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Selecting, Assembling, Contesting: QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34 and the Construction of Conditional *Qiwāmah* on Indonesian Instagram

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Abstract
This article examines how the meaning of QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34 is constructed on Indonesian Instagram at the intersection of the mediatization of religion and the rising phenomenon of female breadwinners. Employing a case study design and non-participatory netnography on 13 posts from four Instagram accounts and 189 of their audience comments, alongside a comparative analysis of four classical exegeses (*tafsīr*) works, this study identifies three interpretive movements. The selection of translations, clauses, and verse segments shifts the legitimacy of *qiwāmah* from inherent superiority (*faḍl*) to economic obligation (*nafaqa*). The assembly of verses and hadiths produces a pseudo-thematic exegesis that protects the wife's income as private property (*milk*), yet frames her financial contribution merely as a gift (*hadiyyah*). Audience contestation reactivates classical legal disagreements regarding patience (*ṣabr*) and divorce (*faskh*). This article argues that digital exegesis constitutes a selective continuity rather than a complete break from tradition: *qiwāmah* becomes conditional, yet the underlying hierarchy persists through a new rationale.

Keywords: *Qiwāmah; Digital Exegesis; Mediatization of Religion; Nafaqa; Audience Reception.*

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Introduction

Questions regarding the basis of male leadership in Muslim families—whether it is rooted in innate superiority or contingent upon economic function—are facing their most serious test as they encounter two simultaneous shifts: the changing economic role of women and the mediatization of Qur'anic interpretation. The concept of *qiwāmah*,

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established by classical jurists as the foundation of male authority over women, persists and remains a subject of debate today.[1] At the same time, the interpretation of the verses underpinning this concept no longer occurs primarily in scholarly circles or texts but rather in the realm of social media, where religious ideas are increasingly shaped by the logic of the medium. The proliferation of voices claiming interpretive authority has created a "cacophony" of orthodoxy, amid which the public increasingly seeks interpretations that are simple and stable.[2] Yet academic debate on these changes remains divided: some researchers view digital media as a space that democratizes interpretation, while others see it as an arena in which conservative interpretations are reproduced within visually appealing formats. Both perspectives rarely address a more fundamental question: What happens to the structure of the verse itself when it is selected, excerpted, and reassembled according to the logic of the medium, only to be reinterpreted by an audience that brings its own life experiences into the comments section?

This phenomenon is clearly reflected in interpretations of QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34 on Indonesian Instagram—in a country where 14.37 percent of households had female breadwinners in 2024.[3] This intersection of social reality and digital media has given rise to new readings. Popular interpretations highlight the clause *bimā faḍḍala* ("due to what [God] has favored/bestowed")[4] and assert that a husband's leadership arises "not because men are superior, but because men are obligated to provide financial support," emphasizing that the title of "husband" comes with a condition: responsibility.[5] Meanwhile, a wife's income is protected as a personal right, yet her contribution is framed as a "gift" rather than as financial support. When a religious scholar categorizes women who receive no financial support as either "foolish" or "smart" based on their choice to

[1] Omaima Abou-Bakr, "The Interpretive Legacy of Qiwamah as an Exegetical Construct," in *Men in Charge?: Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition*, ed. Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mulki Al-Sharmani, and Jana Rumminger (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015).

[2] Frédéric Volpi and Bryan S. Turner, "Introduction: Making Islamic Authority Matter," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 2 (March 1, 2007): 1–19, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407074992.

[3] Nabilah Muhammad, "BPS: 'Female Breadwinners' in Indonesia Dominate Household Income," databooks, December 22, 2025, https://databoks.katadata.co.id/en/employment/statistics/6944f61ef26e1/bps-female-breadwinners-in-indonesia-dominate-household-income.

[4] Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Ada? Suami Nganggur Malah Nyuruh Istri Bekerja.!," Instagram Photo, May 9, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/DJbVQPAhYQO/.

[5] Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Disebut Suami Karena Ada Alasannya," Instagram Photo, January 14, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/p/DTfjXKHE-CP.

divorce or stay, the audience challenges him by citing Prophetic precedent.[6] This phenomenon demonstrates that the *qiwāmah* verse is not merely disseminated but is instead selected, assembled, and contested. This article analyzes these three dynamics to reveal how the meaning of QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34 is produced at the intersection of media logic, the exegetical tradition, and audience experience.

In academic literature, studies on QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34 generally fall into three main approaches. The first is the hermeneutic-normative approach, which compares classical and modern exegesis to reconstruct the meanings of *qiwāmah* and *ḍarb* through contextual hermeneutics.[7] The second is the digital-media discourse approach, which analyzes how content creators and preachers frame the verse on social media—either as an effort to challenge patriarchal interpretations or as a means of reproducing gender inequality.[8] The third is the sociological-empirical approach, which examines how husbandly leadership is experienced within Muslim family practices amid shifting economic roles.[9] Although these three approaches have enriched the study of *qiwāmah*, they tend to treat the text, the medium, and the audience as separate entities. The first approach stops at the exegete's text; the second assesses content framing holistically but fails to track specific segments of the verse that are omitted or left unaddressed; while the third approach examines family

[6] Buya Yahya [@buyayahya_albahjah], "Suami Tak Memberi Nafkah Karena Tak Mampu Bekerja, Memang Ada Hak Bagi Istri Untuk Berpisah.," Instagram Video, April 16, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/p/DXLpReRkoUU/.

[7] Ayesha S. Chaudhry, *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition: Ethics, Law, and the Muslim Discourse on Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Hadia Mubarak, *Rebellious Wives, Neglectful Husbands: Controversies in Modern Qur'anic Commentaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022); Wardatul Karomah and Tri Wahyu Hidayati, "Menafsir Ulang Relasi Gender Dalam Qs. An-Nisa' (4):34 Aplikasi Pendekatan Hermeneutika Kritik Muhammad Arkoun," *Equality Journal of Gender Child and Humanity* 3, no. 1 (June 29, 2025): 66–85, https://doi.org/10.58518/equality.v3i1.3879.

[8] Mahbub Ghozali and Muhammad Toriq Nurmadiansyah, "Media Framing of QS. Al-Nisā' [4]: 34 by @quranreview on Instagram: Glorifying Women Tendencies in Interpretation," *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an* 19, no. 2 (July 27, 2023): 225–48, https://doi.org/10.21009/JSQ.019.2.05; Mohammad Bachrul Falah and Riyanta Riyanta, "Digital Patriarchy: How Indonesian Islamic Preachers Construct Gender Asymmetry through YouTube Fatwas," *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 18, no. 1 (June 30, 2025): 103–22, https://doi.org/10.14421/ahwal.2025.18106.

[9] Alimatul Qibtiyah et al., "Husbands Remain as Imāms: The Phenomenon of House Husband in Yogyakarta and Ponorogo, Indonesia," *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 17, no. 2 (December 30, 2024): 221–44, https://doi.org/10.14421/ahwal.2024.17205; Muhammad Zawil Kiram, "Gendered Division of Domestic Labour: Indonesian Muslim Men's Perceptions, Participation and Experiences in Housework and Childcare," *Journal of Gender Studies* 35, no. 1 (January 2, 2026): 174–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2025.2473923.

realities without linking them to how the verse is interpreted in digital spaces. This research bridges that gap by shifting the focus from a mere assessment of content framing to an examination of the verse's structure itself—specifically, how QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34 is selected and assembled by content creators, then contested by the audience, with classical exegetical traditions serving as a point of comparison.

Addressing this gap, this article analyzes how the meaning of al-Nisā' [4]:34 is constructed on Indonesian Instagram through three interconnected interpretive movements. First, it analyzes how content creators select specific clauses of the verse to shift the basis of *qiwāmah* legitimacy from inherent superiority (*faḍl*) to the obligation of financial provision (*nafaqa*). Second, it traces the integration of the verse and hadith into a normative doctrine that positions a wife's income somewhere between personal ownership (*milk*) and a gift (*hadiyyah*). Third, it explores how the audience contests this doctrine in the comments section while weighing the choice between patience (*ṣabr*) and divorce (*faskh*). These three analyses are conducted through the frameworks of the mediatization of religion and networked religion, alongside a comparison with classical exegesis. The article argues that the digital interpretation of *qiwāmah* represents a selective continuity arising from the interplay between the creators' selection process and the audience's counter-selection, rendering *qiwāmah* conditional without dismantling its hierarchical structure.

The central thesis of this study asserts that social media architecture functions as a filter that determines which strands of tradition are preserved or allowed to fade, thereby generating a selective continuity across three phases of meaning transformation.[10] The *selection phase* shifts the legitimacy of *qiwāmah* from inherent superiority (*faḍl*) to financial provision (*nafaqa*) by bypassing the specific clauses and context of the Qur'anic verse. The assembly phase organizes verses and hadiths into a pseudo-thematic interpretation that positions a wife's assets somewhere between personal ownership (*milk*) and a gift (*hadiyyah*), creating a detached argument vulnerable to reversal. The contestation phase reveals audiences weighing the doctrine against their own life experiences and subsequently reviving Prophetic precedents and classical school-of-thought perspectives regarding patience (*ṣabr*) and divorce (*faskh*). Ultimately, the selection process is twofold: the meaning of *qiwāmah* emerges from the intersection of the producers' selection and the

[10] 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.

audience's counter-selection, rendering *qiwāmah* conditional while simultaneously preserving its hierarchy through new justifications.

Method

This qualitative case study combines text-visual analysis with non-participatory netnography to naturalistically observe interpretations of QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34, financial provision (*nafaqa*), and a wife's assets on Indonesian Instagram.[11] A purposive sampling method was employed based on criteria including relevance to the *qiwāmah* theme, engagement levels, and diversity of authority figures.[12] Based on these criteria, 13 posts were collected from four representative accounts: @quranreview (popular exegesis), @adirbzahira (family influencer), @rumah.tanggasakinah (anonymous advice), and @buyayahya_albahjah (traditional Islamic scholar), observed between January-April 2026. The data comprise visual-textual materials (carousels, infographics, captions), audiovisual content (Reels, lecture clips), and audience comments. Data collection focused on the specific segments of the verse that were selected or omitted, the assembly of intertextual elements, and the contestation found in the comments. The data were subsequently analyzed using a three-stage thematic coding process (selection, assembly, and contestation) and compared against classical exegeses—specifically *al-Kashshāf* by al-Zamakhsharī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* by al-Rāzī, *al-Jāmiᶜ li Aḥkām al-Qurʾān* by al-Qurṭubī, and *al-Tafsīr al-Munīr* by Wahbah al-Zuḥaylī—as well as the theoretical frameworks of mediatization and networked religion.

Data collection involved non-participant observation and digital documentation, resulting in an archive comprising post screenshots, lecture-clip transcriptions, and 189 relevant comments (selected from a total of 237 after filtering out spam and account tags). Commenters' identities were anonymized to ensure adherence to research ethics, and comments quoted in this article were translated from Indonesian by the authors. The analysis proceeded in four stages: (1) mapping segments of QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34 to identify which parts of the text were quoted, explained, or omitted; (2) thematic analysis of the content and comments to construct a three-stage typology (selection, assembly,

[11] Lawrence A. Palinkas et al., "Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research," *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research* 42, no. 5 (September 6, 2015): 533–44, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y.

[12] Robert V. Kozinets and Rosella Gambetti, *Netnography Unlimited: Understanding Technoculture Using Qualitative Social Media Research* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

contestation),[13] using "likes" as an indicator of resonance; (3) a comparative reading against classical exegetical texts to trace both continuities and shifts in tradition; and (4) theoretical interpretation grounded in the concepts of the mediatization of religion and networked religion, placed in dialogue with existing literature.

Results and Discussion

The Pragmatism of Digital *Qiwāmah*: The Conflict Between Economic Obligation and Patriarchal Authority in QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34

The stability of meaning regarding gender relations within the exegetical tradition now faces challenges due to the mediatization of religion—specifically, the adaptation of religious ideas to media logic. This logic is not neutral; rather, it actively shapes public imagination through formats, durations, and levels of audience engagement.[14] While traditional exegetes interpret QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34 as a cohesive whole linking leadership, the basis for authority, and the resolution of *nushūz* (marital discord or recalcitrance),[15] media logic demands concise, shareable excerpts. This shift is reinforced by the phenomenon of "networked religion," which transfers religious authority from religious scholars or official institutions to content creators and audiences.[16] The tension between the verse's integrity and media logic transforms the act of excerpting text into a new form of exegesis: selecting a single clause implies choosing a specific basis for legitimacy, while omitting other segments effectively silences the original meaning.

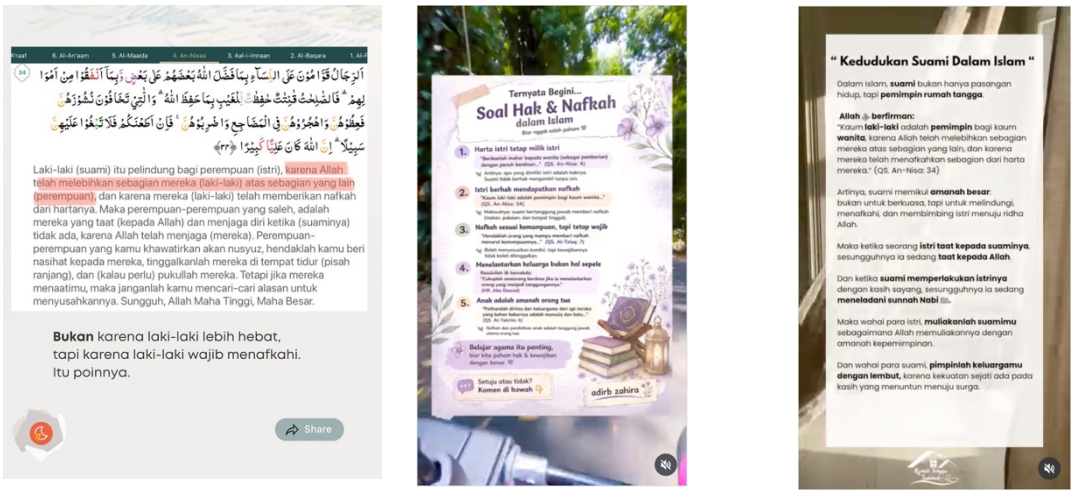
The selective interpretation of QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34 on Instagram starts with the translation of the term *qawwāmūn* and the interpretation of the phrase *bimā faḍḍala*. These choices influence whether *qiwāmah* is understood as male superiority or as an obligation to provide financial support. Variations in the treatment of these clauses are also reflected in the visual layout of the verse excerpts on the posts (see Figure 1).

[13] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (January 21, 2006): 77–101, https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

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

[15] Muḥammad bin Aḥmad Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān,* vol. 5 (Beirut: Muassasah al-Risālah, 2006), 172.

[16] H. A. Campbell, "Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 64–93, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfr074.



Source: *@quranreview, @adirbzahira, @rumah.tanggasakinah*

Figure 1. Translation of *Qawwāmūn* and Treatment of the *Bimā Faḍḍala* Clause in Post Layouts

Figure 1 illustrates two translation variations and three different treatments of the *bimā faḍḍala* clause. In the left panel, @quranreview translates *qawwāmūn* as "protectors," highlights the clause "because Allah has favored some of them (men) over others (women)" in red, and then contextualizes it with a statement immediately below the translation: "Not because men are superior, but because men are obligated to provide financial support. That is the point."[17] In the center panel, @adirbzahira uses "leaders" but cuts the quotation off at "Men are leaders for women...," thereby omitting the two explanatory clauses and immediately interpreting the term to mean "husbands are responsible for providing sustenance (food, clothing, and shelter)."[18] In the right panel, @rumah.tanggasakinah also uses "leaders" but quotes the first sentence of the verse in full—including both explanatory clauses—and interprets it as a "great trust: not for exercising power, but for protecting, providing for, and guiding one's wife toward Allah's pleasure." A fourth approach appears in another post by @quranreview, which subsumes that clause into the concept of financial provision: men are designated as *qawwām* "because they have been favored with the wealth to provide for their wives and families."[19]

The creators not only select which clauses to highlight but also determine the boundaries of the verse quotation. Consequently, the section regarding *nushūz* (marital discord or recalcitrance) and the context of the verse's revelation are never included in the

[17] Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Ada? Suami Nganggur Malah Nyuruh Istri Bekerja.!"

[18] Adirb Zahira [@adirbzahira], "Ternyata Begini, Soal Hak Dan Nafkah Dalam Islam," Instagram Photo, April 23, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/p/DXdXBZaTOaX/.

[19] Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Disebut Suami Karena Ada Alasannya."

explanation. This pattern becomes evident when each post is mapped against the five segments of QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Mapping of Quotations and Segment Explanations for QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34 in Instagram Posts

Post	*al-rijāl qawwāmūn ʿalā al-nisāʾ*	*bimā faḍḍala Allāh...*	*wa bimā anfaqū...*	*fa al-ṣāliḥāt qānitāt...*	*takhāfūna nushūzahunna... wa-ḍribūhunna...*
@quranreview	±	±	±	+	+
@adirbzahira	±	–	–	–	–
@rumah.tanggasakinah	±	±	±	–	–
@rumah.tanggasakinah	±	–	–	–	–

Note: *± (cited and explained); + (cited but not explained); – (not cited)*

Table 1 reveals two distinct patterns of selection. The first pattern is truncation. @adirbzahira and one of the @rumah.tanggasakinah posts cut the quotation off after the first segment, "*al-rijāl qawwāmūn ʿalā al-nisāʾ* (Men are leaders over women...),"[20] while the other @rumah.tanggasakinah post stops immediately after the third segment, "*wa bimā anfaqū* (because they have spent a portion of their wealth)."[21] The second pattern is omission. @quranreview displayed the full Arabic text and translation of the verse—including the phrase "*wa-ḍribūhunna* ([if necessary] strike them)"—yet the accompanying explanatory slides discussed only the first three segments.[22] Consequently, the *nushūz–ḍarb* segment was never explained by any of the accounts, and the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (context of revelation) was not mentioned in a single post. The audience noticed these two patterns. Regarding the translation displayed without explanation, one commenter asked, "...so sorry, is this really the word of God? Did God really say this? ... is that really how the translation from Arabic to Indonesian goes?" Other commenters remarked that the Qur'an was being treated merely as a "foundation to suit one's own needs—citing just a snippet of a verse without even addressing the context of its revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*)," while others noted that the application was limited to "only what was highlighted on the second slide." Regarding the lecture clip, the audience described it as a "short video snippet weaponized by lazy men" and urged others to "watch the full video, not just a fragment."

[20] Rie [@rumah.tanggasakinah], "Istri Wajib Tahu, Kedudukan Suami Dalam Islam," Instagram Photo, October 19, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/DP_OCuHEbBl/.

[21] Rie [@rumah.tanggasakinah], "Wahai Suami, Lelah Boleh Tapi Jangan Lalai," Instagram Photo, November 16, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/DRHrdEIiY4d/.

[22] Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Ada? Suami Nganggur Malah Nyuruh Istri Bekerja.!"

The selection process concerning the two aforementioned typologies culminates in an interpretation of *qiwāmah* (male guardianship/authority) as conditional. The account @quranreview asserts that the title of "husband" carries a prerequisite—responsibility—and that a husband's identity effectively diminishes if he deliberately neglects his duty to provide financial support (*nafaqa*).[23] This interpretation appears to resonate far more strongly: two of the account's posts garnered approximately 10,000 and 9,110 likes, whereas a post by @rumah.tanggasakinah—which equated obedience to one's husband with obedience to God—received only 71 likes.[24] In the comments section, the top comment (144 likes) criticized husbands who "hide" behind demands for obedience while failing to provide support, while the second-highest comment (80 likes) echoed the post's sentiment: "Do not take pride in being the *imām* [leader/head of the household] if you cannot yet provide support with faith." The audience also reordered the verse's components to prioritize financial support over obedience—labeling obedience without support as "exploitation"—and limited the scope of obedience to matters consistent with Sharia.

This shift in understanding the verse does not represent a complete break from the past but rather a selective engagement with the exegetical tradition. Traditionally, exegetes identified two grounds for *qiwāmah*—innate superiority (intellect/knowledge) and material provision (*nafaqa*)[25]—as equally valid bases for a husband's authority. Digital interpretations, however, have discarded the notion of innate superiority, establishing financial support as the sole source of legitimacy. Although the concept of conditional *qiwāmah* has traditional roots—such as al-Rāzī's views on reciprocal obligations[26] or al-Qurṭubī's discussion of the right to annul a marriage (*faskh*) when a husband fails to provide support[27]—the function of this logic has evolved. In classical exegesis, this was merely one of several legal perspectives regarding an inability to provide; in digital media, it has become the singular focus for the moral delegitimization of such negligence. Consequently, various limiting parameters established by exegetes—such as the procedural steps for addressing *nushūz* (marital discord/defiance), the prohibition against injurious blows, and

[23] Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Disebut Suami Karena Ada Alasannya."

[24] Rie [@rumah.tanggasakinah], "Istri Wajib Tahu, Kedudukan Suami Dalam Islam."

[25] Maḥmūd bin Umar Al-Zamakhsyarī, *Tafsīr Al-Kasysyāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ Al-Tanzīl*,vol. 1 (Bairut: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 2009), 505; Fakr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ Al-Ghayb,* vol. 10 (Bairut: Dār Iḥyā' at-Turāṡ al-'Arābī, 1420), 70–71; Wahbah Az-Zuhaylī, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Munīr Fī Al-'Aqīdah Wa Al-Sharī'ah Wa Al-Manhaj,* vol. 5 (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1418), 52.

[26] Al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ Al-Ghayb*, 10:70–71.

[27] Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān*, 5:169.

the injunction to avoid violence—disappear along with the overlooked segments of the verse.

This shift can be explained by how media logic filters the complexities of exegesis. In the process of mediatization, religious ideas tend to be reshaped to fit formats that are concise, straightforward, and easily disseminated.[28] The logic of reciprocity between financial provision and obedience meets these criteria, as it can be condensed into a moral formula that is immediately understood. Consequently, the plurality of interpretive perspectives maintained by exegetes is flattened into a single reading. This process is reinforced by the evolving nature of authority in networked religion, where the legitimacy of an interpretation is determined not by scholarly lineage or the comprehensiveness of an argument, but by its resonance among interconnected content creators and audiences.[29] In such a landscape, the reading most closely linked to the audience's daily experiences gains dominance. Thus, media does not merely transfer exegesis to a new space; it acts as a filter, determining which strands of tradition are revived and which are allowed to fade into obscurity.

Relocating the legitimacy of *qiwāmah* (male guardianship/leadership) from inherent superiority to financial provision demonstrates that the digital sphere operates under a regime of transactional legitimacy. This regime seeks to balance adherence to the gender hierarchy found in the text with the moral sensibilities of an audience increasingly accustomed to the reality of working wives. By discarding claims of intellectual superiority and remaining silent on the issue of *nushūz*, content creators engage in a form of hermeneutic compromise: the husband's status as *qawwām* is preserved, yet the justification for it shifts to the realm of economic obligation—a rationale far more palatable to contemporary audiences. Audience responses—condemning negligent husbands while simultaneously demanding financial support as a prerequisite for obedience—actually serve as a mechanism that sustains this circuit, as the criticism targets the individual husband who has failed rather than the structure of *qiwāmah* itself. This pattern aligns with the trend of digital piety in Indonesia, which embraces women's economic participation while remaining committed to traditional gender ideologies.[30] Thus, conditional *qiwāmah* functions as an adaptive strategy that translates a hierarchical scriptural concept into moral language familiar to popular digital culture, all while preserving male authority without provoking radical doctrinal resistance.

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

[29] Campbell, "Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society."

[30] Annisa R. Beta, *Pious Girls: Young Muslim Women in Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2024), 53.

These findings indicate that the digital space is neither merely an arena for the reproduction of patriarchy nor solely a platform for emancipation. While digital da'wah (religious outreach) often perpetuates conservative interpretations and women's economic dependency,[31] this era also accelerates the dissemination of Muslim feminist ideas[32]. This study occupies a position between these two poles: the concept of "conditional *qiwāmah*" (male guardianship) does not represent a wholesale reproduction of conservative interpretation—as it rejects claims of absolute male superiority and demands husband accountability—yet it is not a fully egalitarian reading, given that the structure of husbandly leadership remains intact. This compromise position aligns with the phenomenon of religious influencers who reconstruct authority using language familiar to young Muslims,[33] with the distinction that the negotiation occurs not merely regarding delivery style or the speaker's persona but touches the very heart of scriptural interpretation—specifically, determining which clause of a verse serves as the basis for legitimacy.

The Illusion of Digital Exegesis: The Conflict Between Textual Assembly and Atomistic Logic in *Nafaqa* Doctrines

If selection determines which clauses are highlighted, assembly dictates how those clauses are structured into doctrine. In the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis, the formulation of norms considers the context of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and the generality of the wording to establish the scope of the law.[34] Conversely, the digital ecosystem offers a streamlined path through "convergent practice"—a "pick-and-mix" blending of religious

[31] Falah and Riyanta, "Digital Patriarchy: How Indonesian Islamic Preachers Construct Gender Asymmetry through YouTube Fatwas"; Muhammad Jihadul Hayat, "Preaching Islamic Legal Rules on Screen: Conservatism on Islamic Family Law in Digital-Based Dakwah Program Mamah Dan Aa Beraksi," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 60, no. 2 (November 29, 2022): 427–66, https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2022.602.427-466.

[32] Eva F. Nisa, "Muslim Women in Contemporary Indonesia: Online Conflicting Narratives behind the Women Ulama Congress," *Asian Studies Review* 43, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 434–54, https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1632796.

[33] Annisa R Beta, "Commerce, Piety and Politics: Indonesian Young Muslim Women's Groups as Religious Influencers," *New Media & Society* 21, no. 10 (October 10, 2019): 2140–59, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819838774; 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.

[34] Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān Fi 'Ulūm Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1 (Beirut: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1974), 107.

sources outside traditional frameworks.[35] Concurrently, mediatization transforms media into a cultural environment that usurps the role of religious institutions in providing moral guidance.[36] Verses and hadith are excerpted and assembled into ready-made lists of normative claims. The tension between the discipline of *istinbāṭ* (legal deduction) and this logic of assembly gives rise to a new doctrine: a wife's earnings are protected as her private property (milk), whereas her economic contribution to the family is classified merely as a gift (*hadiyyah*), not as *nafaqa* (mandatory maintenance).

In the assembly model found on Instagram, the *qiwāmah* verse no longer stands in isolation; instead, it is woven together with other verses and hadith to form a cohesive doctrine regarding maintenance and a wife's assets. This assembly process is most evident in infographics that organize various texts into numbered points, each accompanied by its own normative conclusion (see Table 2).

Table 2. Assembly of Texts into Normative Claims in Infographics on Maintenance and a Wife's Assets

Normative Claim	Quoted Text (Reference)	Drawn Conclusion
A wife's assets remain her own property.	"Give the women their dowries (as a gift) willingly..." (QS. al-Nisāʾ [4]:4)	"What a wife owns is her right. A husband has no right to take it without permission."; A husband may not take any of the assets she owns without her permission.
Providing maintenance is a husband's obligation, and the wife has the right to receive it.	"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women..." (QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34).	"The husband is responsible for providing maintenance, including food, clothing, and shelter."
Maintenance should align with one's means, yet it remains mandatory.	"Let the man of means spend according to his means..." (QS. al-Ṭalāq [65]:7).	"Adjustments based on circumstances are permissible, but the obligation itself cannot be abandoned."
Neglecting one's family is a serious matter.	"It is a sufficient sin for a person to neglect those for whom he is responsible." (Narrated by Abū Dāwūd, no. 1692)	—

[35] Campbell, "Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society."
[36] Hjarvard, "The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change."

Children are a trust placed in the care of their parents.	"Protect yourselves and your families from the Fire..." (QS. al-Taḥrīm [66]:6)	"Providing maintenance and education for children is a primary responsibility of parents."

Table 2 illustrates how two infographics by @adirbzahira compile four to five texts—drawn from three surahs and one hadith—into a numbered list of claims, transforming each text into a norm through labels such as "Meaning" or "Intended Meaning."[37] The sequence of assembly is flexible: the post from May 15 begins with QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34 as the basis for the maintenance obligation, whereas the post from April 23 places the claim "A wife's assets remain her own" first, shifting the *qiwāmah* (guardianship/maintenance) verse to the second position.[38] Although QS. al-Nisa [4]:4 explicitly discusses the mahr (dowry), the conclusion drawn extends to encompass all of the wife's assets—with the May 15 post even reiterating that "A husband may not take any of the assets she owns without her permission." The post from April 23 further expands the scope of the discussion to the parent–child relationship by citing QS. al-Taḥrīm [66]:6. Interestingly, the audience extended this network of texts by introducing references beyond the original post. One commenter corrected the terminology used in the content by referencing a lecture given by another speaker: "Perhaps 'charity' (*ṣadaqah*) is more accurate than 'gift' (*hadiyyah*)... it could be considered a debt owed by the husband (if I recall correctly, I heard this in a lecture by Ustadz Khalid or Syafiq)." Meanwhile, on the @buyayahya_albahjah account, another commenter anchored the scenario of a wife bearing the family's financial burden to a historical example: "Mother Khadījah chose the second option" (201 likes).

This text is distilled into a normative formula that protects a wife's earnings as her personal property while framing her economic contribution as a voluntary gift rather than a form of financial support (*nafaqa*). This formula functions across three domains: ownership, law, and morality (see Figure 2).

[37] Adirb Zahira [@adirbzahira], "Ternyata Begini, Soal Nafkah Suami Dalam Rumah Tangga," Instagram Photo, May 15, 2026, https://www.instagram.com/p/DYW6moTFDMc/; Adirb Zahira [@adirbzahira], "Ternyata Begini, Soal Hak Dan Nafkah Dalam Islam."

[38] Adirb Zahira [@adirbzahira], "Ternyata Begini, Soal Nafkah Suami Dalam Rumah Tangga"; Adirb Zahira [@adirbzahira], "Ternyata Begini, Soal Hak Dan Nafkah Dalam Islam."



Source: *@quranreview, @adirbzahira, @rumah.tanggasakinah*

Figure 2. Normative Formula Concerning a Wife's Income within the Frameworks of Ownership, Law, and Morality

Figure 2 illustrates these three registers. In the ownership register (left panel), @quranreview formulates a financial equation: "Husband's money = wife has a right to it. Wife's money = wife's personal right... If a wife gives, it is a gift. If a husband provides support, it is an obligation."[39] In the legal register (center panel), @adirbzahira asserts that it is forbidden (*ḥarām*) for a husband to use his wife's money without permission and characterizes a wife's assistance in earning a living as an act of "kindness, not an obligation."[40] Meanwhile, in the moral register (right panel), @rumah.tanggasakinah and @buyayahya_albahjah insist that working wives must remain humble, avoid raising their voices, and maintain obedience to their husbands.[41] @quranreview rules out the possibility of role equality by emphasizing that financial provision is the husband's "absolute obligation."[42] Audiences respond to this formula by reproducing it—such as through the acronym "SUAMI" (meaning "All Money Belongs to the Wife")—or by testing its limits against real-life situations not addressed by the content, such as the intention to work in order to help one's own parents.

[39] Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Ada? Suami Nganggur Malah Nyuruh Istri Bekerja.!"

[40] Adirb Zahira [@adirbzahira], "Ternyata Begini, Soal Nafkah Suami Dalam Rumah Tangga."

[41] Rie [@rumah.tanggasakinah], "Wahai Suami, Lelah Boleh Tapi Jangan Lalai"; Buya Yahya [@buyayahya_albahjah], "Suami Tak Memberi Nafkah Karena Tak Mampu Bekerja, Memang Ada Hak Bagi Istri Untuk Berpisah."

[42] Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Disebut Suami Karena Ada Alasannya."

However, the neat normative formula presented on screen often conflicts with the complexities of household financial practices experienced by the audience. In reality, the separation of assets can backfire and become a burden: one wife recounted how her husband used his personal funds solely for himself, while she was forced to cover household and child-related expenses under the pretext that "they are your children too; I'm not burdening you with my needs, after all."[43] Protections for a wife's assets fail to address the bitter experiences of women whose husbands gamble away their property,[44] seize assets before pronouncing divorce, or treat them merely as "walking ATMs." Conversely, the concept of joint property serves as a survival strategy; a wife purchasing a home with her husband might retain payment receipts and preliminary sale agreements as leverage against the threat of domestic violence.[45] From the husband's perspective, the limits of the maintenance obligation are challenged when a wife's demands—such as funding online shopping and settling debts everywhere[46]—are perceived as excessive, even after basic household expenses have been covered.

These tensions reveal both continuity with and a departure from tradition. The principle that a wife's assets belong solely to her is not a new concept; al-Zuḥaylī, for instance, affirmed the financial independence of women, distinguishing it from the concept of *qiwāmah* (male guardianship/responsibility).[47] However, in classical exegesis, this principle was embedded within a system of economic reciprocity. Scholars such as al-Rāzī and al-Qurṭubī explained that the male share of inheritance was balanced by the requirements of the *mahr* (dowry) and *nafaqa* (maintenance)—creating a situation where there was "effectively no advantage" for either party—based on the assumption that the wife remained in the home.[48] A shift occurred when the principle of private ownership was detached from that reciprocal system and applied to the reality of income-earning wives. Because tradition lacked a category for a wife's income as *nafaqa*, her contribution was labelled using existing categories, such as a gift (*hadiyyah*). Consequently, this protective norm became an isolated rule, severed from the web of obligations that originally

[43] Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Ada? Suami Nganggur Malah Nyuruh Istri Bekerja.!"

[44] Buya Yahya [@buyayahya_albahjah], "Suami Tak Memberi Nafkah Karena Tak Mampu Bekerja, Memang Ada Hak Bagi Istri Untuk Berpisah."

[45] Buya Yahya [@buyayahya_albahjah].

[46] Buya Yahya [@buyayahya_albahjah].

[47] Az-Zuhaylī, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Munīr Fī Al-'Aqīdah Wa Al-Sharī'ah Wa Al-Manhaj*, 5:52.

[48] Al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ Al-Ghayb*, 10:70–71; Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān*, 5:169.

supported it, making it vulnerable to subversion by the very parties it was intended to constrain.

Sociologically, this shift can be explained by the changing dynamics of religious authority within the global media landscape. Islamic authority is no longer confined to the interplay between texts, discursive methods, and the expertise of religious scholars; instead, the pluralization of the landscape has fostered a multiplicity of authorities.[49] In this context, texts circulate detached from the discursive frameworks that once bound them. Consequently, Qur'anic verses, hadith, and legal norms are juxtaposed without an overarching legal system to connect them. The systemic interrelationship between inheritance, the dowry (*mahr*), and maintenance (*nafaqa*) is abandoned because these concepts cannot be condensed into simple, numbered points. Meanwhile, a proliferation of voices claiming interpretive authority has created a "cacophony" of competing orthodoxies, within which scripturalist readings offer an appealing sense of simplicity and stability.[50] Formulations based on equality and numbered lists address this need by providing standalone norms that are portable and ready for use in domestic negotiations. The result is a version of Qur'anic meaning that is concise enough to circulate widely and definitive enough to serve as a clear guide, yet too detached from its original systemic context to truly guarantee the justice it purports to uphold.

This process of assembling texts essentially produces a form of pseudo-thematic exegesis: verses from different surahs are gathered under a single theme to create the appearance of a unified teaching, even though each verse is read in isolation from its original context and message. While the numbered format borrows the methodological authority of thematic exegesis, its actual operation replicates an atomistic approach—a tendency to fixate on the wording of a verse in isolation, leading to norms being derived from phrases never intended as legal rulings.[51] For example, a verse regarding the *mahr* (dower) is expanded into a basis for claims over a wife's entire income, while the *qiwāmah* verse is reduced solely to a justification for financial maintenance (*nafaqa*). In this arrangement, Qur'anic authority no longer resides in the verse as part of a unified revelation but is instead lent to the normative formulations constructed upon it. Because each verse stands as a detached proof-text, the assembly is open to extension by the

[49] Peter Mandaville, "Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 2 (March 1, 2007): 101–15, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407074998.

[50] Volpi and Turner, "Introduction: Making Islamic Authority Matter."

[51] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 2–3.

audience with other references or even used for opposing purposes—such as by a husband flipping the logic of personal ownership. This fragmented and extrinsic treatment of the Qur'an finds a new form on digital screens: an exegesis that appears thematically cohesive yet functions as a collection of ready-made, atomistic proof-texts.

The dynamics of this assembly process both expand upon and refine two major perspectives in the study of digital exegesis. The first views social media exegesis as a democratizing effort that presents the Qur'an in a simple, engaging, and responsive manner for young women.[52] The second adopts a more critical stance, highlighting how a casual visual aesthetic often conceals conservative messages regarding QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34.[53] However, both perspectives focus on presentation formats or ideology without addressing the actual mechanisms by which verses are assembled into doctrine. At this juncture, the analysis in this paper complements studies on thematic exegesis in Indonesia, which have noted a growing emphasis on practical, solution-oriented approaches.[54] In the digital realm, this reductionism reaches an extreme: the thematic format is retained as a visual arrangement, while the underlying methodology disappears. The central issue with digital exegesis is not merely simplification or ideology but rather a form of atomism masquerading as a thematic approach—one that shifts the authority of the Qur'anic verse onto normative formulations that are malleable and reversible.

The Agency of Digital Audiences: The Conflict Between Hierarchical Preaching and Textual Authority in *Qiwāmah* Contestation

The digital space creates opportunities for audiences to contest the meaning of QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34. This occurs because religious authority no longer resides in a single source;

[52] Fadhli Lukman, "Digital Hermeneutics and A New Face of The Qur`an Commentary: The Qur`an in Indonesian`s Facebook," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 56, no. 1 (June 14, 2018): 95–120, https://doi.org/10.14421/AJIS.2018.561.95-120; Rasidin Rasidin et al., "Quranic Interpretation on Instagram: The Shift from Traditional to Digital Platforms in Indonesia," *TAJDID: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin* 24, no. 1 (June 30, 2025): 376–406, https://doi.org/10.30631/tjd.v24i1.642; Eva F. Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Daʿwa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia," *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5, no. 1–2 (February 14, 2018): 68–99, https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340085.

[53] Wai Weng Hew, "The Art of Dakwah: Social Media, Visual Persuasion and the Islamist Propagation of Felix Siauw," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (January 2, 2018): 61–79, https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416757; Falah and Riyanta, "Digital Patriarchy: How Indonesian Islamic Preachers Construct Gender Asymmetry through YouTube Fatwas."

[54] Lilik Ummi Kaltsum and Ahmad Syaifuddin Amin, "The Development of Qur'anic Thematic Exegesis in Indonesia: Historical Landscape and Shifts of Authority," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 25, no. 2 (September 20, 2024): 296–319, https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v25i2.5422.

rather, it is distributed across multiple layers: the hierarchical authority of religious leaders, the structural authority of institutions, the ideological authority of shared beliefs, and the textual authority of sacred teachings.[55] When one layer of authority is challenged, audiences can turn to another. Simultaneously, participatory culture brings everyday religious experiences into the public discourse, generating tension between "lived religion" and institutional authority.[56] In this context, the acceptance of exegesis is no longer a passive act but an active process of weighing doctrine against real-life experiences. Regarding the *qiwāmah* verse, this process of weighing options leads to a dilemma left unresolved by digital content: Is a wife who is not financially supported obliged to exercise patience (*ṣabr*), or is she entitled to terminate the marriage (*faskh*)?

This form of contestation is most evident in the comments sections, where challenges are directed squarely at the authority of the interpreter themselves. The categorization of women into "foolish" and "smart" types in @buyayahya_albahjah's lecture indeed garnered widespread support, as reflected in the comment: "A great and smart wife chooses the second option, even though a wife who provides financial support earns three times the reward" (185 likes).[57] However, at the same time, other audience members challenged this labeling by contrasting the kiai's stance with the Prophetic example: "I feel Prophet Muhammad would not call women who decide to divorce 'stupid,' Ustadz" (32 likes), and "Yet the Messenger of Allah himself permitted and legitimized it... It is very unwise for a prominent religious scholar to speak like that" (14 likes).[58] Some women even openly rejected the label based on an awareness of their legal rights: "Buya may judge us as foolish or whatever else, but religion certainly offers a form of justice that one can choose to pursue" (102 likes), and "I chose divorce, so I consider myself smart" (35 likes).[59] This challenge to authority extended to the interpretation of the traditional text *'Uqūd al-Lujjayn*—criticized as "playing the victim while citing scripture"—and to accusations that the content merely consisted of the admin "venting personal

[55] Heidi Campbell, "Who's Got the Power? Religious Authority and the Internet," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12, no. 3 (April 2007): 1043–62, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00362.x.

[56] Benjamin Burroughs and Gavin Feller, "Religious Memetics: Institutional Authority in Digital/Lived Religion," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 39, no. 4 (October 28, 2015): 357–77, https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859915603096.

[57] Buya Yahya [@buyayahya_albahjah], "Suami Tak Memberi Nafkah Karena Tak Mampu Bekerja, Memang Ada Hak Bagi Istri Untuk Berpisah."

[58] Buya Yahya [@buyayahya_albahjah].

[59] Buya Yahya [@buyayahya_albahjah].

grievances,"[60] accompanied by suggestions that matters regarding the legal boundaries of marriage be left "to the experts... within the jurisdiction of the KUA (Office of Religious Affairs)."[61]

Apart from claims to authority, the second point of contention is grounded in real economic experiences that are not addressed by the normative statements in the content. The audience challenged the idealistic assumption—that husbands are always able to provide for themselves—by highlighting the reality of the tight job market: "What about husbands who don't work because it is difficult to find employment and there are parents who still need care?" Additionally, testimony from the field noted that in the factory sector, "there are so few job vacancies for men, and they are often sent home."[62] The voices of men further reinforce this reality; one husband recounted his experience of being affected by "mass retrenchment," working odd jobs for two years until finally he was "kicked out by his wife in a high voice."[63] Through the lens of lived religion, the audience uses the hadith narrative from the lecture to critically distinguish between structural incompetence and moral negligence: "The husband is not lazy but works diligently but is always broke" (3 likes), and this situation is tolerated "as long as the husband doesn't avoid work out of laziness or excessive reliance on his wife."[64] Conversely, the experiences shared by women reveal a genuine double burden, such as wives who "come home from work being shouted at" by unemployed husbands, or daughters who "have to work because their father doesn't support them" (12 likes).[65] These testimonies highlight the problem within the context of changing times, where wives take up careers "either by their own choice or because economic demands require it."[66]

The culmination of the two previous dynamics manifested in the third contestation, which revived the option of divorce (*faskh*)—a right that is legally recognized in jurisprudence but labeled by preachers as a "foolish" woman's choice. Some audience members straightforwardly emphasized the validity of this law: "Divorce is also

[60] Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Ada? Suami Nganggur Malah Nyuruh Istri Bekerja.!"
[61] Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview].
[62] Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview].
[63] Buya Yahya [@buyayahya_albahjah], "Suami Tak Memberi Nafkah Karena Tak Mampu Bekerja, Memang Ada Hak Bagi Istri Untuk Berpisah."
[64] Buya Yahya [@buyayahya_albahjah].
[65] Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Ada? Suami Nganggur Malah Nyuruh Istri Bekerja.!"
[66] Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview].

permissible and not forbidden... why marry if the harm is for the one doing it" (2 likes),[67] "Isn't it okay to just divorce like that?", and "If I had a husband like that, I'd leave him immediately." Others agreed with the option to stay but imposed strict conditions: "I agree to the second one as long as the husband is pious and can be a good *imām*... [otherwise] it's better to divorce" (2 likes). Through logical considerations, the audience also distinguished between purely economic challenges and the husband's bad behavior: "If it's an economic test and the husband behaves well, God willing, we can try, but if it's an economic test because of the husband's behavior... Is the wife obliged to understand and endure???" (21 likes).[68] The limits of patience (*ṣabr*) were then drawn dramatically through existential questions left unanswered by the content, such as "What about domestic violence and temperament?" (2 likes)[69] and "Should we be patient until we die?" On the opposite side, some maintained the choice to persist by shifting expectations of justice to the eschatological realm: "It doesn't matter. Allah will restore my rights later in the afterlife,"[70] or by crudely echoing the speaker's categorization: "Just choose to be a stupid woman or an intelligent woman; the goal is this world or the goal is the afterlife or heaven."[71]

This dynamic illustrates a shift from disagreement over legal consequences to a moral hierarchy. The classical exegesis tradition presents two options for wives who are not financially supported: the Syāfiʿī and Mālikī schools permit *faskh* (annulment) to preserve the purpose of marriage, while the Ḥanafī school requires granting a suspension based on QS. al-Baqarah [2]:280.[72] Digital readings maintain these two positions but alter their status: patience is promoted as evidence of the intelligence of faith, whereas *faskh* is disparaged. However, audience interpretations counter this shift. By affirming the legality of divorce and rejecting violence, the audience revives aspects of tradition that classical interpreters suppressed—such as the category of *nushūz* for husbands due to harsh behavior and the prohibition against mistreating wives.[73] Consequently, the plurality of Islamic jurisprudence, which the speaker sought to level, was in fact critically restored by the audience.

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[67] Buya Yahya [@buyayahya_albahjah], "Suami Tak Memberi Nafkah Karena Tak Mampu Bekerja, Memang Ada Hak Bagi Istri Untuk Berpisah."

[68] Buya Yahya [@buyayahya_albahjah].

[69] Buya Yahya [@buyayahya_albahjah].

[70] Quranic Storytelling [@quranreview], "Ada? Suami Nganggur Malah Nyuruh Istri Bekerja.!"

[71] Buya Yahya [@buyayahya_albahjah], "Suami Tak Memberi Nafkah Karena Tak Mampu Bekerja, Memang Ada Hak Bagi Istri Untuk Berpisah."

[72] Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān*, 5:169.

[73] Al-Qurṭubī, 5:169.

This shift from a legal debate over meaning to a moral hierarchy can be attributed to the evolving nature of religious authority within the media landscape. Popular religious figures often transform Islamic doctrinal discourse into practical discussions focused on individual effort as a path to spiritual piety—a process that simultaneously relativizes religious authority itself.[74] In short video formats, complex jurisprudential disagreements are distilled into practical choices evaluated against a woman's personal virtues. However, this relativization of authority on social media creates an opportunity for audiences to reconsider the legitimacy of those choices. Because online religious authority is stratified, audiences who challenge a preacher's hierarchical authority can easily turn to textual authority—specifically, the Prophetic example that guarantees the right to separation.[75] Consequently, comment sections serve not merely as venues for opinion but as emancipatory spaces where a legal ruling—previously moralized by the media—is reclaimed as a legal right available for the audience to exercise.

Through this dynamic, comment sections function as spaces for corrective interpretation from below, where audiences resolve the meanings of verses left open-ended by the content itself. If *qiwāmah* (male guardianship/authority) is made conditional upon financial provision (*nafaqa*), audiences apply a parallel logic: a wife's patience is likewise conditional upon her husband's behavior. QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34 is thus reconstructed as a reciprocal agreement binding both parties. The way audiences construct this reading mirrors Fazlur Rahman's "double movement": starting from the contemporary context, referencing Prophetic precedent, and then applying it to domestic issues.[76] While this participation marks a democratization of digital interpretation, it also entails specific limitations; audiences selectively restore jurisprudential plurality based on their own experiences, just as content creators selectively highlight specific clauses of a verse to suit their messages. The process of selection is not erased but rather doubled: digital exegesis emerges from the encounter of two mutually corrective selection processes.

This dynamic of corrective interpretation ultimately shifts the focus of studies on digital religious authority from competition among discourse producers to active interpretive practices at the audience level. Most prior research views the contestation of authority as a rivalry among producers—whether concerning the diminishing role of

[74] Nabil Echchaibi, "From Audio Tapes to Video Blogs: The Delocalisation of Authority in Islam," *Nations and Nationalism* 17, no. 1 (January 2011): 25–44, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2010.00468.x.

[75] Campbell, "Who's Got the Power? Religious Authority and the Internet."

[76] Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, 5.

moderate Islamic organizations *vis-à-vis* new digital preachers[77] or the visual strategies religious influencers employ to establish credibility[78]. In these studies, audiences are generally positioned as targets rather than active interpreters. While some research notes audience challenges to gender-biased digital *fatwās*,[79] these challenges are often reduced to a dichotomy of progressive versus conservative narrative clashes.[80] This article's analysis reveals the opposite: audiences rejecting the label of "dim-witted" do not rely on progressive feminist discourse but rather on Prophetic precedents and classical Islamic jurisprudence options to challenge preachers using the tools of tradition itself. This pattern aligns with findings regarding Indonesian social media users who reactivate theological concepts—such as *riyā'* (ostentation)—to navigate the dilemmas of digital piety.[81] This article extends those findings from the realm of the ethics of piety to the realm of interpretive law: what audiences revive is not merely a theological concept but the diversity of legal rulings from various *madhhabs* (schools of thought) that had previously been sidelined. Thus, the digital contestation over the *qiwāmah* verse cannot be reduced to an ideological clash between progressives and conservatives; rather, it represents a form of selective recovery from within the tradition itself.

Conclusion

The digital sphere—often assumed to liberate Qur'anic interpretation from hierarchical constraints—does not, in fact, dismantle *qiwāmah*; instead, it sustains the concept through a new rationale. An analysis of four Instagram accounts reveals that the meaning of QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34 is constructed through three interconnected interpretive movements. At the selection stage, content creators neutralize, merge, or bypass the clause *bimā faḍḍala* (due to [God's] favoring) and remain silent on the segment regarding *nushūz*

[77] Wahyudi Akmaliah, "The Demise of Moderate Islam: New Media, Contestation, and Reclaiming Religious Authorities," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 1 (May 29, 2020): 1–24, https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v10i1.1-24.

[78] Harry Febrian, "Visualizing Authority: Rise of the Religious Influencers on the Instagram," *Social Media + Society* 10, no. 4 (October 6, 2024), https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241286850.

[79] Falah and Riyanta, "Digital Patriarchy: How Indonesian Islamic Preachers Construct Gender Asymmetry through YouTube Fatwas."

[80] Nisa, "Muslim Women in Contemporary Indonesia: Online Conflicting Narratives behind the Women Ulama Congress."

[81] 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.

(marital discord/recalcitrance) and the verse's context of revelation; consequently, the legitimacy of the husband's status shifts from inherent superiority (*faḍl*) to the obligation of financial maintenance (*nafaqa*). At the assembly stage, verses and hadith from various chapters are woven into a pseudo-thematic interpretation that protects a wife's earnings as her private property (*milk*) while recognizing her economic contribution merely as a gift (*hadiyyah*). Because each verse functions as an isolated proof-text, this normative formulation is easily extended or even inverted. At the contestation stage, the audience challenges the moralization of the choice between patience (*ṣabr*) and divorce (*faskh*) by reviving Prophetic precedents and the diversity of legal schools (madhhabs) that had previously been silenced. This study suggests that digital interpretations of the *qiwāmah* verse do not represent a complete break from tradition but rather a selective continuity born from the encounter between two forms of selection: the creators' selection and the audience's counter-selection. It is within this encounter that both *qiwāmah* and patience become conditional, leading the verse to be read as a reciprocal agreement, even though the underlying hierarchical structure remains intact.

A comparative analysis of classical exegesis, combined with digital observation within the frameworks of the mediatization of religion and networked religion, proves useful in revealing the "logic of the medium" underlying the highly practical presentation of scriptural interpretation. This approach tracks not only the content itself but also the aspects of the verses left unaddressed, the strands of tradition reactivated, and the ways audiences weigh these teachings against the realities of their lives. However, this study has certain limitations: the data is confined to four accounts on a single platform and focuses on manifest data (text, visuals, and comments) without incorporating in-depth interviews with content creators or audiences. Furthermore, the gender identities and socio-economic backgrounds of commenters could not be verified, and "like" counts cannot serve as a reliable gauge of general public opinion. These limitations simultaneously open avenues for future research, such as computational analysis of cross-platform comment corpora (including short-form video formats) or ethnographic reception studies involving married couples in economically vulnerable situations. Such future approaches would enable measurement of the extent to which digital interpretations of verses concerning gender relations genuinely shape real-world decisions and negotiations within contemporary Muslim households.

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The authors 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 research is based on publicly available Instagram content analyzed through non-participatory netnography. No private data were accessed. All commenters were anonymized, and no interaction with account owners or users occurred. The study complies with platform terms of service and standard ethical guidelines for digital media research. Formal institutional ethics approval was not required.

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