

CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE QUR'AN IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract

The digital era has fundamentally transformed how religious texts are accessed, consumed, and understood. As digital platforms democratize religious knowledge, traditional methods of Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir) face new challenges and opportunities in maintaining relevance amid rapidly changing social contexts. Objective, This study aims to explore the dynamics of the contextual interpretation of the Qur'an within the digital landscape, analyzing how digital tools shape contemporary understanding and application of sacred texts. Method, This research employs a qualitative library research method with a conceptual and hermeneutical approach, analyzing contemporary digital tafsir platforms, social media discourse, and modern contextual exegetical frameworks. Results, The findings reveal that while the digital era accelerates the dissemination of Qur'anic teachings, it often leads to fragmentation and superficiality in interpretation due to algorithmic biases and the pursuit of viral content. However, it also offers unprecedented spaces for dynamic, inclusive, and highly contextualized applications of the Qur'an to modern issues such as digital ethics, human rights, and gender equality. Onclusion, To remain effective, contextual interpretation in the digital era must bridge the gap between rigorous traditional scholarly methodologies and the interactive, fast-paced nature of digital communication, ensuring that the eternal message of the Qur'an speaks meaningfully to contemporary digital societies.

Keywords : Qur'an, Tafsir, Digital Era, Contextual Interpretation.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of the digital era has radically reshaped the landscape of human civilization, transforming not only communication and social structures but also the ways in which religious texts are accessed, disseminated, and understood. In Islamic scholarship, the Qur'an—as the eternal guidance for humanity—is inherently open to interpretation across different spaces and times (*Sālih li Kulli Zamān wa Makān*). Traditionally, the preservation and explanation of the Qur'an through *tafsir* (exegesis) relied heavily on textual authorities, rigorous methodologies, and classical institutions. However, the contemporary digital revolution has democratized religious knowledge, shifting the authority of interpretation from traditional spaces like mosques and universities to decentralized digital platforms, including mobile applications, websites, and social media.

This technological shift introduces a profound dualism in contemporary Islamic thought. On one hand, the digital era facilitates the mass dissemination of the Qur'an, allowing Muslims worldwide to engage with the sacred text instantaneously. On the other hand, the fast-paced nature of digital consumption often encourages superficiality, fragmentation, and literalist readings. Complex textual nuances are frequently reduced to short, click-driven snippets, which can strip verses of their historical and textual contexts (*asbāb al-nuzūl*). Consequently, there is an urgent need to re-examine how contextual interpretation (*tafsir maqasidi* or hermeneutical approaches) can be effectively formulated and applied within this digital framework to prevent misinterpretation and radicalization.

While previous studies have extensively discussed the digitization of Islamic texts and the rise of "e-jihad" or digital da'wah, there is a noticeable research gap regarding how the *methodology* of contextual interpretation itself adapts to digital structures. Most existing literatures focus either on the technical aspects of digital Qur'an apps or the sociological impact of internet preachers. They rarely address how the philosophical and hermeneutical essence of contextualization—which demands deep historical analysis and contemporary sociological adaptation—can survive and thrive in an ecosystem governed by algorithms, brevity, and viral trends.

To bridge this gap, this study investigates the dynamics of the contextual interpretation of the Qur'an in the digital era. It addresses two primary questions: How do digital platforms alter the production and consumption of contextual *tafsir*? and What methodological frameworks can contemporary scholars employ to ensure that digital interpretations remain contextually relevant without losing their scholarly integrity? By exploring these questions, this research aims to offer a fresh perspective on digital hermeneutics, providing a conceptual bridge between traditional Islamic scholarly rigorousness and the dynamic demands of the modern digital society.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research design (*lughah al-maktabah*) to investigate the dynamics of the contextual interpretation of the Qur'an in the digital era. Given that the focus of this research lies in the intersection of hermeneutics, textual transformation, and digital media, a qualitative

framework allows for a deep, conceptual, and critical exploration of the subject matter rather than statistical quantification.

The data utilized in this study are divided into primary and secondary sources. **Primary Data:** Consists of literature on contextual Qur'anic hermeneutics (such as the works of Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Abdullah Saeed) and contemporary digital *tafsir* outputs found on major digital platforms, including prominent Qur'an applications (e.g., Quran.com, Tafsir Web), and scholarly religious content disseminated through social media networks (YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok). **Secondary Data:** Comprises peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference proceedings regarding digital religion, digital Islam, algorithmic cultures, and the sociology of authority in the digital age.

Data were gathered through a systematic documentation technique and digital tracing. Relevant literatures were indexed using academic databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and Dimensions using keywords like "*Digital Qur'an*," "*Contextual Tafsir*," "*Digital Hermeneutics*," and "*Islamic Authority Online*." Concurrently, digital observation was conducted to map out how contextual interpretation is framed, condensed, and consumed in the digital ecosystem.

The collected data were analyzed using a descriptive-analytical method combined with **hermeneutical analysis** and the **sociology of knowledge** framework. The analysis was carried out in three interconnected stages. **Data Reduction:** Filtering and categorizing digital contents and hermeneutical theories that specifically address contemporary contextual issues. **Data Display:** Mapping out the shift in *tafsir* methodology from traditional textualism to digital contextualism, highlighting the opportunities and structural constraints imposed by digital platforms. **Conclusion Drawing (Verification):** Synthesizing the findings to formulate a methodological conceptual framework for preserving the scholarly integrity of contextual Qur'anic interpretation within the fast-paced, algorithm-driven digital space.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the digital era does not merely act as a neutral medium for transmitting the Qur'an; rather, it actively reshapes the methodology, authority, and consumption of *tafsir*. The intersection between

contextual hermeneutics and digital platforms creates a new ecosystem characterized by both unprecedented democratization and structural fragmentation.

The Digitization of Tafsir: From Linear Text to Hypertextual Networks

The first significant finding points to a shift in how contextual interpretation is structured. Traditional contextual *tafsir* (such as the frameworks proposed by Fazlur Rahman or Abdullah Saeed) relies on a deep, linear reading of history, macro-sociological contexts, and linguistic nuances.

In the digital era, *tafsir* has evolved from linear text to hypertextuality. Digital Qur'an platforms (e.g., Quran.com, Al-Quran Indonesia) allow users to instantly click on a verse and access cross-referenced interpretations, historical contexts (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), and translations simultaneously.

This hypertextual nature offers a massive opportunity for contextualization. Users are no longer passive readers; they can instantly compare classical textualist interpretations (like *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*) with modern contextualist views on the same screen. This multi-layered access allows the historical context of a verse to be retrieved within seconds, making the prerequisites for contextual reading more accessible to the public than ever before.

The Fragmentation of Meaning and the "Snack-Culture" of Tafsir

Despite the accessibility, the discussion reveals a critical paradox: the architectural design of modern digital platforms—specifically social media (TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts)—inherently resists depth. Contextual interpretation requires comprehensive nuance, yet digital media thrives on *brevity, speed, and virality*.

This study finds that digital contextual interpretation often suffers from epistemological fragmentation. Complex hermeneutical debates regarding social justice, gender, or statehood in the Qur'an are frequently condensed into 60-second video clips or multi-slide infographics. While this "*snack-culture*" of religious consumption succeeds in making the Qur'an look trendy and instantly applicable, it risks stripping the text of its deep socio-historical scaffolding.

Critical Note, When a verse is contextually adapted to a highly specific, viral contemporary issue without rigorous methodological safeguards, it often results in *eisegesis* (reading one's own biases into the text) rather than legitimate *exegesis*

(*tafsir*).

The Shift of Hermeneutical Authority: Algorithms vs. Isnad

Traditionally, the legitimacy of a *mufassir* (exegete) was secured through *isnad* (scholarly lineage), institutional validation (e.g., Al-Azhar or traditional *pesantren*), and mastery of classical sciences (*'Ulum al-Qur'an*). In the digital era, authority has undergone a profound shift. The democratizing nature of the internet allows anyone to produce and propagate contextual interpretations. However, digital authority is heavily mediated by **algorithmic architectures**. Platforms prioritize content based on engagement metrics (likes, shares, watch time) rather than methodological accuracy.

As a result, charismatic digital influencers or tech-savvy content creators often hold more sway over how the public contextually understands the Qur'an than traditional, highly trained scholars. This creates a highly polarized digital public sphere where the contextual interpretation of the Qur'an can be easily weaponized or commercialized to align with specific political, ideological, or market-driven trends.

Toward a Digital Contextual Hermeneutics Framework

To address these challenges, the discussion proposes that contemporary Islamic scholarship must not reject digital media, but rather formulate a native Digital Contextual Hermeneutics. This framework suggests that the eternal values of the Qur'an (*al-qiyam al-asasiyyah*) can be protected and communicated online through three strategic approaches:

1. **Interactive Contextualization:** Developing digital interfaces that visually map the historical trajectory of a verse alongside its modern ethical application, preventing users from reading verses in isolation.
2. **Methodological Literacy:** Digital preachers and content creators must be trained to complement visual aesthetics with methodological transparency, such as citing classical and modern contextual sources in digital descriptions or hyperlinked footnotes.
3. **Algorithmic Da'wah:** Collaborative efforts between Islamic scholars and software engineers are required to design search and recommendation algorithms that elevate well-researched, balanced contextual interpretations over reactionary or sensationalist literal readings.

By synthesizing the rigorousness of traditional hermeneutics with the agility of digital media, the contextual interpretation of the Qur'an can serve as an enlightening guide for the complex ethical dilemmas of the modern digital society.

CONCLUSION

The intersection of Qur'anic exegesis and the digital revolution has ushered in a new era of digital hermeneutics, redefining how the sacred text is interpreted and consumed. This study concludes that while the digital era offers unprecedented democratization and accessibility to the contextual interpretation of the Qur'an, it simultaneously poses structural challenges to its epistemological depth. The transformation from linear, author-centric texts to hypertextual, user-driven digital platforms allows modern audiences to instantly connect historical revelations with contemporary realities. However, the architectural nature of digital media—which prioritizes speed, brevity, and algorithmic engagement—frequently leads to the fragmentation of religious meaning and the rise of decentralized, non-traditional authorities who may lack rigorous methodological training.

To ensure that the contextual interpretation of the Qur'an remains academically sound yet publicly accessible, this study emphasizes the urgent need for a systematic framework of Digital Contextual Hermeneutics. Islamic scholarship cannot remain passive in the face of technological advancement; instead, it must actively collaborate with digital creators and software engineers to bridge the gap between traditional scholarly rigor and modern digital communication aesthetics.

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