Qur'anic Interpretation In The Digital Age: Exploring The Role Of Ijtihad On Social Media Platforms

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the evolving dynamics of Qur'anic interpretation in the digital era, particularly on social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. It investigates how the classical concept of ijtihad is recontextualized in the digital landscape, and how digital tafsir practices reshape traditional patterns of religious authority and audience participation. Employing a qualitative interpretive approach, the study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) based on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model: textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. Data were collected through non-participant observation, digital documentation of Qur'anic interpretation content, and semi-structured interviews with digital preachers and followers. The findings reveal five key dimensions of digital tafsir: (1) new typologies of Qur'anic interpretation emphasizing visual, emotional, and motivational formats; (2) shifting authority structures, where metrics such as virality and engagement replace traditional scholarly credentials; (3) the emergence of digital ijtihad, where reinterpretation is driven by social relevance and affective resonance; (4) participatory models of interpretation, where audiences actively shape religious meaning; and (5) global implications of digital tafsir as part of broader trends in digital religion across traditions. This study concludes that tafsir in the digital era is no longer a purely top-down scholarly exercise but a dialogic, decentralized, and affectively driven process shaped by platform logics. The novelty of this research lies in its conceptualization of ijtihad digital and participatory tafsir as frameworks bridging Islamic epistemology with contemporary digital culture. These concepts offer a new theoretical lens for understanding religious transformation in the age of algorithmic mediation and global interconnectivity.

Keywords: Digital Tafsir, Ijtihad, Religious Authority, Participatory Interpretation, Qur'an and Social Media

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an, as the primary sacred text in Islam, occupies a foundational position not only as a source of law and theology but also as a reservoir of meaning that remains dynamic and responsive to the changing contours of time (Kusnadi et al., 2025; Pink, 2025). Historically, engagement with the Qur'an has been mediated through the rigorous discipline of tafsir (exegesis), developed by scholars using classical methodologies. Yet, this exegetical tradition has never been static (Siregar et al., 2023). Throughout Islamic history,

interpretation has always existed within a tension between fidelity to textual transmission (riwayah) and the imperative to address socio-cultural contexts (dirayah)—a dialectic that reflects the ongoing negotiation between orthodoxy and relevance. This dynamic is not incidental but a direct consequence of the Qur'an's claim as a universal revelation, transcending the limits of time and space. Nevertheless, the authority to interpret the Qur'an has historically been concentrated within formal religious institutions and the ranks of the ulama, raising critical questions about accessibility, plurality, and the democratization of sacred understanding in the modern age (Al-Hawary et al., 2023).

In today's context—shaped by socio-political complexity, digital communication, and rapidly shifting epistemological paradigms—the interpretation of the Qur'an faces new challenges that cannot be reduced to methodological concerns alone (Nor et al., 2023). Classical exegetical frameworks, however profound and systematic, often struggle to address urgent contemporary issues such as gender justice, human rights, environmental ethics, and digital culture without appearing ahistorical or rigid (Lumbard, 2021). This raises a fundamental question: How can the Qur'an continue to speak meaningfully to Muslim communities living amid globalization, secularism, and post-truth narratives? More pressingly, who holds the right to interpret the Qur'an in a reality where religious authority is no longer mediated solely by scholarly lineage (sanad), but also by digital algorithms and the virality of content? This situation demands not only a reevaluation of the hermeneutical tools employed, but also a reconceptualization of interpretive legitimacy itself. The digital era compels us to reconsider not only what is interpreted, but also how, by whom, and for whom such interpretation is undertaken (Y. Hanafi et al., 2021).

In the context of this shifting structure of authority and the reconfiguration of religious knowledge distribution, social media has emerged as a new arena that relocates the landscape of Qur'anic interpretation from the exclusive domain of scholars into a more fluid and participatory public space (Dar, 2021). Platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have become not merely tools for religious outreach (da'wah), but sites of meaning-making where two-way interactions between message producers and audiences take place. Digital preachers, Muslim influencers, and religious content creators have come forward as new interpretive actors, shaping public understanding of the sacred text (Osredkar & Kranjc, 2021). On one hand, this phenomenon reflects the democratization of access to religious discourse; on the other, it raises epistemological concerns: Can interpretations compressed into 60-second videos adequately capture the complexity of Qur'anic hermeneutics? And how is interpretive validity established when algorithmic visibility—rather than scholarly lineage (sanad)—determines the reach and reception of religious messages?

This shift marks a radical transformation in the structure of interpretive authority. In the classical paradigm, authority was grounded in verified knowledge, authenticated through intellectual genealogy and well-established methodology (Baraki et al., 2021). In the digital age, however, authority may be constructed through popularity, persuasive rhetoric, and adaptability to new media formats. This phenomenon not only produces tension between traditional scholars and the emerging digital generation but also blurs the boundary between religious knowledge that is transmitted and knowledge that is collectively produced through online interaction. In this context, tafsir is no longer the solitary product of a mufassir, but the negotiated outcome of meaning-making among the text, the reader, and the digital medium itself (Al-Tarawneh, 2022). The theological implications are significant: if interpretation becomes an open arena governed by engagement and virality, how then do we distinguish between popularity and truth? This question extends beyond methodology to the very roots of religious legitimacy in an age of informational disruption (Osredkar & Kranjc, 2021).

In navigating this ever-shifting epistemological landscape, the concept of ijtihad regains its relevance as a methodological framework that is not only legitimate within the Islamic intellectual tradition but also flexible enough to respond to contemporary challenges (Al-Tarawneh, 2021). Originally formulated as an intellectual effort to derive legal rulings from primary sources in the absence of explicit textual evidence, ijtihad can now be expanded into a hermeneutical approach that enables the reinterpretation of the Qur'an in light of today's complex realities—including the digital ecosystem (Baraki et al., 2021). Within the realm of social media-based tafsir, digital ijtihad may be understood as a creative and responsive yet ethically grounded process that addresses the community's growing need for religious understanding that is both meaningful and contextually relevant . Thus, ijtihad becomes not only a tool to bridge text and context, but also a normative mechanism to regulate the boundaries of interpretation within the open—and often unrestrained—arena of digital media (Osredkar & Kranjc, 2021).

Despite the rapid proliferation of digital Qur'anic interpretation and its role in shaping the religious lives of contemporary Muslims, academic inquiry into this phenomenon remains markedly underdeveloped (Bin Rashid Al-Sawafi, 2021). Most tafsir studies continue to be centered on textual approaches—be they philological, thematic, or maudhūʿī—without sufficiently engaging the practical and mediatic dimensions of Qur'anic interpretation that now flourish in digital spaces. Yet, virtual platforms have become arenas where sacred texts are accessed, reproduced, and debated with an intensity that rivals, if not surpasses, that of formal scholarly settings (Izzah, 2021; Muwafi & Fareh, 2021). This gap underscores the urgent need to develop interpretive approaches that are sensitive not only to text and context but also to medium, for in the digital era, the medium is no longer a neutral conduit of meaning but an integral component of its production.

This condition necessitates the emergence of a new conceptual framework capable of integrating the Islamic intellectual tradition with the evolution of digital communication technologies, in which ijtihad serves as both an epistemological and ethical axis (Al-Jubouri et al., 2021). Within the realm of digital Qur'anic interpretation, ijtihad is not only vital as a tool for reinterpretation but also functions as a critical mechanism against the banality of religious content frequently disseminated without methodological accountability (Wadud, 2021). The urgency of this approach becomes even more apparent as digital tafsir practices affect not only how the text is understood, but also influence patterns of religiosity, the construction of Muslim identity, and broader public perceptions of Islam (M. Hanafi et al., 2021; Lawson, 2021). Accordingly, a tafsir framework grounded in ijtihad within the digital landscape is not merely an academic discourse but a strategic necessity for preserving the authenticity, integrity, and relevance of Islamic teachings in an age marked by epistemic disruption (Iqbal & Hossain, 2021).

Based on this background, the present article seeks to explore how Qur'anic interpretation evolves on social media platforms, and how the concept of ijtihad can function as both an analytical and normative tool in assessing the dynamics of digital tafsir (Najjar et al., 2021). This study aims to identify the various forms of digital ijtihad manifested in popular tafsir content across social media, to re-examine the dimensions of authority in the production of Qur'anic meaning, and to formulate ethical and methodological boundaries that may strengthen the legitimacy of digital interpretation within the framework of contemporary Islamic scholarship (Islam, 2022; Raza, 2022). Utilizing a qualitative approach and critical discourse analysis of digital content, this research aspires to contribute to the development of a tafsir epistemology that is both adaptive to the present era and firmly rooted in established scholarly principles.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative interpretive approach with a critical discourse analysis design to explore the dynamics of Qur'anic interpretation within digital spaces, particularly on social media platforms (Etengoff et al., 2022). This approach is selected for its suitability in examining social and cultural phenomena in depth, including how religious meanings are constructed, negotiated, and disseminated through digital media (Sheikh, 2022). The focus of this research is not on tafsir as a purely normative text, but rather as a social practice that unfolds through online interactions among content creators, audiences, and platform algorithms. The conceptual framework of digital ijtihad is employed as an analytical lens to examine how interpretive processes operate in non-traditional contexts, and how religious authority and legitimacy are constructed beyond the bounds of classical scholarly structures.

Data were collected through non-participant observation and digital documentation of Qur'anic interpretation content circulated on platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, with a particular focus on popular accounts that actively present Qur'anic themes. The selection criteria for these accounts included: (1) a substantial follower base, (2) consistent content production, (3) engagement with contemporary issues linked to specific Qur'anic verses, and (4) self-positioning as religious authorities or digital preachers (da'i). The analyzed content included videos, captions, user comments, and interaction patterns between content creators and audiences. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected content creators and audience members to gain insights into their motivations, strategies, and perceptions regarding the digital tafsir practices they follow or produce.

Data analysis was conducted using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed by Norman Fairclough, which involves three primary dimensions: (1) textual analysis (content and narratives), (2) discursive practice (production and consumption), and (3) social practice (ideology, authority, and power structures). This framework was employed to trace how Qur'anic meanings are digitally constructed and how religious authority and power relations are shaped through online interaction. Data validity was reinforced through methodological triangulation, combining observation, documentation, and interviews, along with member checking involving several informants to ensure the accuracy of interpretation. Through this methodology, the research not only provides a descriptive account of the phenomenon but also offers a critical analysis of the epistemological and sociological dynamics embedded in the practice of digital ijtihad.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Typology of Digital Qur'anic Interpretation Practices on Social Media
Social media has revolutionized the ways in which Qur'anic interpretation is both produced and consumed (Ramle et al., 2022). Whereas classical tafsir was typically delivered through lengthy texts or formal sermons, it now appears in compact, visual, and instantly accessible digital formats. Observations of 15 popular Muslim accounts on platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram reveal that tafsir content is generally categorized into several dominant formats: (1) short videos ranging from 1–3 minutes that highlight a single verse in relation to everyday issues; (2) sermon excerpts repurposed from offline religious gatherings; and (3) narrative content (storytelling) combining personal experiences, Qur'anic verses, and motivational messages. For instance, the TikTok account @ustadzx, with 1.2 million followers, posted a 60-second video titled "The Meaning of Patience in QS. al-Baqarah:153," packaged with cinematic visuals, soft background music, and colorful

subtitles. This content not only conveys the literal meaning of the verse but also constructs an emotional and affective connection with viewers (Etengoff et al., 2022).

In terms of content approach, digital tafsir practices can be broadly categorized into two dominant tendencies (Abadi & Fattahizadeh, 2022). First is the textual-normative approach, which maintains the traditional structure of tafsir by elaborating on vocabulary (lafadz), asbab al-nuzul (occasions of revelation), and classical exegetical commentaries. The second is a contextual-reflective approach, wherein Qur'anic verses are directly linked to social realities or individual life experiences. For example, the Instagram account @tafsirdaily (with 478,000 followers) produces a content series titled "Verse of the Day," such as an interpretation of QS. Ar-Ra'd:11 focused on self-improvement, connected to the concept of a growth mindset in modern psychology. The narrative avoids classical exegetical terminology and instead emphasizes "what this verse means for our lives today." This signifies a shift from tafsir as scholarly authority toward tafsir as popular spiritual reflection (Muhammad et al., 2022).

Beyond format and approach, digital tafsir practices also exhibit a distinct thematic consistency (Nadi-Ravandi & Batooli, 2022). Based on a content classification of 200 short videos on TikTok and Instagram Reels, the most prominent themes include: (1) motivation and self-healing (34%), (2) social and familial relationships (21%), and (3) divinity and general spirituality (19%), with the remainder addressing moral, social, and political topics. This indicates that Qur'anic interpretation on social media tends to focus on psychological and existential issues, rather than jurisprudential debates or theological controversies. Visually, many of these contents employ cinematic techniques such as slow-motion, dramatic transitions, and digitally stylized Qur'anic calligraphy. The delivery aims to foster emotional engagement and provoke "moments of reflection," rather than present scholarly exposition. This suggests that digital tafsir is not merely informative but also performative and therapeutic in nature (Mert et al., 2022).

This phenomenon reflects a fundamental shift from tafsir as an academic discipline to tafsir as spiritual storytelling, designed to evoke emotional resonance with the audience (Calis, 2022). The implications of this shift are epistemologically significant: the interpretive process is no longer anchored in authoritative references, but increasingly in personal experiences and relatable popular narratives (Stewart, 2021). While this opens space for broader public participation in accessing the sacred text, it also carries the risks of banalization, oversimplification, and commodification of divine messages (Herlambang et al., 2025). Some content even features isolated verses without proper context, merely to reinforce motivational messages. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the typology of digital tafsir not simply as a variation in communicative style, but as a paradigm shift in how communities interact with revelation—from scholarly engagement to rapidly consumable spiritual intimacy (Alashqar, 2024; Awwaliyah et al., 2023).

3.2 Configuration of Religious Authority in the Algorithmic Era

The rise of social media has shifted the structure of religious authority from a traditional model grounded in scholarly lineage (sanad) to one shaped by digital metrics such as follower count, engagement rates, and algorithmic distribution (Nieber, 2024; Taufiq & Said, 2025). Observations reveal that accounts with high digital authority do not necessarily belong to conventional religious scholars. For example, the TikTok account @kajianmuslimid, with 2.3 million followers, regularly garners 250,000 to 600,000 views per short tafsir video, despite offering only brief interpretations without references to classical exegetical works. In contrast, a YouTube channel managed by a renowned professor of Qur'anic exegesis from a leading Islamic university averages only 3,000–5,000 views per long-format lecture. This disparity indicates that religious legitimacy in digital

spaces is no longer determined by depth of scholarship, but rather by accessibility, format, and alignment with algorithmic preferences (Baidowi & Ma'rufah, 2025).

A deeper analysis of content distribution patterns shows that platform algorithms function as invisible religious actors, shaping which messages are deemed important, viewable, and relevant (Akhtar & Abdullah, 2023). From an analysis of 100 popular tafsir videos, it was found that short-form content (30–90 seconds) with emotionally charged titles such as "The Forgotten Meaning of Sincerity" or "A Verse to Heal Your Heart in Times of Anxiety" achieved click-through rates (CTR) between 12–18%, significantly higher than long-form scholarly content, which reached only 3–5%. Interviewed content creators, such as @ustadzf (Instagram, 680K followers), admitted that algorithms "force" them to compress Qur'anic interpretation into short formats because "if it goes over two minutes, reach drops by 70%." In this context, the algorithm does more than mediate distribution— it actively reshapes epistemological frameworks, aligning religious messaging with a logic of rapid consumption and short user attention spans (Isa et al., 2024; Jauhari et al., 2023). Interview data reveal the emergence of epistemological tension between traditionally authorized scholars and popular figures on social media (Ichwan et al., 2025; Rubino et al., 2023). A lecturer of Qur'anic exegesis at a state Islamic university noted that much digital tafsir content "neglects methodology," yet he acknowledged that such messages are more easily received by the public. On the other hand, content creators such as @hanan_attaki (YouTube, 4.6 million subscribers) and @nasihat_yatim (TikTok, 3 million followers) emphasize that they are "not mufassir," but rather "conveyors of Qur'anic inspiration" who seek to bring the community closer to the Qur'an. The interaction between these positions reflects a negotiation of new legitimacy, in which religious authority is no longer singular but layered: traditional scholars claim legitimacy through sanad (scholarly lineage), while digital preachers derive authority from emotional connection and public engagement. This pattern signifies an unprecedented pluralization of authority, on a scale never before witnessed in Islamic history (Isa et al., 2024; Sa`ad et al., 2025).

This shift in authority models has far-reaching epistemological implications (Ichwan et al., 2025). As algorithms, popularity, and virality become the primary indicators for the reach of tafsir content, interpretive truth and scholarly depth are increasingly displaced by the logic of "what is engaging" rather than "what is methodologically sound." An analysis of user comments on the 50 most popular videos shows that many audiences accept digital tafsir as final truth, without questioning its scholarly sources (Herlambang & Faculty, 2022). Comments such as "This is the first time I understood this verse, thank you Ustadz" frequently appear on content that explains verses in purely motivational terms, without referencing any classical tafsir literature. This phenomenon suggests that social media has shaped a new truth paradigm: visualized truth is more trusted than verified truth (Bakar & Zamzami, 2021; Sa'i, 2025). Accordingly, the configuration of religious authority in the algorithmic era is not only shifting, but also introduces epistemic risks, where authority is grounded in emotional resonance rather than intellectual depth (Dhuhri & Rijal, 2024; Karman et al., 2024).

3.3 Dynamics of Digital Ijtihad: Creativity, Boundaries, and Challenges

In its classical context, ijtihad refers to the intellectual effort of a qualified mujtahid to derive legal rulings from the primary sources of Islam in the absence of explicit textual evidence. However, in the digital era, this meaning has undergone significant contextual expansion (Ayu et al., 2024). This study finds that many Islamic content creators—despite lacking formal scholarly credentials—actively engage in contextual interpretation of Qur'anic verses, responding to contemporary issues such as mental health, social relationships, ecological awareness, and even digital literacy. For example, a video posted by the Instagram account @suaratafsir explains QS. al-Insyirah:5–6 ("Indeed, with

hardship comes ease") in the context of digital worker burnout. Although the video does not mention any exegetical methodology, it implicitly performs a thematic ijtihad (tafsir maudhūʻī) rooted in present-day phenomena (Zakaria et al., 2024). This suggests that in digital spaces, ijtihad is no longer monopolized by academic structures, but also articulated through narrative and interpretive practices that are spontaneous and pragmatic (Lagrini & Debbah, 2025; Rois et al., 2025).

Interviews with two prominent content creators reveal that the production of digital tafsir content often begins with audience questions, personal experiences, or trending social issues (Gördük, 2020). This indicates that the process of digital ijtihad frequently arises from the affective needs of the community rather than purely methodological motivations. As noted by @ustadzonline (TikTok, 1.1 million followers), "Sometimes I don't start with the verse, but with the concerns of my audience—then I find a verse that fits." This reflects a reversal of the conventional interpretive trajectory: not from text to context, but from context to text. To some extent, this inversion reflects a form of religious creativity that enables believers to feel that the Qur'an is "speaking directly" to their lived realities (Lala, 2023; Narol, 2023). However, this creativity also requires careful boundaries, as the absence of clear epistemological frameworks may blur the lines between interpretation and spiritual opinion.

Although digital ijtihad opens space for more dynamic and contextually relevant interpretation, it also presents problematic tendencies when interpretation devolves into personal opinion devoid of methodological control (Alrumiah & Al-Shargabi, 2023). Some observed content, such as interpretations of QS. al-Baqarah:286 (on the idea that God does not burden a soul beyond its capacity), were loosely linked to the concept of "toxic relationships," with little regard for the verse's exegetical context or classical scholarly interpretations. In another case, QS. An-Nisa:34, which discusses gender roles, was cited to justify patriarchal dominance in household relationships—without engaging with the extensive exegetical debates found in academic literature (Alkoragaty et al., 2024). These examples illustrate how digital ijtihad, when detached from normative frameworks and scholarly oversight, becomes vulnerable to subjectivism and instrumentalization of the text, posing a serious challenge to the epistemic validity and credibility of religious narratives in the digital public sphere (Calis, 2022; Isnin & Abdullah, 2021).

To prevent semantic disorientation and misuse of tafsir in digital spaces, it is essential to develop ethical boundaries for the practice of digital ijtihad (Pink, 2025). This study recommends three core principles: (1) Methodological responsibility—ensuring clarity of interpretive approach (textual, thematic, or historical); (2) Transparency of authority—clearly identifying the status of the speaker (scholar, preacher, or content creator); and (3) Discursive civility—avoiding politicization, excessive simplification, or emotional exploitation. The implementation of these principles would help maintain a balance between religious expression and scholarly integrity in the delivery of Qur'anic meaning. In this way, digital ijtihad can develop as an interpretive model that is both adaptive to modern contexts and ethically and theologically responsible (Al-Hawary et al., 2023; Siregar et al., 2023).

3.4 Audience Response and Participation as Subjects of Interpretation

One of the most fundamental transformations in the practice of digital tafsir is the shift in audience position—from passive consumers to active participants in the construction of religious meaning (Lumbard, 2021). In the classical tafsir tradition, the role of the public was largely confined to receiving authoritative explanations from a mufassir (Nor et al., 2023). However, on social media platforms, interactivity enables audiences to respond, comment, and even request interpretations of specific verses based on their personal needs. An analysis of 150 comments on popular tafsir videos on TikTok and YouTube reveals

that over 60% of comments not only praised the content, but also shared personal narratives or requested interpretation of other verses. For instance, under a video by @ustadzinsight (YouTube) discussing QS. Al-Kahf:46 on the temporality of worldly life, a viewer wrote, "Could this also relate to my recent loss of a parent?"—demonstrating that audiences actively seek resonant meanings aligned with their existential experiences (Dar, 2021; M. Hanafi et al., 2021).

These comments serve not merely as feedback but as discursive spaces where the meaning of verses is collectively produced and negotiated. On Instagram Reels, the "reply with video" feature is often used by content creators to respond to interpretive questions or alternative readings posed by followers (Mert et al., 2022; Ramle et al., 2022). In one case, on the account @tafsirqontemporer, a viewer challenged the interpretation of QS. At-Taubah:105—originally discussed in relation to work ethics. In response, the creator produced a dedicated reply video, referencing Tafsir al-Maraghi and contemporary exegesis, framing the verse within the context of the digital economy. This illustrates that interpretation no longer occurs exclusively in closed academic circles, but has become a dynamic and participatory dialogue. Such practices give rise to a model of digital collective tafsir, wherein the public actively shapes the direction and substance of religious narratives through direct engagement (Baraki et al., 2021; Osredkar & Kranjc, 2021).

Audience participation also plays a crucial role in determining the popularity and sustainability of digital tafsir content (Nadi-Ravandi & Batooli, 2022). Interviewed content creators noted that engagement metrics—in the form of likes, shares, and comments—significantly influence the selection of future tafsir themes. In an interview with @daidigital.id (TikTok), he remarked: "If a topic goes viral, like mental health, the audience usually asks for a follow-up or another verse related to it." This indicates that audience demand can guide the trajectory of interpretation, potentially expanding the thematic scope of the Qur'an in modern life. However, this dynamic also poses a risk: when popular preference overrides scholarly depth, emotional response may become the primary measure of interpretive success. As such, algorithmic value may displace scientific validity. Therefore, the creator–audience relationship in digital tafsir must be understood not merely as a communicative exchange but as a complex epistemological relationship (Mert et al., 2022; Ramle et al., 2022)

This overall dynamic suggests that digital tafsir is now emerging as a communal expression, sustained by the active involvement of the Muslim public—rather than a singular authoritative product of a mufassir (Awwaliyah et al., 2023; Islam, 2022). This process shifts the practice of interpretation from an exclusive scholarly domain to a democratic, public space open to a plurality of interpretations (Isnin & Abdullah, 2021). However, such pluralism also presents a challenge: how can we ensure that participation does not lead to extreme relativism? The findings of this study underscore the need for a new approach to contemporary tafsir studies—one that examines not only texts and exegetes, but also understands the audience as epistemic subjects. Thus, digital tafsir scholarship must integrate sociological and cultural dimensions into its analytical framework, as Qur'anic meaning is now produced through interactive networks that simultaneously involve text, medium, content creators, and digital communities (Ichwan et al., 2025; Jauhari et al., 2023).

3.5 Global Implications: Tafsir, Technology, and Religious Transformation

The phenomenon of digital tafsir discussed in this study cannot be understood solely within the confines of the Indonesian Islamic context. It constitutes part of a broader transnational phenomenon—namely, digital religion, which is reshaping nearly all religious traditions across the globe (Mert et al., 2022; Ramle et al., 2022). Studies on digital preaching in Evangelical Christianity, scriptural discourse in Hinduism on YouTube, and

Torah study content on TikTok all reveal similar patterns: sacred texts are being interpreted openly by digital communities, beyond the formal boundaries of institutional religious authority (Baraki et al., 2021; Siregar et al., 2023). The interpretation of the Qur'an on social media, as explored in this research, holds a unique position, as it demonstrates how ijtihad—as an Islamic epistemological tool—can be transformed into a collective interpretive practice that responds to the logic of digital communication technologies. This marks a new chapter in the interaction between revelation, community, and technology, which has yet to be sufficiently addressed in both classical and contemporary tafsir studies (Lawson, 2021; Muwafi & Fareh, 2021).

One of the primary contributions of this study is the formulation of the concept of digital ijtihad—a form of Qur'anic reinterpretation emerging within a digital ecosystem, involving non-traditional actors, and employing audiovisual media as tools of exegesis. This model signifies a broadening of tafsir epistemology, which was previously rooted in scholarly transmission (sanad) and print-based textuality (Amini & Fattahizadeh, 2023; Stewart, 2021). Furthermore, this study highlights the emergence of participatory tafsir practices, wherein audiences not only consume, but also co-produce and direct the meaning of the Qur'an. These two concepts—digital ijtihad and participatory tafsir—have not yet been widely articulated in the global literature on modern exegesis or digital religion. Therefore, this article offers a novel perspective for the study of digital Islam by integrating classical tafsir approaches, digital communication theory, and critical discourse analysis within a single interdisciplinary framework (Akhtar & Abdullah, 2023; Bakar & Zamzami, 2021).

Another significant implication of these findings is that digital tafsir contributes to the shift in religious authority in the global era—a condition that can be described as post-authoritarian religiosity. In this context, religious truth is no longer dictated hierarchically from top to bottom, but rather negotiated through horizontal, open, and affective interactions with the public (Calis, 2022; Narol, 2023). This transformation is highly relevant in international academic forums, particularly within studies of religion and democratization, digital culture, and epistemological pluralism in religious knowledge. In the Islamic context, this process does not entail the collapse of authority, but rather its reformulation—integrating scholarly legitimacy, emotional credibility, and digital connectedness. Therefore, digital tafsir represents a critical arena for observing the contemporary dynamics of Islam as adaptive, progressive, and globally transformative (Al-Tarawneh, 2021; Osredkar & Kranjc, 2021).

From an academic standpoint, this study enriches contemporary tafsir scholarship by constructing a conceptual foundation applicable across disciplines—including religious studies, digital media, cultural studies, and Islamic education (Baidowi & Ma'rufah, 2025; Taufiq & Said, 2025). The proposed models of digital ijtihad and participatory tafsir offer analytical frameworks that can be used comparatively to examine other religious traditions in the technological era. From a practical perspective, the findings of this study may serve as resources for Islamic institutions, preachers (da'i), and policymakers in religious education to develop more inclusive, participatory, and contextually relevant da'wah strategies (Awwaliyah et al., 2023; Rubino et al., 2023). Thus, this research not only provides theoretical contributions for scholars, but also offers practical value for global Muslim communities seeking a middle path between doctrinal authenticity and the dynamics of modern technology.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the practice of Qur'anic interpretation in the digital age has undergone not only a transformation in format and medium, but also a profound

epistemological shift. Through observation of social media content and analysis of audience participation, it was found that tafsir is no longer delivered in a top-down manner by a singular authority. Instead, it has evolved into a dialogical and participatory process within open digital spaces. Religious authority is now shaped not only by sanad (scholarly lineage), but also by digital metrics such as engagement and algorithms, which directly influence audience preferences and perceptions of revelatory messages. In this context, technology functions not merely as a channel of dissemination, but as an active agent that mediates and reshapes religious meaning.

The primary contribution of this study lies in the formulation of two novel concepts—digital ijtihad and participatory tafsir—which reflect innovative ways in which Muslims engage with the Qur'an in the age of social media. Digital ijtihad captures the emergence of contextual and creative interpretations, while simultaneously presenting challenges related to ethical and epistemic boundaries. Meanwhile, active audience engagement signifies the rise of a more democratized model of tafsir, responsive to evolving social dynamics. On a global scale, this research demonstrates that technology-driven religious transformation is a cross-traditional phenomenon worthy of interdisciplinary investigation. Accordingly, digital tafsir emerges as a significant contribution to both contemporary Islamic scholarship and the broader field of digital religion studies.

5.0 **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

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