

Visualizing the Sacred, Monetizing Affect: The Subordination of Qur'anic Authority within Platform Economies

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Abstract

The presence of the Qur'an on social media is often assumed to extend the reach of divine revelation; however, this study suggests otherwise. Through a qualitative case study of the TikTok account @sahabatquranofficial, this article analyzes how platform infrastructure intervenes in the sacred text through three intertwined processes: the standardization of meaning, affective engineering, and capital conversion. Data—including ten videos of Qur'anic recitations, commercial content, and account statistics—were analyzed using Bourdieu's framework of commodification and Srnicek's theory of the platform economy. The findings reveal that the diverse content of the verses is reduced to a single, aesthetically produced register of "serenity," which is then detached from the text and converted into economic value through layered monetization. In this configuration, sacredness is maintained as symbolic capital—valued precisely because it is exchangeable—while religious authority is not merely fragmented but systematically subordinated to the logic of the affective platform economy. Criteria for legitimacy shift from interpretive competence to the measurability of platform metrics.

Keywords: *Commodification of the Qur'an; Affective Economy; Symbolic Capital; Religious Authority; TikTok.*

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Introduction

The digitization of sacred texts has long been regarded merely as a means of disseminating divine revelation. However, digital media fundamentally restructures the Qur'an according to a logic exogenous to religious tradition. In contemporary studies of religion and media, the process of mediatization positions media not as a neutral channel but as a structural force that reshapes how religion is practiced, understood, and



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consumed.¹ When mediatization occurs on digital platforms, it is governed by the “logic of social media”—programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datafication—which prioritizes measurability and engagement as the primary criteria for circulation. This logic is rooted in the platform economy model, which treats public attention as a key commodity.² A fundamental conceptual issue arises: when sacred texts enter such technical architectures, the criteria determining their form and validity no longer stem from religious scholarly traditions but rather from the imperatives of the transnational attention economy.

This global issue is concretely manifested on TikTok through the account @sahabatquranofficial. At least three factors illustrate how the platform’s structural dynamics operate in this specific context. First, the diverse theological, historical, and eschatological content of the surah is homogenized into a single affective frame³—presented as an instant remedy for anxiety. This reduction transforms a text rich in layered meanings into a lightweight, populist discursive commodity.⁴ Second, the sense of serenity seemingly emanating from the verses is actually manufactured through standardized audiovisual formulas; the resulting affective surplus is detached from the text and repurposed as a tool for product commercialization. Third, the sacred text functions as an “attention reservoir,” converted into economic value through multi-layered monetization.⁴ These three empirical observations confirm a consistent structural mechanism: the homogenization of meaning, affective engineering, and capital conversion—processes that systematically subordinate the revealed text to the logic of the platform economy.

Existing scholarship on religion, media, and digital platforms can be categorized into four relatively independent approaches. The first is mediatization and the reconfiguration of authority, which views media as an agent that reshapes religious practices and shifts authority from scholarly institutions to the fluid realm of cyberspace.⁵

¹ Stig Hjarvard, “The Mediatization of Religion: Theorising Religion, Media and Social Change,” *Culture and Religion* 12, no. 2 (2011): 119–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2011.579719>.

² Dallas W. Smythe, “Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism,” *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue Canadienne de Théorie Politique et Sociale* 1, no. 3 (December 30, 1977): 1–27.

³ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Surah Al-Baqarah 285-286,” TikTok Video, February 21, 2025, <https://www.tiktok.com/@sahabatquranofficial/video/7473892391557238034>.

⁴ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Komunitas Sahabat Quran,” TikTok, September 11, 2026, <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZS9ArNnL853EQ-71cXU/>.

⁵ Heidi A. Campbell and Giulia Evolvi, “Contextualizing Current Digital Religion Research on Emerging Technologies,” *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies* 2, no. 1 (January 9, 2020): 5–17,

The second, the aestheticization and popular piety perspective, emphasizes visual beauty and material consumption as primary vehicles for religious expression, while also serving as a site of anxiety regarding sincerity.⁶ The third, the commodification and spiritual economy perspective, illustrates the intersection of religion and market logic through the commercialization of public Islam, the preacher economy, and branding.⁷ The fourth, the platform and attention economy perspective, theorizes audience attention as a traded commodity.⁸ While all four enrich our understanding, they generally position technology,

<https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.149>; Adam Possamai and Bryan S. Turner, "Authority and Liquid Religion in Cyber-space: The New Territories of Religious Communication," *International Social Science Journal* 63, no. 209–210 (September 6, 2012): 197–206, <https://doi.org/10.1111/issj.12021>; Hifsa Nurrahim and Muhammad Ruhul Jadid, "Commodifying the Unseen: Cyber-Capitalism, Rationalized Rituals, and the Reconfiguration of Religious Authority," *Journal of Islam, Media and Society* 1, no. 1 (June 18, 2026): 22–42, <https://doi.org/10.66277/JIMS.1.1.240>; Muhammad Fadli Rahman and Fabiyan Hirzi Abdullah Otta, "Sacred Anchoring in the Cyber-Public Sphere: The Functional Shift of Quranic Authority in Indonesian Digital Ecological Narratives," *Journal of Quranic Media Studies* 1, no. 1 (June 4, 2026): 42–57, <https://doi.org/10.66277/JQMS.1.1.234>.

⁶ Muhammad Wildan and Witriani Witriani, "Popular Piety in Indonesia: 'Aestheticization' and Reproduction of Islam," *Ilahiyat Studies* 12, no. 2 (December 31, 2021): 213–36, <https://doi.org/10.12730/13091719.2021.122.227>; Wai Weng Hew, "The Art of Dakwah: Social Media, Visual Persuasion and the Islamist Propagation of Felix Siau," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (January 2, 2018): 61–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416757>; Carla Jones, "Materializing Piety: Gendered Anxieties about Faithful Consumption in Contemporary Urban Indonesia," *American Ethnologist* 37, no. 4 (November 12, 2010): 617–37, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2010.01275.x>; Nabila Alifa Alfawaid, "The Algorithmic Turn in Quranic Reception: Reconfiguring Aesthetic Distance and Horizon Fusion on Indonesian Instagram," *Journal of Quranic Media Studies* 1, no. 1 (June 30, 2026): 95–118, <https://doi.org/10.66277/JQMS.1.1.239>.

⁷ Greg Fealy, "Consuming Islam: Commodified Religion and Aspirational Pietism in Contemporary Indonesia," in *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. Greg Fealy and Sally White (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2008); Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Making of Public Islam: Piety, Agency, and Commodification on the Landscape of the Indonesian Public Sphere," *Contemporary Islam* 3, no. 3 (October 24, 2009): 229–50, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-009-0096-9>; Daromir Rudnyckyj, "Spiritual Economies: Islam and Neoliberalism in Contemporary Indonesia," *Cultural Anthropology* 24, no. 1 (February 2009): 104–41, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2009.00028.x>; Puji Izzatulbuhthiah and Ola Fedda Mona Denona, "Cyber-Spirituality and Platform Logic: Intertextual Alignment of the Qur'an and the Affective Commodification of Indonesian Muslim Pop Music," *Journal of Islam, Media and Society* 1, no. 1 (June 18, 2026): 43–62, <https://doi.org/10.66277/JIMS.1.1.242>.

⁸ José Van Dijck and Thomas Poell, "Understanding Social Media Logic," *Media and Communication* 1, no. 1 (August 12, 2013): 2–14, <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v1i1.70>; Smythe, "Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism."

aesthetics, or economics as external forces influencing pious subjects, preachers, or products—rather than the sacred text itself. Few studies have linked the homogenization of meaning, affective engineering, and capital conversion within a single analysis centered on platform interventions regarding the Qur’anic text. This is the position this research adopts.

Addressing this gap, this study analyzes how the TikTok platform infrastructure influences Qur’anic recitations on the @sahabatquranofficial account through three interconnected processes. First, it examines how the sacred text is commodified, wherein the diverse theological, historical, and eschatological content of various surahs is homogenized into a single affective register, resulting in a hermeneutic reduction of meaning. Second, it investigates how this standardized text is packaged through aesthetic and affective engineering, such that the “serenity” seemingly emanating from the verses is actually systematically produced and rendered detachable from the text itself. Third, it traces how symbolic capital derived from sacredness is converted into economic capital through layered monetization, and how this conversion subordinates religious authority to the logic of the attention economy. Together, these three objectives aim to demonstrate how the homogenization of meaning, affective engineering, and capital conversion operate as an integrated mechanism in mediating the revealed text.

This article argues that the mediation of the Qur’an on TikTok cannot be understood merely as a neutral expansion of da’wah (religious outreach), but rather as the subjection of the revealed text to the platform’s economic logic. This argument is based on a central thesis: the homogenization of meaning, affective engineering, and capital conversion are not separate phenomena but three stages of the same mechanism—the text is simplified to ensure circulation viability, packaged to captivate, and the resulting accumulated attention is converted into economic value.⁹ Within this framework, sacredness is not erased; instead, it is preserved as valuable symbolic capital precisely because it is convertible across domains.¹⁰ Thus, what is at stake is not merely how the verses are presented, but a shift in the criteria of legitimacy—from interpretive competence to metric-based measurability. By positioning the sacred text itself—rather than the audience or the preacher—as the point of intervention, this article asserts that religious authority within the platform space is not merely fragmented but structurally subordinated to the logic of the attention economy.

⁹ Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 33.

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241.

Method

This research employs a qualitative case study approach, focusing on the TikTok account @sahabatquranofficial—a Qur’anic recitation account with 1.91 million followers that ranks at the top of its category.¹¹ The account was purposively selected due to its significance as an extreme case in which da’wah (religious outreach) and commercial registers converge within a single entity,¹² making it highly relevant for examining the intersection of sacred text and platform logic. The case was identified through a survey of high-follower Qur’anic content accounts and subsequently narrowed according to three criteria: consistent production of verse-based content over a substantial period, high engagement levels, and observable monetization layers. A case study design was chosen to enable an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon within its holistic context. Data sources are secondary and based on digital artifacts, comprising ten Qur’anic recitation videos (along with their captions and metrics), screenshots of commercial channels (sales videos, storefronts, subscriptions), and time-stamped statistical data from a third-party analytics platform (FastMoss).

Data collection involved non-participant observation of the account’s content and interface, accompanied by systematic documentation—including screenshots and the recording of engagement metrics (likes, comments, saves, shares) and metadata (surah, visual background, geotag, upload date). The corpus of ten videos serves as the primary unit of analysis, while commercial channel data and account statistics provide supporting contextual information. The analysis proceeds in three stages, aligned with the study’s three thematic focuses. The first stage involves coding textual content—juxtaposing caption framing with the displayed Qur’anic verses—to identify patterns of meaning reduction. The second stage involves analyzing multimodal components (visuals, typography, soundscapes, and language registers) to examine aesthetic and affective design. The third stage traces monetization architectures and indicators of authority to unpack capital conversion. These three stages are then interpreted through Bourdieu’s framework of commodification and Srnicek’s platform economy, with all findings treated as structural evidence—that is, at the level of function and pattern rather than as claims regarding creator intent or audience reception.

¹¹ FastMoss: TikTok Analisis Data, “Sahabatquranofficial Analisis Influencer TikTok: Pengikut, Konten, Dan Wawasan Promo,” [fastmoss.com](https://www.fastmoss.com), September 11, 2026, <https://www.fastmoss.com/id/influencer/detail/6546101395538509835>.

¹² Jason Seawright and John Gerring, “Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research,” *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (June 9, 2008): 294–308, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907313077>.

From Theological Textuality to Affective Consumption: The Hermeneutical Reduction of Sacred Texts within the TikTok Algorithmic Ecosystem

The shifting dynamics of sacred text consumption in cyberspace can be understood through the fundamental transformation of the function of verses as semiotic signs. In the platform economy ecosystem, the value of a sign is no longer measured by the depth of its meaning but rather by its capacity to be converted into flexible and exchangeable symbolic capital.¹³ In the realm of algorithm-driven religious content production, this mechanism operates through the commodification of signs—a process that transforms verses into products endowed with sacred legitimacy while uprooting them from their traditional interpretive contexts. TikTok’s platform architecture, guided by imperatives such as short duration, visual gratification, and metrics-based circulation, reformulates the text of revelation through two simultaneous operations: the homogenization of theological diversity into a single affective register and the conversion of sacred legitimacy into economic value.¹⁴ This clash between the logic of the attention economy and revelatory texts gives rise to a new production regime—a constellation in which the authority of a verse’s meaning is no longer determined by hermeneutic competence but by aesthetic allure and the engineering of serenity for mass consumption.

The digital presentation of sacred texts on the TikTok account @sahabatquranofficial reveals a consistent, mechanical pattern: a diverse selection of verses rich in theological, historical, and eschatological content is systematically unified into a single frame, providing an immediate cathartic remedy for the psychological burdens and anxieties of modern life. This uniformity is intentional, reflecting a diachronic and structured production process (see Table 1).

Table 1. Production of Sacred Texts in Catharsis and Solution Commodification Schemes

Surah	Caption	Visual Background	Meaning Reduction
QS. al-Insyirāḥ [94]: 1–8	Whoever faces difficulties should read Surah al-Insyirāḥ	The imagery evokes grasslands with dark, moody tones	These verses, which speak of ease following hardship, are often condensed into an instant problem-solving mantra.
QS. al-Bayyinah [98]: 1–7	Increase recitation of the Qur’an before month of Ramadan	Night village, full moon, palm trees.	Surah on the proof of Islam’s truth, often

¹³ Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” 241.

¹⁴ Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, 28.

			reduced to a seasonal practice.
QS. al-A'la [87]: 1–15	Let's us recite the Qur'an first-Surah al-A'la complete verses.	Autumn forest (aerial shot).	This surah, which emphasizes self-purification, has been reduced to routine spiritual entertainment.
QS. Maryam [19]: 30–38	Energy for those who face the impossible	Imagery of forest, river flow, and waterfall.	The story of the miracle of 'Isa distilled into a source of motivation.
QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 285–286	Whoever recites the last two verses of this surah will be granted sufficiency.	Waterfalls, moss-covered rocks.	These verses, which emphasize faith and trust, have been interpreted as a guarantee of material sufficiency.
QS. Maryam [19]: 1–11	Surah Maryam for pregnant women: Write your <i>hajat</i> (wish).	Portrait of a pregnant woman.	Prophet Zakariyyā's prayer as a means of supplication for fulfilling needs.
QS. al-Raḥmān [55]: 1–38	Benefits of reading Surah al-Raḥmān: it is hoped to bring inner peace.	Starry night sky and mountain.	This surah highlights Allah's blessings and serves as a form of soul therapy.
QS. Maryam [19]: 30–35	Surah Maryam, verse 30–35, presented as full melodious recitations for African children.	Bonfire at night with a group of people.	The verses, which describe the miracles of Prophet 'Isa, have been simplified into entertaining content.
QS. al-Kahf [18]: 1–10	Friday blessings: Don't forget to read al-Kahf.	Mountain and lake, evening.	This surah offers protection from the <i>fitnah</i> (test) of the Dajjāl and has become a Friday ritual
QS. al-Ḍuḥā [93]: 1–11	<i>Assalamu'alaikum</i> . Let us recite the Qur'an for a moment: Surah al-Ḍuḥā	Dusk/ orange sky	This surah is brief reminder of Allah's mercy.

Table 1 illustrates how the original spectrum of meanings in each surah is truncated and filtered into a single, homogeneous discourse cluster. QS. al-Insyirāḥ [94], which reflects

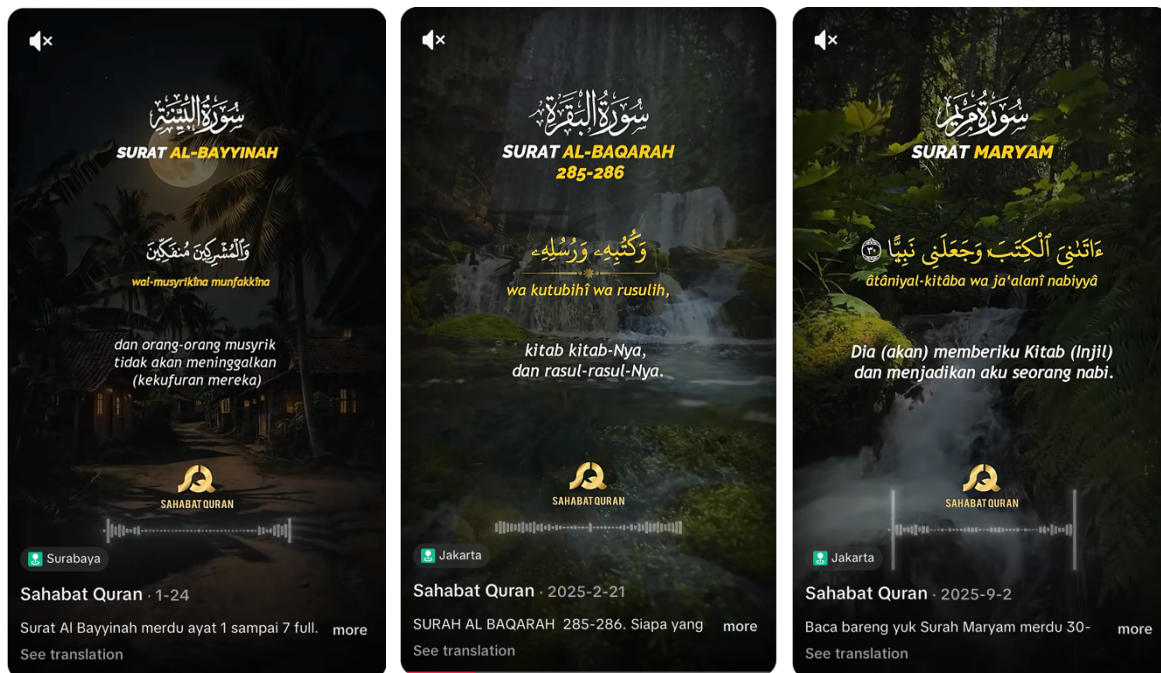
the dynamics of divine compassion and the struggle of faith, is reduced into a mere “problem-solving mantra.” The prophetic narrative in QS. Maryam [19]:30–35, concerning the miracles of ʿĪsā, is reinterpreted as “motivational energy,” while the pillars of faith in QS. al-Baqarah [2]:285–286 are narrowed to a “guarantee of material sufficiency.” This pattern similarly affects QS. al-Bayyinah [98], QS. al-Aʿlā [87], QS. al-Raḥmān [55], QS. al-Kahf [18], and QS. al-Ḍuḥā [93]—all of which are merged into a single function as commodities for inner calm and emotional stress relief. The result of this transformation is consistent: the complexity of sacred texts is diminished to produce light, uniform, solution-oriented discourse products that are easily consumed by a mass audience.

This thematic uniformity is supported by an assembly-style mode of production—constructing content from pre-existing materials rather than generating original interpretations. The recitations in these ten videos are not produced by the creators themselves; instead, they utilize widely circulated *murottal* recordings by *qāri* (reciter) such as Syekh Sudais¹⁵ and Fares Abbad¹⁶, borrowing their authority and vocal beauty to imbue the content with a sense of sacredness. This audio material is then paired with a standardized visual format repeated throughout the entire corpus. Consequently, each video is essentially a combination of three ready-made elements: the borrowed recitation, the Qurʾanic verse text with its translation, and a uniform audiovisual background. These assembled artifacts function as symbolic capital—commodities that carry religious legitimacy by virtue of featuring the verses and their translations, yet are easily reproduced because they require neither interpretive labor nor formal scholarly expertise. Thus, the legitimacy of the sacred text is not established through methodological authority but is acquired by reassembling already legitimized elements into a product ready for circulation within the attention economy.

The most significant implication of this assembly logic is the emergence of a pronounced dissonance between the caption framework and the displayed verse text. This dissonance reveals a tangible hermeneutic reduction driven by the commercialization of content.

¹⁵ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Ngaji Dulu Yuk Surah Al a’la Full Ayat, Merdu Seperti Syekh Sudais,” TikTok Video, January 26, 2026, <https://www.tiktok.com/@sahabatquranofficial/video/7599642373550886165>.

¹⁶ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Jumat Berkah. Jangan Lupa Baca Al Kahfi,” TikTok Video, February 6, 2025, <https://www.tiktok.com/@sahabatquranofficial/video/7468322506252750085>.



Source: TikTok @sahabatquranofficial

Figure 1. Visual formula and text-caption tension across three Surah content pieces.

As shown in Figure 1, a comparison of the three video panels reveals a significant disparity between the caption narratives and the actual content of the displayed text. In the left panel, QS. al-Bayyinah [98] is framed by the caption merely as an invitation to enjoy a “melodious” recitation,¹⁷ despite the verse on screen containing a doctrinal critique of the obstinacy of polytheists in their disbelief. The middle panel presents QS. al-Baqarah [2]:285–286 as a formula for “sufficiency,”¹⁸ although the text actually establishes the foundation of faith in the scriptures and the messengers. Meanwhile, the right-hand panel reduces the prophetic narrative of QS. Maryam [19]:30–35¹⁹ to a slogan about “energy to defy the impossible.” Within this ecosystem, captions no longer function as tools for exegesis but rather as mechanisms for reframing meaning, flattening theological, polemical, and historical dimensions into a single affective register. The sacred text is retained merely as a marker of legitimate commodification, while the depth of its meaning is sacrificed to ensure the content remains snappy, populist, and algorithm-friendly.

¹⁷ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Surat Al Bayyinah Merdu Ayat 1 Sampai 7 Full,” TikTok Video, January 24, 2026, <https://www.tiktok.com/@sahabatquranofficial/video/7598967035904707860>.

¹⁸ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Surah Al-Baqarah 285-286.”

¹⁹ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Surah Maryam 30-35 Full Ayat Merdu Anak-Anak Afrika,” TikTok Video, February 6, 2025, <https://www.tiktok.com/@sahabatquranofficial/video/7469822643756076343>.

This shift demonstrates how TikTok's algorithmic ecosystem fundamentally transforms the epistemological landscape of Qur'anic studies. Such reductionism undermines the core principles of Qur'anic exegesis—*siyāq* (textual context), *munāsabah* (inter-verse correlation), and *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation)—which have traditionally ensured the validity of understanding (*al-fahm al-ṣaḥīḥ*). When doctrinally significant verses—such as al-Baqarah [2]:285–286²⁰ and al-Bayyinah [98]²¹—are reduced to formulas for tranquility or material sufficiency, the methodological framework that anchors the text to its historical coherence collapses. This disintegration of meaning does not arise from a theological intent to distort the text but is a logical consequence of subjecting revelation to the platform's infrastructure. The micro-video format necessitates truncating meaning to fit time constraints; the attention economy prioritizes affective impact over historical complexity; and algorithmic metrics replace scholarly validation—such as *isnād* (chains of transmission) and the authority of the exegete—with indicators of visual popularity.²² Social media is no longer a neutral channel but an active epistemic agent that selects, desacralizes, and transforms revelatory texts into affective commodities ready for consumption.

As epistemic agents, platforms do not merely relocate sacred texts to a new digital space; they transform the way these texts are engaged. Verses are no longer approached as revelations demanding comprehension but as stimuli meant to be felt. The focus shifts fundamentally from the depth of meaning to the allure of experience, and from the cognitive labor of hermeneutics to instant sensory impressions. Within this affective regime, sacredness is not erased but preserved as a symbolic marker that manifests through emotional resonance rather than doctrinal content. A fundamental shift occurs in the ontological function of the text itself—transforming it from a divine word demanding a commitment to interpretation into a visual commodity meant simply to be enjoyed.²³ Consequently, the religious relationships forged within this ecosystem no longer rest on scholarship and the transmission of knowledge but on subjective, ready-to-consume experiences: warm, instantaneous, and stripped of hermeneutic burdens.

²⁰ Muḥammad bin Muḥammad Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl Al-Sunnah*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutb al-'Ilmiyah, 2005), 289.

²¹ Muḥammad bin Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān Fī Ta'wīl Al-Qur'an*, vol. 24 (Bayrūt: Muassasah al-Risālah, 2000), 539.

²² Knut Lundby, "Theoretical Frameworks for Approaching Religion and New Media," in *Digital Religion: Understand Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Christopher Helland (London: Routledge, 2012), 230.

²³ Wildan and Witriani, "Popular Piety in Indonesia: 'Aestheticization' and Reproduction of Islam."

The patterns emerging from this research corpus intersect with the dynamics of contemporary literature while articulating a significant form of academic innovation. The tendency to position platforms not merely as neutral channels but as structural forces reshaping religious practices reinforces the thesis of the mediatization of religion and the negotiation of authority within the landscape of digital religious landscape.²⁴ The shift of authority from scholarly credibility to visual visibility—marked by the dominance of algorithmic metrics over the transmission of isnād—is closely linked to recent studies on the role of religious influencers, “liquid religion,” and the formation of new communicative territories.²⁵ Meanwhile, the monetization aspect resonates with discourses on the commodification of Islam in Indonesia, the phenomenon of “consuming Islam,” aspirational pietism, and the aestheticization of popular piety through the branding of visual da‘wah (preaching).

Nevertheless, this study delineates the theoretical boundaries of previous scholarship by identifying two fundamental areas of novelty. First, whereas most literature emphasizes user agency and its negotiation—such as the dynamics of moral ambiguity and anxieties regarding *riyā’* (ostentation) on social media²⁶—findings from this study confirm the overwhelming dominance of algorithmic structures; these structures aggressively subordinate sacred texts while narrowing the scope for critical audience engagement. Second, while the majority of digital religion studies remain centered on preachers, community institutions, or physical commodities, this research demonstrates that the restructuring and commodification processes within the attention economy now target the materiality of the sacred text itself, engineering it to satisfy the platform’s aesthetic and metric imperatives.

²⁴ Hjarvard, “The Mediatization of Religion: Theorising Religion, Media and Social Change”; Campbell and Evolvi, “Contextualizing Current Digital Religion Research on Emerging Technologies.”

²⁵ 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>; Possamai and Turner, “Authority and Liquid Religion in Cyber-space: The New Territories of Religious Communication.”

²⁶ Fatimah Husein and Martin Slama, “Online Piety and Its Discontent: Revisiting Islamic Anxieties on Indonesian Social Media,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (January 2, 2018): 80–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1415056>.

Aestheticization and Affective Engineering: The Construction of Synthetic Peace and the Commercialization of Sacredness

Aesthetics in the production of digital religious content are never neutral; they serve as a productive instrument that endows the sacred commodity with its allure—a form of legitimacy that does not rely on the authority of hermeneutical scholarship but on the sensuous fascination that makes it recognizable and desirable. This allure operates on an affective level: the serenity that appears to radiate from sacred texts is, in fact, produced through sensory standardization, so that feeling—rather than understanding—becomes the principal value circulated.²⁷ What is distinctive about this engineering is that the affective surplus it generates is not permanently attached to the text; it can be detached and transferred to another object, rendering “calm” itself an independent affective commodity that circulates beyond the verse. Within TikTok’s architecture, this logic manifests through repetitive audiovisual formulas, natural settings stripped of their geographical context, borrowed *murattal* soundscapes, familiar greeting registers, and the migration of the vocabulary of “calm” into the product sales circuit—a crucial point at which aesthetic appeal is transformed into economically convertible capital.

On the @sahabatquranofficial account, religious capital is constructed during a production stage in which the text is packaged as an appealing commodity through visual aesthetics that systematically evoke a calming effect. This packaging follows a fixed visual formula repeated throughout the entire data corpus. As illustrated in Figure 1—which juxtaposes QS. al-Raḥmān [55],²⁸ QS. al-Baqarah [2]:285–286,²⁹ and QS. al-Insyirāḥ [94]³⁰—all three share an identical component structure: calligraphy of the surah name, a gold-accented “Surah [...]” label, three-layer typography (Arabic, Latin, and translation), the account logo, audio visualizer waves, and a natural scenery background. This uniformity is further reinforced by the choice of visual settings (see Table 1), which consistently favor calming natural imagery such as waterfalls, forests, mountains, and the night sky. These aesthetic choices are never neutral; the soft landscape compositions, subtle typography,

²⁷ Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” 253.

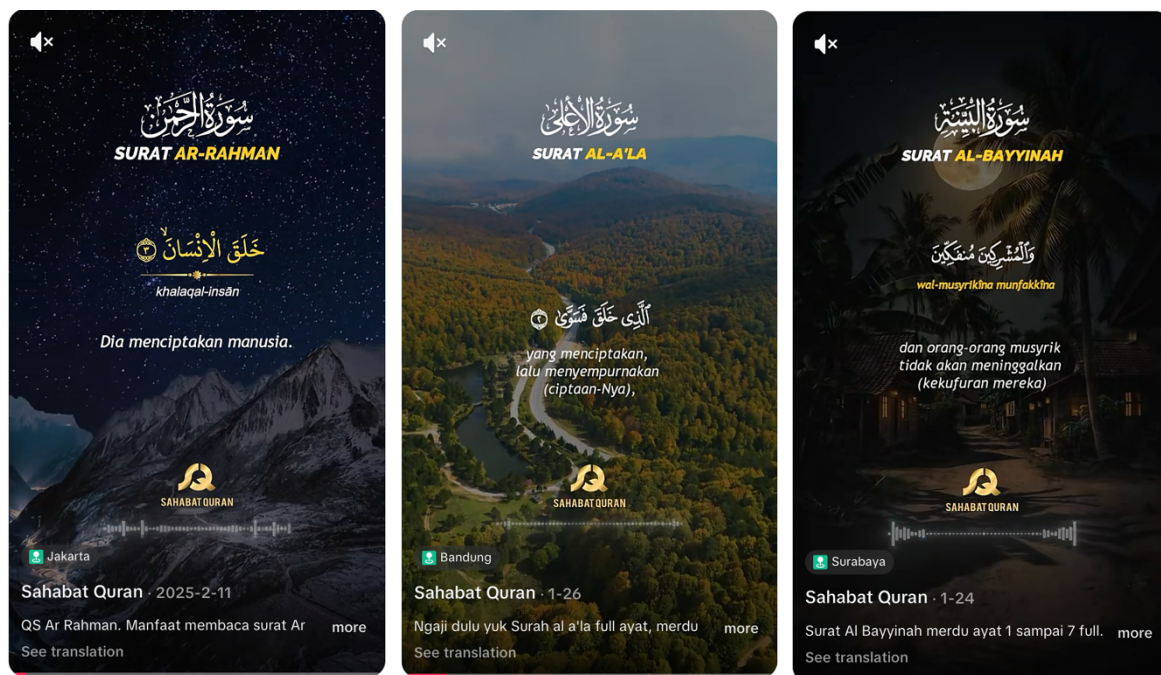
²⁸ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “QS Ar Rahman. Manfaat Membaca Surat Ar Rahman Semoga Memberi Kedamaian....,” TikTok Video, February 11, 2025, <https://www.tiktok.com/@sahabatquranofficial/video/7469863992530423047>.

²⁹ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Surah Al-Baqarah 285-286.”

³⁰ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Surah Al Insyirah. Siapapun Yang Memiliki Permasalahan, Bacalah Surah Al-Insyirah,” TikTok Video, February 19, 2026, <https://www.tiktok.com/@sahabatquranofficial/video/7608610255697661201>.

and serene audio are deliberately designed to elicit an affective response at the sensory level even before the audience comprehends the depth of the verse's meaning. The serenity that appears to emanate from the sacred texts is therefore the product of packaging engineering—a standardized affective use-value crafted to make the sacred commodity attractive and ready for consumption.

This aesthetic work does more than beautify the presentation; it actively detaches texts and spaces from their historical and geographical contexts in order to create an artificial calming effect. Evidence of this dislocation is clearly visible in the mismatch between the visual background and the geotag (see Figure 2).



Source: TikTok @sahabatquranofficial

Figure 2. Standard visual formula and cross-city geotags on Qur’anic audiovisual content. As shown in Figure 2, there is a stark contrast between Indonesia’s urban geotags—such as Jakarta,³¹ Bandung,³² and Surabaya³³—and the visual backdrops of snowy mountain landscapes, temperate autumn forests, and exotic nighttime scenes. This juxtaposition demonstrates that the natural settings do not serve a documentary or contextual function

³¹ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “QS Ar Rahman. Manfaat Membaca Surat Ar Rahman Semoga Memberi Kedamaian...”

³² Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Ngaji Dulu Yuk Surah Al a’la Full Ayat, Merdu Seperti Syekh Sudais.”

³³ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Surat Al Bayyinah Merdu Ayat 1 Sampai 7 Full.”

but are instead as an efficient stock images to evoke a perception of peace across borders. Decontextualization also operates at the linguistic level. The verbal register is deliberately shifted from transcendental tones to the intimate, conversational style typical of younger audiences through familiar greetings such as “*ngaji bentar yuk* (let’s study the Qur’an for a while)”³⁴ or the address “*Sahabat* (friend)”³⁵. This popular diction collapses the sacred distance between text and audience, creating an illusion of personal closeness that makes the words feel friendly and accessible. Both the removal of spatial context and the adjustment of language registers serve the same agenda: maximizing the affective resonance of the product. In this context, aesthetics functions ideologically—the sense of calm and closeness experienced by the audience is not the result of a hermeneutical encounter with the verse but a psychological effect engineered by the logic of packaging.

At an advanced stage, the affective use-values associated with this sacred text undergo subsequent commodification through the migration of discourse into the commercial goods market. The “serenity” register that frames the verse content is identically reproduced in the account’s promotional materials—for example, when digital tasbeih products are marketed through the “*Kunci Ketenangan* (Key to Serenity)” narrative.³⁶ This juxtaposition of these terms demonstrates that the affective appeal originally attached to the sacred text can simply be detached and transferred to a physical object, as if inner peace were a tangible property that could be purchased. This migration of signifiers is not a rhetorical coincidence but evidence that “calm” has been transformed into an independent affective commodity. At this point, the economic function of aestheticization is revealed: the packaging that glosses verses to make them feel soothing is the same methodological device used to make commercial products appear desirable. Affective engineering thus becomes a conceptual bridge connecting sacred and commercial registers, illustrating how accumulated symbolic capital is converted into economic capital within the platform’s monetization architecture.

This phenomenon signifies a fundamental shift in the reception of the Qur’an, which has traditionally relied on the dialectic between aesthetic beauty and depth of appreciation. In the *tilāwah* tradition, beautifying the recitation (*taḥsīn al-ṣawt*) is not an end in itself but a hermeneutic means toward *tadabbur* (deep reflection) and *khusyū‘*

³⁴ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Assalamu’alaikum... Ngaji Sbentar Yuk Surah Ad-Dhuha,” TikTok Video, June 3, 2023, <https://www.tiktok.com/@sahabatquranofficial/video/7240477939790351621>.

³⁵ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Surah Maryam 30-35 Full Ayat Merdu Anak-Anak Afrika.”

³⁶ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Ketenangan Hati,” TikTok Video, April 28, 2022, <https://www.tiktok.com/@sahabatquranofficial/video/709139422221298971>.

(humility)³⁷—solemnity born from contemplation of meaning, not mere sensory stimulation. Scholars even caution that recitation should not slip into *ṭarab*,³⁸ namely aesthetic pleasure detached from meaning. The affective engineering of this content reverses this hierarchy: the calm offered is not the *sakīnah* (tranquility) that accompanies faith, but a synthetic sensory effect produced by standardized visual and auditory composition. Beauty no longer serves solemnity; it stands autonomously as both an attraction and an instrument of commercialization. Emotional experiences that appear to emanate from sacred texts are produced, stripped of their theological roots, and then function as commodities that can be moved and traded.

What is most decisive about this shift is not merely the fact that sacred texts are aesthetically packaged, but rather how this beauty attains ontological independence: affect that was previously tied to the articulation of meaning now exists as an autonomous value, independent of the text that generated it. Once serenity no longer depends on a hermeneutical encounter with the word, it transforms into a floating resource—movable, attachable to any physical object, and ultimately exchangeable in the marketplace. In this configuration, sacredness is no longer present to be interpreted but operates as an affective reservoir that imparts an aura of serenity to commodities outside itself without needing to maintain its theological ties.³⁹ Here, aesthetic appeal reveals its character as capital: it is valuable precisely because it is detachable from its original context and elastically convertible across domains, moving from the sacred to the commercial realm.

The aesthetic patterns observed in this account align with recent literature exploring the connections between aestheticization, piety, and consumption in digital popular Islam.⁴⁰ The economic dimension is closely intertwined with studies of spiritual economies,⁴¹ the commodification of religion and aspirational pietism,⁴² and the dynamics of branding religious authority on social media.⁴³ This research expands these theoretical boundaries in two significant ways. First, while the most literature focuses on pious

³⁷ Yaḥyā bin Syarf Al-Nawawī, *Al-Tibyān Fī Ādāb Ḥamalāh Al-Qurʾān* (Bairūt: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1994), 48.

³⁸ Muḥammad bin Aḥmad Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmiʿ Li Aḥkām Al-Qurʾān*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Muassasah al-Risālah, 2006), 10.

³⁹ Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” 253.

⁴⁰ Hew, “The Art of Dakwah: Social Media, Visual Persuasion and the Islamist Propagation of Felix Siauw.”

⁴¹ Rudnyckyj, “Spiritual Economies: Islam and Neoliberalism in Contemporary Indonesia.”

⁴² Jones, “Materializing Piety: Gendered Anxieties about Faithful Consumption in Contemporary Urban Indonesia.”

⁴³ Simon Sorgenfrei, “Branding Salafism: Salafi Missionaries as Social Media Influencers,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 34, no. 3 (September 13, 2021): 211–37, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341515>.

subjects (such as preacher-influencers and celebrity figures) or physical objects (like clothing and training), this study demonstrates that the target of restructuring is now the materiality of the sacred texts themselves. Here, “tranquility” is extracted from the verse and transformed into a transferable, floating value that can be applied to other commodities. Second, rather than emphasizing user agency in negotiating moral anxieties, this account configuration highlights the dominance of content apparatuses that systematically produce standardized affect to sustain the platform’s economic circulation.

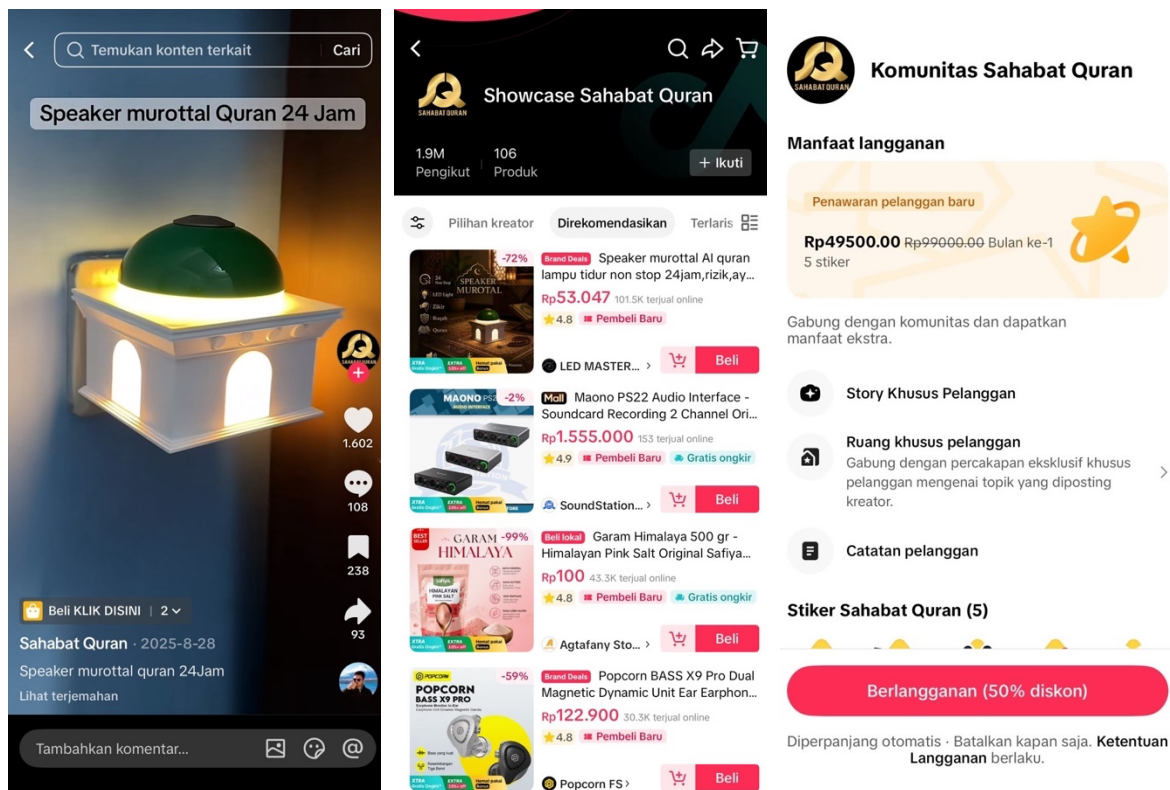
Capital Conversion and the Reconfiguration of Authority: Layered Monetization and the Subordination of Religious Logic

The value of symbolic capital is never remains static; its existence is defined by its capacity to transform into other forms of capital, particularly economic capital. Within the digital platform ecosystem, this capital conversion does not occur in isolation; rather, it is accelerated by a technical architecture that systematically organizes public attention into revenue streams through continuous measurement, intermediation, and monetization.⁴⁴ When this market logic permeates the religious sphere, it does not merely add a commercial layer onto existing practices but subordinates the autonomy of the religious realm itself. Criteria for validity shift radically from scholarly credibility and hermeneutic legitimacy toward the capacity to drive engagement and generate exchange value.⁴⁵ In TikTok’s architecture, this logic of conversion manifests as layered monetization—ranging from sales videos and permanent storefronts to paid subscriptions and live broadcasts—operating in tandem with metric hegemony and the reconfiguration of authority, to the point where religious identity becomes fully assimilated into the digital market taxonomy.

Symbolic capital accumulated through the fabrication and aestheticization of sacred texts is ultimately converted into economic capital via the platform’s multi-layered monetization architecture. Data reveal three commercialization channels operating simultaneously, each employing distinct monetization mechanisms (see Figure 3).

⁴⁴ Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, 27.

⁴⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, “Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field,” *Comparative Social Research* 13 (1991): 1–44.



Source: TikTok @sahabatquranofficial

Figure 3. Variations of Commercial Channels on the @sahabatquranofficial Account

Figure 3 illustrates the various commercial channels available on the TikTok account @sahabatquranofficial. The left panel displays the first channel, which utilizes sales videos featuring “Buy, Click Here” anchor links, generating a Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) of IDR 94.80 million.⁴⁶ The center panel shows a second channel—a permanent commercial storefront on the account profile—featuring 106 products labeled “Brand Deals.”⁴⁷ The right panel represents a third channel in the form of a paid subscription feature (priced at IDR 49,500 per month) that explicitly offers exclusive access to and closer with the creator.⁴⁸ Beyond these three channels, commercialization is also driven by live-streaming sessions that market 158 products from 29 stores, generating a GMV of IDR 101.35 million over an average duration of two hours per session. The visual architecture of these channels confirms that the commercial dimension is not a peripheral or incidental activity;

⁴⁶ FastMoss: TikTok Analisis Data, “Sahabatquranofficial Analisis Influencer TikTok: Pengikut, Konten, Dan Wawasan Promo.”

⁴⁷ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Showcase Sahabat Quran,” TikTok, September 11, 2026, <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSqcdovVe/?page=Mall>.

⁴⁸ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Komunitas Sahabat Quran.”

rather, it constitutes a primary economic infrastructure organically integrated beneath the religious discourse.

Underlying this empirical mapping is a logic of capital conversion characteristic of the platform economy: mass public attention—capitalized through sacred content—is transformed into economic value via distribution channels distinct from the scriptural text itself. This conversion is most evident in the paid subscription model, which monetizes emotional intimacy without the mediation of physical commodities; here, an audience united by the scriptural content becomes a source of recurring revenue. In the storefront channel, value extraction follows a generic commercialization pattern: the majority of displayed commodities are non-religious consumer goods (such as audio interfaces, Himalayan salt, and earphones),⁴⁹ while religious items constitute only a small fraction. This composition demonstrates that the sacred is not sold directly but instead functions as a traffic-gathering instrument, which is then “leased out” to whichever commercial affiliate offers the best return. This entire ecosystem is governed by the hegemony of metrics, where the success of content is no longer measured by hermeneutic depth or theological credibility but by its capacity to drive engagement (an engagement rate of 8.71% and an average of 1.55 million views per video).⁵⁰ This subjugation is starkly revealed when the platform’s algorithmic systems classify an account bearing the name “Qur’an” under the “Food & Drink” category—a juxtaposition that exposes how religious identity is completely subsumed into the taxonomy of the digital marketplace.

The most crucial finding of this research lies in the historical chronology of content production, which firmly refutes the linear assumption that commercialization is a secondary phase following this establishment of the audience base. An analysis of the data reveals that the first commercial content was published on April 28, 2022, just three weeks after the account’s initial upload on April 3, 2022.⁵¹ These findings confirm that the da’wah register and the commercial register have operated simultaneously since the account’s inception, forming a hybrid entity that visually separates the two registers on a visual level but unites them affectively through the discourse of “serenity.” This hybrid configuration prompts a reconfiguration of religious authority that transcends mere reproduction of discourse. With a following of 1.91 million, followers, this non-institutional account usurps the authority to interpret the meaning of verses from formal religious institutions and

⁴⁹ Sahabat Quran [@sahabatquranofficial], “Showcase Sahabat Quran.”

⁵⁰ FastMoss: TikTok Analisis Data, “Sahabatquranofficial Analisis Influencer TikTok: Pengikut, Konten, Dan Wawasan Promo.”

⁵¹ FastMoss: TikTok Analisis Data.

ulama, even expanding its transnational reach, as evidenced by the 24% proportion of followers based in Kuala Lumpur.⁵² The shift that occurs is no longer limited to speak extends to how algorithms and digital capital—through metric engineering and monetization—are redefining the production, packaging, and consumption of sacred texts. Religious authority in this ecosystem is not simply fragmented but is systematically subordinated to the platform's economic logic, which operates behind a comforting interface.

This phenomenon reflects a well-established trend in media studies: when religion enters commercial platforms, it becomes subject to media logic rather than religious tradition. Commercial media aims to capture audience attention to sell to advertisers, making the audience—not the content—the primary commodity. Consequently, religious content risks being reduced to mere attention bait.⁵³ The short-video format intensifies this dynamic because its circulation is entirely driven by engagement metrics. This implies that the success of religious content is measured by its ability to retain audience attention, rather than by its hermeneutical depth. What emerges from this analysis is not incidental religious deviation but the profound influence of the structural forces of commercial media. Like other content categories, religion is subordinated to a single mechanism: converting mass attention into an economic value.

In this context, the reconstruction of religious narratives through the composition of sound and imagery is structurally intertwined with the logic of the attention economy. An audiovisual recomposition that combines *murottal*, verse text, and calming natural visuals serves to capture public attention. Accumulated attention—reflected in the growth of followers, impressions, and interactions—becomes the primary capital within a platform's ecosystem.⁵⁴ An audience engaged by sacred content acts as a foundation that is monetized through advertising, affiliate marketing, and live streaming on separate channels. Historical chronology shows that da'wah and commercial registers have coexisted since the account's inception, demonstrating that both operate as parallel layers. This configuration confirms the structural position of religious content: it does not exist outside the market but rather functions as a central node in the attention value chain, where symbolic capital is converted into economic capital.

The monetization configuration of this account bridges two previously distinct lines of study. From a media political economy perspective, these findings reinforce the

⁵² FastMoss: TikTok Analisis Data.

⁵³ Smythe, "Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism."

⁵⁴ Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, 57.

“social media logic” thesis, which attributes content success to engagement, audience commodification, and platform capitalism.⁵⁵ From the perspective of digital Islam in Indonesia, this phenomenon intersects with the discourse of the “preacher economy,” the acceleration of philanthropy, and the transformation of Islamic authority.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, this study highlights the theoretical limits of both literatures. The first line of study theorizes datafication in general without addressing sacred texts, while the second focuses on the commercialization of preachers’ or celebrity figures’ personas. What emerges here is the positioning of the sacred text itself as an attention reservoir that is capitalized within the circuit of secular affiliation. This commercialization does not rely on personal charisma but on the platform’s impersonal architecture. Consequently, religious authority in this configuration does not merely fragment but is reorganized under the subordination of the platform economic logic, which measures and generates profits from mass attention.

Conclusion

The assumption that the presence of the Qur’an on social media automatically democratizes access to the divine word is not supported by this study; in fact, the opposite occurs. Analysis of the TikTok account @sahabatquranofficial reveals that the diverse theological content of ten surahs is homogenized into a single affective register, while the legitimacy of the recitation shifts from interpretive competence to audiovisual composition designed to soothe the senses. The serenity seemingly emanating from the verses is actually a standardized effect, and its affective surplus can be detached from the text and transferred to other commodities. Economically, the sacred text functions as symbolic capital that attracts attention, which is then converted into economic value through layered monetization.

Combining netnographic observation of the content corpus with Bourdieu’s framework of commodification and Srnicek’s theory of the platform economy proved effective in unraveling the subtle mechanisms behind the soothing interface—specifically, how symbolic capital derived from sacred texts is transformed into economic capital without directly selling the verses themselves. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations: it focuses on a single account; it relies on manifest data—text, visuals, and estimated third-party metrics—without incorporating creator interviews or audience

⁵⁵ Van Dijck and Poell, “Understanding Social Media Logic”; Smythe, “Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism.”

⁵⁶ Martin Slama, “Tracing Digital Divides in Indonesian Islam: Ambivalences of Media and Class,” *CyberOrient* 15, no. 1 (June 13, 2021): 290–313, <https://doi.org/10.1002/cyo2.15>.

reception data; and its scope is limited to a cross-sectional snapshot rather than a longitudinal study. These limitations suggest several directions for future research: comparative studies across accounts and platforms to assess the generalizability of observed patterns; algorithmic audits of religious content curation; quantitative analyses of large-scale engagement; and reception studies involving interviews or surveys to determine whether this affective engineering genuinely influences how audiences interpret the sacred text.

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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 analyzed in this study.

Ethical Approval:

This study did not require formal ethical approval from an institutional review board, as it relied exclusively on publicly available digital artifacts. The data consist of publicly accessible TikTok videos, captions, engagement metrics, commercial content, and third-party analytics (FastMoss) from the account @sahabatquranofficial. No human participants were recruited, interviewed, or surveyed, and no private or restricted data were accessed. All observations were conducted through non-participant observation of content that is openly available on the platform. The research adheres to established ethical guidelines for internet research, including the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) recommendations, by respecting platform terms of service, avoiding any form of deception or interaction with account holders or audiences, and ensuring that the analysis remains at the structural and textual level rather than targeting individuals. All materials used are treated as public digital texts, and findings are presented in aggregate form without disclosing sensitive personal information beyond what is already publicly visible.

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