

Public Ethics and Popular Interpretation: Challenges of Qur'anic Preaching in the Social Media Era.

Abstract:

The development of social media has fundamentally changed the landscape of da'wah and Quranic interpretation in the contemporary public sphere. Da'wah no longer takes place in a controlled, authoritative space, but rather operates in a digital ecosystem characterized by algorithmic logic, speed of distribution, and competition for attention. This article aims to analyze the phenomenon of Quranic da'wah on social media by highlighting the dynamics of popular interpretation, shifts in religious authority, and the accompanying ethical and epistemological implications. Through a qualitative approach grounded in a literature review and conceptual analysis, this research situates digital da'wah practices within the framework of Quranic exegesis and public ethics. The results of the study indicate that social media plays a dual role: on the one hand, expanding public access to the messages of the Quran, but on the other hand, potentially reducing the complexity of the meaning of revelation to simplistic, fragmentary, and often polemical narratives. The absence of an adequate ethical framework for interpretation makes popular interpretation vulnerable to banality of meaning and social polarization. This article emphasizes the importance of reconstructing the ethics of Qur'anic da'wah based on *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, epistemological responsibility, and social awareness, so that social media does not merely become a space for religious expression but also a vehicle for the formation of inclusive, reflective, and civilized religious awareness.

Keywords: *Public Ethics, Popular Interpretation, Qur'anic Da'wah, Social Media*

Introduction

The development of social media over the past two decades has fundamentally changed the landscape of public communication, including the practice of da'wah (preaching) and the transmission of religious meaning. The public sphere, previously mediated by formal institutions such as mosques, religious study groups (*Masyarakat Taklim*), Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), and print media, has now shifted to a digital space that is fluid, fast-paced, and often devoid of established authoritative mechanisms (Hoover, 2016). In this context, the Qur'an serves as the primary normative source. Islam is no longer solely present through academic interpretations and the works of classical scholars, but also through excerpts of verses, short narratives, religious memes, short videos, and viral sermons widely circulated on social media (Campbell & Tsuria, 2022). This transformation presents a great opportunity for the dissemination of Qur'anic values, as well as serious challenges to public ethics and interpretive responsibility.

This phenomenon has given rise to what can be called popular interpretation, a form of Quranic interpretation that is constructed, simplified, and disseminated through digital media for wide public consumption. Popular interpretations do not always come in the form

of books or scholarly works, but rather in the form of concise narratives that are persuasive, emotional, and often normative. Stig Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 181. It works not only as an explanation of the meaning of verses, but also as an instrument for forming opinions, moral legitimacy, and even social mobilization (Zaid, 2005). This is where the issue of public ethics becomes crucial: to what extent popular interpretations adhere to the principles of science, justice of meaning, and social welfare when they operate within the logic of algorithms, attention, and virality.

In the Islamic scholarly tradition, the activity of interpreting the Qur'an has never been understood as a value-free practice (Kamali, 2017). Since the classical period, interpreters have emphasized the epistemological, ethical, and methodological prerequisites for understanding the text of revelation, ranging from mastery of Arabic, the context of the *asbab al-nuzul*, to moral responsibility for the social impact of interpretation. The Qur'an itself emphasizes that conveying the truth must be done with wisdom, *mau'izhahhasanah*, and ethical dialogue (QS an-Nahl [16]: 125) (Al-Qardhawi, 1998). This principle shows that Qur'anic preaching from the beginning contained a public ethical dimension, namely the awareness that religious messages always interact with plural and dynamic social spaces.

However, in the context of social media, the relationship between interpretation, *da'wah*, and public ethics has undergone a significant shift. The logic of digital media tends to emphasize speed, simplification, and polarization, which are not always in line with the complex, contextual, and dialogical nature of Quranic interpretation. As a result, Quranic verses are often removed from their context, narrowed in meaning, or directed to justify particular interests, whether political, ideological, or economic (Esack, 2003). This kind of practice not only has the potential to give rise to reductionism of meaning but can also trigger social conflict, stigmatization of other groups, and erosion of public trust in religious authorities.

On the other hand, completely rejecting popular interpretations is also not a productive option. Social media has become an integral part of contemporary Muslim life, including for the younger generation, who use digital spaces as their primary source of religious knowledge (Yilmaz, 2025). Therefore, the primary challenge of Quranic preaching in the social media era is not between "academic interpretation" and "popular interpretation," but rather how to build an ethical and epistemological bridge between the two. The question then shifts from whether popular interpretation is permissible to how popular interpretation can be developed responsibly, ethically, and remain faithful to the spirit of the Quran as a mercy for the world.

Previous studies on digital *da'wah* and Islam on social media have generally highlighted technological aspects, communication strategies, and changes in religious authority. Some emphasize the democratization of religious knowledge, while others highlight the fragmentation of authority and the rise of religious populism. However, the public ethical dimension of popular interpretation, particularly from the perspective of Quranic exegesis, has received relatively little serious attention (Abdullah, 2017). Many studies stop at phenomenological analysis, without connecting it in depth to the ethical principles of Qur'anic interpretation and its implications for plural public life.

This article addresses this gap by positioning public ethics as the primary lens for interpreting the phenomenon of popular interpretation on social media. Public ethics, here, is

understood as a set of normative values that govern the relationship between religious expression, social responsibility, and the sustainability of harmony in the public sphere(Nisa, 2018). Within this framework, Qur'anic interpretation is not only judged by its linguistic accuracy or the authenticity of its narrations, but also by its social impact: whether it promotes justice, moderation, and empathy, or reinforces exclusivism and conflict.

Thus, the main objective of this article is to critically analyze the relationship between public ethics and popular interpretation in the context of Qur'anic da'wah in the era of social media. This article seeks to answer several fundamental questions: what is the character of popular interpretation that develops in contemporary Muslim social media? What ethical challenges arise from these interpretive practices? And how can the principles of Qur'anic interpretation be transformed into a framework of public ethics relevant to the dynamics of digital media? Through a conceptual-critical approach, this article is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of contemporary tafsir studies, as well as a practical contribution to a more ethical, inclusive, and responsible Qur'anic da'wah in the digital public sphere.

Research methods

This article employs a qualitative approach with a conceptual-critical research design, aiming to deeply analyze the relationship between Quranic interpretation, public ethics, and da'wah practices in the social media era. This approach was chosen because the research focuses not on quantitative measurements or statistical generalizations, but rather on exploring the meanings, normative frameworks, and epistemological problems that arise from the phenomenon of popular interpretation in the digital public sphere(Rahman, 1982).In the tradition of Islamic sciences, particularly the study of interpretation, the qualitative-conceptual approach is seen as most relevant for reading the dynamics of interpretation of sacred texts, which always interact with changing social, cultural, and technological contexts.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data include the Tafsir of al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr, and contemporary thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman, Muhammad Arkoun, and Abdullah Saeed. Meanwhile, secondary data includes interdisciplinary literature relevant to the research theme, such as studies of public ethics, da'wah communication, digital media, and contemporary religious studies. Data collection techniques were carried out through systematic and directed library research(Ullah & Ameen, 2018). This process involved searching primary and secondary literature through reputable academic databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, with strict selection criteria. Prioritized selected literature focused on works directly relevant to Quranic exegesis, public ethics, and digital da'wah, and published by credible publishers or journals.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic-critical analysis. To maintain the validity and credibility of the research, this article employed a theoretical triangulation strategy, combining various theoretical perspectives to ensure a non-one-sided or reductionistic approach(Arkoun, 1994).Indirectly, this research offers an analytical framework and critical reflection that can be used as a conceptual reference. This method allows for an in-depth and

nuanced reading of the challenges of Quranic preaching in the social media era, while also opening up space for further empirical and comparative research in the future.

Discussion

Popular Interpretation as a Digital Discursive Phenomenon

The emergence of popular interpretations on social media cannot be understood solely as a shift in the medium of da'wah, but rather as a discursive transformation in how the meaning of the Quran is produced, distributed, and consumed in the public sphere. In the digital context, interpretations no longer exist primarily as scholarly products born from a long process of philological and methodological study, but as competing discourses within the attention ecosystem(Couldry & Hepp, 2016).Social media works with algorithmic logic that places visibility, engagement, and speed as the main parameters, so that the interpretations of the Qur'an that develop within it tend to be simplified and adjusted to the audience's tastes.

As a discursive phenomenon, popular interpretation can be understood through the framework of the mediatization of religion, the process by which religious practices and symbols are increasingly shaped by media logic. Within this framework, the Quran is positioned not only as a sacred text but also as content that must be “engaging,” “shareable,” and “emotionally relevant”(Bunt, 2018). As a result, certain verses are more frequently highlighted because of their highly suggestive power, while verses that require contextual and reflective reading tend to be marginalized. This process marks a significant shift from interpretation as an epistemic activity to interpretation as a mass communication practice.

In the classical tradition of tafsir, interpretive discourse develops within a relatively secure scientific space, with clear mechanisms of authority established through scientific chains of narration, intellectual reputation, and recognition from the community of scholars. Popular interpretation on social media, by contrast, operates in a more fluid and egalitarian space, where anyone can claim interpretive authority without adequate methodological prerequisites(Gal, 2019). This condition gives rise to what can be called the fragmentation of interpretive authority, namely a situation in which interpretive truth is no longer determined by scientific argumentation, but rather by popularity and number of followers.

This fragmentation is not entirely negative. On the one hand, it has opened up wider access to the Quran and enabled public participation in religious discourse. Many Muslims previously isolated from tafsir literature can now interact directly with Quranic verses through digital media(Ashfiya, 2024).However, without a clear ethical and methodological framework, popular interpretations have the potential to become a means of legitimizing narrow views, ideological bias, and even hate speech disguised as religious arguments. Herein lies the central tension between the democratization of interpretation and the ethical responsibility of conveying the Quranic message.

Furthermore, popular interpretations on social media often blur the lines between interpretation, personal opinion, and preaching rhetoric. Quranic verses are used to reinforce pre-conceived arguments, rather than as texts to be read openly and dialogically. This pattern demonstrates a shift in the function of interpretation from an attempt to understand divine will to a tool for moral justification(Piazza & Landy, 2013). From a public ethics perspective,

174 this kind of practice is problematic because it has the potential to close off space for dialogue
175 and strengthen claims of a single truth in a pluralistic society.

176 From the perspective of exegesis, the main problem with popular interpretations lies
177 not in their concise form or simple language, but rather in the loss of hermeneutical
178 awareness. The awareness that the Quran was revealed in a specific historical context, speaks
179 to a variety of audiences, and has layers of meaning that cannot always be reduced to
180 normative slogans, is often overlooked(Faris, 2023). In fact, classical and contemporary
181 commentators emphasize the importance of tadabbur and caution in ascribing meaning to
182 revealed texts, especially when these meanings are disseminated into the public sphere.

183 Thus, popular interpretation as a digital discursive phenomenon demands a rereading
184 of the relationship between text, interpreter, and public. It is not simply a communication
185 phenomenon, but an ethical terrain that determines how the Quran is present in contemporary
186 social life. Without a strong public ethical framework, popular interpretation risks reducing
187 the Quranic message to a symbolic instrument that loses its transformative power.
188 Conversely, with the right ethical and methodological approach, popular interpretation can
189 actually bridge the gap between academic interpretation and the spiritual needs of modern
190 society.

193 **Religious Authority and Social Media Algorithms**

194 One of the most significant implications of the rise of popular interpretation on social
195 media is a shift in religious authority from traditional structures to algorithmic digital
196 mechanisms. In classical contexts, the authority of Quranic interpretation was established
197 through a long process involving the transmission of knowledge, mastery of methodology,
198 and recognition by the scholarly community(Couldry, 2012).Scholars and commentators gain
199 legitimacy not solely through rhetorical skill but through proven methodological consistency
200 and moral integrity. Social media, on the other hand, creates a new authority determined by
201 visibility, follower count, and user engagement, all calculated by the platform's
202 algorithm(Turner, 2011).

203 Social media algorithms operate on the principle of apparent neutrality, claiming
204 technological objectivity while actually operating on the logic of the political economy of
205 attention. The content deemed "relevant" by the algorithms is not the most accurate or ethical,
206 but rather the content best able to retain users' attention(Schuster & Lazar, 2025). In the
207 context of Quranic da'wah, this situation has encouraged the emergence of instant interpreters
208 who package Quranic verses in sensational, confrontational, or emotional formats to suit
209 algorithmic preferences. As a result, the quality of interpretation is often sacrificed for
210 affordability and popularity(Zuboff, 2019).

211 This shift has given rise to what can be called algorithmic authority, a new form of
212 authority rooted not in scientific legitimacy but in the technical calculations of digital
213 platforms. Within this framework, a preacher or interpreter is deemed "authoritative" not
214 because of the depth of their knowledge, but because of their ability to adapt religious
215 messages to the logic of virality(Cheong et al., 2011). This phenomenon has direct
216 implications for the way the Qur'an is understood and presented to the public, as complex and
217 nuanced interpretations often lose out to black-and-white and provocative ones.

From a public ethics perspective, the dominance of algorithms in determining the visibility of Quranic interpretations raises serious concerns. The digital public sphere, which should be an arena for rational and ethical dialogue, has the potential to fragment into echo chambers, where users are only exposed to interpretations that align with their preferences and ideological affiliations (Chambers, 2023). This situation not only narrows the horizons of religious understanding but also strengthens social polarization and the delegitimization of differing views. In the context of a pluralistic Muslim society, this condition contradicts the Qur'anic principles of deliberation, justice, and recognition of diversity as mentioned in QS al-Hujurat [49]: 13.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

Furthermore, social media algorithms indirectly encourage the commodification of Islamic preaching and Quranic interpretation. Religious content is no longer merely a means of conveying values, but also an economic asset that can be monetized through advertising, sponsorships, and commercial partnerships. In this situation, the line between Islamic preaching as a moral mandate and Islamic preaching as a market product becomes blurred. Quranic verses risk being reduced to "religious branding" that loses its transcendent dimension (Asghari, 2023). The ethical perspective of interpretation demands critical vigilance against this tendency, because the interpretation of revelation is essentially a trustworthy activity that carries moral consequences, not merely a communication strategy.

However, viewing algorithms solely as a threat also risks oversimplifying the issue. Social media still provides strategic opportunities for strengthening ethical, inclusive, and contextual Quranic preaching, if used with methodological and ethical awareness (Abdulrohim & et al., 2025). The challenge lies not in the technology itself, but in the absence of a normative framework guiding the interaction between interpreters, texts, and the public. In this regard, scholars of tafsir (interpretation of the Quran) are required to go beyond external criticism of social media and actively participate in formulating a model for digital da'wah that aligns with the principles of Qur'anic public ethics.

Therefore, the relationship between religious authority and social media algorithms needs to be read dialectically. Algorithms have indeed shifted traditional mechanisms of authority, but they have not necessarily eliminated the need for scientific legitimacy and interpretive ethics. It is precisely in this situation that the urgency of reconstructing interpretive authority becomes increasingly apparent: not by exclusively restoring the dominance of the old authority, but by integrating scientific competence, ethical sensitivity, and digital literacy. Without such efforts, popular interpretation risks becoming a tool for the reproduction of symbolic power that contradicts the ethical purpose of the Quran as a guide for the welfare of humanity.

Public Ethics from the Perspective of the Qur'an

Public ethics from the perspective of the Qur'an is based on the view that revelation not only regulates the individual relationship between humans and God but also establishes a system of social values that guides communal life in a just, dignified, and civilized manner.

The Qur'an positions humans as social beings living within a network of public relations, so that every religious expression, including interpretation, has ethical implications that extend beyond the private sphere(Tanjung & Abdullah, 2025). In this context, Qur'anic public ethics can be understood as a set of normative principles that guide how revealed values are articulated and practiced in a plural and dynamic public space.

One of the main principles of public ethics in the Qur'an is justice (*al-'adl*) as the foundation of social relations. Justice is not only interpreted as formal legal compliance, but also as a moral commitment to placing everything in proportion and not exceeding limits(Al-Qurtubi, 1996).In the context of popular interpretation, this principle demands that the interpretation of Qur'anic verses not be used to legitimize discrimination, symbolic violence, or the delegitimization of other groups(Arkoun, 2002).A fair interpretation must take into account the historical context, ethical goals, and social impact of the meaning conveyed to the public as stated in the word of Allah, QS an-Nahl [16]: 90, which reads:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَنِ وَإِيتَائِي ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ يَعِظُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

The second, no less important principle is moderation (*wasatiyyah*), which affirms the position of Muslims as a mediating community that eschews extreme and reductionist attitudes. Quranic moderation does not mean limitless relativism, but rather a balance between steadfast values and openness to dialogue(Al-Tabari, 2001). In a digital public space that is full of polarization, the principle of *wasatiyyah* becomes an ethical basis for avoiding black-and-white and provocative interpretations(Saeed, 2006).Popular interpretations that are ethical to the public must be able to convey the normative message of the Qur'an without eliminating the complexity of social reality and the diversity of legitimate interpretations as stated in the word of Allah in QS al-Baqarah [2]: 143, which reads:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا

In addition to justice and moderation, the Quran also emphasizes the importance of moral responsibility in public speaking. Verses about what is right and what is good, and the prohibition against spreading prejudice and hatred, demonstrate that public communication in Islam has a strict ethical dimension(Ibn Kathir, 1999).This principle is particularly relevant in the context of social media, where religious discourse can spread widely and have a rapid impact(Rahman, 1980).Interpretations delivered without caution have the potential to give rise to collective misunderstandings and social conflict. Therefore, Qur'anic public ethics demands an awareness of the social consequences of every published interpretation, as Allah says in His book, QS al-Ahzab [33]: 70, which reads:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا

The Qur'anic public ethical framework can also be enriched through the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* approach, which places human benefit as the main goal of Islamic law and teachings. In the *maqāṣid* perspective, interpretation of the Qur'an is assessed not only from its textual suitability, but also from its contribution to the protection of basic values such as life, reason, dignity, and social cohesion(Auda, 2008).Popular interpretations that ignore the *maqāṣid* dimension risk giving rise to literal readings that are ethically dry and socially destructive. In

contrast, the integration of maqāṣid in popular interpretation allows Qur'anic da'wah to function as a constructive, rather than divisive, moral force(Al-Ghazali, n.d.).

In the context of the modern public sphere, Qur'anic public ethics also demands the ability to engage in dialogue with universal ethical principles without losing its normative identity. The Qur'an recognizes human diversity as an ontological fact and makes it the basis for mutual understanding and cooperation(Tang et al., 2018). This principle is relevant for building popular interpretations that are inclusive and communicative, especially in multicultural societies characterized by differences in beliefs and outlooks on life(Rahman, 1979). Interpretations that are oriented towards public ethics do not position the Qur'an as a tool of exclusion, but rather as a source of values that contribute to the common good, as Allah states in his book, QS al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13, which reads:

يٰۤاَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اِنَّا خَلَقْنٰكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَّاُنْثٰى وَجَعَلْنٰكُمْ شُعُوْبًا وَّقَبَاۡئِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوْۤا ۗ اِنَّ اَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللّٰهِ اَتْقٰىكُمْ ۗ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ عَلِيْمٌ خَبِيْرٌ

Thus, public ethics from a Qur'anic perspective provides a solid normative framework for evaluating and reconstructing popular interpretations on social media. Principles such as justice, moderation, moral responsibility, and maqāṣid orientation can serve as an ethical compass guiding interpretive practices in the digital public sphere. Without this framework, popular interpretations risk becoming trapped in the logic of virality, obscuring the ethical intent of the Qur'an. Conversely, by utilizing public ethics as a foundation, popular interpretations can become a means of relevant, civilized, and transformative Qur'anic da'wah.

The Problem of Reductionism and Polarization of Meaning

One of the most prominent problems in popular interpretation practices on social media is the tendency toward reductionism, the narrowing of the Quran's message into simple, often ahistorical, normative formulas. This reductionism arises when Quranic verses are separated from their revelatory context, discursive structure, and ethical purpose, and then presented as instant arguments to address complex issues(Flowers, 2018). In the logic of social media that demands speed and brevity, the complexity of interpretation is often narrowed down to religious slogans that are easy to consume but lack epistemological depth.

Reductionism of meaning is also closely related to the practice of verse selectivity, where popular interpreters tend to choose certain verses that are considered most appropriate to the message they wish to convey, while ignoring other verses that provide a balancing nuance(Kondo & Tebble, 2011). This pattern has the potential to produce partial readings that are not only methodologically misleading but also ethically problematic. From the perspective of exegesis, a fragmented reading of the Qur'an contradicts the principle of al-Qur'ān yufassiruba'duhuba'dan, namely the understanding that the verses of the Qur'an interpret each other within a unified meaning(Al-Zarkasyi, 2007).

In the digital public sphere, interpretive reductionism is often intertwined with the polarization of meaning. Polarization occurs when Quranic interpretations are positioned within a binary opposition: right versus wrong, faith versus disbelief, us versus them(Sevignani, 2022). All of this is done without room for ambiguity and dialogue. This kind of interpretation gains significant traction on social media because it can mobilize

collective emotions and strengthen group identities. However, from a public ethics perspective, the polarization of meaning actually erodes society's capacity for peaceful coexistence and mutual respect(Milan, 2015).

The social impact of reductionism and polarization of interpretation cannot be underestimated. When Quranic verses are used to reinforce exclusive claims of truth, the public sphere transforms into an arena of symbolic contestation rife with suspicion and antagonism. In this situation, Quranic interpretation loses its ethical function as a source of enlightenment and moral transformation, and instead has the potential to become an instrument of legitimizing conflict(Takdir, 2020). This condition is contrary to the purpose of the Qur'an as a guide that leads humans towards justice and social peace, as Allah states in his word QS al-Anbiyā' [21]: 107, which reads:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

From the perspective of Qur'anic hermeneutics, reductionism of meaning demonstrates the absence of historical and contextual awareness in reading the revealed text. Classical exegetes emphasized the importance of understanding the early Arabic socio-cultural context, linguistic structure, and normative intent of the verses before drawing legal or moral conclusions. Popular interpretations that ignore these dimensions risk producing meanings that are not only ahistorical but also irrelevant to the complexities of contemporary reality(Bhat, 2025). As a result, the Qur'an appears as a rigid and narrowly normative text, rather than as a dynamic and contextual source of values.

Furthermore, the polarization of interpretations on social media is reinforced by echo chamber and filter bubble mechanisms, where users are more likely to be exposed to content that aligns with their ideological preferences. In this situation, Quranic interpretation is no longer a means of interdisciplinary dialogue but rather a tool for confirming group identity(Ibrahim, 2014). Qur'anic public ethics demands a reading that goes beyond this logic of exclusivism, by positioning the Qur'an as a source of values that encourage self-reflection, empathy, and openness to difference.

Therefore, the problem of reductionism and polarization of meaning in popular interpretations must be read as a serious challenge to Quranic preaching in the era of social media. The solution to this problem is not simply a moral appeal but requires a methodological and ethical reconstruction of the practice of public interpretation. Popular interpretation must be directed not only to be communicative and relevant, but also to be epistemologically and ethically responsible. Without such efforts, Quranic interpretation risks losing its integrative power in building social cohesion and civilized public ethics.

Qur'anic Da'wah between Popularity and Moral Responsibility

Quranic preaching in the social media era faces an inherent tension between the demands of popularity and moral responsibility. On the one hand, social media opens up vast opportunities for the rapid and massive dissemination of the Quran's message, enabling preaching to reach audiences previously unreachable by formal religious institutions. On the other hand, the logic of popularity that governs the digital space often encourages a shallowing of messages, simplification of meaning, and ethical compromise for the sake of visibility(Shaban, 2024). This tension places preachers and interpreters of the Qur'an in a

moral dilemma that is not simple: how to remain relevant without sacrificing epistemological integrity and public ethics.

From the ethical perspective of da'wah, popularity is not the goal, but rather a potential consequence of conveying a meaningful and responsible message. The Quran itself emphasizes that truth does not always align with the will of the majority, and that the duty of the messenger of revelation is to convey a mandate, not to seek social recognition (Putra & Nofrianti, 2024). This principle has profound ethical implications for the practice of digital da'wah, where metrics of success are often reduced to the number of followers, views, and likes. When popularity becomes the primary measure, da'wah risks shifting from a moral mandate to a public performance, as Allah says in QS al-An'ām [6]: 116, which reads:

وَأِنْ تَطِيعُوا أَكْثَرَ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلَوْا عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۚ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَخْرُصُونَ

Quranic preachers in the digital public sphere essentially function as public moral agents, individuals who not only convey religious texts but also shape the ethical horizons of their audiences. Every published interpretation carries social implications, as it influences how the public understands themselves, others, and social reality (Kamali, 2003). Therefore, the moral responsibility of preachers extends beyond textual conformity to the text and encompasses awareness of the social impact of the message. Interpretations that incite hatred, polarization, or delegitimization of other groups, even if popular, contradict the ethical goals of Qur'anic preaching.

Furthermore, the ethics of Quranic preaching require epistemological honesty, namely a willingness to acknowledge the limitations of knowledge and the diversity of interpretations. In the context of social media, where preachers are often required to appear certain and convincing, acknowledging the complexity of interpretation is often seen as a weakness. Yet, in the Islamic scholarly tradition, prudence and intellectual humility are integral to the ethics of interpretation (Ibn Kathir, 1999). Presenting nuances and differences of opinion in popular interpretations can actually be an ethical practice that enriches public understanding, even if it does not always align with the logic of virality.

Another equally important challenge is the commodification of da'wah, where the popularity of preachers on social media is converted into symbolic and economic capital. This practice raises ethical questions about the boundaries between da'wah as a mandate and da'wah as a profession. While Islam does not deny the material aspects of life, Qur'anic public ethics demands that economic interests not distort the message of revelation. When interpretations of the Qur'an are tailored to the interests of sponsors or the market, the risk of moral compromise increases (Popivanov, 2021). In this context, the integrity of da'wah is tested not by public criticism, but by the internal temptation to sacrifice values for profit.

However, placing popularity and moral responsibility as a binary opposition is also not entirely accurate. Popularity can be an effective tool for Quranic da'wah if managed with ethical awareness and a strong epistemological commitment. The challenge is to formulate a digital da'wah strategy that can harness the potential of social media without falling into the logic of reductionism and polarization (Nuriana & Salwa, 2024). In this case, preachers and academics of interpretation are required to develop a model of Qur'anic communication that is communicative and reflective, popular but still rooted in the principles of public ethics.

Thus, the dilemma between popularity and moral responsibility is not merely a technical one, but an ethical one that demands in-depth reflection on the purpose of Quranic da'wah itself. Is da'wah intended to gain public attention, or to foster a sustainable ethical awareness? The answer to this question will determine the direction of popular interpretation on social media, as well as the quality of its contribution to a just and civilized public life.

Reconstruction of the Ethical Framework of Interpretation in Digital Public Space

Based on the problematic nature of popular interpretation, shifting religious authority, and the challenges of public ethics in the social media era, a reconstruction of the ethical framework of interpretation is needed that can address the dynamics of the digital public sphere without losing the normative foundations of the Quran. This reconstruction is not intended to replace classical interpretation methodology, but rather to actualize it in the context of contemporary public communication characterized by speed, openness, and plurality of audiences(Niam, 2025). In other words, the ethics of interpretation in the digital public space must be understood as an expansion of the responsibility of interpretation, not a simplification of it.

The first step in this reconstruction is to reaffirm interpretation as a public mandate. When Quranic interpretation is conveyed through social media, it is no longer confined to the limited sphere of the scholarly community but enters a broad and heterogeneous public arena. Consequently, interpreters bear a greater ethical responsibility for the social impact of the meanings they produce. This principle demands an awareness that every public interpretation is not merely an epistemological claim but also a moral act that has the potential to shape people's attitudes, perceptions, and social relations(Buchanan, 2002).

Second, an ethical framework for public interpretation needs to be built on the integration of interpretation methodology and digital literacy. Mastery of Qur'anic sciences such as Arabic, the asbab al-nuzūl, and qawā'id al-tafsīr remains a primary prerequisite, but it is no longer sufficient. Qur'anic interpreters in the digital era are also required to understand the logic of social media, including algorithmic mechanisms, viral culture, and the potential for distortion of meaning. Digital literacy in this context is not merely technical ability, but a critical awareness of how media influences messages and their reception in the public sphere(Pangrazio, 2016).

Third, the ethics of public interpretation must be oriented toward the maqāsid al-sharī'ah (the principles of Islamic law) and social welfare. The ethical reconstruction of popular interpretation requires a shift in focus from merely affirming law or identity to protecting basic human values, such as dignity, justice, and social cohesion. From this perspective, interpretations that are textually correct but socially destructive require ethical critique. Conversely, interpretations that encourage empathy, dialogue, and social justice can be seen as more in line with the normative goals of the Qur'an, even if delivered in a popular format(Akhtar, 2024)

Fourth, the reconstruction of interpretive ethics in the digital public sphere requires strengthening awareness of interpretive plurality. Throughout its history, the Quran has given rise to a diversity of legitimate and productive interpretations. This awareness is crucial to prevent claims of a single truth that are often reinforced by the logic of social media. Popular

interpretation with public ethics does not close off the space for difference, but rather educates the public about the spectrum of meanings and approaches to understanding the revealed text. This practice aligns with the ethics of Quranic dialogue, which respects differences and encourages deliberation(Afsaruddin, 2021)

Fifth, the ethical framework of public interpretation needs to be embodied in the operational principles of digital da'wah. These principles include: caution in citing verses, transparency of sources and references for interpretations, avoidance of provocative and stigmatizing language, and a willingness to make corrections and clarifications in the public sphere. These operational principles serve not only as moral guidelines for preachers but also as educational instruments for the public to be more critical in consuming Quranic interpretations on social media(Armita, 2025)

Thus, reconstructing the ethics of interpretation in the digital public sphere is a strategic effort to bridge the tension between popularity and moral responsibility in Quranic propagation. This framework emphasizes that popular interpretation need not be synonymous with shallowing of meaning or ethical compromise. Rather, with a strong methodological foundation and a clear public ethical orientation, popular interpretation can become a medium for transforming Quranic values that is relevant, inclusive, and effective for contemporary society.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes that Quranic da'wah in the social media era cannot be understood simply as a transformation of communication media, but rather as a paradigmatic shift in the production, distribution, and legitimization of Quranic meaning in the public sphere. The emergence of popular interpretations demonstrates the tension between the democratization of access to revelation and the weakening of epistemological and ethical control over interpretation. In this context, the Quran risks being reduced to a normative symbol subject to the logic of algorithms, popularity, and polarization, thereby losing its reflective and transformative power as a moral guide for social life.

Furthermore, this research shows that the main problem with popular interpretation lies not in the simplicity of its language or digital format, but rather in the absence of a public ethical framework that guides interpretive practices in a pluralistic, open space. When interpretation is separated from the principles of justice, moderation, moral responsibility, and the maqāṣid al-sharī'ah orientation, it has the potential to give rise to reductionism of meaning, fragmentation of religious authority, and social polarization. Conversely, the integration of Qur'anic public ethics allows popular interpretation to function as a bridge between the academic exegetical treasury and the spiritual needs of contemporary society without compromising scholarly integrity.

Thus, reconstructing the ethics of interpretation in the digital public sphere is an urgent agenda in contemporary interpretation studies and Islamic da'wah practices. Quranic interpretation needs to be reaffirmed as a public mandate that demands epistemological caution and ethical sensitivity to its social impact. By strengthening methodological awareness, digital literacy, and a welfare orientation, Quranic da'wah on social media can not only remain relevant but also contribute significantly to building a just, inclusive, and civilized public sphere, in line with the spirit of the Quran as a blessing for all of nature.

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