

YOUTH SOCIAL MEDIA BEHAVIOR AND ETHICAL INFORMATION VERIFICATION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE DIGITAL TABAYYUN MODEL

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of social media has intensified concerns about misinformation and the ethical responsibilities of users, particularly among youth who constitute one of the most active online populations. While technological solutions such as automated fact-checking have gained prominence, less attention has been given to the behavioral and ethical dimensions of information verification. This study examines the influence of youth social media behavior on ethical information verification practices and proposes a structured value-based framework to address this gap. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 215 young social media users. Behavioral constructs grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior; attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control were employed to examine their relationship with ethical verification practices, which were operationalized through self-control, open-mindedness, critical thinking, and information-seeking behaviors. Descriptive, correlation, and regression analyses were conducted using SPSS. The findings reveal a strong and significant positive relationship between social media behavior and ethical information verification ($r = 0.767$, $p < .01$). Regression analysis further indicates that social media behavior is a substantial predictor of verification practices, explaining 59% of the variance ($R^2 = .59$). These results demonstrate that ethical verification is not merely a technical or cognitive skill, but a behavioral practice shaped by attitudes, social influence, and perceived capacity for action. Building on these empirical insights, the study introduces the Digital Tabayyun Model as a value-based ethical verification framework that integrates source evaluation, reflective verification behavior, and impact awareness. The model complements existing technological and behavioral approaches by emphasizing the human-centered dimensions of ethical decision-making in digital environments. This study contributes to research in information and education technology by providing empirical evidence on behavioral determinants of ethical verification and offering a culturally responsive, value-based model to support digital literacy and responsible social media engagement among youth.

Keywords: *Ethical Information Verification; Youth Social Media Behavior; Digital Literacy; Theory of Planned Behavior; Digital Tabayyun*

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of social media has fundamentally transformed how information is produced, accessed, and disseminated, particularly among young people. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, X, and WhatsApp have become primary

sources of news, opinions, and social narratives, enabling users to consume and share information instantly and at an unprecedented scale. While this digital environment enhances connectivity and participation, it also intensifies exposure to misinformation, unverified content, and emotionally driven narratives [3]. Numerous studies have

highlighted that young users, despite being digitally active, remain vulnerable to inaccurate or misleading information due to habitual sharing behaviors, peer influence, and limited critical evaluation practices [9, 10].

Within the field of information and education technology, existing research has extensively examined issues related to digital literacy, media consumption patterns, and online behavior among youth. Prior studies indicate that ethical information practices such as verifying sources, evaluating credibility, and considering the social impact of sharing are essential competencies for responsible digital citizenship [5, 7]. However, empirical evidence suggests that high levels of social media usage do not necessarily translate into high levels of information verification or ethical reflection [11, 13]. Instead, information sharing is often shaped by behavioral tendencies, emotional responses, and perceived social norms rather than systematic evaluation of accuracy or consequence [8, 14].

To explain these behavioral patterns, scholars have increasingly applied behavioral frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which links attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control to actual practices in digital contexts. Research adopting this perspective demonstrates that users' verification behaviors are influenced not only by knowledge or skills but also by social expectations and perceived ease of performing verification actions [15]. Despite these insights, much of the existing work remains descriptive or diagnostic, focusing on identifying problematic behaviors rather than proposing structured ethical or educational interventions that can guide users toward more responsible information practices.

At the same time, technological responses to misinformation such as automated fact-checking systems, algorithmic content moderation, and artificial intelligence-driven verification tools have gained significant attention [4]. While these approaches enhance efficiency in detecting false or misleading content, they largely operate at the system level and often overlook the human behavioral and ethical dimensions of information sharing. Consequently, there is a growing recognition that technological solutions alone are insufficient without complementary frameworks that cultivate ethical awareness, critical judgment, and self-regulation among users, particularly youth.

Despite the breadth of research on social media behavior and digital literacy, several important gaps

remain. First, there is a lack of empirical studies that explicitly examine the relationship between youth social media behavior and ethical information verification practices using validated behavioral constructs. Many studies discuss verification in abstract or normative terms but provide limited quantitative evidence on how behavioral factors shape verification practices in real-world contexts [16, 17]. Second, although ethical principles are frequently invoked in discussions of digital literacy, few studies operationalize these principles into structured models that can function as practical educational or behavioral frameworks. Ethical considerations are often treated as supplementary rather than integrated components of information behavior models.

Third, existing verification and literacy frameworks tend to be value-neutral or technologically driven, offering procedural guidance without embedding ethical reflection on consequences, responsibility, and social impact. This creates a missing link between behavioral analysis and ethical intervention, particularly in multicultural and value-sensitive contexts where ethical reasoning plays a crucial role in information practices. As a result, there is a need for models that bridge behavioral insights, ethical verification principles, and educational applicability in a coherent and empirically grounded manner.

These identified gaps provide the primary motivation for the present study and highlight the need for an integrated behavioral and value-based verification framework. Addressing these gaps is significant for several reasons. From an educational perspective, young people represent a critical group whose information practices will shape future digital ecosystems. Strengthening ethical information verification among youth contributes directly to the development of digital literacy, critical thinking, and responsible participation in online environments. From a technological standpoint, integrating behavioral and ethical frameworks complements existing verification technologies by reinforcing human-centered decision-making rather than relying solely on automated systems. Furthermore, from a societal perspective, improving ethical verification practices can mitigate the spread of misinformation, reduce social harm, and promote healthier digital discourse.

In response to these challenges, this study aims to examine the influence of youth social media behavior on ethical information verification practices through an empirical investigation.

Drawing on behavioral constructs commonly associated with digital decision-making, the study analyzes how attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control relate to verification-oriented practices among young social media users. Beyond behavioral analysis, the study proposes the Digital Tabayyun Model as a structured ethical verification framework that integrates source evaluation, reflective verification behavior, and impact awareness into a cohesive model. While rooted in ethical principles, the model is presented as a value-based digital verification framework applicable to educational and technological contexts.

The significance of this study lies in its dual contribution. Empirically, it provides quantitative evidence on the behavioral predictors of ethical information verification among youth, addressing a key gap in literature. Conceptually, it introduces a structured model that translates ethical verification principles into an actionable framework suitable for digital literacy education and technology-enhanced interventions. By positioning ethical verification as both a behavioral practice and an educational outcome, this study offers insights relevant to researchers, educators, and technology developers concerned with fostering responsible information practices in the digital age.

2. SURVEY OF RELATED WORKS

Understanding ethical information verification in social media environments requires an integration of behavioral theory, digital literacy research, and value-based ethical frameworks. While prior studies have examined youth media consumption patterns, misinformation, and digital responsibility from various perspectives, these strands of research are often discussed in isolation. To provide a coherent theoretical foundation for the present study, this section reviews relevant literature across four interconnected themes: (1) youth social media behavior and information literacy, (2) the application of the Theory of Planned Behavior in digital ethics, (3) ethical verification and value-based digital models, and (4) tabayyun as an ethical verification construct. These themes are discussed chronologically and thematically to highlight the evolution of research in the field and to clarify the conceptual and empirical gaps addressed by this study.

2.1 Youth Social Media Behavior and Information Literacy

Early studies on youth engagement with digital media primarily focused on access, frequency of

use, and technological competence. During the initial expansion of social networking platforms, research largely portrayed young people as “digital natives” who were assumed to possess advanced skills in navigating online environments [18]. This assumption led to a strong emphasis on technical proficiency rather than critical evaluation or ethical reflection in information use. However, subsequent empirical studies began to challenge this narrative, showing that high levels of digital exposure do not necessarily correspond to strong information literacy or verification skills [19].

As social media evolved into a dominant information ecosystem, scholars increasingly examined how youth consume, interpret, and share information online. Research in the mid-2010s highlighted that young users tend to rely on heuristics such as popularity indicators (likes, shares, and comments) and peer endorsement when assessing the credibility of online information [20]. These behavioral tendencies were found to increase susceptibility to misinformation, particularly in environments characterized by information overload and rapid content circulation. Studies also revealed that emotional engagement and immediacy often outweigh accuracy considerations in youth information-sharing decisions [21].

More recent research has shifted toward the concept of information literacy as a multidimensional construct encompassing not only technical skills but also critical thinking, source evaluation, and ethical awareness. Within this framework, information literacy is understood as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and responsibly use information in digital contexts [25]. Empirical findings consistently indicate that many young social media users demonstrate confidence in their ability to evaluate information, yet their actual verification practices remain inconsistent. This discrepancy suggests a gap between perceived competence and enacted behavior, particularly in real-time social media interactions.

Contemporary studies further emphasize the role of behavioral and social factors in shaping youth information practices. Peer influence, perceived social norms, and platform affordances have been shown to significantly affect decisions to verify or share information [26]. For example, research has found that young users are more likely to share unverified content when it aligns with group identity, emotional resonance, or prevailing narratives within their social networks [29]. Conversely, verification behaviors tend to decline when users perceive such practices as time-

consuming, socially unnecessary, or unlikely to be rewarded within their online communities.

In parallel, scholars have raised concerns about the limitations of current digital literacy initiatives, which often prioritize technical competencies over ethical reasoning and behavioral self-regulation [30]. While educational interventions have demonstrated some success in improving awareness of misinformation, their impact on sustained verification behavior remains mixed. This has led to growing calls for literacy frameworks that integrate ethical considerations, reflective judgment, and responsibility toward social consequences, rather than focusing solely on factual accuracy or technical detection skills [6].

Recent trends in information and education technology research increasingly advocate for human-centered approaches that acknowledge the interaction between user behavior, cognitive processes, and value systems [22]. In this view, ethical information verification is not merely a skill but a practice shaped by attitudes, social expectations, and perceived behavioral control. However, despite growing recognition of these factors, empirical studies that explicitly link youth social media behavior to ethical verification practices remain limited [34, 35]. Much of the literature addresses misinformation as a technological or informational problem, leaving behavioral and ethical dimensions underexplored.

Overall, the existing body of research demonstrates that youth social media behavior plays a critical role in shaping information practices, yet significant gaps persist. There is a lack of empirically grounded studies that examine how behavioral patterns influence ethical verification practices in an integrated manner. Furthermore, current information literacy models often stop short of translating ethical awareness into actionable behavioral frameworks. These limitations underscore the need for research that systematically investigates youth social media behavior as a determinant of ethical information verification and informs the development of value-based models that can support responsible digital engagement.

2.2 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in Digital Ethics

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) has been widely applied to explain and predict human behavior across various domains, including health, education, and technology use. Developed as an

extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action, TPB proposes that behavior is primarily shaped by three interrelated components: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control [1].

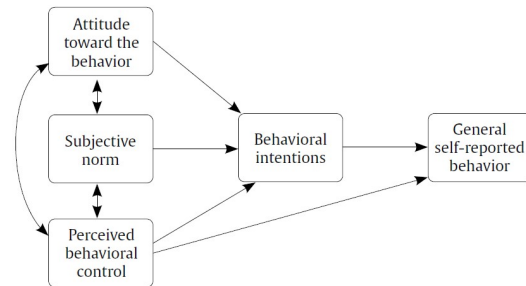


Figure 1: The Theory of Planned Behavior [31]

Together, these constructs determine behavioral intention, which in turn influences actual behavior. Over time, TPB has become one of the most influential frameworks for examining decision-making processes in contexts where behavior involves deliberation, self-regulation, and social influence [2].

In the context of digital environments, early applications of TPB focused on technology adoption, online learning participation, and information system usage. These studies demonstrated that users' attitudes toward technology, perceived expectations from significant others, and confidence in their ability to use digital tools significantly influenced their online behaviors [24]. As digital platforms became increasingly embedded in everyday life, researchers began extending TPB to examine more complex behaviors, including online ethics, information sharing, and responsible technology use.

From the mid-2010s onward, TPB has been increasingly employed to study ethical behavior in digital contexts, particularly in relation to privacy protection, cyber ethics, and responsible online engagement. Research findings consistently indicate that ethical digital behavior is not driven solely by knowledge or awareness but is strongly influenced by users' evaluative beliefs, perceived social pressures, and perceived ease or difficulty of performing ethical actions [27]. For example, studies have shown that users with positive attitudes toward ethical online conduct are more likely to engage in responsible practices, such as respecting privacy settings or refraining from harmful content sharing. Similarly, subjective norms such as peer expectations and community

standards play a critical role in shaping ethical decision-making online.

More recent research has extended TPB to examine behaviors related to information credibility assessment and verification in social media environments. These studies suggest that users' willingness to verify information before sharing is influenced by their beliefs about the importance of verification (attitude), perceptions of whether verification is socially expected or valued (subjective norm), and their confidence in possessing the skills, time, and resources necessary to perform verification (perceived behavioral control) [31]. Importantly, perceived behavioral control has emerged as a particularly significant predictor in digital contexts, where verification is often constrained by time pressure, information overload, and platform design.

Within the field of digital ethics, TPB has also been used to highlight the gap between ethical intention and actual behavior. While many users express strong intentions to behave ethically online, empirical evidence shows that these intentions do not always translate into consistent practices. Scholars attribute this gap to situational factors such as emotional arousal, social reinforcement mechanisms, and platform affordances that prioritize speed and engagement over reflection [32]. These findings underscore the relevance of TPB in explaining why ethical awareness alone is insufficient to ensure ethical digital behavior.

Despite its widespread application, existing TPB-based studies in digital ethics reveal several limitations. First, many studies focus on isolated ethical behaviors such as privacy protection or cyberbullying prevention rather than examining ethical information practices as a holistic process. Second, ethical considerations are often treated implicitly within TPB constructs rather than being explicitly operationalized as core components of the behavioral model. As a result, TPB has frequently been used as an explanatory framework without being integrated into the development of structured ethical intervention models [37].

Furthermore, while TPB effectively explains how attitudes, norms, and perceived control influence behavior, it does not inherently specify the ethical content or value framework that should guide behavior. This limitation has led to calls for the integration of TPB with value-based or ethical constructs that can provide normative direction alongside behavioral explanation. In the context of information verification, this integration is

particularly important, as verification involves not only cognitive evaluation but also ethical judgment regarding responsibility, potential harm, and social impact.

Recent trends in information and education technology research suggest a growing interest in combining TPB with ethical and value-oriented frameworks to address complex digital behaviors [39]. Such hybrid approaches aim to preserve TPB's explanatory strength while enriching it with ethical principles that inform decision-making processes. However, empirical studies that operationalize this integration in the context of social media verification behavior among youth remain scarce. Most existing research either applies TPB without a clearly articulated ethical framework or discusses ethical verification without grounding it in a robust behavioral theory [42].

In summary, the literature demonstrates that TPB provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding ethical behavior in digital environments, including information verification practices. Its emphasis on attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control aligns closely with the behavioral realities of social media use among youth. Nevertheless, the absence of integrated ethical verification models within TPB-based research highlights a critical gap. Addressing this gap requires an approach that combines TPB's behavioral explanatory power with a structured ethical framework capable of guiding verification practices in real-world digital contexts. This need directly informs the present study's focus on examining behavioral predictors of ethical information verification and proposing a value-based model that complements TPB within social media environments.

2.3 Ethical Verification and Value-Based Digital Models

The growing complexity of digital information environments has intensified scholarly interest in ethical verification as a critical dimension of digital literacy and responsible technology use. Early discussions of verification in online contexts largely centered on technical accuracy, emphasizing fact-checking mechanisms, source authentication, and automated detection of misinformation [12]. These approaches were driven primarily by developments in information systems and computational methods, reflecting a strong belief that technological solutions could effectively mitigate the risks of false or misleading content.

As misinformation became more pervasive and socially consequential, researchers began to recognize the limitations of purely technical verification models. Studies in the late 2010s highlighted that algorithmic detection systems, while efficient in identifying patterns of false information, often struggle with contextual interpretation, cultural nuance, and ethical judgment [23]. This realization marked a shift in scholarly discourse from system-centered verification toward more human-centered and ethically grounded approaches that emphasize user responsibility, reflective judgment, and social accountability [28].

In response to these concerns, the concept of ethical verification emerged as an extension of traditional information verification. Ethical verification goes beyond assessing factual correctness to include consideration of intention, potential harm, and social impact [47]. Within this framework, verification is understood not merely as a procedural step but as a moral and civic practice that requires individuals to evaluate the broader consequences of information sharing. Research in education technology and digital ethics increasingly positions ethical verification as a core component of digital citizenship, linking it to values such as responsibility, fairness, and respect for others [48].

Alongside this conceptual development, scholars have proposed various value-based digital models aimed at embedding ethical considerations into information practices. These models typically integrate ethical principles such as accountability, transparency, and social responsibility into frameworks for online behavior and digital literacy education [53]. Early value-based models often adopted normative approaches, articulating what users ought to do without fully addressing how such behaviors can be cultivated or sustained in real-world digital contexts. While these models provided important moral guidance, their limited attention to behavioral mechanisms reduced their practical impact [55].

More recent developments have sought to bridge this gap by combining ethical frameworks with behavioral and educational theories. In this vein, value-based digital models increasingly emphasize reflective practice, self-regulation, and awareness of social consequences as integral components of verification behavior [57]. Research in this area suggests that ethical verification is more likely to occur when users internalize ethical values and perceive verification as both meaningful and socially endorsed. This shift reflects a broader trend

toward integrating ethical reasoning into digital literacy programs rather than treating ethics as an add-on to technical instruction [52, 54].

In the context of social media, value-based models have been applied to address issues such as online civility, hate speech prevention, and responsible content sharing. These models often advocate for a multi-layered approach that combines cognitive skills (e.g., critical evaluation), affective dispositions (e.g., empathy, self-restraint), and normative commitments (e.g., responsibility, public good) [56]. Empirical studies indicate that interventions grounded in such holistic frameworks are more effective in promoting sustained ethical behavior than those focused solely on information accuracy or rule compliance.

Despite these advances, several limitations remain evident in the literature. First, many ethical verification models remain conceptually rich but empirically under-tested, with limited quantitative evidence demonstrating their influence on actual user behavior. Second, existing value-based frameworks often lack clear operationalization, making it difficult to translate ethical principles into concrete behavioral indicators or educational practices. Third, while ethical considerations are frequently discussed in abstract terms, fewer studies offer structured models that align ethical values with established behavioral theories such as TPB, which are crucial for explaining how and why individuals act in digital contexts [45].

Furthermore, most value-based digital models have been developed within secular ethical traditions, emphasizing universal principles such as fairness and responsibility without systematically engaging with culturally or religiously grounded value systems. While this approach enhances generalizability, it also overlooks the potential contribution of context-specific ethical frameworks that may resonate more strongly with communities [44]. This gap is particularly relevant in multicultural societies, where ethical reasoning is often shaped by deeply embedded moral traditions that influence attitudes and behavioral norms.

Recent trends in information and education technology research point toward a growing interest in culturally responsive and value-sensitive design of digital ethics frameworks. Scholars increasingly argue that ethical verification models should not only be technically sound and behaviorally informed but also culturally meaningful to their intended users [38]. Such models are more likely to foster internalization of ethical principles and long-

term behavioral change, especially among youth whose digital practices are strongly influenced by identity and community values.

In summary, the evolution of research on ethical verification and value-based digital models reflects a gradual shift from technical detection toward human-centered, ethically grounded, and behaviorally informed approaches. While existing studies provide valuable insights into the importance of integrating ethics into digital verification practices, significant gaps remain in terms of empirical validation, operational clarity, and cultural contextualization [33]. These gaps underscore the need for models that combine ethical principles with robust behavioral frameworks and educational applicability. This need directly informs the present study's effort to propose a structured ethical verification model that complements behavioral analysis and addresses the limitations of current value-based approaches in social media contexts.

2.4 Tabayyun As An Ethical Verification Construct

The concept of tabayyun originates from a moral-ethical tradition that emphasizes careful examination, verification, and responsible judgment before accepting or disseminating information. In its contemporary application, tabayyun can be understood as an ethical verification construct that aligns closely with the goals of digital literacy and responsible information behavior [59]. Rather than functioning solely as a religious or normative principle, tabayyun may be reframed as a structured approach to ethical information practices that integrates cognitive evaluation, behavioral self-regulation, and awareness of social consequences.

From a functional perspective, tabayyun embodies three interrelated dimensions that are highly relevant to modern digital environments. First, it emphasizes source evaluation, requiring individuals to assess the credibility, relevance, and reliability of information before engaging with it. This dimension resonates strongly with established principles of information literacy, particularly in relation to critical source analysis and verification skills. Second, tabayyun promotes reflective decision-making, encouraging individuals to pause, reconsider, and avoid impulsive sharing driven by emotional or social pressure. This aspect aligns with contemporary discussions on self-regulation and mindful technology use. Third, tabayyun foregrounds impact awareness, directing attention to the potential consequences of information

sharing on individuals, communities, and social harmony [58].

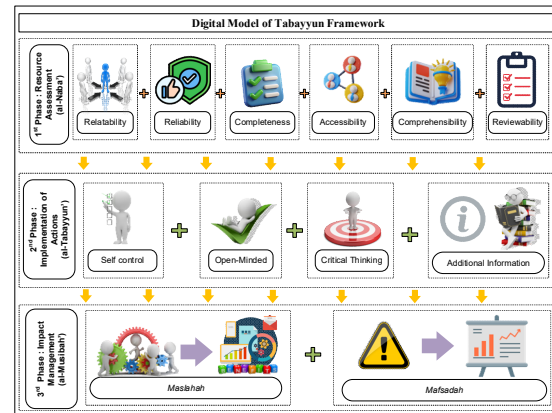


Figure 2: Digital Tabayyun Framework [58]

In recent years, scholars interested in digital ethics and value-based education have begun to explore how culturally grounded ethical principles can inform contemporary models of responsible technology use. Within this emerging discourse, tabayyun has been identified as a potential ethical lens through which information verification can be conceptualized not merely as a technical procedure but as a morally situated practice [62]. This approach reframes verification as a responsibility toward others, emphasizing accountability and prevention of harm rather than mere accuracy checking.

Compared with existing ethical verification frameworks, tabayyun offers a distinctive contribution in its holistic integration of cognitive, behavioral, and ethical elements. While many verification models focus primarily on analytical skills or procedural steps, tabayyun embeds these processes within a broader value structure that prioritizes caution, fairness, and social responsibility [60]. This integration makes tabayyun particularly suitable as a foundation for value-based digital models that seek to cultivate sustainable ethical behavior rather than short-term compliance with rules or guidelines.

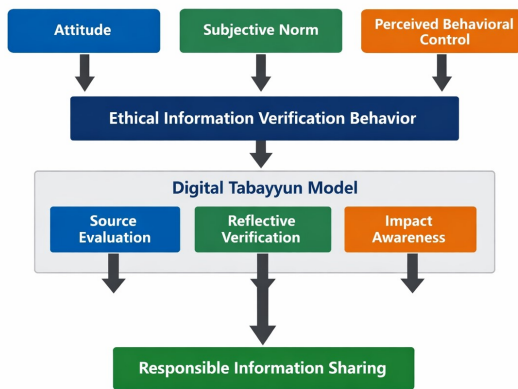


Figure 3: Integrated Behavioral–Ethical Verification Framework

Figure 3 illustrates the integrated framework of the present study, combining behavioral constructs derived from the Theory of Planned Behavior with ethical information verification practices and the proposed Digital Tabayyun Model. The framework demonstrates how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence verification behavior, which is further structured through the dimensions of source evaluation, reflective verification, and impact awareness. This integration provides a comprehensive view of how behavioral and ethical factors interact to shape responsible information sharing in digital environments.

Importantly, tabayyun is not positioned in this study as a prescriptive doctrine but as an operationalizable ethical construct that can be translated into behavioral indicators and educational practices. Its principles can be mapped onto observable verification behaviors such as checking sources, seeking additional information, resisting impulsive sharing, and evaluating potential social impact [61]. This functional reinterpretation allows tabayyun to be integrated with established behavioral theories, including the Theory of Planned Behavior, thereby enhancing its relevance for empirical investigation.

Despite its conceptual potential, tabayyun has rarely been operationalized in empirical studies of digital information behavior. Existing discussions often remain at a normative or philosophical level, offering valuable ethical insights but limited guidance on how the principle can be systematically embedded into behavioral models or digital literacy interventions [63]. As a result, there remains a clear gap between the ethical aspirations associated with tabayyun and its practical application in contemporary digital contexts.

Recent trends in culturally responsive digital ethics highlight the importance of grounding ethical models in value systems that resonate with users' identities and social environments. For youth in particular, ethical frameworks that connect with their cultural narratives may foster stronger internalization and sustained behavioral change [64]. In this sense, tabayyun provides a culturally meaningful yet universally adaptable construct that complements secular ethical verification models by adding depth in moral motivation and responsibility.

2.5 Comparative Analysis of Existing Verification Approaches

Existing approaches to information verification in digital environments can be broadly categorized into three main strands: technology-driven verification systems, digital literacy frameworks, and behavior-based models. Each approach offers distinct strengths but also exhibits important limitations when addressing ethical verification in social media contexts. Technology-driven approaches, such as automated fact-checking and algorithmic detection systems, focus on identifying false or misleading information efficiently. While these methods are effective in large-scale content filtering, they often lack contextual understanding and do not address the user's role in responsible information sharing.

Digital literacy models emphasize the development of critical thinking and information evaluation skills. These approaches contribute to improving awareness and analytical ability among users; however, they frequently treat ethical considerations as secondary and may not sufficiently influence actual user behavior in real-time digital interactions. Behavioral models, particularly those based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, provide strong explanatory power in understanding how attitudes, social norms, and perceived control influence online behavior. Nevertheless, such models typically do not incorporate explicit ethical frameworks, limiting their capacity to guide value-based decision-making in information verification.

In contrast, the proposed Digital Tabayyun Model integrates behavioral insights with a value-based ethical framework. It combines source evaluation, reflective verification behavior, and impact awareness into a structured model that addresses both the cognitive and ethical dimensions of information verification. This integration enables a more comprehensive approach that not only

explains user behavior but also guides responsible digital practices

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Verification Approaches

Approach	Key Features	Strengths	Limitations
Technology-driven (e.g., fact-checking, AI detection)	Automated verification, large-scale filtering	Fast, scalable, efficient	Lacks human judgment, limited ethical reasoning
Digital literacy models	Focus on critical thinking and evaluation skills	Improves awareness and analytical ability	Weak behavioral impact, ethics often implicit
Behavioral models (TPB-based)	Explains behavior via attitude, norms, control	Strong predictive capability	Lacks structured ethical framework
Digital Tabayyun Model (Proposed)	Integrates behavior + ethics reflection	Holistic, value-based, behaviorally grounded	Requires further empirical expansion

In summary, tabayyun can be reconceptualized as an ethical verification construct that aligns with contemporary goals of digital literacy, responsible social media behavior, and value-based education. Its emphasis on source evaluation, reflective judgment, and impact awareness positions it as a coherent ethical framework that bridges behavioral analysis and moral reasoning. The limited empirical operationalization of tabayyun in existing research underscores the need for studies that translate this ethical principle into structured, testable models. This gap provides the foundation for the present study's proposal of the Digital Tabayyun Model as a value-based ethical verification framework grounded in behavioral theory and applicable to modern digital environments.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This section outlines the research design, participants, instruments, data collection procedures, and analytical techniques employed to achieve the objectives of the study. The methodological approach was developed to ensure transparency, replicability, and alignment with the study's focus on examining the relationship between youth social media behavior and ethical information verification practices. By combining validated behavioral constructs with structured statistical analysis, the methodology provides a systematic basis for testing the proposed

relationships and informing the development of the Digital Tabayyun Model.

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the influence of youth social media behavior on ethical information verification practices. A quantitative approach was selected to allow systematic measurement of behavioral constructs and to enable statistical testing of relationships between variables. The design is suitable for achieving the study's primary objectives, which focus on identifying behavioral predictors and examining their influence on verification practices in social media contexts.

The study integrates behavioral analysis with a model development component. While the empirical phase focuses on testing relationships between variables, the conceptual phase draws on the empirical findings and prior literature to inform the development of the Digital Tabayyun Model as a value-based ethical verification framework.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The study involved 215 respondents, primarily drawn from the youth population in Malaysia. Participants were selected using convenience sampling, targeting individuals who actively use social media platforms. This sampling method was considered appropriate given the exploratory nature of the study and its focus on behavioral patterns among young users.

The demographic profile of the respondents indicates that the majority were aged between 18 and 25 years, representing students in tertiary education institutions. This group was selected due to their high level of engagement with social media and their relevance as a key demographic for digital literacy and ethical information practices. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study prior to completing the survey.

3.3 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire consisting of three main sections. Section A (Demographic Information) gathered background data on respondents, including gender, age, education level, location, and frequency of social media use. Section B (Social Media Behavior) measured youth social media behavior using constructs adapted from the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). It comprised three dimensions:

- i. Attitude Toward Ethical Verification – assessing respondents’ beliefs and evaluations regarding the importance of verifying information before sharing.
- ii. Subjective Norms – measuring perceived social expectations and peer influence related to verification practices.
- iii. Perceived Behavioral Control – examining respondents’ perceived ability, confidence, and resources to engage in verification behavior.

Each dimension was operationalized using five items, resulting in a total of 15 items for this section. Section C (Ethical Information Verification Practices) assessed verification-oriented practices based on four functional dimensions associated with ethical verification behavior; a) self-control (ability to refrain from impulsive sharing), b) open-mindedness (willingness to consider alternative viewpoints), c) critical thinking (evaluation of logic, evidence, and source credibility), and d) information seeking (efforts to consult additional or authoritative sources).

A total of 20 items were used to measure these dimensions. All items in Sections B and C were rated using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed using an online survey platform (Google Forms) to facilitate broad and efficient data collection. The survey link was shared through university communication channels, including student groups and academic networks, targeting active social media users. Data collection was conducted over a period of four weeks to ensure sufficient participation. Prior to the main data collection, a pilot test involving 30 respondents was carried out to assess the clarity, reliability, and relevance of the questionnaire items. Based on the feedback received, minor revisions were made to improve item wording and structure. Only responses that were fully completed were included in the final analysis to ensure data quality and consistency.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis followed a systematic sequence to ensure reliability and replicability.

- i. Descriptive Analysis - summarize respondents’ demographic characteristics

and determine the overall levels of social media behavior and ethical verification practices. Mean scores and standard deviations were computed for all constructs, and interpretation of mean levels followed established benchmarks for Likert-scale data.

- ii. Normality Testing - conducted using skewness and kurtosis indices to assess the distribution of data. Values within the acceptable range indicated that the data set met the assumptions required for subsequent parametric analyses.
- iii. Correlation Analysis - examine the relationship between youth social media behavior and ethical information verification practices. This analysis provided an initial assessment of the strength and direction of the association between the two main constructs.
- iv. Regression Analysis - test the predictive influence of social media behavior on ethical verification practices, simple linear regression was conducted. Ethical information verification was treated as the dependent variable, while social media behavior served as the independent variable. The regression model evaluated the proportion of variance explained (R^2) and the statistical significance of the predictive relationship.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained through institutional procedures prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The study adhered to ethical research standards involving human participants, including transparency of purpose, informed consent, and secure handling of data.

4. RESULT ANALYSIS

A total of 215 respondents participated in the study. The demographic profile indicates that the sample was predominantly composed of young adults, with 97.2% aged between 18 and 25 years, reflecting the intended focus on youth social media users. Female respondents constituted 68.8%, while males represented 31.2% of the sample. Most participants were students (97.2%), highlighting the educational relevance of the study.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	67	31.2
	Female	148	68.8
Age	18–25 years	209	97.2
	26–35 years	3	1.4
	36–45 years	3	1.4
Occupation	Students	209	97.2
	Government sector	4	1.9
	Self-employed	1	0.5
	Unemployed	1	0.5
Daily social media use	< 5 hours	41	19.1
	6–10 hours	125	58.1
	11–15 hours	38	17.7
	≥ 16 hours	11	5.1

In terms of social media usage, most respondents reported spending 6–10 hours per day on social media platforms (58.1%), indicating a high level of digital engagement. This pattern confirms that the sample represents an active user group for whom ethical information verification practices are particularly relevant.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Key Constructs

Descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the overall levels of youth social media behavior and ethical information verification practices. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for each construct using a five-point Likert scale.

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis

Construct	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Social Media Behavior (overall)	4.32	0.50	High
Attitude toward ethical verification	4.54	0.52	High
Subjective Norm	4.29	0.61	High
Perceived Behavioral Control	4.12	0.60	High
Ethical Information Verification (overall)	4.24	0.54	High
Self-control	4.18	0.60	High
Open-mindedness	4.32	0.55	High
Critical thinking	4.24	0.61	High
Information seeking	4.23	0.68	High

All constructs recorded high mean scores, indicating that respondents generally demonstrated positive attitudes toward ethical verification, perceived strong social encouragement, and felt capable of engaging in verification practices. Similarly, ethical information verification practices across self-control, open-mindedness, critical

thinking, and information seeking were reported at high levels.

4.2 Normality Assessment

Normality tests based on skewness and kurtosis indices showed that the data distribution fell within acceptable ranges for parametric analysis..

Table 4: Normality Assessment

Variable	Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis
Social Media Behavior	4.32	-0.42	-0.42
Ethical Information Verification	4.24	-0.28	-0.23

These results confirmed the suitability of the dataset for correlation and regression analyses.

4.3 Correlation Between Social Media Behavior and Ethical Verification

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between youth social media behavior and ethical information verification practices.

Table 5: Correlation Analysis

Variables	r	Significance
Social Media Behavior ↔ Ethical Information Verification	0.767	p < .01

The results show a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between social media behavior and ethical information verification practices (r = 0.767, p < .01). This finding supports the hypothesis that more positive behavioral orientations toward social media use are associated with higher levels of ethical verification practices.

4.4 Regression Analysis

To determine the predictive influence of youth social media behavior on ethical information verification, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted.

Table 6: Regression Analysis

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	0.61	0.21	-	2.89	.004
Social Media Behavior	0.84	0.05	.77	17.44	< .001

Model summary: R = .77, R² = .59, F(1, 213) = 304.25, p < .001

The regression results indicate that youth social media behavior significantly predicts ethical information verification practices. The model explains 59% of the variance in verification practices, demonstrating a strong predictive relationship. This finding confirms that behavioral

factors play a substantial role in shaping ethical verification in social media contexts.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important empirical insights into the relationship between youth social media behavior and ethical information verification practices. The consistently high mean scores across behavioral and verification constructs suggest that young users are not merely passive consumers of digital content but exhibit a substantial level of awareness regarding responsible information practices. However, the strength of the correlation and regression results reveals a more nuanced reality: ethical verification is deeply intertwined with behavioral orientations rather than being solely a matter of knowledge or awareness.

5.1 Behavioral Foundations of Ethical Verification

The strong positive relationship between social media behavior and ethical information verification supports the theoretical premise of the Theory of Planned Behavior. Attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control emerged as meaningful determinants of verification practices. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that ethical digital behavior is shaped not only by cognitive competence but also by social expectations and perceived ease of action [36]. In practical terms, young users are more likely to verify information when they believe verification is important, socially valued, and within their capacity to perform.

Notably, perceived behavioral control appears particularly salient in this context. Despite widespread awareness of misinformation, verification practices can be constrained by time pressure, information overload, and platform design that prioritizes speed over reflection [40]. The high mean score for perceived control in this study suggests that respondents generally feel capable of engaging in verification, yet the strong predictive effect indicates that such confidence must be continuously reinforced through supportive educational and technological environments [41].

5.2 Ethical Verification as a Behavioral Practice

The high levels of self-control, open-mindedness, critical thinking, and information-seeking behaviors demonstrate that ethical verification among youth is a multidimensional practice rather than a single action. These

dimensions collectively reflect the integration of cognitive evaluation, emotional regulation, and social responsibility [43]. This finding supports contemporary perspectives in digital ethics that conceptualize verification not merely as a technical procedure but as a form of ethical agency.

At the same time, the results highlight a potential tension between reported attitudes and real-world digital practices. Although respondents expressed strong endorsement of ethical verification, previous studies suggest that actual behavior in fast-paced online environments may still be inconsistent. This discrepancy underscores the importance of structured frameworks that can translate ethical awareness into habitual practice, moving from intention to sustained action [46].

5.3 Contribution of the Digital Tabayyun Model

Against this empirical backdrop, the proposed Digital Tabayyun Model gains relevance. The model's three core components; source evaluation, reflective verification behavior, and impact awareness directly correspond to the behavioral and ethical dimensions identified in the findings. By operationalizing ethical verification into a structured framework, the model addresses a key limitation in existing literature, which often treats ethical principles as abstract ideals rather than actionable practices.

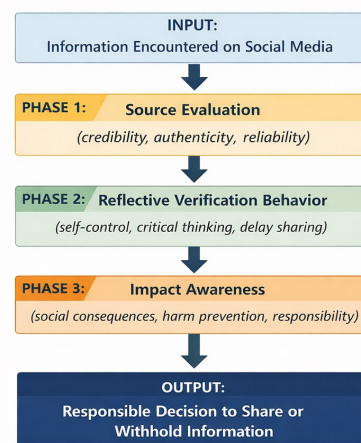


Figure 4: The Digital Tabayyun Model

Figure 4 presents the refined Digital Tabayyun Model as a structured ethical verification framework. The model consists of three sequential phases: source evaluation, reflective verification behavior, and impact awareness. These phases guide users from initial information exposure to responsible decision-making, emphasizing both

cognitive evaluation and ethical consideration. The model complements behavioral findings by translating ethical verification into a practical and actionable process suitable for digital environments.

Unlike purely technological or rule-based approaches to misinformation, the Digital Tabayyun Model emphasizes the human-centered dimension of verification. It complements automated systems by reinforcing ethical judgment, self-regulation, and responsibility among users [58]. This positioning is especially important in educational contexts, where the goal extends beyond short-term compliance to the cultivation of long-term ethical dispositions.

5.4 Educational and Technological Implications

The findings carry significant implications for digital literacy education and technology design. From an educational standpoint, the strong influence of behavioral factors suggests that interventions should move beyond technical training toward programs that address attitudes, social norms, and perceived control [49, 51]. Embedding ethical verification into curricula, co-curricular activities, and peer-led initiatives may enhance the social legitimacy of verification practices.

From a technological perspective, the results support the development of ethics-by-design features in social media platforms. Nudging mechanisms such as “pause before sharing” prompts, credibility indicators, and contextual warnings can reinforce users’ perceived behavioral control and encourage reflective engagement with information [4]. When aligned with value-based frameworks such as the Digital Tabayyun Model, these features can create an ecosystem that supports ethical verification at both the individual and system levels.

5.5 Comparative Performance Analysis

Although traditional performance metrics such as accuracy and computational efficiency are commonly used in evaluating algorithm-based verification systems, the present study adopts a behavioral and value-based approach, which requires a different evaluation perspective. Existing technology-driven models, such as automated fact-checking systems, demonstrate high efficiency and scalability in detecting misinformation. However, their performance is largely dependent on predefined datasets and algorithms, and they often

lack contextual understanding and ethical judgment. As a result, while these systems perform well in terms of detection accuracy, they do not necessarily influence users’ verification behavior or decision-making processes.

Digital literacy models, on the other hand, aim to improve users’ cognitive abilities in evaluating information. Their effectiveness lies in enhancing awareness and analytical skills, but their impact on actual verification behavior is often limited, as they do not explicitly address behavioral drivers or social influences. Behavioral models, particularly those based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, show strong explanatory power in predicting user behavior. However, they do not provide a structured ethical framework to guide verification practices, limiting their practical applicability in addressing misinformation from a value-based perspective.

In comparison, the proposed Digital Tabayyun Model demonstrates strengths in terms of behavioral relevance, ethical integration, and practical applicability. Rather than focusing on computational efficiency, the model enhances verification performance by promoting reflective behavior, responsible decision-making, and awareness of social consequences. This makes it particularly suitable for educational and human-centered digital environments.

While the model does not provide measurable performance indicators such as algorithmic accuracy, its effectiveness lies in its ability to complement existing technological systems by addressing the human and ethical dimensions of information verification. Future research may explore the integration of the Digital Tabayyun Model with technological tools to evaluate its impact using mixed-method or experimental approaches.

5.6 Limitations and Challenges

This study has several limitations and challenges that should be acknowledged. First, the use of a cross-sectional survey design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between youth social media behavior and ethical information verification practices. While the findings demonstrate strong associations, they do not capture changes in behavior over time.

Second, the study relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to response bias. Participants may overestimate their ethical verification practices due to social desirability, particularly when

responding to items related to responsible online behavior. Third, the sample is predominantly composed of students aged 18 to 25, which, although relevant to the study's focus on youth, may limit the generalizability of the findings to other demographic groups such as working adults or older populations.

In addition, the study focuses primarily on behavioral predictors and does not incorporate real-time behavioral tracking or experimental validation. This presents a challenge in fully capturing actual verification practices in dynamic social media environments. Another challenge encountered during the research was ensuring consistent interpretation of questionnaire items related to ethical behavior, as such constructs may be influenced by individual values and contextual understanding. Although a pilot test was conducted to improve clarity, variations in interpretation may still exist.

These limitations highlight the need for future research employing longitudinal designs, diverse samples, and mixed-method approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of ethical information verification in digital contexts.

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTION

This study set out to examine the influence of youth social media behavior on ethical information verification practices and to propose a structured framework that integrates behavioral insights with value-based ethical principles. Through an empirical investigation involving young social media users, the findings demonstrate that ethical verification is not merely a matter of technical competence or informational awareness, but is deeply shaped by behavioral orientations, social influence, and perceived capacity to act responsibly in digital environments.

The strong predictive relationship between social media behavior and ethical information verification underscores a central conclusion of this study: ethical verification is fundamentally a behavioral practice. While contemporary efforts to address misinformation often emphasize technological solutions such as automated fact-checking and algorithmic moderation, this study shows that sustainable improvement in information integrity also requires attention to the human dimensions of digital engagement. Attitudes toward verification, perceived social expectations, and confidence in one's ability to verify information

collectively shape how young users navigate the digital information landscape.

Building on these empirical insights, the study introduces the Digital Tabayyun Model as a value-based ethical verification framework that complements existing behavioral theories. By structuring ethical verification around three interrelated components; source evaluation, reflective verification behavior, and impact awareness, the model translates ethical principles into actionable practices. This contribution is significant in that it bridges a persistent gap in literature between ethical ideals and operational frameworks. Rather than positioning ethics as an abstract add-on to digital literacy, the model embeds ethical reasoning within everyday information practices, making it relevant for both educational and technological applications.

From a theoretical perspective, this study advances current understanding of digital ethics by demonstrating how the Theory of Planned Behavior can be enriched through integration with value-based constructs. While TPB effectively explains how attitudes, norms, and perceived control influence behavior, the Digital Tabayyun Model adds normative depth by providing ethical direction to these behavioral drivers. This synthesis offers a more comprehensive approach to studying ethical information practices, one that accounts for both the psychological mechanisms of behavior and the moral dimensions of decision-making in digital contexts.

The implications of these findings are particularly relevant for education, technology design, and policy development. In educational settings, the results suggest that digital literacy initiatives should move beyond technical skills and incorporate ethical verification as a core learning outcome. Programs that cultivate reflective judgment, self-regulation, and social responsibility are likely to be more effective in fostering long-term behavioral change than those focused solely on detecting misinformation. The Digital Tabayyun Model provides a conceptual foundation for such initiatives, offering educators a structured framework that can be integrated into curricula, co-curricular activities, and teacher training programs.

In terms of technological development, the study highlights the importance of ethics-by-design in social media platforms and digital tools. Behavioral findings indicate that users are more likely to engage in ethical verification when they feel supported by their environment. This opens

opportunities for designers to embed nudging mechanisms such as prompts for reflection, credibility indicators, and contextual warnings that reinforce users' perceived behavioral control and encourage mindful information sharing. When aligned with value-based frameworks like the Digital Tabayyun Model, such design features can help create digital ecosystems that promote ethical agency rather than passive consumption.

From a broader societal and policy perspective, the study reinforces the view that addressing misinformation requires a multi-layered strategy that integrates technological safeguards with behavioral and ethical education. Policymakers and educational authorities may draw on these findings to support initiatives that emphasize ethical information practices as part of digital citizenship programs. By framing ethical verification as both a personal responsibility and a collective good, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to strengthen social resilience in the face of information disorder.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study relied on a cross-sectional survey design and self-reported data, which may not fully capture actual verification behavior in real-time digital environments. In addition, the sample was predominantly composed of students aged 18 to 25, which, while appropriate for the study's focus on youth, may limit the generalizability of the findings to other demographic groups. These limitations point to important directions for future research.

Future studies may extend this work in several ways. First, longitudinal and experimental designs could be employed to examine how ethical verification practices evolve over time and how interventions based on the Digital Tabayyun Model influence sustained behavior change. Second, qualitative approaches such as interviews and focus group discussions could provide deeper insights into how young users interpret ethical responsibility in digital contexts. Third, interdisciplinary research involving education specialists, behavioral scientists, and technology developers could explore how the model can be translated into practical tools, such as digital literacy modules, mobile applications, or AI-assisted verification systems.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of research at the intersection of information technology, education, and digital ethics by demonstrating that ethical information verification among youth is best understood as a behavioral and value-driven practice. Through its

empirical findings and the introduction of the Digital Tabayyun Model, the study offers a novel framework that integrates behavioral theory with ethical guidance, providing a foundation for future research and practical innovation. By advancing a more holistic understanding of verification in social media environments, this work supports the development of digital ecosystems that are not only technologically sophisticated but also ethically grounded and socially responsible.

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