

The Phenomenon of Muslim Influencers and Qur'anic Interpreters in the Digital Space: A Study of Ismail Al-Ascholy's Interactions on the Instagram Account @ismailascholy

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Abstract

This article analyzes Ismail Al-Ascholy's interaction patterns on his Instagram account @ismailascholy, focusing on the formation of interpretive authority in digital dakwah. This study uses a netnography approach to examine the interaction between Ismail Al-Ascholy and his followers, as well as Max Weber's authority framework to explore the types of authority he possesses. The analysis reveals that Ismail Al-Ascholy embodies traditional and charismatic religious authority. His traditional authority stems from cultural legitimacy through his lineage as a descendant of Kyai Khalil Bangkalan, a prominent religious scholar, and his position as the leader of a pesantren. His charismatic authority is formed through personal appeal via persuasive communication style, emotionally resonant spiritual narratives, and direct interactions that build trust and strengthen his charisma on social media. Using a netnographic approach, it was found that interactions on the Instagram account @ismailascholy are participatory and interactive, where followers actively contribute to interpretive discourse. Followers engage in discussions, question and answer sessions, and the dissemination of tafsir content. These findings indicate that digital dakwah is changing religious relationship patterns, where the authority of tafsir is not only determined by traditional religious structures but also by social dynamics that develop in virtual spaces, creating an authority that is more flexible and responsive to the needs of followers.

Muslim Influencer; Authority; Ismail Al-Ascholy; Instagram.

Abstrak

Artikel ini menganalisis pola interaksi Ismail Al-Ascholy di akun Instagram @ismailascholy, dengan fokus pada pembentukan otoritas tafsir dalam dakwah digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan netnografi untuk mengkaji interaksi antara Ismail Al-Ascholy dan pengikutnya, serta kerangka otoritas Max Weber untuk menggali tipe otoritas yang dimilikinya. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa Ismail Al-Ascholy merepresentasikan otoritas keagamaan tradisional dan kharismatik. Otoritas tradisionalnya berasal dari legitimasi kultural melalui silsilah ulama, yakni keturunan dari Kyai Khalil Bangkalan, serta posisinya sebagai pemimpin pesantren. Otoritas kharismatiknya terbentuk dari daya tarik personal melalui gaya komunikasi persuasif, narasi spiritual yang menyentuh, serta interaksi langsung yang membangun kepercayaan dan memperkuat karismanya di media sosial. Dengan pendekatan netnografi, ditemukan bahwa interaksi di akun Instagram @ismailascholy bersifat partisipatif dan interaktif, di mana pengikut aktif berkontribusi dalam diskursus tafsir. Pengikut terlibat dalam diskusi, tanya jawab, serta penyebaran konten tafsir. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa dakwah digital mengubah pola relasi keagamaan, di mana otoritas tafsir tidak hanya ditentukan oleh struktur keagamaan tradisional, tetapi juga oleh dinamika sosial yang berkembang di ruang virtual, menciptakan otoritas yang lebih fleksibel dan responsif terhadap kebutuhan pengikut.

Kata Kunci: Influencer Muslim; Otoritas; Ismail Al-Ascholy; Instagram.

INTRODUCTION

The development of social media in the digital space has become a tool that provides a platform for users to express themselves, interact, share, and communicate with other users in the form of virtual social bonds (Jundillah, 2021). According to Hootsuite We Are Social, the percentage of social media usage worldwide increased from 5.10 billion in 2023 to 5.45 billion in 2024. Similarly, the number of active social media users in Indonesia, according to a survey conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), stands at 215.63 million, with a significant increase to 221.56 million users in 2024 (Haryanto, 2024).

This increase in users has also encouraged a shift in the function of social media, which was previously used more to share general information and personal photos, but has now developed into a space for disseminating religious content. One form of this transformation can be seen in the emergence of accounts that actively share verses from the Qur'an along with their interpretations (Nurdin, 2023). Social media has become the primary means of disseminating interpretations of the Qur'an in a format that is more concise, dynamic, and accessible to various segments of society. In addition, interactive spaces such as comment columns and live streaming features enable two-way communication between Dai, Ulama, or Muslim influencers and their followers.

The advantages and conveniences offered by the emergence of digital spaces, often referred to as new media, certainly bring other impacts that deserve attention. One significant change that has emerged is a shift in authority, particularly in terms of the authority to interpret the Qur'an in digital spaces. Until now, religious authority including who is considered to have the right to interpret religious texts in a legitimate and authoritative manner has been held by religious figures such as kyai, ustadz, and ulama, particularly ulama tafsir, who rely on classical religious texts. However, the emergence of digital spaces has indirectly shifted and even eroded the role of traditional religious authority (Hasan, 2022).

According to Eko Saputra and Fadhli, citing Triantoro's study, the emergence of new religious authorities through new media does not automatically replace the dominance of traditional religious authorities. Traditional religious authorities still possess the ability to adapt to the evolving digital context. With a strong foundation in religious scholarship and the effective use of new media, traditional religious authorities are not only able to maintain but also surpass the popularity of new religious authorities in the digital public sphere (Fadhli, 2020).

In the dissemination of religious teachings and interpretations of the Qur'an presented in the form of videos or other educational content, there is an important role played by figures known as digital preachers. These preachers are generally active on social media and are often referred to as influencers, individuals who have many followers and are able to market ideas or products through digital platforms. The term "social media influencer" refers to an individual's ability to convey information widely to their followers. An influencer has a significant impact on shaping others' decisions or perspectives, thanks to the authority, knowledge, position, or closeness they hold with their audience (Anjani & Irwansyah, 2020).

The emergence of Muslim influencers in the digital space has broadened the horizons of Islamic preaching, including in terms of interpreting the Qur'an. They appear as new actors who

utilize digital platforms to convey religious teachings in a more personal, interactive, and relevant manner to the context of young people's lives. Their presence has also changed the landscape of interpretive authority, which was previously held exclusively by scholars with structured scientific legitimacy and rigorous methodologies. Today, this authority is becoming more dispersed, and in some cases even relies more on popularity. On the one hand, this phenomenon opens up a wider space for dakwah and reaches a more diverse audience. However, on the other hand, there are serious challenges regarding the accuracy of content and the validity of scholarly interpretations. Therefore, a critical attitude from society is needed in filtering religious information, as well as a commitment from influencers to maintain scientific integrity in conveying interpretations of the Qur'an.

The existence of preachers in the digital realm needs to be examined scientifically in order to understand the dynamics of religious authority and how it is formed in the context of digital media. The concept of authority itself has become a central theme in various studies examining the relationship between religion and media. Authority is understood as a theoretical framework that explains how someone can build and maintain influence over a particular community in the digital space. However, the character and essence of authority in the digital world have not yet been comprehensively defined. Therefore, more in-depth research is needed, not only to identify who is considered to have religious authority in the digital space, but also to explore the factors that shape and influence the existence of such authority (Hidayatullah, 2024).

One interesting figure to study in this context is Ismail Al-Ascholy, a young ulama from Bangkalan, Madura, who actively disseminates his interpretation of the Qur'an through social media, particularly Instagram. He has a strong academic background from various renowned Islamic boarding schools and studied directly under prominent figures such as KH. Maimoen Zubair and KH. Bahauddin Nursalim (Al-Hafidz, 2023). Ismail Al-Ascholy has developed his preaching in a form that is closer to the digital generation. Through his Instagram account @ismailascholy, he shares his interpretations of verses from the Qur'an in a light yet profound manner, using casual language that is relevant to contemporary issues (Al-Ascholy, 2013). This approach has made him one of the Muslim influencers who is able to bridge the messages of the Qur'an to the wider community, especially the younger generation, in a contextual, communicative, and easy-to-understand manner.

Building on this phenomenon, this paper aims to examine in greater depth how social media, particularly Instagram, has become a new medium for the formation and distribution of religious authority through the practice of interpreting the Qur'an. The case of Ismail Al-Ascholy, a young ulama with a strong pesantren background, is an interesting example of the encounter between traditional authority and the dynamics of digital dakwah. His activities on his Instagram account not only display communicative Islamic content, but also show his active involvement in answering questions, responding to comments, and engaging in dialogue with his audience, thereby creating a participatory space for interpretation. Thus, this paper will focus on two main questions: first, what patterns of interaction does Ismail Al-Ascholy establish with his followers on his Instagram account @ismailascholy; and second, what forms and dynamics of Qur'anic interpretive authority does he exhibit in this digital space?

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with the netnography method, which is an adaptation of ethnography applied to online communities, particularly social media, with attention to demographic, psychographic, and follower segmentation aspects. The netnography approach is very suitable for examining the dynamics of online communities, because its main focus is to understand activities in digital spaces where individuals interact and form their own culture and social systems. Conceptually, netnography shares similarities with virtual ethnography; the difference lies in the terminology used to describe the approach (Steeve A. J. Muntu, 2021).

Research data was obtained through direct observation of content published on the @ismailascholy account, including posts, captions, comment columns, and story highlights. Digital documentation in the form of screenshots, number of comments, intensity of interaction, and patterns of follower participation were used as the main material in the analysis to understand the dynamics of consumption and construction of religious authority in the digital space.

To analyze the construction of religious authority in these digital interactions, Max Weber's theoretical framework of authority is used, which divides authority into three ideal types: traditional, legal-rational, and charismatic (Weber, 1947). This framework helps identify the sources of Ismail Al-Ascholy's legitimacy in social media and the active role of his followers in shaping and reinforcing his authority in the digital space.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Qur'anic Interpreters Authority and Muslim Influencers

Authority is defined as obedience to power without the need for additional encouragement or effort. Khaled Abou El-Fadl provides a view of the concept of authority, according to which authority is distinguished between coercive authority and persuasive authority. Coercive authority involves efforts to influence people through various means, including threats, persuasion, punishment, or incentives. Ultimately, rational individuals will obey such commands in order to achieve a practical goal. In addition, persuasive authority requires the involvement of power based on norms and beliefs, with individuals possessing the capacity to regulate or direct the behavior of others (El-Fadl, 2004).

In the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), authority is defined as legitimate power given to an institution in society to enable its officials to carry out their functions. Authority also includes the right to act, power or authority, and the right to take action or establish rules in order to govern others (Kbbi.web.id, 2024). Max Weber classified authority into three main forms, namely traditional authority, legal-rational authority, and charismatic authority. Traditional authority is based on belief in values and social order that have been passed down from generation to generation. Leaders in this system are respected and obeyed because they are considered to have legitimacy derived from historical ties to their predecessors. However, with the advancement of modernization, Weber argued that traditional authority tends to be replaced by legal-rational authority, which is grounded in principles of rationality and formal rules, as seen in the bureaucratic systems of modern Western societies. Legal-rational authority derives its legitimacy from laws and procedures that are rationally formulated and objectively applied. Meanwhile, charismatic authority

arises from the collective belief that a leader possesses extraordinary appeal or spiritual power that inspires followers to obey not because of tradition or formal rules, but because of the leader's exceptional personality and abilities (Weber, 1947).

In the context of science and religion, authority also refers to individuals or institutions that have legitimacy and competence in providing understanding or explanations related to a particular science or doctrine. Authority is the right, power, or privilege possessed by a person or institution to make decisions, establish rules, or provide explanations that must be recognized and respected by others. Authority can stem from various factors, such as expertise, experience, social position, or legal and religious legitimacy (Weber, 1978). Authority is often held by experts who are competent in their field. In religion, authority usually refers to individuals or institutions that have a deep understanding of religious teachings and are entitled to issue fatwas or interpretations of holy scriptures.

To understand this, we need to realize that authority does not operate in isolation, but rather depends on various supporting and fundamental elements. Several sources can form the basis of authority, including revelation, empirical evidence, human reasoning, and established traditions. In a religious context, God is considered the highest authority, but His existence is realized through the role of humans as His agents. Humans, in their role as agents of God (*ḫalīfah fī al-ardh*), are tasked with bringing about change on earth and acting as God's spokespersons in conveying His messages as recorded in sacred texts (El-Fadl, 2004).

The delivery of messages from the Qur'an requires oral interpretation and the ability of the interpreter to demonstrate their scholarly credibility. In the digital age, social media has transformed the dynamics of religious interpretation by creating more interactive and accessible spaces, enabling diverse voices to emerge beyond formal religious authorities. However, this also presents challenges, as individuals without a religious academic background but possessing rhetorical skills can influence public understanding, which contradicts the concept of classical interpretive authority (Hasan, 2022). The interpretation product is then freely accessible to all and its meaning is disseminated through the same media. This enables a process of reinterpretation that combines conventional and technology-based models. At this point, interpretation is evolving toward the production of unlimited meaning using classical interpretation models. The change in interpretation models can be seen, on one hand, as the impact of technological determinism in interpretation studies and, on the other hand, as a repetition of interpretation mechanisms (Ghozali, 2022).

The process of disseminating information on social media, especially religious content, has grown with the emergence of micro-celebrities or influencers, individuals who gain popularity due to audience engagement with the content they consistently post on digital platforms. Unlike television celebrities, who generally have a background in the arts or entertainment, influencers do not necessarily have special skills, but are able to influence many people through their communication style and closeness to their followers. In their evolution, some influencers have begun to shift their roles from mere entertainment or business endorsements to conveyors of religious messages, and are now known as Muslim influencers.

Muslim influencers are individuals who leverage their popularity and social media platforms to spread Islamic teachings, whether through quotations from the Qur'an, advice, brief studies, or

engaging and culturally relevant dakwah content. Their presence brings a new dimension to the digital dakwah landscape, as they blend the role of a popular figure with religious functions. However, the emergence of Muslim influencers also reflects ideological contestation between two major currents of contemporary Islamic thought: Islamism, which emphasizes the normative application of Islamic teachings, and Post-Islamism, which seeks to respond to social realities in a contextual manner. In the digital realm, these two currents interact and form a new hybrid identity as a consequence of the convergence of dakwah, technology, and popular culture (Aini, 2021).

Profile of Ismail Al-Ascholy and Instagram Account @ismailascholy

Muhammad Ismail Ahmad Yahya, better known as Muhammad Ismail Al-Ascholy or Ismail Al-Ascholy, is a Ulama from Bangkalan, Madura, who was born on June 10, 1995. He is a direct descendant of the renowned Ulama, Syaikhona Muhammad Kholil Bangkalan. His lineage can be traced through the family line of Syaikhona Kholil, namely Muhammad Ismail Ahmad Yahya bin Muthmainnah binti Abdullah Schal bin Romlah binti Imran bin Muhammad Kholil. Based on this lineage, Ismail Al-Ascholy is the sixth-generation descendant of Syaikhona Muhammad Kholil (Al-Hafidz, 2023).

Since the age of six, Ismail Al-Ascholy began his education at SD Demangan 2, located in his hometown. During his six years of elementary education, he also attended madrasah classes every afternoon at Pondok Pesantren Syaikhona Muhammad Kholil, where he resided. After completing his primary education and madrasah studies, he continued his studies at Pondok Pesantren Darul Falah Amsilati Jepara under the guidance of KH. Taufiqul Hakim. Over the course of approximately nine months (2007–2008), he studied in the Amsilati class, focusing on Arabic language, particularly the sciences related to classical Islamic texts, such as *nahwu* and *saraf*. Under the guidance of KH. Taufiqul Hakim, Ismail Al-Ascholy studied the Amsilati method, a method designed to accelerate the understanding of classical Islamic texts. This method was developed by KH. Taufiqul Hakim after a six-year testing process (Al-Hafidz, 2023).

After completing his education at Pondok Pesantren Darul Falah Amsilati Jepara, in 2008 Ismail Al-Ascholy continued his studies in Arabic language at Pondok Pesantren Al-Islah, Lasem, under the guidance of KH. Hakim bin Masduqi Al-Lasimi. After studying there for six to seven years, he finally completed his studies. Next, Ismail Al-Ascholy planned to continue his education at Rubath Tarim in Yemen under the guidance of Habib Salim bin Abdullah Salim Asy-Syatiri. However, before his departure, he was required to undergo a preparatory period at Pondok Pesantren Masyhad An-Nur in Sukabumi under the guidance of Habib Abdurrahman. He spent approximately nine months studying at the boarding school before finally departing for Yemen. Unfortunately, after only two months of studying at Rubath, the ongoing war in the region forced Ismail Al-Ascholy and many other students to return to Indonesia.

Upon returning to his homeland, Ismail Al-Ascholy taught at Pondok Pesantren Syaikhona Muhammad Kholil. In 2015, he continued his studies at Pondok Pesantren Al-Anwar in Sarang, under the guidance of KH. Maimoen Zubair. At this pondok pesantren, he began to delve deeper into the science of Qur'anic exegesis through daily studies and ahadan sessions that discussed Tafsir Jalalain and included direct interpretations from KH. Maimoen Zubair. In addition to studying under KH. Maimoen Zubair, Ismail Al-Ascholy also learned extensively about the Qur'an

and tafsir from KH. Bahauddin Nursalim (Gus Baha). He frequently attended Gus Baha's gatherings, both by visiting his residence at Pondok Pesantren LP3IA in Narukan and when Gus Baha visited the grave and Pondok Pesantren Syaikhona Muhammad Kholil in Bangkalan. From these interactions, Ismail Al-Ascholy has adopted Gus Baha's method of interpretation, which often explains the meaning of verses by linking them to current events in society, making them easier to understand.

After three years of studying at Pondok Pesantren Al-Anwar in Sarang, Ismail Al-Ascholy returned to Pondok Pesantren Syaikhona Muhammad Kholil in 2018. There, he served as both a teacher and a mentor. Shortly after his return, in mid-2019, he decided to marry Muktafiyah Bikanafillah, the daughter of a prominent Ulama from Surabaya, KH. Miftachul Akhyar, who is known as the founder and caretaker of the Pondok Pesantren Miftachussunnah in Tambaksari, Surabaya (Al-Hafidz, 2023). From this marriage, Ismail Al-Ascholy has been blessed with three children.

Ismail Al-Ascholy is a prolific young ulama who has written various works including translations, summaries, and his own thoughts. Some of his works include *Al-Wardah fi Tarjamah al-Burdah* (translation of the Book of *Burdah*), *Dur al-Ghliy*, *Urjuzah al-Nuzum al-Jurumiyah*, *Aqidah* (a book on *Tauhid*) and *Risalah Lailah al-Qadr*, *Badru al-Fadhlil Mutanali* (a book on *Nahwu* with a *Tasawuf* nuance). In addition, he also wrote *Fathu Wabab al-Ali* (nazam from a book by Sheikh Ismail Utsman Zein Makkah), *An-Nafabat al-Miskiyah* (in the form of a *maqalah*), and *Azhar al-Na'im fi al-Ash'arilah al-Katabtuha fi al-Tarim* (poetry describing the Prophet, the saints, and the scholars of Tarim). His other works include *Kharaid al-Faraid Nazm Qawaid al-Aqaid*, *Lujjaj al-Hujjaj wa al-Awaid fi Syarh Kharaid al-Faraid*. He also compiled *Al-Nagham li Dawi al-Gham* (a song for those who are sad), *Wa Kullu Man* (a translation of Kitab *Aqidah* Ibn Al-Lasimi), and *Rawaih ar-Raihan fi Maulid Sayyid Waladi al-Adnan*. In the field of *arud*, he compiled *Manhaj al-Tatziq li Ilmi al-Arud*, which discusses the methods of applying this science. One of his monumental works is *Safinah Kalla Saya'lamun fi Tafsir Syaikhina Maimun*, which contains a collection of interpretations by KH. Maimoen Zubair (Anam, 2024), as well as his latest work, *The Qur'anything: Sepuluh surat dari Tuhan*, written in Indonesian (Al-Ascholy, 2025).

Ismail Al-Ascholy began his career in the field of *dakwah* as a teacher and mentor at the Pondok Pesantren Syaikhona Muh. Kholil Bangkalan, focusing on teaching *'ilm al-'arud* and tafsir. In addition, he also teaches Tafsir Jalalain at Pondok Pesantren Sidogiri, Pasuruan, every Saturday and Sunday. Since the establishment of the Lajnah Turots Syaikhona Kholil during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, he has been actively involved as a committee member, particularly in writing introductions for manuscripts and other books. Over time, invitations to lectures, book discussions, seminars, and various Islamic events began to pour in, making him increasingly recognized in various circles.

His *dakwah* is not only conducted directly, but also through social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. He began actively sharing his knowledge of Al-Qur'an interpretation on Facebook while studying at Al-Anwar Islamic boarding school in Sarang, around 2018–2019. In 2020, he expanded his preaching efforts through the YouTube channel Al-Ascholy, featuring various Islamic content, including Qur'anic exegesis and Qur'anic studies, such as the content titled "Knowledge from Gus Baha, recorded by his student, Habib Shodiq." In 2021, he

further expanded the reach of his dakwah through Instagram, connecting with a broader audience digitally (Al-Hafidz, 2023).

The Instagram account @ismailascholy, owned by Muhammad Ismail Al-Ascholy, is a public account with a primary focus on Qur'anic exegesis. He joined Instagram in March 2013 and currently has 100 posts, with 97,700 followers and 614 following. In his bio, he states, “*saya pernah belajar tafsir Al-Qur'an, tapi jangan tanya hukum*” (I have studied Qur'anic exegesis, but please don't ask about the law). Additionally, there is a WhatsApp link directing users to order books he has written, particularly about The Qur'anything and the exegesis of Mbah Maimoen.

This account features various content related to tafsir studies, including posts of classical texts, book excerpts, and information about online and offline study sessions. Some highlights on the profile include interpretations of surahs in juz 30 and specific themes, such as: Qul Ya, Takasur, Wal Asri, Story Qur'an, Kahfi Phase 3, Iqra', Mysterious, Old Testament, and many more interpretations by Ismail Al-Ascholy, indicating a series of studies that have been discussed previously. In the feed section, there are posters of Islamic studies, interpretations of certain issues or verses, as well as moments of his personal and family activities (Al-Ascholy, 2013)

Overall, this account serves as an active digital platform for spreading knowledge of the Qur'an and its interpretation to a wide audience. The presentation of interpretations on Instagram @ismailascholy is packaged in a friendly and appealing manner for the audience. This is evident from the use of popular terminology among netizens and the effective use of emojis to reinforce the expressions and messages conveyed by Ismail Al-Ascholy in his interpretations. The casual language style is also reflected in the titles of each story highlight, which serves as a platform for sharing various interpretations, making the delivery of interpretations lighter and easier to understand (Musyaffa', 2023).



Figure 1: Instagram profile @ismailascholy



Figure 2: Instagram post by @ismailascholy

Ismail Al-Ascholy's Interaction Patterns on His Instagram Account @ismailascholy

Ismail Al-Ascholy is a Muslim influencer who actively shares his interpretation of the Qur'an in the digital world, particularly through his personal Instagram account. He presents his

content in various forms, such as Instagram feeds and stories. In his activities, Ismail Al-Ascholy not only shares his understanding of the Qur'an and its interpretation, but also actively interacts with his followers through comments and question-and-answer sessions on his Instagram stories, creating dynamic and interactive communication with his audience. One example of Ismail Al-Ascholy's interaction with his followers is seen in a post encouraging them to participate. In a post on October 2, 2024, he stated:

"Write any word, and I will give you a copy of the Qur'an (accompanied by a black-rimmed glasses emoticon)."

The upload also included a caption,

"I'll wait (accompanied by a smiling emoticon showing teeth), I'll reply in the comments."

This post successfully attracted a huge response from his followers, as evidenced by the 2,047 comments it received, demonstrating the high level of enthusiasm and interaction within the community he has built (Al-Ascholy, 2013).



Figure 3: Ismail Al-Ascholy's post on October 2, 2024

Among the interactions in the comments section of the post was one from Instagram user @alizainalmuhammad, who commented "Instagram." In response, Ismail Al-Ascholy replied by quoting QS. An-Nisa: 83,

﴿وَإِذَا جَاءَهُمْ أَمْرٌ مِّنَ الْأَمْنِ أَوْ الْخَوْفِ أَذَاعُوا بِهِ ۖ وَلَوْ رَدُّوهُ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ وَإِلَى أُولَى الْأَمْرِ مِنْهُمْ لَعَلِمَهُ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَنْبِطُونَهُ مِنْهُمْ وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَتَآبَعْتُمُ الشَّيْطَانَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا۝٨٣﴾

Ismail Al-Ascholy also added that,

"Those people are so unclear. If something happens, they immediately upload a story, share it, and it goes viral. Whether they are upset or happy, everything is a story (accompanied by an emoticon laughing with a tilted head and tears). Try asking a Kyai if something happens, then you will get a verse from the Qur'an like now, wkwkw. Thank Allah for His mercy, there are Kyais on Instagram where you can vent. If you don't play around on Instagram, you'll go to hell (accompanied by a smiley emoticon showing teeth)."

Next, Figure 4 Instagram user @alizainalmuhammad responded to Ismail Al-Ascholy's answer by saying,

"That's spot on, Ra. The key point is in adz'a'u (أذاعوا), which refers to either them or the post itself (accompanied by an emoticon laughing and sweating on the left side of the forehead)" (Al-Ascholy, 2013).



Figure 4: Comment section of the post dated October 2, 2024

The next interaction was with Instagram user @anwhiir, who commented and asked about dakwah on social media. In response, Ismail Al-Ascholy quoted QS. Al-Kahfi: 84-85,

﴿إِنَّا مَكَّنَّا لَهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَءَاتَيْنَاهُ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ سَبِيلًا ۝ ٨٤ فَأَتْبَعَ سَبِيلًا ۝ ٨٥﴾

Ismail Al-Ascholy also added an explanation of the verse he quoted by stating,

"Social media is just one of the many paths of dakwah. If social media had existed in the time of Dzulqarnain, he would definitely have used it for dakwah and surely had a blue checkmark (accompanied by a laughing emoticon)."

Furthermore, Instagram user @anwhiir responded to Ismail Al-Ascholy's answer by asking further questions and saying,

"Sorry Lora, this verse can be explained again with dakwah, I'm a little confused (accompanied by a laughing emoticon with tears)."

Ismail Al-Ascholy then responded by providing a more detailed explanation of the relationship between dakwah and QS. Al-Kahfi: 84-85, saying,

"The verse is about Dzulqarnain, who was a person whom Allah made all means of dakwah easy for him. Whether it was dakwah using a pulpit, war, debate, wealth, throne, knowledge, etc., everything was made easy for him by Allah, because he was given access to all the means that led to guidance. So, if social media existed at that time, which we know is one of the means of dakwah, then he would definitely have used social media for dakwah. I took the POV of dakwah and the verse from there. If you have a different point of view, you can use other verses, as there are many verses about dakwah and social media. This

means that dakwah on social media is a good thing, because social media is also one of the thousands of means of guidance. Of course, this is with the fulfillment of the requirements, which is not my discussion (accompanied by a smiling emoticon showing his teeth).”

At the end of the interaction, after receiving a more in-depth explanation from Ismail Al-Ascholy regarding the relationship between dakwah and QS. Al-Kahfi: 84-85, Instagram user @anwhiir expressed his gratitude and stated that he was looking for topics of discussion regarding the study of Al-Qur'an and Tafsir (Al-Ascholy, 2013).



Figure 5 & 6: Comment section of the post dated October 2, 2024

Furthermore, in response to the same comment from two different Instagram users, namely the comment “ibu” (mother), Ismail Al-Ascholy gave different responses. To the Instagram user @butterflyukss, he replied by quoting QS. Al-Qashas: 10,

﴿وَأَصْبَحَ فُؤَادُ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰ فَرَجًا إِنْ كَادَتْ لَتُبْدِي بِهِ لَوْلَا أَن رَّبَطْنَا عَلَىٰ قَلْبِهَا لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ۝١٠﴾

Not only quoting QS. Al-Qashash: 10, Ismail Al-Ascholy also provides a brief explanation of the meaning of the verse by saying,

“A mother always thinks about her child.”

Meanwhile, to Instagram user @moh.muzakki_alamsyah, Ismail Al-Ascholy responded by quoting QS. Ali Imran: 35,

﴿إِذْ قَالَتِ امْرَأَتُ عِمْرَانَ رَبِّ إِنِّي نَذَرْتُ لَكَ مَا فِي بَطْنِي مُحَرَّرًا فَتَقَبَّلْ مِنِّي إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ۝٣٥﴾

And providing an explanation by saying,

“A mother has very high expectations for her child even when he or she is still in the womb.” (Al-Ascholy, 2013).

This difference shows that even though the same words are used, the context and meaning behind them can be different, so the response given is adjusted to the different understanding and perspective of the word.



Figure 7 & 8: Comment section of the post dated October 2, 2024

Next is a post on March 19, 2025, in which he states,

“While reading the Qur’an during Ramadan, are there any verses whose meaning you are curious about? Let’s discuss them (accompanied by an emoticon of a hand with the thumb and index finger circled).”

The post contained an interactive invitation to his followers to discuss verses from the Qur’an that they did not understand during Ramadan. He also added a comment:

“Whoever reads the Qur’an for a long time and then feels heat enveloping him, that’s a sign they’re on fire (accompanied by a fire emoticon).”

With the note “not a hadith” and including QS. Thoha: 10, the post received many responses from followers, who enthusiastically wrote questions and verses they wanted to understand more deeply, as evidenced by the 276 comments on the post. This shows the high level of audience engagement and the effectiveness of the communicative approach used.



Figure 9: Ismail Al-Ascholy's post on March 19, 2025

One response came from Instagram user @roainaaaa__, who commented and questioned the repetition of verses in Q.S. Al-Qamar, which reads,

﴿وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ﴾

In response to this, Ismail Al-Ascholy provided an answer by explaining his point of view,

"So, in this letter, Allah repeats this sentence four times; first, after the story of the people of Noah. Second, after the story of the Ad people, the people of Hud. Third, after the story of the Thamud people, the people of Sholeh. And fourth, after the people of Lot. The meaning of the repeated verse is: 'and indeed We have made the Qur'an easy to remember, easy to recite, easy to understand. So, is there anyone who will try to recite it, remember it, and understand it?' Why is it repeated four times? There are many possible answers, including that repetition is an emphasis. Additionally, repetition is a form of simplification. Repetition indicates that there is an important meaning in those stories that needs to be studied. And among the possibilities I feel need to be discussed in this context is how easy the Qur'an is. Imagine, to discuss these ancient histories, how many hundreds or even thousands of tools and facilities would be needed, and how much money would have to be spent to confirm the existence of those people? Yet, simply because the Qur'an mentions them, even children talk about them, even if they don't understand, at least their lips are discussing it. Now compare that to physics or chemistry lessons, for example: $A1 \times F4 = C2$ Protom millennium, blah blah (or something like that I don't know). Do children talk about that? If they do, they must be geniuses. But the Qur'an? Even children who haven't reached puberty can talk about Noah, Saleh, Thamud, Ad, Firaun, and so on. Even if they don't understand, at least they are familiar with those words. They are familiar with them, even though this should be a topic for philologists. The Qur'an is so easy, right? That's roughly how I personally interpret it" (Al-Ascholy, 2013).

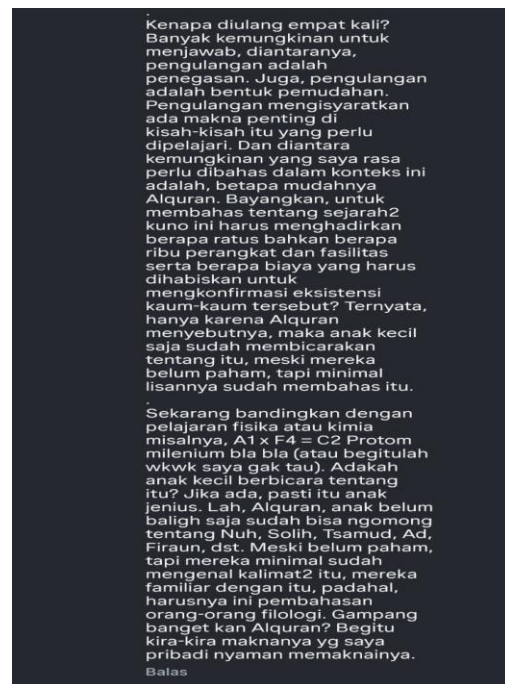


Figure 10 & 11: Comment section of the post dated March 19, 2025

The next response also came from Instagram user @dfrrhman, who commented and asked about QS. Al-Qashash: 24, which reads,

رَبِّ إِنِّي لَمَّا أَنْزَلْتَ إِلَيَّ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَقِيرٌ ﴿٢٤﴾

In response, Ismail Al-Ascholy said,

"This is a verse that tells of the prayer of the Prophet Moses when he was mentally and physically exhausted. As soon as he said that, a bright path appeared before him. That is, the woman who would become his wife, as well as the house of his future in-laws, which would save him from the pursuit of Qibty." (Al-Ascholy, 2013).



Figure 12: Comment section of the post dated March 19, 2025

In addition to posts, Ismail Al-Ascholi also uses the story feature to build interaction with his followers. Several times he has shared stories containing invitations to dialogue and opened question and answer sessions on the interpretation of the Qur'an. In this way, he not only conveys his thoughts, but also provides a space for his followers to participate, ask questions, and discuss various perspectives directly. This approach reflects how interpretation can evolve in the digital space, making it more interactive and closer to the community. In the Q&A session on his Instagram story, Ismail Al-Ascholi begins by writing a statement to open the discussion, including:

1. In a highlight post titled "Qur'anything" on December 29, 2021, he wrote, *"Name anything, absolutely anything, and I will quote the Qur'an (accompanied by a smiling emoticon showing his teeth)."*
2. In a highlight post titled "Qur'anything" on January 6, 2022, he wrote, *"Okay, let's continue from the other day. Write whatever you want, and I'll give you the Qur'an (accompanied by a laughing emoticon and sweat on the left side of the forehead)."*
3. In a highlight post titled "Yasin Dikit" on March 18, 2022, he revealed that he had read Surah Yasin three times and felt many *faidah*. Then, he asked his followers, *"anyone else feel the same?"* He then invited them to share their experiences by writing, *"Please share here, I want to learn (accompanied by a smiling emoticon)."*
4. In a highlight post titled "Qur'anything 2" on April 18, 2022, he wrote, *"Try to collect questions about verses, the meaning of verses, interpretations, basically anything about the Qur'an."*

5. In a post highlighting Ayat Kursi on June 15, 2022, he wrote,
"I hope I can answer, except for the law (accompanied by a smiling emoticon showing teeth)."
6. In a highlighted post titled "3 crying emoticons" on July 28, 2022, he wrote,
"Want to ask for an interpretation?"
7. In a highlight post titled "Qur'anything 2" on August 13, 2022, he wrote,
"Let's ask questions about the Qur'an if you want to." (Al-Ascholy, 2013).



Figure 13: Qur'anything 2 highlight post on April 18, 2022



Figure 14: Yasin Dikit highlight post on March 18, 2022

The invitation to engage in dialogue through a question-and-answer session was well received by his followers, who asked various questions and offered responses. One of them was in the Qur'anything 2 highlight post on April 19, 2022, where they asked about a verse explaining the importance of maintaining cleanliness, both personal hygiene and environmental cleanliness. In response to the question, Ismail Al-Ascholy briefly answered, "Yes," and then shared the verse along with its explanation as follows:

"The Environment:

﴿وَوَايَةٌ لَهُمُ الْأَرْضُ الْمَيْتَةُ أَحْيَيْنَاهَا وَأَخْرَجْنَا مِنْهَا حَبًّا فَمِنْهُ يَأْكُلُونَ ۝ ۳۳﴾

Even the dead earth, God brought back to life by growing various kinds of plants. How can we destroy the living earth with trash and filth? Therefore, we must preserve it.

The Body:

﴿... فِيهِ رِجَالٌ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَتَطَهَّرُوا وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُطَهَّرِينَ ۝ ۱۰۸﴾

What Allah praised about the Ansar in the Quba mosque was that they were clean and tidy, and Allah loves people who are like that" (Al-Ascholy, 2013).



Figure 15: Highlights from Qur'anything 2 (April 19, 2022)

Furthermore, in the Qur'anything 2 highlight post on April 18, 2022, one of his Instagram followers asked about QS. An-Nisa': 79, specifically regarding the use of the phrase *مِنْ نَفْسِكَ* when discussing evil. Responding to the question, Ismail Al-Ascholy answered by presenting the verse in question and providing his explanation, as follows:

﴿مَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنْ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ سَيِّئَةٍ فَمِنْ نَفْسِكَ وَأَرْسَلْنَاكَ لِلنَّاسِ رَسُولًا وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا ۝٧٩﴾

"The easy part is that because we are civilized towards Allah, it is not appropriate for humans to attribute evil to Him, even though in essence everything is His will. The difficult part is that in this verse, Allah is speaking to the Prophet, so the word 'you' refers to the Prophet, not everyone. If everyone looks at the rest of the verse, it says, 'I have sent you as a Messenger.' So everyone will be a Prophet. Wkwk. Now, how can it be that 'if something bad happens to you, it's because of you'? After all, it's the Prophet, right? So here's the story: the previous verse talks about the 'poisonous' people around the Prophet, who believed this: if something good happens, it's from Allah; if something bad happens, it's because of Muhammad. These people weren't just talking; they could convince others. They could make people uncomfortable around the Prophet. 'Because of him we're dying, because of him we're sick, because of him we're poor, and so on'. When said with conviction, these words shake the listener's heart, especially if said with a convincing expression (angry emoticon). Wkwk. That's why Allah clarified without telling the Prophet to respond to such statements: Muhammad, if there is good, it is from Allah. If something bad happens, consider it your own fault. You have been made a Messenger by Me, so it is impossible for you to cause evil. But still, instill this: if something bad happens, it is your own fault. In other words, don't blame others. So this verse is a valuable lesson about how Allah wants this moral principle to be applied widely not blaming others but blaming

oneself. That's why some scholars say this verse is addressed to the Prophet, but its real target is his followers" (Al-Ascholy, 2013).



Figure 16: Highlights from Qur'anything 2 (April 18, 2022)

Not stopping there, in the Qur'anything 2 highlight post on August 14, 2022, one of Ismail Al-Ascholy's Instagram followers also asked a question about Surah Al-Waqi'ah. He wanted to know why the surah that discusses the Day of Judgment is associated with the virtue of facilitating sustenance. Responding to this, Ismail Al-Ascholy replied by saying,

"According to several references, Surah Al-Waqi'ah is also called Surah Al-Ghina (الغنى). Ghina is the opposite of al-faqr. Faqr means need. Therefore, ghina means not needing anything. This means that the richest person is the one who needs nothing. And the way to not need anything is by knowing how severe the Day of Judgment will be, how delightful Paradise is, and how painful Hell is. These three things are discussed in Al-Waqi'ah. Therefore, one who knows about the Hereafter will feel that this world has no meaning except for the things that lead to salvation in the Hereafter. Thus, he becomes the person who is most 'not in need' of the world. Not needing anything is ghina. And ghina is wealth. Thus, the Surah al-Waqi'ah makes a person wealthy. Even the Prophet said: (شَيَّبَنِي هُودُ وَالْوَاقِعَةُ) 'I was made gray by the Surah Hud and the Surah Waqi'ah' (Al-Ascholy, 2013).



Figure 17: Highlights from Qur'anything 2 (August 14, 2022)

The Dynamics of Interaction and Authority of Ismail Al-Ascholy's Interpretation on the Instagram Account @ismailascholy

Ismail Al-Ascholy's interaction pattern on Instagram shows a creative and participatory communicative approach in disseminating interpretations of the Qur'an in the digital space. He does not only position himself as a conveyor of knowledge, but also as a facilitator of dialogue between the sacred text and the daily lives of his followers. Through the feed and story features, Ismail presents interactive content such as inviting followers to write keywords to be matched with verses from the Qur'an, answering questions about interpretation, and responding to comments in a relaxed style while still referring to verses. His approach emphasizes the importance of the relevance of the Qur'anic text to contemporary issues, such as social media, family relationships, and daily spiritual experiences. The responses he gives to his followers are personal and contextual; the same word can be answered with different verses. This reflects Ismail Al-Ascholy's hermeneutic sensitivity to the dynamics of digital communication and the audience's diverse interpretations. He also often frames verses in a humorous, familiar style and inserts emoticons, creating a lighthearted dakwah atmosphere that nevertheless contains profound values.

This study of Ismail Al-Ascholy's interaction patterns on his Instagram account @ismailascholy covers several aspects such as behavior patterns, consumption culture, and the participation of followers in shaping authority. In this case, the author analyzes the responses and comments of followers of the Instagram account @ismailascholy to the content, particularly in the context of digital dakwah. Followers of @ismailascholy act not only as a passive audience but also as active consumers of Al-Qur'an interpretations who participate in shaping the dynamics of religious authority.

An analysis of the profile of digital tafsir consumers on the Instagram account @ismailasholy uses demographic, psychographic, and segmentation aspects. Demographically, in

terms of age, educational background, and religiosity, of the 97.7 thousand followers of @ismailascholy, the majority are young Indonesian Muslims, most of whom have a background in pesantren, Islamic higher education, or urban Islamic study communities. This is evident from the fact that most followers have profiles styled after traditional Islamic students, with women wearing hijabs and men dressed modestly, and there are almost no profiles without hijabs or containing inappropriate elements.

Psychographically, that is, looking at the psychology of digital consumers, which discusses consumer motivations such as intellectual, spiritual, and emotional needs (Maslow, 1943). In their psychographics, they show a strong motivation to deepen their religious knowledge in a light, contextual, and accessible form. This can be seen in the interaction between the account owner @ismailasholy and his followers, who frequently share one of his question-and-answer posts, which has garnered 200,000 views and 2,047 comments, demonstrating the engagement and curiosity of the followers toward the content.

Followers can be divided into two groups: active consumers, who regularly interact through comments and questions, and passive consumers, who prefer to observe and absorb content without much interaction. In the @ismailasholy account, the majority are less active consumers or can be categorized as passive consumers. If we look at several posts in the @ismailasholy account, the number of likes and comments has not reached 50% of the total number of followers, even though the account's views sometimes exceed the number of followers. This indicates that most of the followers of @ismailasholy are merely recipients of news or content posted by the account owner.

In observing consumer behavior patterns, it was also found that followers showed dynamic patterns of consumption of interpretive content. They not only accessed posts and stories uploaded by Ismail Al-Ascholy, but also actively participated in question and answer sessions and discussions initiated through the comment feature and Instagram stories. The high volume of responses, such as thousands of comments on a single post, indicates a high level of emotional and intellectual involvement. In addition, the behavior of reposting answers or explanations of tafsir also shows the role of followers in expanding the dissemination of digital dakwah.

The development of digital dakwah has created new opportunities to spread Islamic teachings more effectively in the modern era. Through the use of technology and social media, ulama and Muslim influencers are able to reach a wider audience, while providing religious guidance and information relevant to everyday life. (Awali, 2024). Digital dakwah is not merely a process of spreading religious teachings in general, but also reflects the transformation of the practice of "*nyantri*," which is an intensive religious learning process under the guidance of a kyai or ulama in a pesantren environment. The practice of nyantri does not only focus on the transfer of Islamic knowledge, but also includes character building, instilling manners, and internalizing Islamic values in everyday life. Thus, digital dakwah has become a new space for the reproduction of religious authority and the transmission of Islamic values through digital media.

This culture also emerged on the @ismailasholy account in the digital space. This culture underwent a transformation without losing its essence. The followers of the @ismailascholy account consciously adopted the practice of "*nyantri*" with characteristics adapted to the online platform, forming what can be called a "digital nyantri" culture or, to use the popular term, "*nyantri*

zaman now” (Nursetiyawati et al., 2025). Followers construct scholarly relationships with Ismail Al-Ascholy not only as viewers of content, but also as individuals seeking religious understanding. Although physical meetings do not occur, respect, proper etiquette in asking questions, and seriousness in listening to interpretive answers demonstrate the reproduction of santri-kyai relationships online. Through the comment feature, stories, and question-and-answer sessions, followers do not merely consume interpretations passively but actively engage in building religious discourse. This aligns with the critical yet respectful learning characteristics of the santri culture. In the interaction patterns that emerge, there is an evident effort by followers to maintain proper etiquette in asking questions, demonstrate humility, and acknowledge their limitations in knowledge all of which are fundamental values in the traditional santri tradition.

Netnography is an approach that focuses on understanding digital spaces, where individuals interact with each other and collectively form their own culture and social order (Steeve A. J. Muntu, 2021). In this case, a netnographic study of @ismailascholy's followers shows that the account displays a culture of digital interpretation consumption that leads to the formation of a participatory, interactive, and credibility-based learning community. Followers play an active role in constructing religious authority by consuming, discussing, and distributing the interpretations presented. This phenomenon indicates that in the digital age, the authority of interpretation is no longer entirely centered on traditional religious structures but is also shaped by the social and cultural dynamics of consumers in virtual spaces.

Ismail Al-Ascholy's interpretive authority in the digital space can be understood through various sources of legitimacy mentioned in Max Weber's framework of authority, namely traditional, legal-rational, and charismatic (Weber, 1947). Previous research conducted by Dafa Aqila Musyaffa examined the authority of Ismail Al-Ascholy using Max Weber's framework, representing traditional and charismatic authority rooted in the lineage of religious scholarship and social position within the pesantren. Although discussed within the context of the digital space, the study primarily focuses on the continuity of classical authority within the pesantren world as reflected digitally, without delving deeper into how social media actively shapes and mediates such authority (Musyaffa', 2023).

In this study, Ismail Al-Ascholy's religious authority on social media, particularly Instagram, is a form of new authority that has grown from the encounter between Islamic scholarly tradition and the dynamics of digital space. Although he does not explicitly highlight his formal educational background, Ismail still has legitimacy as a graduate of Islamic educational institutions and pesantren. This provides a strong foundation for public acceptance of him as a competent religious figure. However, the primary source of his authority does not stem solely from institutional affiliations but rather from traditional authority, as explained by Max Weber, which derives from established social structures and heritage.

In this context, Ismail's authority is supported by his position as a pesantren leader and descendant of a prominent Ulama, Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan, who is a central figure in the pesantren knowledge network in Indonesia. This status grants him strong cultural and religious legitimacy in the eyes of the community, particularly among those who remain firmly committed to the traditional values of the pesantren. In the digital context, this traditional authority remains

influential because social media audiences tend to place greater trust in figures with lineage to ulama or kyai, as symbols of the continuity of scholarly tradition and spiritual blessings.

Ismail Al-Ascholy also possesses strong charismatic authority in the digital age, as described by Max Weber. This authority does not stem solely from traditional religious leadership, but rather from personal appeal that builds trust and a wide following. Ismail Al-Ascholy's interactions on Instagram feature a persuasive communication style and personal spiritual narratives that touch the hearts of his audience. His attractive visual appearance and ability to respond directly to his followers on social media through the story feature and comment section further strengthen his charisma. By utilizing digital platforms such as Instagram, Ismail Al-Ascholy has been able to build intense emotional relationships with his followers, making himself a relevant and inspiring young ulama figure amid the dynamics of modern dakwah. This makes Ismail Al-Ascholy's charismatic authority very effective in attracting the attention and loyalty of audiences in the digital realm.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of Muslim influencers in the digital space marks a significant shift in the patterns of authority in the interpretation of the Qur'an. A study of the Instagram account @ismailascholy shows that Ismail Al-Ascholy not only acts as a conveyor of interpretation, but also as a facilitator of interactive dialogue between the sacred text and the daily lives of his followers. With a communicative, contextual, and participatory approach, he has successfully formed a relationship similar to that between santri and kyai in a digital format, which can be referred to as the practice of "*nyantri digital*." The interaction pattern that has been established shows that followers are no longer passive, but are actively involved in the consumption, distribution, and interpretation of religious meaning. Demographic, psychographic, and segmentation analysis of his followers shows a dominance of young Indonesian Muslims with high spiritual and intellectual motivations. Audience segmentation also indicates the presence of active and passive consumers, both of whom contribute to shaping Ismail Al-Ascholy's authority in the digital space. Ismail's religious authority does not only stem from his intellectual capabilities and experience in pursuing tafsir, but is also strengthened by social and cultural legitimacy as the heir to the tradition of ulama through lineage and pesantren leadership, as well as his personal appeal in conveying religious messages on social media. This finding shows that digital space is not only a means of spreading dakwah, but also a field for constructing a new authority that is more fluid, open, and participatory in the contemporary landscape of Qur'anic interpretation. In this case, Instagram is not only a medium for spreading dakwah, but also a discursive space where tafsir grows and interacts directly with the community. This pattern shows a new form of participatory tafsir in the digital era, where the meaning of the Qur'an is not only transmitted in one direction, but also negotiated and constructed together between the *mufassir* and the audience in a fluid and open space.

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