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Digital Interpretive Authority in Instagram Reels: Johanna Pink's Perspective

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital media has transformed the production, dissemination, and reception of religious authority in contemporary Muslim societies. Instagram Reels, as an algorithm-driven visual platform, has facilitated a shift in Quranic interpretive authority from traditional religious scholars to digital content creators. This study aims to examine the construction and transformation of Quranic interpretive authority in Instagram Reels through Johanna Pink's perspective on the decentralization of tafsir authority. Employing a qualitative approach with a content analysis design, the study investigates religious content published by the Instagram accounts @dipajang.id and @quranic.ayaaat. Data were collected through documentation of videos, captions, visual imagery, audio elements, and audience interactions. Data analysis was conducted using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, focusing on textual, discursive, and sociocultural dimensions. The findings reveal that Quranic verses are recontextualized in ways that align with platform algorithms and audience preferences. While @dipajang.id frames Quranic messages within narratives of productivity and hustle culture, @quranic.ayaaat positions them as resources for emotional validation and self-healing. The study identifies the emergence of performative authority, whereby religious legitimacy is increasingly derived from algorithmic visibility, audience engagement, and aesthetic presentation rather than traditional exegetical expertise. These findings highlight the need to expand contemporary tafsir scholarship to address the dynamics of Quranic interpretation and authority formation within digital religious environments.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the nature of Islamic da'wah in Indonesia has undergone a significant transformation (Ulfa, 2024). Whereas in the past religious authority rested almost entirely with ulama who had been educated in pesantren or formal Islamic higher education institutions, today anyone can emerge as a conveyor of religious messages armed with digital devices and internet access (Halim et al., 2026; Ramadhani, 2026). This change does not merely signify a shift in communication mediums but represents a fundamental transformation in the structure of the production, distribution, and consumption of religious knowledge

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(Tasya & Siswanto, 2026). Authority, which was previously concentrated in specific religious institutions and figures, is now being decentralized through digital spaces that enable broader public participation (Campbell et al., 2019; Pink, 2019; Yasin, 2025).

One digital space that plays a key role in this process is social media, particularly Instagram Reels. This short-form video feature is designed to maximize user engagement through a combination of eye-catching visuals, trending audio, and concise, easy-to-understand narratives. These characteristics not only influence how information is conveyed but also shape the way religious messages are produced, packaged, and received by audiences. In this context, algorithmic logic and platform aesthetics are factors that help determine the visibility and popularity of a religious message in the digital space (Widayoko et al., 2025).

As the country with the world's largest Muslim population, Indonesia provides a highly relevant context for examining this phenomenon. High internet penetration and social media usage have given rise to a new generation of content creators who actively produce and disseminate Islamic messages (Alqohar & Maharani, 2026). Some creators even have millions of followers and are able to reach a very wide audience. However, this popularity does not always correlate with their level of Islamic scholarship. As a result, the boundaries between traditional religious authority and digital authority are becoming increasingly blurred, giving rise to new dynamics in the practice of Quranic interpretation in the age of social media (Pink, 2018; Setyanoor et al., 2025).

Research on the relationship between sacred texts, social media, and digital technology has grown rapidly in recent years. One important study was conducted by (Abdullah & Istiqomah, 2025; Hakim et al., 2025), who examined interpretive practices on the Instagram account Quran Review. These studies found that verses from the Quran are recontextualized through the use of colloquial language, aesthetically pleasing visual illustrations, and themes that are trending among the younger generation. These findings indicate that Quranic narratives are adapted to the characteristics of social media, which prioritize visual appeal and emotional connection with the audience. According to Arminsa & Muchtar, (2026); Rafsanjani et al., (2026), a strong focus on visual logic and the appeal of social media has the potential to reduce the use of authoritative sources of interpretation and in-depth linguistic analysis, thereby giving rise to the phenomenon of the de-authorization of interpretation in the digital space.

Meanwhile, Baqir & Mashlahah, (2026); Razak & Haramain, (2025) reveal that religious content on short-form video platforms undergoes commodification through various mechanisms governed by the logic of the digital economy. This research indicates that verses from the Quran are packaged in such a way as to align with algorithmic preferences, monetized through audience engagement, and encourage creators to continually adapt to platform demands in order to maintain content visibility. In this context, sacred texts function not only as a medium for spiritual transmission but also as part of a mechanism for generating economic value. Consistent with these findings, religious symbols within the Mobile Legends online gaming community are recontextualized as strategies for increasing popularity, shaping community identity, and generating financial profit. Through an analysis of the TikTok accounts Abiazkakiaa and Majelis Nurul Legend, Fadhilah demonstrates that social media has facilitated the transformation of religious outreach into part of the digital content industry, which commodifies both religious messages and their audience.

Furthermore, various studies on digital religion indicate that platform algorithms are playing an increasingly significant role in determining the visibility, reach, and legitimacy of a religious narrative (Zaenuri, 2024). Research on digital

religious authority also indicates that the number of followers, engagement levels, and the virality of content are now emerging as new sources of legitimacy that, in many cases, rival formal scholarly-based religious authority (Saputra et al., 2025). Furthermore, social media opens up broader spaces for participation, allowing non-traditional actors to engage in the production of religious meaning and the interpretation of the Quran. Based on these various studies, at least ten key findings can be identified, namely: i) the recontextualization of Quranic verses on social media; ii) the use of popular language as a medium for interpretation; iii) the dominance of visual aesthetics in the delivery of religious messages; iv) a decline in the use of authoritative sources of interpretation; v) the emergence of the phenomenon of the de-authorization of interpretation; vi) the commodification of religious content; vii) the commodification of audiences through platform monetization; viii) creators' adaptation to algorithmic logic; ix) the transformation of da'wah into part of the digital content industry; and x) the strengthening of religious legitimacy based on popularity, engagement, and the virality of content. These findings indicate that digital transformation not only changes the medium through which religious messages are conveyed but also shifts the structure of authority, patterns of legitimacy, and mechanisms of Islamic knowledge production in the digital public sphere.

Nevertheless, these various studies still leave a significant research gap that warrants further investigation. Wildan, (2025) study focuses on the epistemological aspects and de-theorization of interpretation in the digital space, while the research by Fianto & Qorib, (2022) places greater emphasis on the analysis of the commodification of religion through Vincent Mosco's media political economy perspective. To date, no study has been found that empirically examines the dialectical relationship between the textual structure of the Quran, the visual aesthetics of Instagram Reels, the logic of platform algorithms, and contemporary ideological framings such as hustle culture and self-healing using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. Furthermore, previous research has not adequately explained how the interaction between platform algorithms, creators' visual strategies, and audience reception shapes new forms of legitimacy in the practice of Quranic interpretation on social media. Thus, there is a clear gap between the theory of interpretive authoritywhich has long been based on scholarly capacity and the reality of digital media, which allows non-clerical actors to gain religious legitimacy through popularity, algorithmic visibility, and audience engagement.

A search of the Scopus database for studies on Digital Tafsir found 31 documents from 2023 to 2026. The analysis clearly shows that no studies have yet been found related to the authority of Digital Tafsir in Instagram Reels. Below is a visualization of the VOSviewer bibliometric analysis based on the themes of digital tafsir, Quranic media, and social media.

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Fig. 1. Vosviewer visualization analysis related to digital exegesis, Quranic media, and social media (Scopus data base, 2023–2026)

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of Johanna Pink's theory of the decentralization of interpretive authority with Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the practice of recontextualizing Quranic verses in the short-form video format of Instagram Reels. Unlike previous studies that focused on the de-authorization of interpretation or the commodification of religion, this study specifically examines the dialectical relationship between the Quranic text, visual aesthetics, algorithmic logic, and the construction of digital ideology. Another novelty lies in the use of the accounts @dipajang.id and @quranic.ayaaat as case studies representing two major trends in the recontextualization of Quranic verses on social media: productivity-oriented (hustle culture) and psychological validation (self-healing). Through this approach, this study also proposes the concept of performative authority as a new analytical category to explain forms of religious legitimacy constructed through popularity, audience engagement, and algorithmic visibility rather than solely through the scholarly authority of traditional exegesis.

The implications of this study encompass theoretical, practical, and social aspects. Theoretically, this study expands the field of contemporary exegesis by demonstrating that the processes of producing and legitimizing the meanings of the Quran in the digital age no longer take place exclusively within academic and religious institutional settings, but also through the algorithmic mechanisms of social media. Practically, this study contributes to strengthening the public's digital literacy and critical exegetical literacy in understanding how religious messages are constructed, disseminated, and negotiated in the digital environment. Socially, the findings of this study can serve as a basis for consideration by academics, Islamic educational institutions, religious authorities, content creators, and policymakers in formulating strategies to strengthen scholarly authority, develop ethics for digital da'wah, and improve the quality of religious content on social media. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the development of the theory of digital interpretive authority while enriching research on the living Quran and digital Islamic studies in the algorithmic era.

This phenomenon ultimately raises a fundamental academic question: Who has the right to interpret the Quran, and on what basis is the legitimacy of such interpretation granted? In the classical Islamic scholarly tradition, the authority to interpret the Quran generally rests with scholars who are well-versed in various supporting disciplines, such as Arabic linguistics, 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, hadith, usul al-fiqh, and other methodological frameworks. However, in the digital age, these

boundaries have become increasingly blurred with the emergence of new actors who gain legitimacy through popularity and social media exposure.

Therefore, this study aims to systematically examine this phenomenon through an analysis of Instagram Reels content published by the accounts @dipajang.id and @quranic.ayaaat as case studies. This study aims to analyze how platform algorithms and visual aesthetics shape the construction of Quranic exegesis discourse on Instagram Reels, how this process reflects the decentralization of exegetical authority from Johanna Pink's perspective, and what implications this has for the transformation of religious authority and the development of exegetical scholarship in the digital age.

METHODS

This study aims to examine the construction of Quranic interpretive authority in Instagram Reels content within an algorithm-based digital space. To achieve this objective, the study employs a qualitative approach focused on understanding the meaning, context, and power relations at work behind the production and distribution of religious messages on social media. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to examine in depth the process of recontextualizing Quranic verses, the formation of ideology, and the dynamics of religious legitimacy aspects that cannot be explained through a quantitative approach. In this context, social media is understood not merely as a means of communication, but as a discursive arena where various actors produce, negotiate, and reproduce religious meanings (Cresell, 2016; Efendi et al., 2026; Engkizar et al., 2026; Iphofen & Tolich, 2018; Istiqomah et al., 2025; Muhlasin et al., 2026; Rosyadi & Athari, 2025).

Methods and Types

This study employs a qualitative approach using content analysis combined with Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model. Content analysis is used to identify and organize the elements of the message contained in Instagram Reels posts, while Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used to uncover the relationships between language, power, and ideology embedded in the text, visuals, and digital communication practices. According to Fairclough, (1992); Munfarida, (2014), discourse not only represents social reality but also plays a role in shaping and maintaining specific power relations. Therefore, the use of Critical Discourse Analysis is considered relevant for analyzing how verses from the Quran are recontextualized through algorithmic logic, visual aesthetics, and ideological interests that emerge within the social media ecosystem. This study focuses on three dimensions of Fairclough's analysis: the text dimension, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice (Fairclough, 1992).

Data Sources

The research data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained from Instagram Reels posts on the @dipajang.id and @quranic.ayaaat accounts, which were selected using purposive sampling. The selection of these two accounts was based on several criteria, namely: i) they consistently produce content containing quotations or interpretations of Quranic verses; ii) they have more than 20,000 followers, thereby qualifying as influential actors in the digital da'wah space; iii) they represent distinct aesthetic and communication strategies in conveying religious messages; and iv) they actively and consistently post Islamic content. The research corpus consists of a number of Reels posts that meet the following criteria: they explicitly contain quotations from Quranic verses, have an engagement rate above the account average, and feature visual elements that represent the key characteristics of each creator. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from academic literature related to digital exegesis, religion and social media, Johanna

Pink's theory of the decentralization of authority, and Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992; Pink, 2019).

Instruments

The primary instrument in qualitative research is the researcher (the "human instrument"), who plays a role in the processes of data collection, interpretation, and analysis (Aryasutha et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2024; 2025; Sugiyono, 2020). To support this process, this study uses documentation sheets and a digital observation format that includes: i) screenshots of visual elements in Reels; ii) transcriptions of text appearing in the video or captions; iii) identification of audio elements, background music, and voice narration; and iv) recording of supporting data such as the number of followers, comments, views, and reposts. To ensure the accuracy of the interpretation of the analyzed Quranic verses, each verse was cross-referenced and compared with at least two authoritative sources of exegesis: The Study Quran and The Quran and Its Translation, published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted in stages following Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis model. In the textual dimension, the study analyzes word choice, narrative structure, the use of Quranic verses, visual symbols, and aesthetic elements used in Reels content. In the discourse practice dimension, the study examines how content is produced, distributed, and consumed within Instagram's algorithm-based ecosystem, including creators' strategies for building audience engagement. Furthermore, in the sociocultural practice dimension, the study examines the relationship between the produced content and the broader social context, such as hustle culture, self-healing trends, the commodification of religion, and the transformation of religious authority in the digital age (Amin, 2025; Armita, 2025; Engkizar et al., 2023; 2025; Fairclough, 1992; Pink, 2019). The results of the analysis of these three dimensions are then interpreted using Johanna Pink's perspective on the decentralization of interpretive authority to explain the emergence of new forms of religious legitimacy in social media spaces.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations that need to be openly acknowledged. The research corpus focused only on two Instagram accounts; therefore, the findings are not intended to be generalized to the entire digital interpretation ecosystem in Indonesia. Furthermore, this study does not include an empirical analysis of audience responses to and interpretations of the content examined. Therefore, future research is recommended to incorporate the perspectives of social media users through interviews, surveys, or digital ethnography in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of interpretive authority in the digital space.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Decentralization of Interpretive Authority: Johanna Pink

In her study of contemporary Islamic exegesis, Johanna Pink identifies a phenomenon she calls the decentralization of interpretive authority. According to her, the process of producing exegesis in the modern era is no longer centered on traditional religious scholar institutions but has spread to various new actors, facilitated by the expansion of communication media and the marketplace of ideas (Pink, 2019). Pink argues that media do not merely function as neutral channels for conveying messages. Media actively shape the content and the ways in which messages are produced and received. In this context, an interpreter's authority is increasingly determined by their ability to adapt to the demands of the medium, rather than solely by the depth of their exegetical methodology. Digital platforms, within Pink's framework, function as discourse markets where interpretations compete for public attention.

It is important to note that Pink does not normatively assess this phenomenon of decentralization as purely negative. He acknowledges that the expansion of participation in the production of religious discourse can reflect the vitality and adaptability of Islam. However, Pink also cautions that the absence of scholarly-based selection mechanisms has the potential to produce distorted and misleading discourse. The tension between these two possibilities is the focus of the analysis in this study.

Critical Discourse Analysis: Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

Norman Fairclough developed a Critical Discourse Analysis model that dissects discourse through three dialectically interrelated dimensions. This model was chosen for its ability to link micro-linguistic analysis with macro-social and ideological contexts a methodological necessity for examining social media content that is rich in cultural and economic context (Fairclough, 1992).

First, the textual dimension (micro) encompasses an analysis of word choice, sentence structure, visual elements, and other semiotic elements. In this study, the textual dimension includes the selection of quoted Quranic verses, supplementary text added by the creator, and visual elements such as typography and image composition.

Second, the discourse practice dimension (meso), which relates to the processes of text production and consumption. In the context of Reels, this includes how content is produced to meet the demands of Instagram's algorithm, the selection of audio and visual aesthetics that align with popular trends, as well as patterns of content distribution and consumption by the audience. Third, the sociocultural practice dimension (macro), which analyzes the social and ideological contexts underlying the discourse.

Corpus: Basic Empirical Data

Before proceeding to the discourse analysis, it is important to present the empirical profiles of the two accounts under study. The following data was collected directly from the Instagram app and used as the sample for the analysis of 20 Reels from each account.

Table 1. Empirical Profile of the Corpus

Indicator	@dipajang.id	@quranic.ayaaat
Total Followers	±31.000	±20.700
Average Comments per Reel	±200	±10
Average Number of Reposts per Reel	±12.200	±16
Reels Containing Quranic Verses/Hadith Quotations	20/20 (100%)	20/20 (100%)
Reels with Secular Background Music	18/20 (90%)	0/20 (0%)
Reels Featuring Hustle/Aesthetic Visuals	17/20 (85%)	3/20 (15%)
Reels Featuring Melancholic Visuals	2/20 (10%)	16/20 (80%)

The data in Table 1 reveal several key patterns that serve as entry points for discourse analysis. First, the @dipajang account has more followers, an average of more comments on its content, and more reposts; however, the @quranic.ayaaat account is less likely to use secular audio or background music it prefers not to use music at all, and even Islamic instruments are rarely used in some of its content. Despite these differences, both accounts share a commonality: their content includes quotations from the Quran and the Hadith.

The Visual Aesthetics of Reels and the Commodification of Quranic Verses: The @dipajang.id Account

First is the analysis of the textual dimension. The Reel selected as a representative case is a post by @dipajang.id featuring an excerpt from Quranic verse Al-Kahfi: 39.

وَلَوْلَآ اِذْ دَخَلْتَ جَنَّتَكَ قُلْتَ مَا شَآءَ اللّٰهُ ۙ لَا قُوَّةَ اِلَّا بِاللّٰهِ ۚ اِنْ تَرَنِ اَنَا۠ اَقَلَّ مِنْكَ مَالًا وَّوَلَدًاۚ

Meaning: *And why did you, when you entered your garden, not say, 'What Allah willed [has occurred]; there is no power except in Allah '? Although you see me less than you in wealth and children* (QS. Al-Kahfi: 39)

In its original text, this verse is part of a dialogue between two owners of orchards: one who is arrogant about his wealth and another who reminds him to utter the shahada a declaration of faith in the will and power of Allah SWT who is above all things (Qolilah, 2025).

Theologically, the core meaning of this verse is reverence toward Allah: one should not boast of worldly possessions without acknowledging that all of it is a trust from Allah that can be taken away at any time. This message is intended to curb arrogance, not to encourage a fighting spirit in the face of adversity.

However, in the @dipajang.id post, the creator added the sentence: "Don't give up, because miracles happen when we're on the verge of despair." This sentence does not contain any new theological information, but rather a generic motivational message drawn from popular self-help traditions. The imposition of this text effectively shifts the verse's function from a message of submission to God to a source of worldly encouragement. This is what can be identified as a moment of recontextualization at the textual level, when a text is taken out of its original context and inserted into a substantially different discursive context.

Second is the analysis of the discourse practice dimension. At the discourse practice level, the choice of audio is the most decisive element. The @dipajang.id account uses the song "Fix You" by Coldplay as background music. In discourse practice analysis, this choice of audio is not a neutral aesthetic decision: Coldplay's song is a product of Western pop culture that carries specific emotional associations in the minds of its listeners loss, hope, and healing. The combination of the Quranic verse and this audio creates what, in Critical Discourse Analysis terminology, is referred to as intertextuality where the meaning of a text is shaped by its interaction with the other texts surrounding it.

The chosen visuals reinforce this framing: an aesthetically pleasing desk with a laptop, coffee, and houseplants. In media semiotics, these images serve as visual codes that trigger specific associations in the audience's minds: productivity, career success, and the lifestyle of an urban professional. When verses from the Quran are placed against this kind of backdrop, what occurs is what Pink identifies as the influence of the media market, in which religious messages are tailored to serve the tastes and needs of a specific audience segment in this case, young people who are focused on productivity and achievement (Pink, 2019).

Third is the sociocultural analysis. At the sociocultural level, the @dipajang.id practice operates within the ideological ecosystem of hustle culture a worldview that celebrates relentless hard work as the highest value and measures success through quantifiable productivity. This ideology has permeated social media content culture extensively, particularly among young users.

What warrants analytical scrutiny is that in 17 of the 20 Reels analyzed (85%), the same pattern recurs: verses from the Quran are consistently placed within visual contexts aligned with the hustle culture ideology. This consistency is no coincidence; it reflects a conscious editorial choice by creators to target specific audience segments. High engagement data then signals Instagram's algorithm to distribute similar content even more widely, creating an amplification effect that reinforces one

particular interpretive model over others.

From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, this is a concrete example of how ideology operates through media texts: without explicit coercion, a worldview is communicated and normalized through the repetition of aesthetic patterns. In the context of Quranic interpretation, the impact is that millions of viewers repeatedly accept the hustke culture framework as a valid Islamic framework, even though that framework does not stem from recognized traditions (Alif et al., 2026). Below, the author has created an image related to the three Visual Aesthetics of Reels and the Commodification of Quranic Verses: the @dipajang.id account.

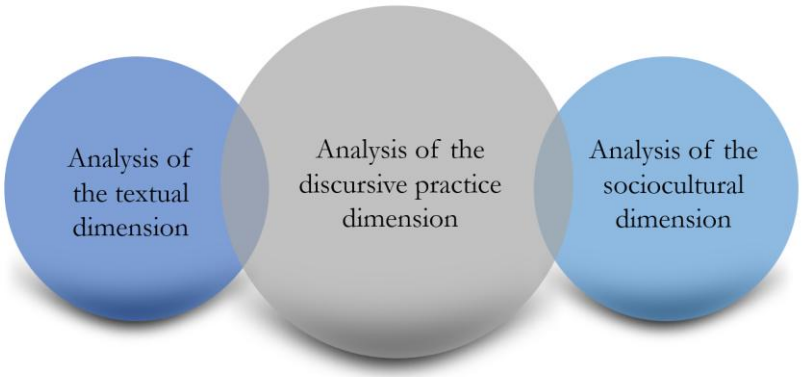


Fig 2. The Visual Aesthetics of Reels and the Commodification of Quranic Verses: The @dipajang.id Account

Reduction of Meaning for Emotional Validation: The @quranic.ayaaat Account

First is the analysis of the textual dimension. A representative example from @quranic.ayaaat is a Reel featuring the English translation of Quran 10:65: "Do not let their words sadden you." The choice of English already implies a non-neutral discursive decision: it targets a more cosmopolitan audience and places the Quran within a universal global framework (Andesra & Alfabanni, 2025; Riza & Zainuddin, 2023).

More critical than the choice of language is the way this verse is excerpted and presented. In its original context, QS. Yunus: 65 is part of a series of verses in which Allah consoles the Prophet Muhammad, who was facing pressure and ridicule from the Quraysh over the message he carried (DepagRI, 2019). The original message relates to a Prophet's steadfastness in carrying out his divine mandate, not individual resilience in the face of everyday criticism or social pressure.

The reduction of the verse to a single phrase and the removal of its context create what might be called a false universalization a process in which a message that was originally specific and contextual is stripped of its historical and theological content so that it can be applied to any situation. As a result, a verse that was meant to speak of faith and steadfastness in carrying out the prophetic mission has been transformed into a generic quote about ignoring what others say.

Second is the analysis of the discourse practice dimension. At the discourse practice level, @quranic.ayaaat constructs a consistent and well-calibrated aesthetic. Of the 20 Reels analyzed, 16 (80%) used visuals themed around a melancholic aesthetic: images of desolate nature, a solitary figure in a vast space, or the silhouette of an isolated person. The image of a solitary white horse against a dark background used in the main case study Reel is a perfect example of this aesthetic: it conveys a quiet beauty and a dignified solitude (Instragram, 2026).

Of the 20 Reels analyzed, the @quranic.ayaaat account almost universally avoided using secular audio or background music, instead creating a specific inner atmosphere for the audience as they processed the displayed verses of the Quran.

Within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, this illustrates how content production practices shape how texts are received: the audience processes the verses solely in silence and personal tranquility.

Third is the sociocultural analysis. At the sociocultural level, the @quranic.ayaaat practice operates within the context of the wellness spirituality trend sweeping the urban youth. As a global phenomenon, wellness spirituality is characterized by the pursuit of spiritual experiences that are personal, flexible, and therapeutic distinct from adherence to formal religious doctrines and institutions. In this context, the Quran is positioned not as a book of law or a belief system demanding total commitment, but rather as a source of tranquility that can be consumed at any time according to emotional needs. Illouz refers to a similar logic as emotional capitalism: where emotions including the need for spiritual tranquility are commodified and catered to by the market.

What needs to be critically examined is not merely the individual content of each Reel, but the cumulative effect of these posts. When 16 out of 20 Reels consistently position the Quran as an instrument of self-healing, the audience gradually constructs an understanding that the primary function of the Quran is to provide solace a construction that is theologically partial and inadequate. Within Pink's framework, this is an example of how the media market systematically shapes the reception process of sacred texts. Below, the author has created an illustration related to the three reductions in meaning for the sake of emotional validation: the @quranic.ayaaat account.

Performative Authority: The Conceptual Nature of Empirical Findings

Based on an analysis of the two cases above, this study proposes the concept of performative authority as an analytical category to describe a distinctive form of religious legitimacy in the era of social media platforms. This concept emerges from the dialectic between Pink's theory of the decentralization of authority and empirical findings on how algorithmic mechanisms construct legitimacy (Pink, 2019).

Performative authority is defined as: an actor's ability to gain public recognition as an authoritative conveyor of religious messages, not through traditional scholarly transmission chains, but through aesthetic performances that successfully garner the audience's attention and affection within the algorithmic ecosystem of digital platforms.

Unlike Weber's three types of authority (traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational), performative authority does not rely on the sanctity of tradition, extraordinary personal qualities, or formal legal legitimacy. It relies on digitally measurable performance: how much content is viewed, liked, and shared (Swedberg, 2007).

Table 2. Systematic differences between traditional authority and performative authority

Dimension	Traditional Authority	Performative Authority	@dipajang.id	@quranic.ayaaat
Source of Legitimacy	Scholarly lineage (*sanad*) and academic certification (*ijazah*)	Engagement and aesthetics	Followers and likes	Emotional resonance
Validation Method	Methodological exegesis (tafsir) studies	Platform algorithm metrics	Content views and shares	Affirmative comments
Key Actors	Trained	Digital	Visual content	Curators of

Dimension	Traditional Authority	Performative Authority	@dipajang.id	@quranic.ayaaat
	scholars and Quranic exegetes (*mufassir*)	content creators	designers	Quranic quotations
Function of Sacred Texts	Source of legal and theological guidance	Instrument of popular narratives	Accessory to hustle culture	Tool for psychological self-healing
Dominant Medium	Classical texts and study circles	Social media platforms	Aesthetic Instagram Reels	Melancholic Instagram Reels

Source: Developed by the researcher based on Fairclough, (1992); Pink, (2019) and empirical research findings.

The table above shows that performative authority is not merely a deviation from traditional authority; it is a system of legitimation with its own internal logic that operates coherently within the digital platform ecosystem. In this system, the truth of an interpretation is not verified through scientific study but rather through market acceptance: the more likes, comments, or reposts an interpretation receives, the more true it is perceived to be by the audience (Branham, 2017).

CONCLUSION

This study examined how platform algorithms and visual aesthetics shape the discourse of Quranic interpretation on Instagram Reels and explored their implications for the transformation of religious authority from the perspective of Johanna Pink. The findings indicate that the decentralization of interpretive authority in the digital era is not merely driven by broader access to religious content production, but also by the role of algorithms as discourse curators that regulate the visibility and legitimacy of particular interpretations. The analysis identified two dominant patterns of Quranic recontextualization: the commodification of religious messages through *hustle culture* narratives on @dipajang.id and the therapeutic reinterpretation of Quranic verses through *self-healing* discourses on @quranic.ayaaat. These findings demonstrate that the circulation of Quranic meanings on social media is increasingly shaped by platform logic, audience engagement, and visual storytelling, resulting in new forms of religious authority beyond conventional scholarly structures.

Building upon these findings, this study offers the concept of performative authority as a theoretical novelty to explain a form of digital religious legitimacy constructed through algorithmic visibility, audience engagement, and aesthetic appeal rather than solely through traditional scholarly credentials and exegetical expertise. This conceptual contribution also suggests the need to expand Johanna Pink's framework on the decentralization of tafsir authority by incorporating the visual and algorithmic dimensions of contemporary social media. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening digital tafsir literacy to enable audiences to critically assess religious content circulating online. Although this study is limited to two Instagram accounts and does not include an empirical analysis of audience reception, it contributes to the advancement of digital tafsir studies, living Quran Studies, and broader discussions on the transformation of Islamic authority in algorithm-driven digital environments, while providing a foundation for future comparative and audience-centered research.

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Author contribution

Muhammad Rezta Egaputra: data curation, writing-original draft preparation, analysis, conceptualization, methodology, visualization, and editing.

AI Statement

The data and the grammatical structure in this article have been validated and verified by English language experts and no AI-generated sentences are included in this article.

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