

From Ontological Devotion to Functional Efficacy of *al-Ṣamad*: the Epistemic Shift from “Knowing” to “Using” God in Digital Qur’anic Interpretation

Turkey Al Zhafir,^{1*}

¹UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Email: zhafirturkey@gmail.com

**Corresponding author*

Abstract

The shift from ontological devotion to functional efficacy represents a profound transformation in digital Qur’anic interpretation. Utilizing aesthetics of reception, this study analyzes the reconfiguration of the “horizon of expectations” concerning *al-Ṣamad* on the Instagram account @quranreview. Through digital ethnography, it examines how visual strategies and performative narratives reduce the “aesthetic distance” between rigid monotheistic doctrines and the pragmatic needs of the cyber society. The findings reveal that classical doctrinal stability has eroded under digital aesthetics, driving an epistemic shift from “knowing” to “using” God. The validity of interpretation is no longer measured by traditional methodology but by functional efficacy in providing instant emotional satisfaction (*Genuss*). Ultimately, *al-Ṣamad*’s transcendence is domesticated into a therapeutic instrument for the attention economy, transforming religious knowledge into a tool for spiritual consumption.

Keywords: *al-Ṣamad*, Aesthetics of Reception, Digital Domestication, *Genuss*, Instagram

Article History:

Received: April 27, 2026

Accepted: May 29, 2026

Published: June 2, 2026

DOI:

10.66277/jqms.1.1.235

Introduction

The transformation of theological authority in digital spaces has sparked profound discursive tensions, particularly as the transcendent text of QS. al-Ikhlāṣ interacts with the immanent logic of social media. Within the framework of reception aesthetics, every sacred text carries a stable, traditional “horizon of expectation.”¹ However, platforms like Instagram compel these texts to be recontextualized to meet the expectations of contemporary audiences. This interpretive challenge arises as the aesthetic distance

¹ Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bathi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 22.



between the absolute doctrine of monotheism and the practical needs of digital users narrows, blurring the boundary between the sacredness of the text and the profaneness of media consumption.² Consequently, the interpretation of verses is no longer dominated by rigid cognitive transmission but is increasingly influenced by emotional dynamics that demand immediate relevance. The failure of existing literature to analyze this shift in reception—particularly at the cognitive level of content creators—has left our understanding of the evolution of faith in the era of religious mediatization incomplete and theoretically underdeveloped.

This theoretical gap is evident in current studies, which tend to treat the digital Qur'an merely as a technological artifact or a functional tool for da'wah.³ Research remains fragmented, focusing primarily on religious authority in cyberspace, the visual aesthetics of religious content, and the commodification of Qur'anic verses.⁴ However, most studies overlook the profound transformation in readers' cognitive frameworks when transcendent texts are reframed as pragmatic, performative narratives. Although the mediatization of religion has been extensively explored, the shift from a rigid theology of the text to an experiential theology centered on audience emotional engagement has not been thoroughly examined.⁵ This study aims to address this gap by analyzing the evolving interpretations of QS. al-Ikhlāṣ, with a particular focus on how digital reception processes reshape the essence of monotheism into forms of spiritual consumption that resonate with the expectations of contemporary cyberspace audiences.

² Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Quran: Toward a Contemporary Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 45–47.

³ Iqomah Richtig and Muhammad Saifullah, "'Quranreview': Interaksi Anak Muda Muslim Dengan Al-Quran Di Era Digital ['Quranreview': The Interaction of Muslim Youth with the Qur'an in the Digital Era]," *SUHUF* 15, no. 2 (February 9, 2023): 267–87, <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v15i2.765>; Izzuthoriqul Haq and Muhammad Labib Syauqi, "Digital Native Character in Social Media Interpretation: A Study on Instagram Accounts, @quranreview," *Al-A'raf: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam Dan Filsafat* 18, no. 1 (June 30, 2021): 47–68, <https://doi.org/10.22515/ajpif.v18i1.3491>.

⁴ Bouziane Zaid et al., "Digital Islam and Muslim Millennials: How Social Media Influencers Reimagine Religious Authority and Islamic Practices," *Religions* 13, no. 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040335>; Gary R. Bunt, "#Islam, Social Networking and The Cloud," in *Islam in the Modern World*, ed. Jeffrey T. Kenney and Ebrahim Moosa (London: Routledge, 2014); Achmad Tifaza Alfarizi, Munir, and Rizki Farabi, "Quran in the Digital Age," *Al-Bunyan: Interdisciplinary Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 2, no. 2 (January 24, 2025): 116–26, <https://doi.org/10.61166/bunyan.v2i2.24>.

⁵ Mia Lövhelm and Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatized Conditions of Contemporary Religion: Critical Status and Future Directions," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 8, no. 2 (2019): 206–25, <https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-00802002>.

This study specifically examines how the Instagram account @quranreview transforms conceptions of divinity through a unique and provocative digital reception model. It addresses two interrelated research questions: (1) How does @quranreview interpret QS. al-Ikhlāṣ [112]:2 as a practical, solution-oriented model of divine transformation on social media? (2) How do genre and enjoyment (*Genuss*) in audience reception of this content shape new patterns of meaning that tend toward the consumptive-reflective? Through these questions, the research aims to map the emerging boundaries between sacred texts, creative interpretations on Instagram, and audience expectations within an increasingly complex and algorithmically fragmented digital religious landscape.

The central argument of this study is that @quranreview has effectively narrowed the aesthetic distance between the demanding doctrine of monotheism and audience expectations through an enjoyable (*genussvoll*) mediation strategy. Drawing on reception theory, the transformation in the meaning of QS. al-Ikhlāṣ [112]:2 results from a negotiation between the sacred text and the horizons of expectation of readers who desire a God who is “easily accessible” and “profitable.”⁶ @quranreview does not merely interpret the text; it reproduces religious pleasure through aesthetic visualizations that engage the audience personally, free from the burden of rigid doctrinal rules. This suggests that digital religious authority is now determined more by an account’s ability to satisfy emotional expectations than by fidelity to classical scholarship.⁷ Thus, this approach represents not mere simplification but an evolutionary form of reception—one that positions the Qur’an as an object of spiritual consumption aligned with contemporary lifestyles.

Method

This qualitative study employs a digital ethnographic approach combined with a reception aesthetics framework to examine the dynamics of sacred text interpretation in cyberspace. The analysis applies Hans Robert Jauss’s three pillars of the “horizon of expectations” to identify the paradigm shift in interpreting QS. al-Ikhlāṣ on the

⁶ Hans R. Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 31–35.

⁷ Pauline Hope Cheong, “Religious Authority and Social Media Branding in a Culture of Religious Celebification,” in *The Media and Religious Authority*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2016), 81–102.

@quranreview Instagram account. First, genre norms⁸ are examined through the transformation of the Qur'anic text into popular visual content that adheres to Instagram's aesthetic conventions. Second, intertextual experiences⁹ are explored by mapping how @quranreview's narratives negotiate classical tafsir literature alongside contemporary communicative language. Third, the relationship between life and text is analyzed through the account's ability to generate functional and applicative meanings that address the audience's existential needs. This approach allows the researcher to view the text not as a static product but as a dynamic process of reception shaped by the logic of social media.

The primary data consist of a digital corpus comprising posts from the @quranreview Instagram account, including visual elements, caption narratives, and content typologies related to QS. al-Ikhlāṣ. The selection of QS. al-Ikhlāṣ as the unit of analysis was based on purposive sampling, as this surah represents the theological core that @quranreview strategically reconstructs for practical application. Data were collected through participatory digital observation and systematic documentation of the account's media archives. The data were then analyzed using qualitative content analysis, with the findings compared against the audience's horizon of expectations to classify forms of reception into exegetical, aesthetic, or functional categories. To ensure reliability, data triangulation was performed by cross-verifying the findings with relevant literature on digital Qur'anic interpretation and content performance metrics within the attention economy.

The Discursive Genealogy of *al-Ṣamad*: From Theological Orthodoxy to Functional Authority

The evolution of the interpretation of QS. al-Ikhlāṣ within the Islamic intellectual tradition demonstrates remarkable doctrinal stability prior to the contemporary phenomenon of digital mediatization. During the formative period, authoritative commentators such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Māturīdī interpreted *al-Ṣamad* through a rigorous ontological and transcendental framework. Their primary concern was to establish God as an existentially independent, absolute Being, entirely free from materiality and all

⁸ Mika Bogumila, "Looking out for the Horizon: The Music of Gustav Mahler in the Light of the Theory of the Aesthetic of Reception by Hans Robert Jauss," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Musicology* 13, no. 189–202 (2013).

⁹ Alfa Ghifari, Budi Tri Santosa, and Diana Hardiyanti, "Horizon of Expectation on Popular Lyrical Poetry: Jauss's Reader Response Perspective," *ELLITE: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Teaching* 6, no. 2 (December 21, 2021): 55–69, <https://doi.org/10.32528/ellite.v6i2.6088>.

creaturely limitations.¹⁰ This doctrinal stability served as a theological bulwark against anthropomorphism, preserving the purity of divine transcendence. Accordingly, *al-Ṣamad* was understood as an attribute of perfect divine self-sufficiency, unmatched by any created entity, thereby securing God's position in a sacred realm far removed from profane human perception.

This ontological foundation was later reinforced through meticulous philological analysis and the harmonization of narrations during the mature phase of Qur'anic exegesis. Al-Zamakhsharī, leveraging his linguistic expertise, emphasized God as the sole source (*maf'ūl*) of all desires and needs of creation.¹¹ This interpretation was masterfully synthesized by Ibn Kathīr, who integrated classical narrations to affirm God's eternity and freedom from all physiological needs.¹² At this stage, the Qur'anic text was viewed not merely as a statement of faith but as a linguistic structure that firmly establishes an asymmetrical relationship between the All-Sufficient Creator and inherently dependent creatures. In the modern period, Ibn Ashur continued to uphold these boundaries, maintaining the sublime transcendence of *al-Ṣamad* while firmly rejecting any pragmatic reduction of its meaning.¹³

However, in the contemporary era, a noticeable shift in interpretive orientation has emerged, increasingly engaging with the subjectivity and psychological needs of readers. Commentators such as al-Nawawī,¹⁴ al-Jazāirī,¹⁵ and especially al-Marāghī,¹⁶ began shifting the focus from God's abstract metaphysical essence toward more intimate, relational, and functional dimensions in the life of the believer. Their emphasis on direct, unmediated dependence on God signaled the early stages of domesticating the sacred text for public discourse. In this context, tawhid was no longer confined to intellectual speculation in madrasahs but was increasingly positioned as an existential solution to the complexities of

¹⁰ Muḥammad bin Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān Fī Ta'wīl Al-Qur'an*, vol. 24 (Bayrūt: Muassasah al-Risālah, 2000), 731.

¹¹ Maḥmūd bin Umar Al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr Al-Kasasyāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ Al-Tanzīl*, vol. 3 (Bairut: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 2009), 818.

¹² Ismā'īl bin 'Umar bin Kaṣīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'an Al-'Aẓīm*, vol. 8 (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutb al-'Ilmiyah, 1419), 489.

¹³ Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn 'Āsyūr, *At-Taḥrīr Wa at-Tanwīr*, vol. 30 (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tunisiyah li Nasyr, 1984), 617.

¹⁴ Muḥammad bin Umar Nawawi Al-Jawi, *Marāḥ Labīd Li Kashf Ma'nā Al-Qur'ān Al-Majīd*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutb al-'Ilmiyah, 2013), 679.

¹⁵ Jābir bin Mūsā Al-Jazāirī, *Aisar Al-Tafāsīr Li Kalām Al-'Alī Al-Kabīr*, vol. 5 (al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah: Maktabah al-'Ulūm wa al-Ḥikam, 2003), 628.

¹⁶ Aḥmad bin Muṣṭafā Al-Marāghī, *Tafsīr Al-Marāghī*, vol. 30 (Mesir: Muṣṭafā al-Bāb al-Ḥalabī, 1946), 265.

modern life. This development marks a critical transition in which the meaning of the verses began to be negotiated with audience expectations that demand religion provide immediate relevance and practical support.

This interpretive genealogy demonstrates that, even before entering the Instagram ecosystem, readers' horizons of expectation had already shifted from a rigid theocentric understanding toward a more pragmatic and applicative orientation. This pre-existing hermeneutical gap created fertile ground for the sacred text to engage with demands for relevance in digital spaces. The @quranreview account astutely capitalizes on this long historical trajectory through sophisticated aesthetic visualization strategies. Rather than inventing radically new meanings, the account accelerates and amplifies the functional tendencies already latent in modern exegesis. By embedding interpretation within performative lifestyle narratives, @quranreview transforms the demanding doctrine of monotheism into an easily consumed narrative of religious enjoyment. This approach effectively meets the emotional expectations of digital society, positioning religion as an object of spiritual consumption aligned with modern identities.

The Digital Domestication of *al-Şamad*: Reconfiguring the Horizon of Expectations in Instagram-Based Quranic Reception

The tradition of Qur'anic interpretation is experiencing a significant epistemological shift from textual authority to interactive and visual digital spaces. This transformation is facilitated by what Hans Robert Jauss describes as the narrowing of the "aesthetic distance"¹⁷—the gap between the historically fixed meaning of sacred texts and the subjective understanding of contemporary readers. Consequently, sacred texts are no longer perceived as distant, untouchable objects. Social media, particularly Instagram, serves as a new arena that negotiates audience expectations by transforming theological content into informative and performative narratives. The @quranreview account functions as an agent that operationalizes Jauss's concept of *aisthesis* (aesthetic reception). Here, the Qur'an is repositioned as an instrument of "religious pleasure" (*Genuss*), liberating readers from the constraints of rigid dogma.¹⁸ Through Jauss's framework, the interpretation of QS. al-Ikhlāş on this account reveals an evolving form of reception that fundamentally reshapes the understanding of God to align with the existential needs of

¹⁷ Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, 25.

¹⁸ Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, 31–35.

cyber society.¹⁹ This theoretical integration advances the analysis beyond mere content description toward a deeper socio-religious interpretation.

The message construction on @quranreview consistently reconfigures the doctrine of monotheism through the lens of intimate, everyday problems faced by its audience. This is evident in the diction used in post titles, which employs popular and persuasive language to connect the concept of divine absolutism with social realities (see Figure 1).



Source: @quranreview Instagram account.

Figure 1. Visualization of meaning in the @quranreview account.

In Figure 1, metaphorical elements such as the ACC symbol,²⁰ saving money,²¹ and praying hands²² function as *aisthesis* instruments. They simplify complex theological concepts—such as answered prayer—into transactional and positive terms. This strategy transforms originally rigid verses into accessible, communicative narratives. The content is deliberately structured to build empathy by first mapping crises in interpersonal relationships before presenting theocentric spiritual solutions.

The visual aesthetics demonstrate intentional digital identity management through consistent color schemes and typography designed to evoke “religious

¹⁹ Ahmad Rafiq, “The Reception of the Qur’an in Indonesia : A Case Study on the Place of the Qur’an in a Non-Arabic Speaking Community” (The Temple University, 2014), 45–50.

²⁰ Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], “Tidak Ada Yang Tidak Dikabulkan Selama Mintanya Sama Allah [Nothing is Denied when Praying to Allah],” Instagram Photo, February 18, 2026, <https://www.instagram.com/quranreview/p/DU5MvNlk77J/>.

²¹ Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], “Ikhlās Tanpa Kata Ikhlās [Sincerity without the Word Sincerity],” Instagram Photo, April 2, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/quranreview/p/DWn0KdV4sA/?img_index=1.

²² Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], “Kamu Itu Boleh Minta-Minta, Tapi Sama Allah [You are allowed to beg, but only from Allah],” Instagram Photo, September 13, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/quranreview/p/DPvxUuLk9fu/>.

enjoyment.” The use of a blue background with yellow and white fonts,²³ white backgrounds with orange accents, and graphic elements—such as paper,²⁴ praying hands, and a house-shaped savings box²⁵—goes beyond mere decoration. These elements function as visual navigation tools that facilitate the rapid absorption of theological messages. The recurring visual patterns help maintain stability in followers’ expectations by providing a calming aesthetic. Collectively, these characteristics highlight that religious interpretation in cyberspace operates within an “attention economy,” where the acceptance of a message depends heavily on its graphic appeal and its ability to generate affective engagement.

Substantially, the constructed narratives domesticate the Qur’an’s technical linguistic terms by employing analogies relevant to the lifestyles of the digital generation. For instance, the concept of *al-Ṣamad* is no longer conveyed through distant grammatical or theological debates but is translated into the psychology of the servant: mentoring,²⁶ frequent supplication,²⁷ and readiness to grant requests²⁸ amid existential anxiety. Through this approach, @quranreview offers a therapeutic model of interpretation in which monotheism becomes a remedy for feelings of inferiority or fear of failure in social dynamics. This emphasis on the functional dimension of the verse signals the emergence of a pragmatic reception model on social media—one that prioritizes peace of mind and ease of access over the validation of *sand* (chains of narration) or references to classical scholarship.

The configuration of messages on the @quranreview platform represents a radical acceleration in the “domestication of transcendence.” It reduces the aesthetic distance between the ontological sacredness of classical texts and the pragmatic expectations of digital audiences. This evolution reflects a clear shift from the defensive theology of the classical era—which emphasized God’s metaphysical self-sufficiency—to a therapeutic theology that employs the concept of *al-Ṣamad* as a tool for emotional healing and an existential solution to the servant’s anxiety.²⁹ Through systematic visualization strategies, such as the recurring use of the “ACC” symbol, @quranreview not only simplifies

²³ Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], “Tidak Ada Yang Tidak Dikabulkan Selama Mintanya Sama Allah.”

²⁴ Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], “Ikhlas Tanpa Kata Ikhlas.”

²⁵ Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview].

²⁶ Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], “Kuliah Kebutuhan Tersier? [Higher Education: A Tertiary Need?],” Instagram Photo, May 19, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/quranreview/p/C7JpEEyBn7P/?img_index=7.

²⁷ Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], “Kamu Itu Boleh Minta-Minta, Tapi Sama Allah.”

²⁸ Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], “Tidak Ada Yang Tidak Dikabulkan Selama Mintanya Sama Allah.”

²⁹ Heidi A. Campbell, “Introduction: The Rise of the Study of Digital Religion,” in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell (New York: Routledge, 2013), 7–11.

theological content but also operationalizes Jauss's concept of *aisthesis*. In doing so, it transforms complex doctrinal teachings into functional narratives of "religious pleasure".³⁰ This phenomenon illustrates how digital mediatization has disrupted traditional interpretive authority: the validity of an interpretation is no longer judged primarily by the rigor of its chain of transmission but by its affective efficacy and its ability to deliver instant relevance to contemporary digital society.

The @quranreview model represents an epistemological shift in interpretive authority—from the scholastic-representational tradition of classical tafsir to a performative-consumptive mode. Traditional tafsir emphasizes rigorous methodological standards, including linguistic mastery and *munāsabah* (correlation), to preserve the ontological authenticity of the sacred text.³¹ In contrast, the digital ecosystem produces what can be described as an "epistemic event," in which interpretive validity is determined less by methodological coherence and more by functional efficacy for the reader. Consequently, Qur'anic knowledge is reduced to pragmatic, usable knowledge. The meaning of terms such as *al-Ṣamad* is no longer sought in the metaphysical depths of God's essence but rather in the extent to which the text can address the audience's psychosocial crises.³² In this context, media functions not merely as a distribution channel but as a cognitive framework that reshapes how religious knowledge is constructed and received. It accelerates epistemic simplification by embedding the Qur'anic text within fluid, everyday analogies. The result is a profound shift from knowing God (ontological understanding) to using God (God as a practical solution), reflecting the text's adaptation to the demands of instant, personalized religiosity in contemporary society.

This phenomenon highlights the growing dominance of reader subjectivity. The audience is no longer a passive recipient of sacred authority but has become a "determinant of meaning," compelling the text to engage with personal anxieties.³³ By narrowing the aesthetic distance, @quranreview's approach causes the Qur'anic text to lose much of its transcendent "otherness." Rather than challenging the audience's horizons of expectation, the text is reshaped to satisfy affective needs.³⁴ Consequently, the Divine is increasingly instrumentalized—recognized primarily insofar as it provides

³⁰ Hjarvard, "The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change."

³¹ Jane D. McAuliffe, "The Tasks and Traditions of Interpretation," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Quran*, ed. Jane D. McAuliffe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 190.

³² Saeed, *Interpreting the Quran: Toward a Contemporary Approach*, 46.

³³ Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, 25.

³⁴ Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 45.

pragmatic solutions to the existential crises of cyber-society. Interpretive validity thus undergoes radical democratization, disrupting traditional authority structures. Theological truth now depends largely on the capacity to deliver immediate emotional gratification.

The argument concerning the “instrumentalization of the Divine” in this study offers theoretical novelty by revealing the deeper, often overlooked consequences of digitalization. While previous literature has generally viewed such phenomena positively—as successful attempts to narrow aesthetic distance, adapt to contemporary needs,³⁵ or address mental health issues among younger generations³⁶—this analysis advances a more critical and epistemological perspective.³⁷ @quranreview’s visual optimization is no longer seen merely as a progressive engagement strategy but as an ontological disruption in which the sacred “otherness” of the text has been thoroughly domesticated.

The Architecture of *Aisthesis* and the Politics of Consumption: Transforming Readers into Architects of Meaning within the @quranreview Ecosystem

The transformation of interpretation within the @quranreview ecosystem marks the emergence of a new paradigm of truth that positions aesthetics as the primary arbiter of theological authority. Through the lens of receptivity, the *Genuss* identity presented by this account is not merely a strategy for accessibility but a form of liberation from the epistemic burden of classical interpretation, which demands rigorous intellectual prerequisites.³⁸ Here, religious enjoyment becomes the foundational criterion by which a text is deemed true—not due to its methodological coherence with tradition, but because

³⁵ Ujang Abduloh Mahpud and Muhammad Habib Izzuddin Amin, “Menakar Otentisitas Dan Kualitas Konten Al-Qur’an Di Ruang Digital: Analisis Penafsiran Nadirsyah Hosen Di Instagram [Assessing the Authenticity and Quality of Quranic Content in the Digital Space: An Analysis of Nadirsyah Hosen's Interpretation on Instagram],” *Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Sosial* 8, no. 2 (December 21, 2025): 243–63, <https://doi.org/10.61941/iklila.v8i2.434>.

³⁶ Ani Nabila Farahdiba, “The New Trend in Digital School of Tafsīr: Qur’an Journaling and the Reconfiguration of Religious Authority on @Aisharizqy’s Instagram,” *Journal of Ushuluddin and Islamic Thought* 2, no. 1 (June 1, 2024): 119–47, <https://doi.org/10.15642/juit.2024.2.1.119-147>.

³⁷ Pipin Armita, “Digital Da’wah and Quranic Interpretation: Opportunities, Distortions, and Ethics in the Spread of Interpretations on Social Media,” *International Journal of Islamic Thought and Humanities* 4, no. 1 (May 15, 2025): 154–64, <https://doi.org/10.54298/ijith.v4i1.421>; Izzuthoriquel Haq and Muhammad labib Syauqi, “Digital Native Character in Social Media Interpretation: A Study on Instagram Accounts, @quranreview,” *Al-A’raf: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam Dan Filsafat* 18, no. 1 (June 30, 2021): 47–68, <https://doi.org/10.22515/AJPIF.V18I1.3491>.

³⁸ Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, 31–32.

of its capacity to provide immediate emotional gratification.³⁹ This phenomenon elevates the reader from a passive recipient to an active arbiter of meaning. Sacred texts must now negotiate with the audience's standards of visual comfort to maintain their relevance in the highly competitive digital attention economy.

The synchronization of digital identity management and the simplification of the audience's cognitive load operate through what can be termed aesthetic navigation. The recurring visual motifs centered on QS. Al-Ikhlāṣ [112]:2 are not merely attempts to maintain branding consistency; they represent a strategy to "tame" the complexity of the sacred text. Instructive phrases such as *repot lho* (it's troublesome, you know),⁴⁰ *ikhlas itu sulit dan berat* (sincerity is difficult and hard),⁴¹ and *jangan suka minta-minta ah* (don't like begging)⁴² along with accompanying visual metaphors, function as cognitive filters. These elements enable readers to absorb theological points instantly, bypassing any tedious dialectical process. This aesthetic effectively collapses the distance between the sacredness of the text and the profaneness of everyday life, transforming the Quran into a fully "managed" object within the audience's perception. Instagram's visual architecture thus ceases to be mere decoration and instead becomes a structure that reduces theological weight to pragmatic graphic consumption.

The Instagram account @quranreview engages in a process of radical translation of technical Qur'anic terms—such as *al-Ṣamad*—by deconstructing classical grammatical structures and reconnecting them to the psychological realities of millennials. These key phrases are no longer presented as objects of distant philological debate but as practical tools for addressing crises in social relationships and feelings of insecurity prevalent in cyberspace.⁴³ By framing the concept of monotheism in popular, persuasive language,⁴⁴ the account effectively transforms the Quran from a majestic "Statement of God" into an intimate "Response to the Anxiety" of a servant. This linguistic transformation reveals that, in digital spaces, religious language loses its ontological weight and evolves into fluid

³⁹ Saeed, *Interpreting the Quran: Toward a Contemporary Approach*, 45–47.

⁴⁰ Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Tidak Ada Yang Tidak Dikabulkan Selama Mintanya Sama Allah."

⁴¹ Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Ikhlas Tanpa Kata Ikhlas."

⁴² Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Kamu Itu Boleh Minta-Minta, Tapi Sama Allah."

⁴³ Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Tidak Ada Yang Tidak Dikabulkan Selama Mintanya Sama Allah"; Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Kamu Itu Boleh Minta-Minta, Tapi Sama Allah."

⁴⁴ Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Kuliah Kebutuhan Tersier?"; Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Ikhlas Tanpa Kata Ikhlas."

analogies. Interpretation ultimately conforms to the reader's performative lifestyle, which demands immediate relevance from every theological expression.

The power of @quranreview's impact lies in its ability to facilitate catharsis by precisely mapping the audience's mental and emotional crises. Before presenting spiritual solutions, the content is intentionally structured to build empathy through narratives of failure, sadness, and human vulnerability that reflect contemporary conditions (see Figure 2).



Source: Instagram account @quranreview.

Figure 2. @quranreview's catharsis scheme for QS Al-Ikhlāṣ [112]:2.

The sympathetic identification depicted in Figure 2—by directly addressing the audience's emotional crises—makes readers feel “found” and “understood” rather than “judged” by the text's rigid moral standards. The resulting emotional relief becomes the primary indicator of successful reception. Consequently, the truth of QS. Al-Ikhlāṣ [112]:2 is no longer rooted in its metaphysical depth but in its effectiveness at alleviating existential anxiety. Through this pattern, the sacred text loses its instructive authority and is transformed into a therapeutic instrument that prioritizes emotional calm over methodological rigor in interpretation.

Reflectively, this data confirms a shift in the standards of validity for religious knowledge in cyberspace. While in the classical tradition, the truth of an interpretation is measured by methodological rigor, in the @quranreview ecosystem, validity is determined by psychological efficacy.⁴⁵ This marks the decline of hierarchical scholastic authority, replaced by fluid digital authority. Authority is no longer based on the personal credibility

⁴⁵ Peter Fischer-Nielsen, “The Internet Mediatization of Religion and Church,” in *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives*, ed. Stig Hjarvard and Mia Lövhelm (Gothenburg: Nordicom, 2012), 63–78.

of the interpreter or classical scholarship but rather on the level of emotional resonance that content design can evoke. Religious truth ultimately deteriorates into mere affective engagement, resulting from the synchronization of cyberspace's emotional expectations with the packaging of therapeutic messages.

The emergence of the therapeutic interpretation model illustrates how the Quranic text has been relegated to the profane realm through a systematic process of subjugation to immanence. God is no longer present to challenge the reader's horizons of expectation with demanding morality; instead, God is reconfigured to confirm and satisfy individual emotional needs.⁴⁶ The prominence of themes such as “answered prayers” and “peace of mind” indicates that Islamic theology on social media has shifted toward serving as a tool for mental health stability.⁴⁷ In this context, the Quran loses its sublime transcendence and is transformed into a technical manual for achieving emotional balance. Religious interpretation is ultimately reduced to a spiritual supplement that must align with the audience's psychological comfort to remain relevant amid the stressful dynamics of modern society.

All of these dynamics culminate in the emergence of a hegemonic reader subjectivity, wherein the audience becomes the primary architect of meaning, subordinating the text to their personal interests. The underlying significance of the systematic use of visual elements lies in the attempt to forcibly negotiate the sacred text so that it aligns with the principles of the “attention economy.”⁴⁸ Religious truth is no longer objective and universal—demanding obedience—but subjective and personal, demanding satisfaction. This represents the most crucial epistemic shift: the sacred text must sacrifice its independence to secure its right to exist amid the frenzy of digital disruption, which prioritizes speed and affective resonance over ontological depth.

This analysis offers a distinctive theoretical contribution that extends beyond the predominantly descriptive literature on the digitalization of religious interpretation. While many studies emphasize the increased of religious information,⁴⁹ this article

⁴⁶ Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, 31–32.

⁴⁷ Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner, *Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 63–67.

⁴⁸ James Williams, *Stand Out of Our Light: Freedom and Resistance in the Attention Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 27.

⁴⁹ Liang Zhang, “The Digital Age of Religious Communication: The Shaping and Challenges of Religious Beliefs through Social Media,” *Studies on Religion and Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2025): 25–41, <https://doi.org/10.71204/DE63MN10>; Md. Ishaque, Mahmudulhassan Mahmudulhassan, and Muhammad

demonstrates that such convenience entails an ontological disruption to the very nature of divinity. Its originality lies in revealing that social media platforms like Instagram are not merely distribution channels but cognitive frameworks that actively reshape the construction and reception of religious knowledge. This insight is essential for understanding the future of religiosity in the digital age, where the sacredness of religious texts is gradually dissolving into consumer functionality. This transformation exemplifies how religion adapts to maintain relevance by becoming an aesthetic object that satisfies the contemporary digital generation's desire for instant spirituality.

Conclusion

The doctrinal stability of the classical exegetical tradition, which long maintained a sacred distance between the transcendent text and the reader, has collapsed under the hegemony of immanent digital aesthetics. This study finds that the mediatization of the Qur'an through the @quranreview account has accelerated a shift from a rigid ontological theology to a therapeutic theology that fully submits to the sovereignty of the reader's subjectivity. The validity of interpretation is no longer verified through methodological coherence or chains of narration (*sand*) but rather through the functional efficacy of the message in delivering instant emotional gratification (*Genuss*) to cyber-society. Through the systematic architecture of *aisthesis*, the sacredness of the text has been thoroughly domesticated to align with the pragmatic horizons of audience expectations. This phenomenon marks the birth of the epistemic event "Using God," in which divine authority is instrumentalized into a mere object of performative spiritual consumption that must conform to the demands of the digital attention economy.

The integration of digital ethnography with Hans Robert Jauss's aesthetics of reception has proven highly effective in analyzing the mechanisms behind the narrowing of aesthetic distance between the transcendent text and the immanent audience. This approach successfully reveals how visual and techno-linguistic navigation function as cognitive structures that transform the nature of religious knowledge on social media. However, the study is limited by its focus on a single popular Instagram account, with the specific unit of analysis being the Tawhid Surah. This limitation opens avenues for future research to examine how different platform algorithms shape the domestication of sacred texts across more diverse genres, such as legal or eschatological verses. Future studies should also broaden their scope to include audience responses across multiple platforms,

Abuzar, "Sustaining Digital Faith: How Technology Impacts Religious Activities and Participation in the Digital Era," *Bulletin of Islamic Research* 1, no. 2 (June 6, 2023): 177–88, <https://doi.org/10.69526/bir.v1i2.338>.

thereby providing a more comprehensive mapping of digital religiosity in the rapidly evolving cyber landscape.

Acknowledgements:

Deepest thanks are due to all individuals whose encouragement, constructive suggestions, and diverse support significantly contributed to the completion of this research.

Data Availability Statement:

The authors ensure that the datasets necessary to replicate the conclusions of this work are presented in their entirety within the article [and/or] its supplementary information.

Disclosure Statement:

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest. The research was conducted independently of any commercial or financial relationships with the media organizations or platforms analysed in this study.

Ethical Approval:

Ethical approval was not required for this study as it relies entirely on the analysis of digital content that is within the public domain. Data was collected solely from public accounts on Instagram with unrestricted public access. The data collection process adhered to the platform's Terms of Service and API guidelines. To further ensure ethical standards and protect user privacy, any potentially identifiable information, such as user handles and specific metadata, has been anonymized in the final reporting.

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