

Applying the Thematic Hadith Method in Research Related to Islam

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Abstract

Various researches have been carried out by Islamic academicians, especially Islamic academicians from the past, related to fields they had explored such as beliefs (*aqidah*), Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), mystical dimensions of Islam (*tasawuf*), interpretation (*tafsir*), *hadith*, astronomy (*falak*), philosophy etc. These academicians had used various research methods when exploring their fields of study. Hence, most of these research methods have yet to be studied before they could be applied as methods in Islamic research. It is for this reason that this study aims to study one the research methods used by past Islamic religious scholars, which is the thematic (*al-mawdu'iy*) hadith method. The two questions that arise in this study are, what is the thematic hadith method? and how can the method be applied in research related to Islam?. In order to answer these questions, the discussions in this study were divided into two main parts. The first is to identify the thematic hadith method used by the *muhaddithin* (scholars of the hadith) when elaborating on the Prophet's SAW hadith. The second is to analyse the suitability of applying the thematic hadith method in a study related to Islam. The quantitative study found that the thematic hadith method was suitable for application in studies related to Islam. The suitability was based on two aspects, namely rating the sources of the data and analysing the data.

Keywords: *Applying, Thematic, Hadith, Method, Research, Islam*

1.0 Introduction

Islamic scholars had used numerous research methods in their research on fields such as beliefs (*aqeedah*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), mystical dimensions of Islam (*tasawuf*), interpretation (*tafsir*), *hadith*, astronomy (*falak*), philosophy etc. The methods used were part of their traditional thinking. However, most of the research methods have not been studied by researchers as to their applicability as a method for research related to Islam. Until now, only the various types of knowledge procured from their research has been accepted and focused upon but there have been scarce efforts to study these research methods used by Islamic scholars for application in a research. For example, Zahri and Zul-kifli (2008) studied the respondent's quality based on the hadith narration method; Zuhdi (2009) studied the suitability of applying the *Usul Fiqh* method in research related to Islam; Hassan (2010) studied the application of the hadith compilation

method as a method for collecting data on research related to Islam; Nawi (2012) studied the epistemological and Islamic worldview (*tasawur*) aspect as a branch of algebra applied in the data analysis method applied in research related to Islam; Hanapi (2013) studied the suitability of applying the *mufassirin* (scholars who interpret) method in the data analysis process in research related to Islam; Alias (2014) studied the scientific method for examining Islam; Syahmi (2014) studied suitability of applying the *dilalah* method in *Usul Fiqh* as a data analysis method in research related to Islam; Khairuldin (2014) studied the process of delivering *fatwa* (religious decrees) as a method of research related to Islam; and Hanani (2015) studied the *naqd* (criticism) hadith method as a deciding method on the authenticity of data in research related to Islam. As of now, there has not been any study that discussed the suitability of the thematic hadith method in research related to Islam.

Hence, based on this existing gap, this paper intends to study one of the research methods used by Islamic scholars, which is the thematic hadith method. Specifically, this paper intends to examine and study the suitability of applying the thematic hadith method in research related to Islam. The thematic hadith method is one method of researching hadith, besides the analysis (*al-tahliliy*) hadith method. Presently, there already exist efforts to study developmental knowledge based on hadith and the Prophet's SAW *sirah*; however, the methods studied rarely involve the thematic hadith method. The common and popular methods of analysis used are the content analysis and textual analysis methods. Hence, the question arises, what is the thematic hadith method? How to apply the method in research related to Islam?

In order to answer all these questions, the discussion in this paper is divided into two main sections. The first section discusses the thematic hadith method used by the *muhaddithin* (scholars of the hadith) by elaborating on the Prophet's SAW hadith; while the second section discusses the suitability of applying the thematic hadith method in research related to Islam. This research is a library research and was initiated by analysing numerous views of experts in the field of hadith. All views were examined based on current research and literary works.

2.0 The Meaning of the Thematic Hadith

The thematic hadith is a modern term used extensively among researchers who study contemporary topics or themes based on the Prophet's SAW hadith and is presumed to be a new branch of knowledge on hadith. According to al-Zayyan (2002), the thematic hadith is a corpus of knowledge and elaborates on the history of various hadith from a variety of sources of hadith related to a topic being discussion. This could be done in two forms, which is either based on a word or meaning. In other words, the thematic hadith is a corpus of knowledge that discusses topics or themes related to cognizance (thinking), society, economy, nature, all fields of knowledge and the Prophet's SAW hadith relevant to the subject matter. The aim is to obtain a concept pertaining to comprehension and resolution according to *al-manhaj al-nabawiy* (teachings of the Prophet SAW through the hadith). The definition of the thematic hadith adduced by al-Zayyan (2002) is actually the result of reviews and adaptations from references

related to the method of interpreting thematic, such as the works of al-Farmawiy (1977), 'Abd al-Rahim (1992), Muslim (1997), and al-Khalidiy (2001). Although references regarding the interpretation of thematic are still lacking; however, they are far advanced compared to the references related to the thematic hadith.

3.0 Background of the Thematic Hadith Method

According to al-Syarman (2010), the development of knowledge on the thematic hadith began during the time of the Prophet SAW because much of the Prophet's SAW speeches and sermons had clearly referred to a theme or topic. This is because the Prophet's SAW choice of using the thematic hadith method allowed a better understanding and implementation based on several hadith that had been elaborated on. According to al-Syarman (2010), the development of the thematic hadith has had several steps added at each generation right until to this day. However, al-Syarman (2010) did not specify when the thematic hadith actually surfaced.

According to al-Zayyan (2002:218-219), research on hadith using the thematic hadith method begun only recently but it did not deviate from the scope outlined in the al-Sunnah during the time the hadith were compiled, which was during the time of Ibn Shihab al-Zuhriy. Hence, it evolved as a separate discipline of knowledge all by itself and was taught in universities. Besides that, students and experts also carried out research using this method. Thus, the universities have tremendously helped in developing the thematic hadith, especially the University of *Al-Azhar* in Egypt.

Based on the views of al-Syarman (2010) and al-Zayyan (2002), it could be concluded that early ideas about the thematic hadith method had existed since the time of the Prophet SAW but at that time it was not known as the thematic hadith method. Actually, the name thematic hadith method' was introduced by the contemporary *muhaddithin*.

4.0 Specific Characteristics of the Thematic Hadith Method

Based on previous efforts to elaborate on the meaning of the thematic hadith, a picture about the specific characteristics of this discipline of knowledge was finally revealed. There were at least six specific characteristics of the thematic hadith.

First, knowledge is characteristic of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), which rivets on in-depth examination of the reality of the problem and actual understanding of the religious references (*nass*), either in the texts or in its context. This leads to placing a particular religious reference (*nass*) accurately against an issue being discussed. Differences in views and understanding are accepted as long as it fulfils the discipline and spirit of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning).

Second, the debate on this discipline has managed to instil confidence when focusing on the questions and thoughts that have become the points of the current discussion. The aim is to

find a solution or some sort of explanation based on Islam that relies on the hadith as the second most important source after the al-Qur'an.

Third, the discipline of this knowledge should be discussed outside its limitations. Issues that cannot be related directly or indirectly to the hadith cannot be included in discussions on the thematic hadith.

Fourth, the actual function of the thematic hadith method is to research a topic by collecting all the relevant hadith from the main source of hadith reference. Hence, limitations in the form of time and effort have allowed the selection of specific sources such as *Sahih al-Bukhariy*, *Sahih Muslim*, *al-Kutub al-Sittah* (Six Imam Scriptures), *al-Kutub al-Tis'ah* (Nine Imam Scriptures) etc.

Fifth, choosing a topic from a hadith could be presumed to be the thematic hadith method, which constitutes the compiling of all narrations, making a comparison of the pronunciations and analysing the texts of the hadith. A hadith goes through a traditional process of the hadith discipline before forging a bond and becoming closely related with the current problem, which then becomes a topic of discussion.

Sixth, evaluation of the hadith's status is compulsory in the thematic hadith approach. The *mawdu'* (false) and *da'if* (weak) hadith that cannot be considered for debating purposes should not be relied on for views and solutions in Islam.

5.0 The Difference Between Compiling Hadith According to Topical and the Thematic Hadith Method

Compilation of hadith according to the *mawdu'* have been the practice of the *muhaddithin* from the early times. Moreover, the compilation according to this approach was first used since stage one of the compilation process, which is the *jawami'*, *musannafat* and *muwatta'at* and the climax of the achievement was the *al-Muwatta'* scripture written by Imam Malik r.a. (Itr, 1987:91-94).

The hadith are compiled according to the main topics, which are called scriptures (*kitab*), before being divided into sub-topics that are called 'chapters'. *Jawami'* gathers all types of hadith relevant to all the main topics of religion. Whereas, *Musannafat* contains hadith such as *Marfu'*, *Mawquf* and *Maqtu'*, which usually focuses on topics related to Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh Islami*). *Muwatta'at* is the name of choice by some hadith scholars when writing the *Musannafat*.

This differs from the second step in opening a hadith, which is the *masanid* or the compilation of hadith according to the companions of the Prophet SAW who had narrated it. Hence, the third generation compilation of hadith, which is the *sihah* and *sunan* stage, choses

to compile the hadith according to the thematic hadith because of the presumption that it better assists and facilitates the process of searching for the hadith (al-Umariy, 1993:300-308).

A summary of the comparison between compiling the hadith according to *mawdu'* and by using the thematic hadith method are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Difference Between the Compilation of Hadith According to Thematic and the Thematic Hadith Method

<i>Num.</i>	<i>Compilation of the Hadith According to The Thematic</i>	<i>The Thematic Hadith Method</i>
1	Started as early as the time of compiling the hadith	Started recently due to the effect and influence of the renaissance and awareness for a solution.
2	Focuses on the compilation and documentation of hadith texts delivered by a chain of narrators.	Focuses on the analysis, comments and examination intended to find answers for the views and Islamic solutions to contemporary problems.
3	The main element of Hadith throughout time that guaranties the originality of the religious source and is suitable for use in all types of methods in literary works and research.	Efforts towards independent reasoning (<i>ijtihad</i>) pertaining to Islamic knowledge when understanding hadith texts in a contemporary context.

Table 1 shows the difference between compiling hadith according to thematic and the thematic hadith method. Although there are clear differences between the two, there still exists a relationship between the two. Actually, the hadith that is compiled according to thematic becomes the original source of reference for the thematic hadith method. The compilation of hadith according to thematic that was initiated by traditional hadith scholars had greatly assisted and facilitated contemporary researchers in studying the thematic hadith (Hasyim, 1996:28-31; Abu Zahw, 1984; Sadiq, 2006; 'Abd al-Rahman, 2007; 'Abd al-Hadi, 1987). Presently, the process of searching for hadith from original sources has become much easier and faster with the help of computer software technology, websites and cd.

6.0 The Steps Involved in the Research on Hadith That Uses the Thematic Method

Research on hadith that uses the thematic hadith has several steps that must be followed. The discussions on these steps are divided into two sections, namely the general steps and the specific steps.

a) The General Steps in the Thematic Hadith

There are seven general steps in the thematic hadith as suggested by al-Zayyan (2002:228-229). These seven steps are as follows:

1. Choosing the theme or title - The researcher of the thematic hadith would choose a title or theme much preferred by Muslims currently. This is important because the title would contribute towards progress, civilization and Islamic perseverance. In other words, the chosen title has the potential to solve the embroilment among Muslims, including issues that need solutions.
2. Compiling the hadith - Making efforts to compile hadith related to the topic of research is a process done with care and detail, which involves all the main sources of venerated (*muktabar*) hadith.
3. Examining the status of the hadith – Examining the relationship between the chain of narrators of a hadith follows the methods of hadith scholars such as using *rijal* (a corpus of knowledge that discusses the narrators, their way of life, their good standing among the companions of the Prophet SAW, *tabi'in*, and *tabi' tabi'in*), *al-jarh wa al-ta'dil* (knowledge that discusses about narrators and the acceptance or rejection of their narrations) and *al-'ilal* (knowledge that discusses unnoticed or ambiguous reasons that could jeopardise the authenticity of a hadith). Thus, only authenticated hadith that could become points of reference are accepted in this study.
4. Identifying Important Issues – To identify and isolate important issues related to the research topic based on the selected hadith is very important in order to avoid discussions that stray from the main topic. .
5. To uphold the *manhaj ilmi* (academic approach) – Researchers must be trustworthy and honest about the texts or evidence (*naql*) and critical reviews (*naqd*), have a transparent attitude and be unbiased in dealing with differences in views, especially when dealing with religious law and understanding of texts so that the best decisions and conclusions are made.
6. Elaborating the texts – Texts in the excerpts of the hadith must be elaborated in detail in order to avoid depending exclusively on religious references when trying to prove the existence of a hadith in a topic of discussion.
7. Relations with the current reality – Discussions about the topic of study must be related to the current reality of Muslim society in order to facilitate the achievement of research objectives.

b) The Specific Steps in the Thematic Hadith

The steps adduced by al-Zayyan (2002:228-229) were also agreed upon by al-Syarman (2010:236-239) and al-Asyrafy (2012). Hence, al-Syarman (2010:236-239) stated that the steps adduced by al-Zayyan (2002) were generally used in the study of the thematic hadith. Therefore, al-Syarman (2010:236-239) had further detailed the steps by al-Zayyan (2002:228-229) as being specific steps when adducing two stages that need to be faced by researchers involved in the study of the thematic hadith, which were building an Islamic worldview (*tasawwur*) and compiling hadith related to the research. The second stage is to write and elaborate the *al-manhaj al-nabawiy* (the Prophet's SAW approach) based on the compiled hadith. Both these stages have two main sections, namely the steps related to the title or theme of the section and the steps related to the hadith.

The first stage, which is to build the initial picture and compile the hadith, has two sections of discussions. The first section involves steps related to the title or theme of the research. Al-Syarmān (2010:236-239) had adduced seven steps for this section, which comprised comprising choosing a suitable title or theme for the research; understanding in detail the chosen title and theme; setting the objectives of the research; forming a suitable title for the research; compiling hadith that are related to the chosen title or theme of the research; examining and exploring the relations between the chosen title or theme and the current reality and other academic studies; to write the research proposal. The second section involves two steps related to the hadith. The first is to assess the hadith that could be adopted and the second would be to understand the contents of the hadith and to be conversant with the elaborations and the Islamic decree (*hukum hakam*) contained in it.

The second stage is related to writing and exploring the *al-manhaj al-nabawiy*, which also contains two sections of discussions. The first section involves steps related to the title or theme of the research, which is divided into nine steps. The first step is to ensure that the title or theme of the research covers the whole discussion contained in the hadith and academic research. The second step states that the discussions on the title or theme of the research must be based on the al-Qur'an when dealing with current needs. In the third step, discussions on the title or theme of the research must be based on *maqasid al-syari'ah* (purposes of *syariah*) when solving current needs. The fourth step is to fulfil the demands and characteristics of the title or theme of the research. The fifth step explores and provides the objectives and *al-manhaj al-nabawiy*. The sixth step ensures that the discussions cover the various views and ideas that are able to fulfil the current needs. The seventh step connects the *al-manhaj al-nabawiy* to current reality. The eighth step holds-on firmly to the conditions and regulations of an academic research, while the ninth step portrays the results of the research to the relevant experts in the field. The second section is about the steps related to the hadith and writing style of the research. It contains four steps with the first being the choice of the narrations and use of the *al-syawahid* (signs or indicators) and *al-mutaba'at* (criteria); the second is to use a suitable method to extract the hadith from the original source; the third step is to discard any

ambiguities that arise about the hadith and the fourth step is to use an appropriate language and delivery style.

A summary of the stages that depict changes of the general steps in hadith *al-mawdu'iy* to specific steps are shown in Diagram 1.

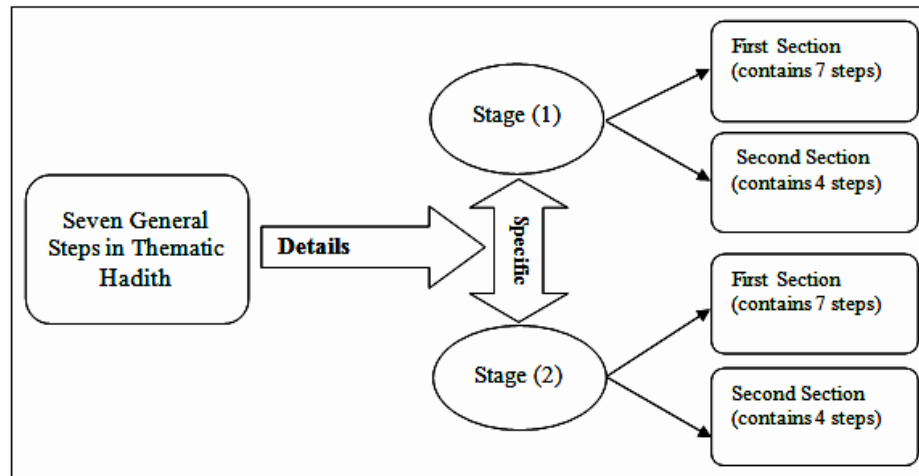


Diagram 1: A summary of the stages that depict changes of the general steps in hadith *al-mawdu'iy* to specific steps

7.0 The Suitability of Applying the Thematic Hadith Method in Research Related to Islam

Based on previous examinations on the thematic hadith method, there are two aspects involved in the suitability of applying the thematic hadith method in a research, especially research related to Islam and Muslims. The two aspects are rating the source of the data and the data analysis.

a. Rating the Source of the Data

As mentioned in the previous discussion, the thematic hadith method is a method for compiling hadith that are related to a title or theme. The hadith compilation process is carried out meticulously involving all main sources of revered hadith. Hence, these hadith need to be compiled based on authentic narrations such as hadith found in *Sahih al-Bukhariy* dan *Sahih Muslim* scriptures.

In the data collection process, the method of rating sources of data used by the *muhaddithin* is suitable in determining the priority, originality, authority and authenticity of the data, especially in qualitative research. Hence, this could be a standard that needs to be adhered to so that data such as documents or texts that are mostly used in qualitative studies fulfil the standards. This is similar to other reference sources besides the al-Qur'an, Hadith, specific authorities and expertise in the field that should be given priority. Actually, the method of rating a source is not limited to fields that only study Islam. Thus, fields of study not related

to Islam should also use this method in order to ascertain the originality, authority and credibility of a source.

b. Data Analysis

Based on previous studies, it was found that the thematic hadith method used by the *muhaddithin* when analysing texts from the hadith that have similar titles or themes could be applied as a method for analysing a text or document (qualitative) in research related to Islam. In other words, the thematic hadith method is suitable for analysing data for studies based on texts or documents that have similar themes or titles. For example, *A Study on Issues Related to Beliefs (Aqeedah) Reported in the Utusan Malaysia Newspapers (1990-2000)*. In such a study, a researcher would compile all the newspaper reports related to issues on beliefs (*aqeedah*) and then analyse it using the thematic hadith method.

More specifically, for studies based on texts or documents, a researcher could use the thematic method as a method of analysis. Hence, the researcher could modify the thematic method in order to analyse texts from divine deliverance (*wahyu*) such as the al-Qur'an and Hadith, when analysing literary texts and Islamic history. The method of analysing texts based on the thematic method could be carried out as follows:

- i. Determining the title or theme
The researcher must ascertain the theme that would be studied in one or several texts. The ascertained theme must be located in the text, either implicitly or explicitly. It must also be ascertained whether the theme is the main theme or secondary to the text.
- ii. Dividing the texts
The researched text or document is divided according to its two contents, which are texts that contain the theme being researched and texts that do not contain the theme. Each theme to be researched must list the discussions that would take place.
- iii. Compiling the Discussions and Analysis in one Framework
At this stage, the researcher needs to determine the discussions and analysis that would occur, which is by determining the major and minor titles in detail. The division of chapters and sub-chapters must be carried out carefully.
- iv. Analysis Based on the Main Sources
Each theme studied in a text, especially Islamic literary text, must be referred to the main sources in Islam such as the al-Qur'an, al-Sunnah, views of the Prophet's SAW companions, views of *al-tabi'in*, views of *tabi' al-tabi'in*, views of contemporary religious scholars and Islamic thinkers. Each discussion and analysis must be authenticated according to the references mentioned earlier.

v. Summary of the Analysis

At the end of the research, the researcher discusses and concludes based on the findings found in the texts. The views of the writers of the texts that were researched would be presented in this section.

8.0 Conclusion

Based on the overall discussions in this working paper, it was found that the thematic hadith method used by the *muhaddithin* is suitable for application in analysing the research data related to Islam, especially the thematic hadith because it is the most recent and systematic hadith method. In order to produce a data analysis method that is more comprehensive and systematic, the thematic hadith method could be explored in detail through specific studies; either studies at the Bachelor's Degree or the Post-Graduate levels.

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