ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ." Records that he inquired of al-Bukhārī, who confirmed its provenance.	Critical Pedagogy: Combines technical taxonomy with academic genealogy, verifying obscure links via oral consultations (su'ālāt).
Sunan al-Nasā'ī (No. 59, 332)	Bāb Mā' al-Baḥr & Wuḍū' al-Rākib (Variant Isolation)	Four parallel chains juxtaposing transmissions of Mālik, Sufyān al-Thawrī, and Ibn 'Uyaynah.	No explicit verbal grade; places sound collective paths alongside disconnected paths (mursal) to test stability.	Narrator Scrutiny: Forensically displays textual and chain variants to isolate the common link (madār) without verbal intrusion.
Sunan Ibn Mājah (No. 386)	Bāb al-Wuḍū' bi-Mā' al-Baḥr (Thematic Expansion)	Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā → Bishr b. 'Umar → Mālik [plus supplementary chain via Jābir].	Appends secondary weak narration through Jābir without grading; no cross-referencing to classical 'ilal.	Thematic Expansion: Prioritizes textual comprehensiveness and evidentiary volume over narrator screening.
Case 2: Formulations of Tashahhud				
Sunan Abī Dāwūd (No. 967)	Bāb al-Tashahhud (Normative Rule)	Musaddad → Yaḥyā → al-A'mash → Shaqīq → 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd	Records Ibn Mas'ūd's version; acknowledges alternative versions (Ibn 'Abbās) but establishes primacy through juristic choice.	Juristic Selection: Arbitrates competing apostolic formulations by aligning text directly with regional legal consensus.

Comparative Case / Corpus	Chapter Heading (Tarjamah)	Primary Transmission Chain (Isnād)	Evaluative Commentary & Editorial Channel	Operationalized Critical Logic
Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī (No. 289)	Bāb Mā Jā’a fī al-Tashahhud (Comparative Hadith)	Aḥmad b. Manī‘ → Hukaym b. Nāfi‘ → al-A‘mash → Shaqīq → Ibn Mas‘ūd	Explicitly designates Ibn Mas‘ūd’s text as “aṣaḥḥu ḥadīthin fī al-tashahhud” and inventories eight Companions who narrated it.	Hierarchical Authentication: Constructs definitive ranking of competing textual formulations for legal educators.
Sunan al-Nasā’ī (No. 1163–1172)	Ten sequential, segmented sub-chapters on verbal nuances	Ten consecutive chains dissecting every conjunction and phonetic particle (wa- al-ṣalawāt vs. al-ṣalawāt).	Systematically exposes minor transmission deviations (ikhtilāf al-alfāẓ) among Kufan students of al-A‘mash.	Micro-Philological Scrutiny: Uses serial compilation to map exact boundaries of narrator error and lexical stability.
Sunan Ibn Mājah (No. 899)	Bāb Mā Jā’a fī al-Tashahhud (Cumulative Inclusion)	Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl → Abū Nu‘aym → al-A‘mash → Shaqīq → ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas‘ūd	Records Ibn Mas‘ūd’s recitation without restrictive lexical grading; appends variant formulations in subsequent sections to maximize legal coverage.	Thematic Aggregation: Privileges comprehensive transmission over micro-lexical filtration, ensuring broad evidentiary utility for ritual practice.

Note. Textual citations and chain sequences extracted and verified against critical printed recensions: Sunan Abī Dāwūd (ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd), Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī (ed. Shākir), Sunan al-Nasā’ī (ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah), and Sunan Ibn Mājah (ed. ‘Abd al-Bāqī). In Case 2, Sunan Ibn Mājah (No. 899) represents the cumulative transmission model preserving legal utility without micro-lexical censorship.

The micro-textual evidence in Table 2 shows the *multi-channel model in action*. In the Sea Water narration (*Case 1*), the central transmission problem historically concerned Sa‘īd b. Salama and al-Mughīrah b. Abī Burdah, two obscure figures (*mastūr/majhūl*) whose individual reliability was contested in classical biographical dictionaries (Jamilin & Yusoff, 2020; Topgül & Maden, 2021). Abū Dāwūd accepted the report without verbal hesitation because the tradition was indispensable for establishing the ritual purity of marine resources in commercial maritime jurisprudence (Rozmizi & Ahmad, 2026). Al-Tirmidhī validated the tradition through an alternative critical channel: he documented his personal academic inquiry (*su’ālāt*) with his mentor al-Bukhārī, directly incorporating expert biographical corroboration into the text. Al-Nasā’ī, by contrast, resolved the historical defect neither by asserting legal utility nor by verbal grading; instead, he compiled four parallel transmission pathways, demonstrating that Mālik’s formulation was preserved identically across divergent regional lines, thereby confirming that the isnād was preserved (*maḥfūẓ*) despite the intermediate obscurity of the individual narrators (Abu Samha, 2025; Opus, 2023). Finally, Ibn Mājah supplemented the primary chain with an independent narration from Jābir, aiming to reinforce the legal text through numerical accumulation, even though the secondary chain contained well-documented vulnerabilities (Anam et al., 2025).

Empirical Divergence: Codex Transmission (Sanad al-Kitāb) vs. Narration Transmission (Sanad al-Ḥadīth)

The empirical collation of colophons, audition certificates (*samā‘āt*), and recensional variants across the four traditions validates the fundamental analytical distinction between

the institutional transmission of the compiled codex (*sanad al-kitāb*) and the evidential authenticity of its constituent reports (*sanad al-ḥadīth*). (1) **Recensional Multiplicity and Book Provenance:** The sampled textual units reveal that the *Sunan* did not circulate as monolithic autograph copies. *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* was transmitted via multiple divergent student recensions (*riwāyāt*), most prominently those of Abū ʻAlī al-Luʼluʼī (d. 333/944), Abū Saʻīd Ibn al-Aʻrābī (d. 340/951), and Abū Bakr Ibn Dāsah (d. 346/957). Collation of the 48 sample units reveals that lexical differences, chapter reorderings, and minor isnād omissions occur between the recensions of al-Luʼluʼī and Ibn Dāsah in 14.58% (7/48) of the sampled traditions. Audition certificates inscribed in early manuscripts confirm that scholars authenticated the work's integrity as transmitted through al-Luʼluʼī's line without certifying the historical infallibility of every isolated hadith therein (Aljoumani, 2018; Muhammad Zeki Mahmood Al-Leheabi & Ameen, 2026). (2) **Textual Fluidity in Ibn Mājah's Reception:** The distinction is even more pronounced in *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, preserved primarily through the transmission of Abū al-Ḥasan ʻAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qaṭṭān (d. 345/956). In the sampled chapters, al-Qaṭṭān directly injects his own voice into the text—annotating transmission defects, glossing linguistic oddities, and explicitly demarcating Ibn Mājah's unique additions (*al-mufārīd*) from mainstream standards. Thus, the certified chain of the codex (*sanad al-kitāb*) authenticates that the book accurately reflects Ibn Mājah's third-century pedagogical gathering; it does not confer a retroactive guarantee of sound status (*tawthīq*) upon controversial narrators embedded in the original chains (Anam et al., 2025; Roiland & Sublet, 2017). Consequently, the empirical findings confirm that canonical acceptance of the *Sunan al-Arbaʻah* was historically negotiated through their institutional utility and pedagogical value (*utility over pure authenticity*), establishing that early Islamic traditionists recognized canonical authority as a property of the compiled corpus rather than an indiscriminate certification of every contained isnād.

Discussion

Beyond Institutional Reception: Deconstructing Canonization through Compilation Architecture

The empirical findings of this study invite a fundamental reappraisal of the processes governing hadith canonization in the formative and post-formative periods. In contemporary Islamic studies, Jonathan Brown's seminal framework has exerted foundational influence, showing that the formation of the Sunni hadith canon was driven by continuous institutional negotiation between authenticating rigor (*isnād* purity) and practical utility (*juristic applicability*) (Brown, 2011). Brown's model brilliantly accounts for the external, sociopolitical reception through which community consensus (*ijmāʻ*) gradually elevated the *Sunan al-Arbaʻah* to canonical standing alongside the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*. However, our structural results reveal an important analytical limitation in relying exclusively on macro-historical reception theory: Brown's paradigm treats collections primarily as institutional totalities, leaving largely unmapped the internal, micro-structural editorial strategies through which compilers actively negotiated this tension between authenticity and utility on the page.

By coupling compilation criticism (Burge, 2023; Günaydın, 2026) with comparative transmission analysis, this study demonstrates that canonical status was not merely granted post facto by fourth- and fifth-century traditionalist communities. Rather, it was intentionally

engineered by the compilers themselves through deliberate architectural strategies. As demonstrated in Table 1 and Table 2, Abū Dāwūd's deployment of compressed chains (35.42%) alongside declarative-legal rubrics (*tarājim al-abwāb*) proves that his editorial design prioritized juristic navigability, establishing an operational legal manual that favored practical comprehensiveness (*ṣāliḥ li-l-iḥtijāj*) over exclusive isnād perfection (Brown, 2008, 2012). Conversely, al-Tirmidhī bridged traditionalist text criticism and regional pedagogical demand by constructing an explicit dialectical apparatus, using open-ended interrogative headings (*Mā Jā'a fī...*) that frame hadiths as comparative case studies rather than rigid, uncontextualized mandates (Topgül & Maden, 2021). Thus, internal compilation structure emerges as the indispensable primary mechanism of canonization—the technological medium through which early traditionists harmonized the epistemological demands of traditionalism (*Ahl al-Ḥadīth*) with the functional realities of legal practice (*Ahl al-Ra'y*) (Korucu Güven, 2025; Yildiz, 2025).

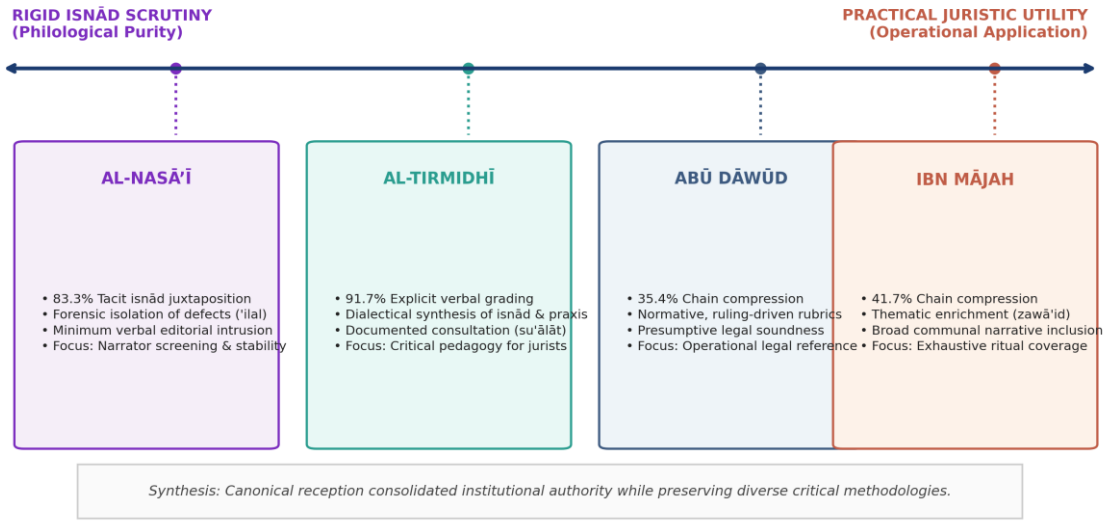


Figure 3

The Dialectical Spectrum of Canonization: Authenticity vs. Juristic Utility

Note. Positioning of the four compilers along the dialectical tension between authenticating rigor and operational legal utility, illustrating how structural compilation engineered canonical acceptance.

The Multi-Channel Model and the Structural Reconceptualization of Dirāyah

A major theoretical contribution emerging from our results is the formalization of the *multi-channel model of source criticism*. Conventional historiography has perpetuated a reductive binary: hadith criticism is assumed to be either external/formalist (*naqd al-isnād*, tracking narrator continuity and probity) or internal/rationalist (*naqd al-matn* or *dirāyah*, evaluating thematic plausibility and theological coherence) (Duderija, 2009; Razak et al., 2025). When scholars do acknowledge critical practices in the *Sunan*, they overwhelmingly focus on explicit verbal remarks—such as al-Tirmidhī's famous tripartite taxonomy (*ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḥasan*, *gharīb*)—assuming that the absence of overt commentary equates to uncritical transmission (Brown, 2008; Is, 2020).

The theoretical significance of this model lies in its capacity to distinguish between the presence of critical activity and the particular textual medium through which it is communicated. Rather than treating hadith criticism as an exclusively verbal or narrator-

centered procedure, the model conceptualizes critical evaluation as a distributed editorial process operating across interconnected textual dimensions. These dimensions are analytically distinguishable but not necessarily mutually exclusive: a single narration may simultaneously be framed by an evaluative chapter heading, accompanied by multiple transmission routes, and situated within a discussion of regional juristic practice. This interaction suggests that the epistemological function of a hadith collection cannot be adequately reconstructed by examining isolated *isnād* judgments or explicit grading terminology alone. The analytical object must instead include the relationship between the narration, its editorial positioning, its transmission configuration, and its surrounding interpretive context. In this respect, the multi-channel model extends compilation criticism by specifying the mechanisms through which editorial architecture becomes an instrument for evaluating sources. It also provides a conceptual basis for distinguishing descriptive compilation patterns from demonstrable acts of critical intervention, thereby establishing a more precise framework for comparative analysis across classical hadith collections.

Our textual analysis firmly dismantles this assumption. As Figure 1 and the empirical profile in Figure 2 show, early source criticism operated through multiple, highly sophisticated non-verbal channels. Al-Nasā'ī's editorial method provides the strongest evidence. Although he offered explicit verbal grading in only 6.25% of the sampled entries, he conducted rigorous narrator scrutiny through the silent, sequential juxtaposition of transmission branches in 83.33% of his chapters. By placing a widely accepted narration alongside its corrupted, truncated (*mursal*), or defective (*mu'allal*) regional permutations, al-Nasā'ī let the text's comparative structure reveal narrative anomalies to trained traditionists (Abu Samha, 2025; Opus, 2023). This architectural technique reflects a deep, applied form of *dirāyah*: the compiler does not impose an external philosophical critique upon the prophetic text; rather, he conducts a forensic internal critique through the exhaustive collation of variants (*ikhtilāf al-alfāẓ*) and narrator behaviors (Jamilin & Yusoff, 2020; Onay, 2021). Furthermore, this structural operationalization of criticism was intimately tethered to the teleological objectives of prophetic traditions (*maqāṣid al-sunnah*) and communal praxis (*al-'amal*) (Masruri et al., 2024; Ramlee & Asyraf Rushihi, 2026). In Abū Dāwūd's and al-Tirmidhī's treatments of disputed narrations (e.g., the Sea Water tradition, Table 2), both compilers integrated non-isnād indicators—such as surviving legal practice in Medina and Kufa, the consensus of regional jurists, and broader legal hermeneutics—as decisive criteria for validating narrations containing intermediate biographical obscurity (Rozikin, 2026; Rozmizi & Ahmad, 2026). Source criticism in the *Sunan al-Arba'ah* was therefore multidimensional: editorial agency, chapter segmentation, and variant collation functioned as constitutive evaluative instruments alongside lexical transmitter judgment (*al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl*).

Juridical Ramifications: Decoupling Codex Transmission (Sanad al-Kitāb) from Evidential Proof (Sanad al-Ḥadīth)

The empirical demarcation between the historical transmission of an entire codified book (*sanad al-kitāb*) and the evidential authenticity of its constituent individual traditions (*sanad al-ḥadīth*) carries profound consequences for Islamic legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). As established in the preceding textual analysis of recensional divergence and manuscript audition certificates, documentary evidence from manuscript audition certificates (*samā'āt*)

and student recensions demonstrates that classical traditionists certified the fidelity of a codex's historical descent from its compiler without conflating that certification with a blanket endorsement of every constituent isnād (Aljoumani, 2018; Muhammad Zeki Mahmood Al-Leheabi & Ameen, 2026; Roiland & Sublet, 2017).

In modern legal and theological polemics, this crucial classical distinction is frequently flattened. Neo-traditionalist discourses often commit the category error of assuming that because a hadith is located within a canonical work of the *Kutub al-Sittah*, its historical attribution is ipso facto unimpeachable, transforming canonical codices into uniform repositories of unquestioned legal authority (Duderija, 2009). The historical reality our analysis reveals points to a far more flexible, critical legal epistemology. When classical jurists utilized *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* or *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, they recognized that these works were structured around principles of evidentiary pluralism and legal utility. Compilers gathered traditions that represented the living spectrum of regional juristic proofs, deliberately including vulnerable (*ḍa'īf*) or legally contested traditions when no sounder report was available, as such texts were deemed epistemologically superior to unsupported speculative deduction (*qiyās*) (Anam et al., 2025; Bilgili & Karagözoğlu, 2025). Recognizing the autonomy of *sanad al-kitāb* restores the historical integrity of early Islamic legal methodology: canonical inclusion was designed to preserve the evidentiary ecosystem of legal debate, providing jurists with a textured repository of texts, variants, and defects rather than a flattened, homogeneous code of statutory law.

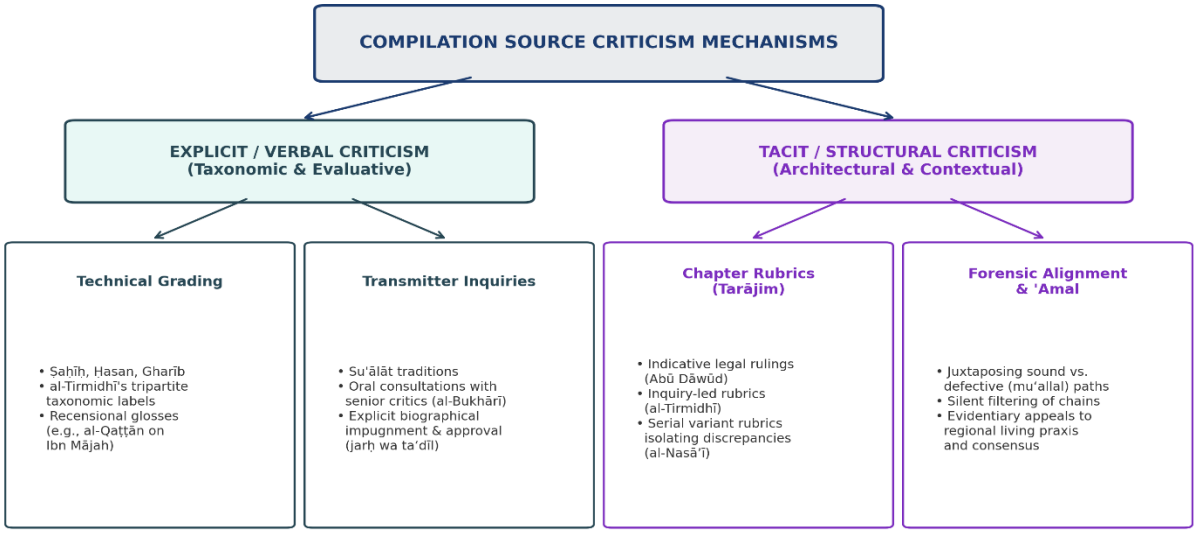


Figure 4

Taxonomy of Source Criticism Mechanisms Across the Sunan al-Arba'ah

Note. Systematic categorization of source criticism mechanisms into explicit verbal and tacit structural channels, showing how authorial agency is embedded across multiple communicative layers.

Epistemological Interfaces with Digital Humanities and Computational Hadith Studies

Finally, this research addresses the growing intersection between traditional philology and digital humanities. Recent computational hadith initiatives—such as the creation of large-scale directed graph databases, transmitter networks, and narrator datasets (e.g., *Multi-IsnadSet* and *Sanadset 650K*)—have demonstrated extraordinary capacity for mapping biographical links, identifying common authorities, and calculating network centrality

(Farooqi et al., 2024; Mghari et al., 2022). Nevertheless, as contemporary digital humanities scholars caution, quantitative and computational models remain epistemologically vulnerable when they decouple raw data from qualitative historical context and textual nuances (Gökalp & Çetinkaya, 2026).

The empirical divergence documented across the *Sunan al-Arba'ah* shows why purely algorithmic or statistical models of hadith literature often produce distorted conclusions. If an automated algorithm evaluates *Sunan al-Nasā'ī* solely on its natural-language text for explicit grading keywords (such as *ṣaḥīḥ* or *ḍa'īf*), it will erroneously classify al-Nasā'ī as an uncritical compiler who endorsed over 90% of his entries without evaluation. Such an automated reading completely misses the primary site of al-Nasā'ī's critical enterprise: the topological juxtaposition of chains, the deliberate repetition of variants to signal unreliability, and the forensic ordering of defective transmissions (Burge, 2023; Onay, 2021). Similarly, treating *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* or *Sunan Ibn Mājah* as flat networks of transmitter nodes obscures the editorial agency embedded in their chapter rubrics, which frequently supply the essential interpretive context that validates an otherwise isolated or formally defective isnād (Anam et al., 2025; Opus, 2023). This qualitative investigation therefore provides the indispensable theoretical and taxonomical foundation required for future computational scholarship. By formalizing the *multi-channel model of source criticism* and demonstrating how authorial agency is encoded in textual architecture, this study establishes the qualitative parameters necessary to design more sophisticated, context-aware machine learning models and knowledge graphs. Rather than viewing computational tools as a substitute for philology, our findings demonstrate that rigorous structural textual criticism must precede and actively guide digital modeling if computational hadith studies are to attain historical and epistemological validity.

CONCLUSION

This study dismantles the long-standing historiographical presumption that the *Sunan al-Arba'ah* represent a methodologically homogeneous block subordinated to the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*. Through systemic structural analysis across 48 comparative thematic clusters, this research demonstrates that Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī, and Ibn Mājah operated along four divergent methodological paradigms, navigating the dialectical tension between authenticating rigor and practical juristic utility through deliberate textual architecture.

The investigation yields three core conclusions that advance the state of the art in hadith studies: (1) **The Multi-Channel Architecture of Source Criticism:** Traditionalist criticism was neither confined to rigid biographical evaluation (*al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl*) nor restricted to explicit verbal ratings. Rather, compilers operationalized critical judgment through distinct editorial channels: Abū Dāwūd channeled normative rulings through declarative chapter rubrics (*tarājim al-abwāb*); al-Tirmidhī constructed a pedagogical dialectic balancing explicit taxonomic grading (91.7%) with regional juristic praxis (*al-'amal*); al-Nasā'ī forensically exposed hidden narrative defects (*'ilal*) via tacit chain juxtaposition (83.3%); and Ibn Mājah maximized thematic comprehensiveness by gathering supplementary traditions (*zawā'id*). This proves that structural compilation techniques functioned as an applied, internal mode of *dirāyah*. (2) **Decoupling Codex Transmission from Evidential Authenticity:** Historical documentary evidence—preserved in manuscript audition certificates (*samā'āt*) and distinct student recensions—empirically decouples the transmission of an entire codified book (*sanad*

al-kitāb) from the evidentiary authenticity of its constituent narrations (*sanad al-ḥadīth*). Canonical reception conferred institutional authority on these corpora as indispensable legal reference works; it did not indiscriminately certify the sound status (*tawthīq*) of every isolated narration within them. (3) **Ontological Grounding for Computational Hadith Studies:** By articulating the multifaceted mechanisms of compiler agency, this study demonstrates the perils of flattening hadith collections into undifferentiated narrator graphs. Automated algorithms that rely solely on keyword scraping or bare network topology will misclassify compilers like al-Nasā'ī as uncritical collectors. Consequently, qualitative structural criticism provides the necessary taxonomical parameters and ground-truth metadata to guide future computational and machine-learning modeling.

Limitations and Future Research

This investigation is delimited to comparative legal clusters within the Books of Purification and Prayer (*Kitāb al-Ṭahārah* and *Kitāb al-Ṣalāh*) across critical printed editions, focusing on structural-textual analysis rather than physical manuscript codicology. Future scholarship should expand this comparative framework across non-ritual legal domains—such as commercial transactions (*mu'āmalāt*) and penal law (*ḥudūd*)—and interrogate unpublished recensional manuscripts to trace how scribal variance intersected with regional reception. Finally, interdisciplinary collaboration between hadith specialists and data scientists is essential to formalize multi-layered graph models that integrate qualitative editorial interventions, ensuring that digital humanities applications reflect the full epistemological complexity of early Islamic textual scholarship.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors sincerely thank the Department of Hadith Studies at Sekolah Tinggi Ekonomi dan Bisnis Islam (STEBI) Lampung and Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung for providing institutional facilities and academic support throughout the preparation of this research.

DECLARATIONS

Declaration Category	Statement Details
Use of AI Statement	The authors declare that no Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were used in the empirical data collection, textual collation, or primary analytical processes of this manuscript.
Authors' Contributions	Imron Taslim contributed to conceptualization, methodology, textual collation, and drafting the initial manuscript. Rizzaldi and Mohd Asmadi Yakob contributed to structural data analysis, literature review, critical revision, and final proofreading. All authors have read and agreed to the published version.
Funding Statement	This research received no external grant or specific financial support from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.
Conflict of Interest	The authors declare that they have no competing financial interests, institutional rivalries, or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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