

When the Playlist Becomes the Pulpit: How Platform Logic Re-Oralizes, Serializes, and Domesticates the Qur'an in Digital Qur'anic Interpretation

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Abstract

The mediatization of sacred texts in cyberspace is often perceived as a neutral extension of the medium that democratizes religious knowledge. However, serial video platforms increasingly reshape the very ways scripture is authorized, structured, and understood. This study examines the epistemological encounter between platform architecture and Qur'anic interpretation through a qualitative case study combined with transcript analysis. By analyzing the twenty-nine-episode series "Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look" by Nouman Ali Khan on Bayyinah TV, using Walter Ong's concept of secondary orality and the framework of the mediatization of religious authority, the findings reveal that platform logic operates through three interlocking processes: the re-oralization of textuality, whereby authority rests on performance rather than transmission (*isnād*); the serialization of coherence, which subordinates the text's unity to algorithmic retention; and the domestication of meaning through analogies that bind revelation to the digital consumer's lifeworld. Consequently, this study highlights how the Qur'an is subsumed into a self-optimizing resource aligned with the neoliberal subject.

Keywords: *Nouman Ali Khan; Digital Qur'anic Interpretation; Secondary Orality; Mediatization of Religious Authority; Neoliberal Subsumption.*

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Introduction

The mediatization of sacred texts—originally conceived as a neutral expansion of revelation's reach—encounters a profound epistemological conflict when mediated by global video platforms that actively shape meaning. Within the framework of mediatization theory, religious institutions, symbolic content, and personal practices



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increasingly conform to media logic. Media no longer merely transmits religious imagination; it actively molds it according to popular cultural genres.¹ Tension arises precisely at a promising intersection: digital exegesis. Celebrated for democratizing knowledge by granting millions direct access to the Quran without institutional intermediaries, digital exegesis simultaneously subjects the comprehension of divine revelation to the demands of retention, visibility, and engagement metrics. Interpretive authority no longer rests solely on tradition and personal charisma;² instead, it depends on voluntary audience acceptance and references to popular media culture. Consequently, the sacred text risks losing its transcendent autonomy, becoming reconfigured according to the logic of the hosting platform rather than the hermeneutic principles that originally gave rise to it.

This dynamic is clearly evident on Bayyinah TV, a digital platform led by Nouman Ali Khan (b. 1978), founder of the Bayyinah Institute, whose channel reaches millions of subscribers worldwide. Through a twenty-nine-episode series on QS. al-Raḥmān [55], Khan sequentially dissects the chapter, blending detailed Arabic grammatical analysis and intertextual structural mapping with popular analogies that connect the text to the audience's everyday experiences.³ This serialized format requires scholarly expertise to function as an engaging communicative event; the surah's coherence is structured as an architectural narrative spanning multiple episodes, and the gap between the 7th-century text and the modern audience is bridged through imagery ranging from gadgets and industry to family life. In short, this channel serves as an ideal empirical space to observe how platform infrastructure intervenes in the construction of interpretive authority and the dissemination of revelation.

Existing scholarship can be categorized into three main approaches. The first is the linguistic-rhetorical approach, which highlights how Khan employs Arabic linguistic devices and persuasive strategies in his lectures. For instance, Sidek and Yunus analyze Khan's rhetorical strategies using the ethos-pathos-logos triad and conclude that *logos*

¹ Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change," *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook* 6, no. 1 (June 1, 2008): 9–26, https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.6.1.9_1.

² Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān Fi 'Ulūm Al-Qur'an*, vol. 4 (Beirut: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1974), 155–60.

³ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, "Surah Ar-Rahman [Trailer]," YouTube Video, February 5, 2026, <https://youtu.be/tMY0PN1pE8U?si=ZbN5t5xvyuLwr6iL>.

dominates his da'wah,⁴ while Azizah and Fitriana examine the speech-act strategies of requests in his exegesis of QS. al-Ikhlāṣ [112] and QS. al-Bayyinah [98]⁵. The second is the methodological-exegetical approach, which situates Khan within the landscape of interpretive methods. Hairul identifies Khan's linguistic and thematic approaches on YouTube—along with their cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects—while studies of the “A Deeper Look” series map the features of his thematic exegesis.⁶ The third is the discourse-value approach, which examines the ideational content of his exegesis. Nurhamidah and colleagues analyze the values within “Amazed by the Qur'an” using systemic functional discourse analysis.⁷ While these three approaches have enriched our understanding of Khan's style, method, and content, they tend to treat the medium as a neutral vessel—analyzing *what* Khan conveys without examining *how* the platform's architecture shapes the structure of the exegesis itself. No study has yet interpreted Khan's exegetical practice as a phenomenon of mediatization—specifically, how the logic of a serial medium shapes authority, coherence, and textual meaning. This study fills that gap by analyzing the “Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look” series through the lenses of “secondary orality” and the mediatization of religious authority, demonstrating how the textuality of the Qur'an is re-oralized, serialized, and domesticated into a digital resource.

Departing from this gap, this study aims to analyze the mediatization of the Qur'an in Nouman Ali Khan's digital exegesis through three interrelated dimensions. First, it examines how the textuality of the Qur'an is re-oralized—specifically, how its grammatical and literary precision is transformed into an audiovisual performance. Grounded in Ong's framework of secondary orality, this reactivation of oral reasoning is generated by and mediated through electronic technology, shifting the locus of authority from the traditional transmission (*isnād*) to communicative performance. Second, it maps how textual coherence (*naẓm*) is serialized into a narrative architecture governed by the

⁴ Nurul Hafizah Sidek and Kamariah Yunus, “The Rhetorical Strategies of an Internationally Renowned Preacher: Nouman Ali Khan,” *Jurnal Ilmi* 14, no. 1 (2024): 36–47.

⁵ Ayu Nur Azizah and Irta Fitriana, “A Case Study of QS.Al-Ikhlās and QS.Al-Bayyinah Tafseer Delivered by Nouman Ali Khan (A Pragmatics Approach),” *Diglossia: Jurnal Kajian Ilmiah Kebahasaan Dan Kesusastraan* 10, no. 1 (September 20, 2018): 48–59, <https://doi.org/10.26594/diglossia.v10i1.1501>.

⁶ Moh. Azwar Hairul, “Tafsir Al-Qur'an Di Youtube: Telaah Penafsiran Nouman Ali Khan Di Channel Bayyinah Institute Dan Quran Weekly,” *Al-Fanar: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 2, no. 2 (2019): 197–213, <https://doi.org/10.33511/ALFANAR.V2N2.197-213>.

⁷ Idha Nurhamidah et al., “A Qur'anic Discourse Analysis: Exploring Values in Nouman Ali Khan's Amazed by the Qur'an,” *3L The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies* 31, no. 2 (June 25, 2025): 133–45, <https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2025-3102-10>.

retention and circulation logics of the playlist format, wherein the medium's structure directly conditions how sacred messages are organized and experienced. Third, it analyzes how the distance between the text and the audience is bridged through analogies that anchor revelation to the lifeworld of digital consumers, reframing the Qur'an as an instrument for self-optimization that resonates with modern subjects seeking continuous self-improvement.

The central thesis of this study posits that integrating of video platform architecture into interpretive practice no longer serves as a neutral medium of representation but actively shapes how the authority, coherence, and meaning of sacred texts are constructed. This process unfolds through three systematic operations. First, the re-oralization of textuality shifts the foundation of authority from inherited transmission to staged performance, reflecting a broader evolution in digital religious authority that prioritizes visibility and audience engagement over institutional credentials. Second, the serialization of textual coherence transforms the text's intrinsic unity of the text into a segmented experience that depends on continuous consumption, governed by platform systems that emphasize engagement rather than hermeneutic rigor. Third, the text's subsumption into "resource reason" repositions the Qur'an from a text demanding transcendent submission to a tool aligned with neoliberal subjectivity—where power operates not through prohibition but through a language of personal fulfillment that frames self-optimization as an authentic spiritual desire.⁸ At this final stage, the familiarity fostered by secondary orality ultimately displaces the sacred, transcendent foreignness of the text in favor of worldly utility.

Method

This research is a qualitative case study that uses the exegesis series "*Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look*" on the Bayyinah TV channel as its primary material. This series was purposively selected for three reasons: it is led by Nouman Ali Khan, one of the most influential digital interpreters with a global audience of millions; it consists of twenty-nine episodes, allowing for the observation of a complete pattern of mediatization; and it focuses on a single *surah*, enabling an in-depth analysis of its interpretive structure. A case study design was chosen because it facilitates an intensive investigation of a contemporary

⁸ Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*, trans. Erik Butler (London: Verso, 2017).

phenomenon within its real-world context.⁹ The primary data consist of verbal transcripts from all full episodes as well as promotional trailers (31 videos in total), while secondary sources include literature on mediatization, digital religious authority, and classical Qur’anic studies to support the analytical framework.

Data collection was conducted through non-participant observation of all episodes, with key speech segments transcribed to ensure precise citation and verification. The verbal data were then analyzed in three stages. First, data reduction was performed by categorizing speech segments into nine distinct analytical categories corresponding to the study’s three core focuses. Second, the data were organized into matrix tables linking each quote to its specific episode, timestamp, and analytical function. Third, conclusions were drawn through an interpretive reading grounded in Walter Ong’s framework of secondary orality, alongside theories of mediatized religious authority. To ensure validity, the study employed source triangulation by cross-referencing themes across different episodes and validating them against secondary literature—ensuring that interpretations relied on consistent, overarching patterns rather than isolated fragments.

A New Authority in the Hybrid Terrain: Nouman Ali Khan and the Bayyinah Channel in the Digital Interpretive Landscape

The interaction between the Qur’an and new media has transformed the sacred text from a community-bound religious tradition into a platform-mediated phenomenon, as the holy book becomes searchable, portable, and continuously integrated into everyday digital life. This transformation extends far beyond mere access, reaching the very foundations of authority itself: interpretive authority over the Qur’an no longer depends solely on *isnād* (transmission), formal scholarly credentials, or institutional recognition, but is increasingly negotiated through media visibility, communicative performance, audience trust, and algorithmic distribution.¹⁰ What emerges is not a simple replacement of traditional scholars by online influencers, but rather a hybrid terrain in which classical scholarship, institutional legitimacy, charismatic performance, and platform logic operate

⁹ Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 37.

¹⁰ Ahmad Syukron et al., “Digitalizing the Living Qur’an: Religious Authority and the Transformation of Qur’anic Knowledge in Indonesia,” *Jurnal Indo-Islamika* 16, no. 1 (June 30, 2026): 191–207, <https://doi.org/10.15408/jii.v16i1.51744>; Dina Istiqomah, Muhammad Rusidi, and Opi Yensi, “Tafsir Digital: Antara Adaptasi Dan Krisis Otoritas Keagamaan,” *Lathaif: Literasi Tafsir, Hadis Dan Filologi* 4, no. 1 (June 21, 2025): 41, <https://doi.org/10.31958/lathaif.v4i1.15416>.

simultaneously.¹¹ In this space, algorithms help shape religious visibility, frequently favoring accessible, emotionally resonant content over dense, methodological treatises.¹² These conditions make digital exegesis a critical arena for examining how sacred textual authority is renegotiated today.

One of the most representative figures for observing this hybrid dynamic is Nouman Ali Khan. Born in 1978 in Berlin to a Pakistani family, he grew up moving across several countries—Germany, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United States—a cosmopolitan background that heavily influences his communicative style.¹³ Unlike most traditional interpreters, his scholarly background is not rooted in formal *madrassa tafsīr* education with inherited chains of transmission (*isnād*); rather, it centers on an intensive mastery of the Arabic language pursued since 1999 under the guidance of Dr. Abdus-Samie from Quran College, Faisalabad. This linguistic foundation formed the bedrock of his teaching career at Nassau Community College before he founded the Bayyinah Institute in 2006. This absence of traditional classical authorization is key to understanding his role: mirroring the logic of the hybrid field, his legitimacy is built through performative linguistic mastery rather than inherited lineage.

Khan's personal authority is directly supported and amplified by the channel infrastructure he manages. His official YouTube channel, "Nouman Ali Khan – Official – Bayyinah," active since February 19, 2009, has grown into one of the world's most influential English-language Qur'anic education platforms, boasting approximately 2.84 million subscribers, over 346 million total views, and nearly 2,500 videos as of mid-2026.¹⁴ This scale and continuity solidify his position as a central authority in the digital space. In addition to these public offerings, Bayyinah operates the subscription-based streaming platform Bayyinah TV, which delivers structured Arabic language curricula and *tafsīr* series. A flagship offering of this platform is the "A Deeper Look" series—a surah-based thematic exegesis that analyzes individual chapters verse by verse, emphasizing textual

¹¹ Muhammad Nur Rhafik et al., "Qur'anic Exegesis in the Digital Sphere: The Dynamics of Authority, Audience, and Algorithms on Individual and Collective Platforms," *QiST: Journal of Quran and Tafseer Studies* 5, no. 2 (June 10, 2026): 597–626, <https://doi.org/10.23917/qist.v5i2.17742>.

¹² Kamil Azka and Azarudin Awang, "The Scientific Authority of Ulama in the Era of Social Media Algorithms and the Shift in the Legitimacy of Islamic Fatwas," *NIHAYAH: Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (April 29, 2026): 54–69, <https://doi.org/10.65802/nihayah.v2i1.121>.

¹³ Sameen Tahir Khan, "Nouman Khan: The One-Man Qur'an Movement," *Arab News*, April 5, 2013, <https://backup.arabnews.com/news/445647>.

¹⁴ Social Blade, "Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah's YouTube Statistics," *SocialBlade.com*, June 10, 2026, <https://socialblade.com/youtube/handle/bayyinah>.

structure, linguistic nuance, and internal coherence (*naẓm*). The series “*Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look*,” which serves as the empirical focus of this study, comprises twenty-nine episodes and a promotional trailer released in a serialized format designed for sustained viewership. These serialized, structured, and retention-oriented features make the Bayyinah platform an ideal empirical site for examining the mediatization of Qur’anic interpretation.

The Re-Oralization of Sacred Texts: Performative Authority and the Displacement of Classical Transmission in Nouman Ali Khan’s Digital Exegesis

The shift in religious authority within digital spaces can be understood through fundamental changes in how sacred knowledge is authorized. Interpretive authority no longer depends on inherited chains of transmission (*isnād*), formal credentials (*ijāzah*), and institutional endorsement; instead, it relies on direct, observable demonstrations of expertise.¹⁵ In video-based religious content, this process occurs through the reactivation of “secondary orality”—an orality generated and mediated by electronic technology that revives key characteristics of oral reasoning (additive, redundant, and tied to lived experience) without abandoning its foundation in written culture.¹⁶ The grammatical and textual precision that was once confined to the pages of physical books is transformed into an audiovisual performance that serves as an instrument of legitimation. This transformation shifts classical textual authority through two simultaneous operations: the staging of linguistic competence directly on the screen and the integration of grammatical meaning into the listener’s everyday experience. The resulting tension between platform architecture and revealed text creates a new order of authority validated primarily through performance, wherein the textuality of the Qur’an is re-oralized to establish legitimacy based entirely on what is seen and heard.

The legitimacy established by Nouman Ali Khan’s textual analysis is achieved through the deliberate demonstration of grammatical competence, directly observed by the audience. Unlike traditional literary authority, which is concealed within classical texts, his expertise is performatively showcased through a series of speech events presented before the camera (see Figure 1).

¹⁵ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 2002), 132.

¹⁶ Ong, 167.

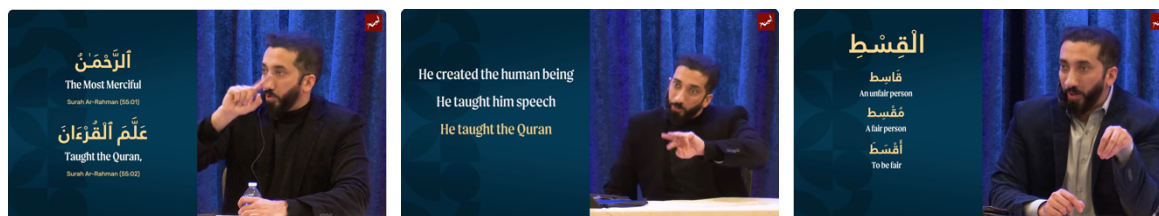


Figure 1. Stages of Grammatical Competency on the Digital Board

In Figure 1, Khan reinforces the text's exceptionalism through repeated claims of structural uniqueness. In the left panel, he highlights that QS. al-Rahmān is "the only surah in the entire Quran that begins with Allah's name," emphasizing that this "has never happened anywhere else in the Quran."¹⁷ This feature is then presented as a dynamic "discovery" when he analyzes a reversed syntactic order (shown in the middle panel), stating that "this should be in reverse order, but this is flipped, and the thing that goes last chronologically is being mentioned first," before describing it as "a profound thing."¹⁸ A similar pattern emerges at the morphological level in the right panel, where variations in verb patterns (*wazn*) are offered as evidence of semantic precision—pointing out that "the verb pattern actually means to be fair... therefore [the form] actually means to make sure you're not being unfair."¹⁹ Across these three instances, authority is not derived from external traditional sources; rather, it is generated in real time through an analytical performance conducted live before the viewer.

Beyond demonstrating linguistic precision, Khan's grammatical performativity operates through the management of syntactic gaps—specifically, the omission of the direct object (*ḥadf*) in the clause *'allam al-Qur'ān*. This omission is transformed into an inclusive mechanism characteristic of oral reasoning. Rather than treating the omitted object as a mere technical issue of *'i'rāb* (the vowel at the end of a word), Khan frames it as an open space accessible to all: "You can fill in the blank with anything. He taught anyone who wants to learn the Qur'an."²⁰ This sense of universality is further expanded additively through layered additions that create an open-ended list of recipients: "He even taught the disbeliever if he wanted to learn the Qur'an... He taught past generations and future

¹⁷ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, "Ep 1: A Surah with a Deliberate Design, Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look," YouTube Video, February 20, 2026, https://youtu.be/pdsPOqKjcr4?si=kLb-ISI_edPgWNAv.

¹⁸ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, "Ep 3: Teaching as an Act of Mercy, Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look," YouTube Video, February 22, 2026, <https://youtu.be/9itQHfB7DOU?si=nVR6VQv8fKGLoKmU>.

¹⁹ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, "Ep 8: Don't Violate the Balance, Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look," YouTube Video, February 27, 2026, <https://youtu.be/2Ec6jH1oWts?si=m8RGbDfOBI1LKSAD>.

²⁰ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, "Ep 3: Teaching as an Act of Mercy, Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look."

generations the Qur'an... others that haven't even joined them yet."²¹ This additive structure culminates in an institutional metaphor, where the grammatical omission is read as a standing invitation: "He opened the invitation to this university... the highest teacher opened his doors."²² Through these utterances, rhetorical features (*balāghah*) traditionally debated among exegetes (*mufasssīrūn*) are reworked into an inclusive narrative, wherein every grammatical gap serves not as an ellipsis but as a signal of universal reach.

Reactivation of oral textuality is evident in the use of redundancy and the anchoring of lexical concepts within everyday experience—two features that Ong identifies as central to the psychodynamics of oral reasoning. When rejecting the notion of synonymy in the language of the Qur'an, Nouman Ali Khan repeats his assertion and immediately reinforces it with a culinary analogy: "There are no synonyms. There are no synonyms... basically, they're both burgers, but they're not the same. Different toppings."²³ This analogy is extended to explain the process of semantic extraction, where nuances of meaning are described as "the toppings on this word that give its meaning true flavor."²⁴ A similar pattern of redundancy emerges when Khan distinguishes active teaching from the mere transmission of information through triadic repetition and concrete imagery of growth: "He nurtured them little by little by little. This is actually the Qur'an being taught, not informed—taught,"²⁵ which he subsequently clarifies using an agricultural metaphor: "The idea of nurturing a plant is you water it, you make sure weeds don't come... and it takes time before it gets to maturity. This is the Qur'an."²⁶ Throughout these utterances, abstract linguistic categories are not presented through technical definitions but are anchored to objects and experiences familiar to a digital audience, allowing concepts to take root through repetition and proximity to the listener's lived world.

This dynamic illustrates how the video platform ecosystem fundamentally transforms the epistemological landscape of interpretive authority. By setting aside the traditional markers of legitimacy central to classical scholarship—such as *isnād* (transmission), *ijāzah* (authoritative teaching license), and formal institutional

²¹ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah.

²² Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah.

²³ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, "Ep 2: Mercy Before Everything, Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look," YouTube Video, February 21, 2026, <https://youtu.be/776wd4rgME8?si=jQ10CTypriIWNmMqU>.

²⁴ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah.

²⁵ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, "Ep 3: Teaching as an Act of Mercy, Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look."

²⁶ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah.

affiliations—cyberspace shifts the basis of authority from inherited credentials to performative demonstration. Khan’s interpretive practice exemplifies that this shift does not arise from an intentional effort to deconstruct tradition but rather as a logical consequence of subjecting exegesis to platform infrastructure.²⁷ Retention-driven video formats require scholarly expertise to be presented as an engaging communicative event; the attention economy favors captivating demonstrations; and algorithmic metrics supplant the verification function of *isnād* (transmission) with cyber-aesthetic validation. Digital technology thus ceases to be a neutral vessel, acting instead as an epistemic agent that shape who is perceived as authorized to interpret.

This methodological transformation reveals that Qur’anic textuality within digital platforms is not merely transferred from page to screen but undergoes a profound re-oralization—a reactivation of oral reasoning that Ong terms “secondary orality,” which is born from and mediated by electronic technology.²⁸ The grammatical precision that was classically literate, implicit, and accessible primarily through close textual reading is refashioned into an audiovisual performance capable of immediate visual and auditory verification by a mass audience. When an interpreter’s legitimacy is no longer sustained by an inherited chain of transmission but by the immediacy effect produced through on-screen performance, the locus of interpretive authority undergoes a fundamental reversal: what legitimizes an interpretation is no longer its connection to ancestral lineage but its capacity to appear convincing in the present. The authority of the revealed text thus rests on what is directly seen and heard rather than on what is historically passed down.

This circulation of performative grammar demonstrates that textual competence no longer merely signifies mastery of tradition but functions independently as a source of legitimacy. Arabic linguistic analysis displayed on screen is decoupled from its classical verification ecosystem and repurposed to generate an authority anchored in performative fascination. This process reconfigures traditional scholarly evidence, subjecting the interpreter’s validity to mediatization and validation through operational, temporal, and aesthetic digital cues.²⁹ Beneath the seemingly solemn presentation operates a subtle shifting mechanism: authority, once grounded in cross-generational continuity, is reduced to a function of visibility and resonance within the platform space. At this juncture,

²⁷ Heidi Campbell, “How Religious Communities Negotiate New Media Religiously,” in *Digital Religion, Social Media and Culture: Perspectives, Practices and Futures*, ed. Pauline Hope Cheong et al. (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

²⁸ Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 133.

²⁹ Hjarvard, “The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change.”

secondary orality no longer directs audience consciousness toward the transcendent authority of transmission but instead generates a performative clarity that unmoors authority from its classical hermeneutic ecosystem.

The Serialization of Sacred Coherence: *Naẓm* as Retentive Architecture in Nouman Ali Khan's Serial Qur'anic Interpretation

The logic of a medium is never neutral toward the message it transmits; it actively shapes how that message is structured, segmented, and reassembled.³⁰ In playlist-based Qur'anic interpretation, the Qur'anic text is no longer approached solely as a linear corpus to be interpreted but is restructured into a serial narrative architecture, where each unit is designed to function independently while linking seamlessly to the next. Inter-verse and inter-surah coherence—studied within classical tradition as *naẓm* (arrangement)—thus shifts its primary function to serve as a retention mechanism: the intertextual network is constructed not merely to demonstrate theological unity but to generate narrative momentum that encourages viewers to move from one segment to the next. Textual connections no longer occur through traditional footnotes or bibliographic references³¹ but through a dynamic similar to hyperlink logic, rendering the interpretative process fluid, non-linear, and decentralized. Consequently, intertextuality in platform space performs a dual function: it expands horizons of meaning while simultaneously subjecting the rhythm of textual analysis to the algorithmic and retention demands of the serial medium.

The narrative architecture of Khan's series is grounded in a macro-structural mapping that extends well beyond individual episodes. In the opening episode, he situates QS. al-Raḥmān within an interconnected cluster of surahs that form a closed structural ring: “50 stands alone, and 51 and 52 are pairs. Then 53 and 54 are pairs... 55 and 56 are very closely connected, so the pair of this surah is actually [QS. al-Wāqī'ah].”³² This ring structure is subsequently framed as an interlocking, self-contained system: “51 and 52 are paired, 53 and 54 are paired, 55 and most of 56 are paired, and whatever is left over from 56 is paired with 50 back again. So everything connects.”³³ This principle of comprehensive interconnectedness is legitimized through a textile metaphor that unifies discrete parts

³⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994), 7.

³¹ Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 132.

³² Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, “Ep 1: A Surah with a Deliberate Design, Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look.”

³³ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah.

into a coherent whole: “they were stitched together... when cloth is stitched together, it becomes interconnected and inseparable... you see a consistent cloth.”³⁴ Such macro-level mapping functions as a narrative promise—a grand structural framework that can only be fully realized if the viewer watches the entire series—thereby uniting theological coherence with a serial retention strategy in a single interpretive movement.

Where the ring structure provides this macro-framework, thematic mirroring functions as a narrative hook, linking individual episodes through open-ended structural tension. Khan introduces thematic mirroring across adjacent surahs by highlighting paired imagery: “[53 and 54] one is called the star and the other is called the moon, so they’re both the depictions of the same night sky... they very closely connect with each other.”³⁵ This technique is then deployed as a retroactive reading instruction that prompts the viewer to connect distant passages: “we’re working backwards from where [it] started; they kind of start mirroring each other. The only thing left is the last passage of [QS. al-Wāqī‘ah].”³⁶ Furthermore, Khan trains his audience to actively construct cross-textual links as a interpretive skill in its own right: “you might find similar verses in other places in the Qur’an, and you might make connections to what’s being said in these other places.”³⁷ These analytical moves demonstrate how mirroring operates as more than a structural discovery; it serves as a narrative hook—a point of tension that drives viewer movement across episodes and fosters the continuous curiosity required to sustain a digital series.

The intertextual method, explicitly articulated by Nouman Ali Khan, demonstrates how textual networks are constructed in layers. He outlines a three-tiered framework to structure his analytical approach: “The final lens you need is connections... first: connections inside the surah; then: similar verses in other places; step three: things said by the Prophet.”³⁸ The historical layer of this framework is activated when Khan connects the companions’ transformative experiences with texts beyond *Surah ar-Rahman*: “What the Prophet did through the Qur’an for 23 years for his companions—that, in an analogy,

³⁴ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, “Ep 29: Drawing Lessons Carefully: Humility in Understanding, Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look,” YouTube Video, March 20, 2026, <https://youtu.be/sMxmDIUyzvw?si=6C5sy9zHQhzDtoNg>.

³⁵ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, “Ep 1: A Surah with a Deliberate Design, Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look.”

³⁶ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah.

³⁷ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, “Ep 29: Drawing Lessons Carefully: Humility in Understanding, Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look.”

³⁸ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah.

is found at the end of [Surah] al-Fath, Surah number 48.”³⁹ At a level closer to the viewer, this intertextual network is integrated directly into daily life through contextualized *sīrah* (prophetic biographical) narratives: “If something bad’s happening in your life when you start coming towards the Qur’an, you are walking in the footsteps of your Prophet.”⁴⁰ These analytical moves demonstrate that intertextuality is not only structurally layered—progressing from intra-surah and cross-surah connections to *ḥadīṣ* and *sīrah*—but is also mediatively oriented, bridging 7th-century texts with the lived experiences of contemporary audiences.

The organization of the series demonstrates that media logic does not merely convey interpretation but actively shapes how textual coherence is structured and experienced. As McLuhan emphasized, every medium introduces “changes of scale, rate, or pattern” into human affairs, regardless of the content it carries.⁴¹ The principle of *naẓm*—the thematic and structural connection between verses and surahs that serves as an interpretive key in classical tradition—is repurposed in platform space as a retention mechanism that keeps viewers within the playlist ecosystem. Macro-mapping and ring structures that extend beyond individual episodes function as a narrative promise: the structural unity of the text can only be fully realized by following the entire series, thereby merging theological coherence with engagement design in a single movement. Textual engagement no longer proceeds linearly from the beginning to the end of a physical corpus; instead, it becomes fluid, segmented, and organized by interface architecture. In other words, the medium does not stand external to the message but provides the very form through which it is constituted.

This network assembly highlights that Khan’s intertextual connections no longer resemble the static footnotes of print culture but instead align with a logic of convergence that, as Jenkins observes, encourages audiences to “search for new information and make connections among scattered media content.”⁴² Techniques such as inter-surah mirroring and retroactive reading instructions do not present fully prefabricated meanings; rather, they prompt viewers to actively navigate, link, and assemble relationships across disparate texts—a form of participation that transforms passive viewers into active interpretive

³⁹ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, “Ep 3: Teaching as an Act of Mercy, Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look.”

⁴⁰ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, “Surah Ar-Rahman [Trailer].”

⁴¹ McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 8.

⁴² Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 3.

collaborators. Textual coherence thus performs a dual function: it expands semantic horizons while simultaneously subordinating the rhythm of textual analysis to the structural demands of a serial medium. Recurring refrains and open-ended narrative tensions cease to be mere stylistic devices; they become operational units designed to drive movement between segments and sustain viewer engagement within the platform ecosystem.

Ultimately, the assembly of this textual network reveals that Qur'anic coherence is undergoing a process of serialization: a unity once understood as an intrinsic quality of the text is now reproduced as a mediated experience that unfolds across screens and depends on continuous consumption. When the structure of *naẓm* is framed as a narrative puzzle to be gradually “discovered,” interpretive authority shifts from the stabilized text to the curator who controls the pace of its unfolding. This shift occurs within an attention economy where platforms curate content based on predicted retention and engagement metrics rather than intrinsic scholarly value or hermeneutic accuracy.⁴³ In this environment, algorithms function, as Gillespie describes, as “custodians of public discourse” that covertly determine which forms of knowledge achieve circulation.⁴⁴ Consequently, what appears to be an enriching intertextual network ultimately anchors the analysis of sacred text to the infrastructure of the attention economy, transforming divine revelation from a closed, transcendent corpus into an ongoing stream of digital impressions.

Taming the Text for the Digital Lifeworld: Analogical Domestication and the Subsumption of the Qur'an as a Resource in Nouman Ali Khan's Interpretation

The distance between the horizon envisioned by a sacred text and the lived reality of its contemporary readership necessitates continuous hermeneutic bridging whenever the text is reinterpreted in a new context. The greater this temporal and cultural divide, the more extensive the interpretive intervention required to make the revelation resonate with modern reasoning. In digital interpretation production, this bridging occurs by anchoring textual meaning within the audience's “lifeworld”—an everyday sphere that, for the global urban middle class, is thoroughly shaped by consumer objects, productivity

⁴³ Tim Wu, *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Struggle to Get Inside Our Heads* (London: Atlantic Books, 2016), 6.

⁴⁴ Tarleton Gillespie, “The Relevance of Algorithms,” in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, ed. Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J. Boczkowski, and Kirsten A. Foot (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014), 167.

paradigms, and technological vocabularies.⁴⁵ Here, analogy functions not merely as a pedagogical simplification tool but as a cognitive mechanism that transforms the character of the text itself: theological paradoxes that challenge strict causality are reframed into functional, reassuring, and actionable narratives. Through this process, the Qur'an subtly shifts from a transcendent text demanding absolute submission to an accessible resource that can be leveraged for personal efficiency—a framing that resonates powerfully with the self-optimization mentality governing contemporary digital culture.

This anchoring of sacred text within the digital lifeworld is most pronounced through clusters of technological analogies that engage viewers via their own material culture. To rationalize the theological paradox of sequence—why the teaching of the Qur'an precedes the creation of humanity in *Surah ar-Rahman*—Nouman Ali Khan invokes the image of a cutting-edge gadget distributed without guidance: “You handed somebody an iPhone... with no instructions. It's an incredible device.”⁴⁶ This image is subsequently expanded through manufacturing logic that positions the Qur'an as a functional user manual: “The manufacturer of the washing machine and the laptop and the telephone—you know what they have first? They have the manual,”⁴⁷ culminating in the rhetorical query, “What's the ultimate instruction manual for the human being?”⁴⁸ The same industrial vocabulary surfaces when Khan critiques consumerism using the very language of consumer culture: “The 2015 Range Rover and the 2023 Range Rover are still a Range Rover, essentially the same engine.”⁴⁹ Across these examples, revealed text is rationalized through metaphors aligned with functional utility, translating complex theological arrangements into an operational logic familiar to a digital audience.

While the technological cluster operates through machine logic, the affective-domestic cluster bridges aesthetic distance through the language of emotional intimacy and familial closeness. Khan grounds the semantic root of the word *rahmah* directly in bodily experience and motherhood: “This is actually used for the womb of the mother... the sack that Allah has created to allow the baby to grow and nourish.”⁵⁰ This intimacy is

⁴⁵ Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 42.

⁴⁶ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, “Ep 3: Teaching as an Act of Mercy, Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look.”

⁴⁷ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah.

⁴⁸ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah.

⁴⁹ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, “Ep 13: Two Worlds, One Boundary and Hidden Beauty, Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look,” YouTube Video, March 4, 2026, https://youtu.be/mePNUglK1h8?si=9ts_yqXuOnjjFpd-.

⁵⁰ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, “Ep 2: Mercy Before Everything, Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look.”

further articulated by distinguishing between mere mercy and unconditional care: “The [rahmah] of a mother has nothing to do with being spared... she’s caring for the child constantly and unconditionally.”⁵¹ This affective dimension is then explicitly connected to the existential condition of urban viewers, as Khan addresses contemporary isolation and presents family life as its antidote: “I used to feel like [work was everything]... now I just want to go home and spend [time], and I now find pleasure in my family.”⁵² Through these discursive moves, transcendent narratives are refashioned into a therapeutic intimacy that addresses modern melancholy, positioning the text as an emotional sanctuary from the isolation characteristic of contemporary digital life.

The culmination of these two clusters of analogies is the repackaging of the Qur’an as an optimizable resource—a shift most starkly evident in the vocabulary Nouman Ali Khan employs. In the series trailer, the sacred text is directly juxtaposed directly with search engines and AI-driven answer platforms: “The Qur’an is your Google now. It’s your... it’s your ChatGPT. It’s there to answer your questions.”⁵³ This orientation is reinforced by the language emphasizing productivity and gamification, framing the act of reading as a project of self-optimization: “there are going to be quizzes, live reflection circles, even prizes... it’s not about quantity, it’s about quality.”⁵⁴ This same meritocratic vocabulary permeates the interpretation of theological concepts; *ihsān*, for instance, is translated into a performance ethos: “[The word] means to do the best you can... you have to do the best [in every situation].”⁵⁵ Across these three instances, the dimension of the text that demands unquestioning submission is quietly sidelined, replaced by a utilitarian framing that positions the Qur’an as an instrument for a more productive life—a subsumption that strongly resonates strongly with the “growth mindset” mentality of the global urban Muslim middle class.

This analogical domestication demonstrates that the gap between the 7th-century textual world and the digital audience is bridged not through doctrinal explanation but by anchoring meaning within the listener’s *lifeworld*—a realm of everyday experience shaped

⁵¹ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah.

⁵² Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, “Ep 22: Desire, Dignity and What Allah Knows You Want, Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look,” YouTube Video, March 13, 2026, https://youtu.be/iW_tZ96cyZI?si=o2qR-rCaDJItRtf_.

⁵³ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, “Surah Ar-Rahman [Trailer].”

⁵⁴ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah.

⁵⁵ Nouman Ali Khan - Official - Bayyinah, “Ep 24: Doing Your Best and What Allah Calls ‘The Best’, Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look,” YouTube Video, March 15, 2026, https://youtu.be/iW_tZ96cyZI?si=o2qR-rCaDJItRtf_.

by gadgets, industry, and domestic relationships. This proximity to the lifeworld is a hallmark of oral reasoning which, within Ong's framework, invariably ties knowledge to concrete situations rather than abstract categories.⁵⁶ Yet, when this anchoring occurs within platform media, it simultaneously becomes an act of mediatization: as Hjarvard articulates, religion increasingly submits to media logic, molding religious imagination to fit the genres of popular culture.⁵⁷ Analogies involving iPhones, automotive manufacturing, and familial warmth serve not merely as didactic aids but as mechanisms that align the revealed text with the sensibilities already mastered by digital consumer culture.

As theological paradoxes are rationalized through the imagery of a device requiring a "manual," and divine love is expressed through maternal intimacy that alleviates urban isolation, the Qur'an gradually transitions from a transcendent text demanding submission to a resource promising functional clarity. This shift closely aligns with the mentality identified by Byung-Chul Han in the "achievement society," where individuals are driven to continuously optimize themselves and capitalize on their own potential.⁵⁸ Translating *ihsān* as an imperative to "do one's best" functions not merely as a spiritual exhortation but also as an echo of a productivity ethos demanding ceaseless self-improvement—a framing that renders revelation more attuned to the logic of efficiency than with transcendent demands that transcend cost-benefit calculations.

This repackaging illustrates that the subsumption of the Qur'an as a resource is not a deliberate theological subversion but a structural consequence of its integration into platform infrastructure. When positioned alongside search engines and AI interfaces, the boundary between revelation and informational utility becomes blurred, and textual authority is measured by its capacity to fulfill immediate practical needs. Han reminds us that neoliberal power operates most effectively not through prohibition but through freedom—by reframing the demand for optimization as an authentic personal desire.⁵⁹ At this juncture, the secondary orality that brings the text closer to the audience's lived experience generates a profound paradox: the very familiarity it fosters facilitates the displacement of the text's sacred otherness by calculations of worldly utility.

These findings represent a theoretical departure from much of the existing literature. Several studies view the integration of scientific and technological language

⁵⁶ Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 42–43.

⁵⁷ Hjarvard, "The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change."

⁵⁸ Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society*, trans. Erik Butler (California: Stanford University Press, 2015), 8–11.

⁵⁹ Han, *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*, 1.

into digital religious discourse as a modernizing force that adapts sacred texts to the positivist reasoning of younger generations.⁶⁰ Other scholars interpret it as an accommodative practice that expands the reach of religious messaging while forging new authority relations,⁶¹ or as an inclusive arena where authority is negotiated through algorithmic visibility and circulation⁶². Indeed, the juxtaposition of the Qur'an with science is frequently celebrated as evidence of revelation's ultimate compatibility with modern knowledge, even as some scholars caution against its potential to foster pseudoscience,⁶³ and others emphasize how marketization alters believers' interactions with religion⁶⁴. In contrast to these perspectives, this study argues that the fusion of the Qur'an with technological analogies and productivity vocabularies within digital exegesis does not merely modernize or democratize revelation; rather, it signals a deeper phase of subsumption. The sacred text is no longer simply negotiated but is absorbed into "resource reason"—reframed as an instrument for self-optimization aligned with neoliberal subjectivity, such that its demands for transcendent submission are quietly supplanted by calculations of worldly utility.

Conclusion

The widespread assumption that digital exegesis simply democratizes knowledge by making the Qur'an more accessible to lay audiences cannot be sustained in light of these findings. An in-depth analysis of the series "*Surah Ar-Rahman: A Deeper Look*" on Bayyinah TV demonstrates that Nouman Ali Khan's interpretive practice operates through three mutually reinforcing processes: Qur'anic textuality is re-oralized so that authority no longer depends on an inherited *isnād* but on staged performance; textual coherence (*naẓm*)

⁶⁰ Dwi Sukmanila Sayska and Jani Arni, "Evidences of Scientific Miracle of Al-Qur'an in the Modern Era," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 24, no. 1 (June 2, 2016): 79, <https://doi.org/10.24014/jush.v24i1.1481>.

⁶¹ Moch Fakhruroji, "Mediatization of Religion in 'Texting Culture': Self-Help Religion and the Shifting of Religious Authority," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 5, no. 2 (December 10, 2015): 231, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v5i2.231-254>.

⁶² Dindin Solahudin and Moch Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority," *Religions* 11, no. 1 (December 31, 2019): 19, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019>.

⁶³ Stefano Bigliardi, "The 'Scientific Miracle of the Qur'an,' Pseudoscience, and Conspiracism," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 52, no. 1 (March 2, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12321>.

⁶⁴ Elif Izberk-Bilgin and Russell W Belk, "Religion in Neoliberal Times: The Global Spread of Marketization, Implications for Religion, and Future Research Directions," *Marketing Theory* 25, no. 1 (March 16, 2025): 57–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14705931241261000>.

is serialized into a narrative structure governed by platform retention logic and algorithmic circulation; and the historical gap between the 7th-century text and modern viewers is bridged through analogies that anchor the revelation to the lifeworld of contemporary consumers. Together, these three processes culminate in a single outcome: the Qur'an is no longer positioned as a transcendent authority demanding submission but is subsumed into a resource optimized for personal development. Ultimately, the secondary orality that fosters textual familiarity facilitates the displacement of the text's sacred otherness in favor of worldly, utility-driven considerations aligned with the imperatives of the neoliberal subject.

Methodologically, combining comprehensive transcript analysis of the series' entire corpus with Walter Ong's framework of secondary orality and theories of mediatized religious authority proves effective in uncovering the subtle mechanisms operating beneath the video platform interface. This approach successfully demonstrates how platform affordances shape new forms of religious authority that cannot be fully explained by classical interpretive categories alone. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. It focuses on a single channel and a single interpreter, relying exclusively on data derived from meaning production—namely, transcript analysis—without empirically measuring audience reception. These limitations suggest fruitful avenues for future research, including netnographic analyses of user comments and cross-platform engagement patterns, algorithmic audits of content distribution, and experimental reception studies designed to evaluate shifts in theological cognition among digital communities exposed to mediatized exegesis.

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The primary data analyzed in this study are publicly accessible on the Bayyinah Institute YouTube channel.

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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 analyzed in this study.

Ethical Approval:

Not applicable. This research is based solely on the analysis of publicly available media content and did not involve human or animal participants, personal data, or any interactions requiring informed consent. Therefore, ethical approval from an institutional review board was not sought.

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