

RECONCEPTUALIZING CONTEXT AND AUDIENCE IN QUR'ANIC DISCOURSE: A MODERN LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF Q.S. AL-MUṬAFFIFĪN [83]: 1–6

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Abstract: Contextual Qur'anic interpretation faces the challenge of relating the historical meaning of a text to contemporary ethical issues without disregarding its original significance. This challenge is evident in the interpretation of *tatfif* in Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifin [83]: 1–6, which historically concerns fraudulent measurement and weighing but also presents an ethical pattern involving the fulfillment of entitlements in exchange relationships. Previous studies have examined *tatfif* in relation to commercial ethics and contextual interpretation, yet the analytical relationship between its specific meaning and contemporary ethical application requires further clarification. This study develops an interpretive framework integrating textual context, historical context, and audience-oriented interpretation. It employs qualitative library research and contextual textual analysis of the relevant Qur'anic verses, classical exegetical works, and literature on linguistics and hermeneutics. The analysis examines the passage's internal structure, its historical context, the audience's role in constructing understanding, and the conditions for contemporary ethical application. The findings indicate that the contrast between *yastawfūn* and *yukhsirūn* represents an asymmetry in the fulfillment of entitlements, while historical contextualization confirms that the primary meaning of *tatfif* remains associated with deficient measurement and weighing. Building on this distinction, the study proposes asymmetrical entitlement as an analytical concept describing a situation in which one party demands full fulfillment of its own entitlement while diminishing another party's legitimate due. Its application is governed by four criteria: legitimate entitlement, a reciprocal relationship, unequal standards, and an advantage obtained by reducing another party's due. This study offers a framework for extending the ethical relevance of Qur'anic discourse through contextual interpretation while distinguishing contemporary ethical analogy from the original lexical meaning of *tatfif*.

Keywords: Asymmetrical Entitlement, Audience Reception, Contextual Interpretation, Qur'anic Linguistics, *Tatfif*.

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Abstrak: Penafsiran kontekstual Al-Qur'an menghadapi tantangan dalam menghubungkan makna historis teks dengan persoalan etis kontemporer tanpa mengabaikan makna asalnya. Persoalan ini tampak dalam penafsiran *tatfif* pada QS al-Muṭaffifin [83]:1–6, yang secara historis berkaitan dengan kecurangan takaran dan timbangan, tetapi juga mengandung pola etis mengenai pemenuhan hak dalam hubungan pertukaran. Penelitian terdahulu telah membahas *tatfif* dalam konteks etika perdagangan dan penafsiran kontekstual, tetapi hubungan analitis antara makna spesifiknya dan penerapan etis kontemporer masih perlu diperjelas. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengembangkan kerangka interpretasi yang mengintegrasikan konteks tekstual, historis, dan audiens untuk menjelaskan hubungan tersebut. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan analisis tekstual-kontekstual terhadap ayat-ayat terkait, tafsir klasik, serta literatur linguistik dan hermeneutika. Analisis mencakup struktur internal teks, konteks historis, peran audiens dalam membangun pemahaman, dan kemungkinan penerapan etis kontemporer. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa pertentangan antara *yastawfūn* dan *yukhsirūn* menggambarkan ketimpangan dalam pemenuhan hak, sementara konteks historis menegaskan bahwa makna utama *tatfif* tetap berkaitan dengan pengurangan takaran dan timbangan. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, penelitian ini mengusulkan konsep *asymmetrical entitlement* untuk menjelaskan pola ketika suatu pihak menuntut pemenuhan haknya secara penuh, tetapi mengurangi hak pihak lain. Penerapannya dibatasi oleh empat kriteria: hak yang sah, hubungan timbal balik, standar yang tidak setara, dan keuntungan melalui pengurangan hak pihak lain. Studi ini menawarkan kerangka kerja untuk memperluas relevansi etis wacana Al-Qur'an melalui penafsiran kontekstual, seraya membedakan analogi etis kontemporer dari makna leksikal asli istilah *tatfif*.

Kata-kata Kunci: *Asymmetrical Entitlement*, Linguistik Al-Qur'an, Penafsiran Kontekstual, Resepsi Audiens, *Tatfif*.

Introduction

Contemporary economic relations involve increasingly complex forms of exchange in which the fulfillment of one party's interests is often directly connected to the rights of another. An ethical problem arises when a party seeks full realization of its own entitlement while providing another party with less than what is legitimately due (Savage et al. 2019, 144–56). A Qur'anic basis for examining this problem appears in Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifin [83]: 1–6, which condemns *tatfif* in the context of measurement and weighing (Maulana and Safitri 2025, 251–65). The opening verses describe those who demand full measure when receiving from others but reduce the measure or weight when giving to them. Al-Ṭabarī interprets this conduct as taking one's own right in full while diminishing the right of another, while Ibn 'Āshūr similarly relates the contrast between *yastawfūn* and *yukhsirūn* to the complete fulfillment of one's entitlement and the reduction of another's due (Ṭabarī 1994, 282–84; 'Āshūr 1984, 187).

Although *tatfif* is expressed through measurement and weighing, the verses present more than a problem of inaccurate quantity. They juxtapose two opposing standards of entitlement: the *muṭaffif* demands complete fulfillment when receiving but reduces fulfillment when giving. The ethical problem therefore concerns the unequal treatment of entitlements within a reciprocal relationship. This creates a phenomenon gap between the historical manifestation of *tatfif* in commercial measurement and weighing and contemporary economic relations, which involve contracts, services, pricing, distribution, and other forms of exchange. The question, therefore, is how the ethical structure embedded in the

verses can be identified and related to contemporary economic relations without detaching *tatfif* from its textual and historical context.

This leads to the central research problem of the study: how can the ethical structure of *tatfif* in Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6 be reconstructed and contextualized so that its contemporary relevance can be established without either restricting the concept to literal deficiencies in measurement and weighing or extending it indiscriminately to every form of economic injustice? Addressing this problem requires attention to the lexical meaning of *tatfif*, the textual relationship between *yastawfūn* and *yukhsirūn*, the historical-commercial circumstances surrounding the verses, and the conditions that determine whether a contemporary practice corresponds sufficiently to their ethical structure (ʿĀshūr 1984, 189–93).

Previous research provides important foundations for addressing this problem. One group of studies examines *tatfif* primarily in relation to business ethics and fraudulent commercial practices. Sambo, for example, examines Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn in relation to unethical business transactions among Muslim traders in Ilorin. Through interviews and descriptive-analytical methods, the study investigates fraudulent practices involving the reduction of weight and measurement and relates them to Islamic commercial ethics and *ḥisbah* (Sambo 2025, 111–19). This research demonstrates the continuing relevance of *tatfif* to contemporary commercial ethics. Its analytical focus, however, remains primarily on fraudulent measurement and weighing in a particular commercial setting rather than on the broader relational structure between the fulfillment of one's own entitlement and the reduction of another's due.

A second body of scholarship concerns contextual Qur'anic interpretation. Saeed develops a contextualist approach to Qur'anic ethico-legal interpretation by emphasizing the importance of the historical context of revelation alongside changing contemporary circumstances (Saeed 2006, 1; Nuraini et al. 2024, 32). His later work further develops the relationship between the socio-historical setting of the Qur'anic message and contemporary contexts and needs (Saeed 2014, 13–14; Rois et al. 2025, 205). Saeed and Akbar likewise argue that contextualist interpretation can facilitate the application of Qur'anic ethical teachings to contemporary circumstances while maintaining fundamental Qur'anic values (Saeed and Akbar 2021, 527). Hatta identifies four major stages in Saeed's contextualist method: engagement with the world of the text, critical analysis, identification of meaning for the first recipients, and determination of meaning and application for the present (Hatta 2023, 47–55). Muhyin similarly examines the methodological dimensions of Saeed's contextual interpretation and its relationship to contemporary social circumstances (Muhyin 2023, 1–16).

The relationship between these two strands of scholarship reveals the research gap. Studies of *tatfif* have established its significance for commercial ethics and fraudulent measurement, while contextualist scholarship has provided principles

for relating Qur'anic meanings to historical and contemporary circumstances. What remains insufficiently developed is the analytical connection between these two areas, particularly a clear account of how the textual structure of *tatfif* can be identified, situated within its historical-commercial context, and then assessed for its relevance to contemporary economic relations. The gap is therefore primarily interpretive and analytical, rather than methodological.

To address this gap, this study proposes asymmetrical entitlement as an analytical formulation for describing the ethical structure of *tatfif*. The concept refers to a relational condition in which an actor seeks full realization of his or her own legitimate entitlement while reducing what another party is legitimately entitled to receive. This formulation is derived from the textual contrast between *yastawfūn* and *yukhsirūn* and from classical exegetical explanations concerning the fulfillment of one's own due and the reduction of another's. "Asymmetrical entitlement" is not a term employed by the classical exegetes or by Saeed; rather, it is an analytical formulation developed by this study from the textual and exegetical evidence.

This study contributes by formulating *asymmetrical entitlement* from the textual and exegetical structure of Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6 to clarify the ethical structure of *tatfif* and its relevance to contemporary economic practices. Its application is limited by four criteria: legitimate entitlement, reciprocal or transactional relations, unequal standards, and advantage gained by reducing another party's due. These criteria maintain the textual specificity of *tatfif* while preventing its extension to all forms of economic injustice. The study employs a qualitative contextual approach based on library research and textual analysis, examining the verses through internal textual, historical, and audience-oriented analysis, with *structural correspondence* used to assess their relevance to contemporary economic relations.

The Concept of Context in Modern Linguistics and the Qur'anic Exegetical Tradition

In modern linguistics, context is fundamental to the interpretation of meaning because language operates within particular communicative situations. John Lyons emphasizes that meaning cannot be adequately understood apart from the situational, social, and psychological conditions in which an utterance occurs (Lyons 1995, 258–92). Pragmatic and discourse-oriented approaches therefore examine not only linguistic structure but also communicative intention, social relations, and the circumstances in which an utterance acquires significance. Context, in this sense, is not merely external information added to a text but an essential dimension of how meaning is understood. The interpretation of an utterance requires attention to the relationship between its linguistic form and the conditions under which it is produced, communicated, and understood.

From this perspective, linguistic meaning cannot always be determined through the isolated examination of individual words or grammatical constructions. The same expression may acquire different pragmatic implications depending on the relationship between speakers, the purpose of communication, the surrounding discourse, and the knowledge shared by participants. Context helps clarify whether an utterance functions as a description, a request, a warning, a criticism, or another communicative act. Consequently, an adequate interpretation requires attention to both the linguistic organization of an expression and the wider circumstances that contribute to its significance. Research on pragmatic competence similarly emphasizes the relationship between linguistic resources and the contextual conditions through which communicative meaning is constructed (Mao and He 2021, 1–13).

The relevance of this perspective to Qur'anic interpretation lies in the need to examine how linguistic expressions acquire significance within the organization of a passage. A Qur'anic verse is not interpreted solely by assigning dictionary meanings to individual words. Its meaning also emerges through syntactic relations, lexical contrasts, rhetorical structures, the sequence of statements, and its relationship to the surrounding verses. These elements establish the immediate textual environment in which a particular expression should be understood. In the case of Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6, for example, the significance of *tatfīf* becomes clearer when the condemnation in the opening verse is read alongside the subsequent description of those who demand full measure when receiving and reduce the measure when giving. The relationship between these expressions provides a basis for identifying the particular conduct being condemned and for examining its ethical implications.

A comparable concern with context can be found in the Qur'anic exegetical tradition, particularly through the concept of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, which refers to the historical, social, and situational circumstances associated with the revelation of particular verses (Anisa et al. 2026, 214–32). Classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī combined linguistic analysis with transmitted reports in order to clarify both the meanings of Qur'anic expressions and the circumstances in which particular passages were revealed. Contextual interpretation, therefore, is not exclusively a modern methodological development but has long been embedded in the exegetical tradition, although its conceptualization and analytical procedures have developed over time.

Within classical *tafsīr*, contextual information does not necessarily replace lexical or grammatical analysis. Rather, transmitted reports, linguistic explanations, and the broader organization of the passage can work together to establish a more comprehensive interpretation. The historical circumstances associated with a verse may clarify the problem addressed by the revelation, while linguistic analysis helps determine what the wording actually communicates. This relationship is important

because historical reports should not be used to disregard the wording of the Qur'an, just as lexical analysis should not ignore relevant historical information. The interpretive task involves assessing how these sources of evidence contribute to an understanding that remains grounded in the text. Contemporary comparative studies of classical *tafsīr* and modern hermeneutical approaches likewise identify the relationship between textual interpretation, historical understanding, and methodological assumptions as an important issue in Qur'anic studies (Ichwan and Salisu 2024, 107–26).

Contemporary approaches to Qur'anic interpretation have further expanded this contextual orientation by relating the historical circumstances of revelation to broader ethical and social meanings. Najib Abdul Kadir et al. (2022), for example, show how Quraish Shihab connects historical context with a universal ethical orientation, treating *asbāb al-nuzūl* not merely as historical information but as a means of understanding the ethical and legal significance of Qur'anic guidance (Kadir et al. 2022, 1464–75). This orientation raises an important interpretive question: how can the significance of a Qur'anic passage remain relevant to circumstances that differ from those of its first audience without losing its connection to the original text? Addressing this question requires distinguishing the historical form of a problem from the ethical significance established through the wording and context of the passage.

Contextual interpretation consequently involves more than transferring a statement from one historical setting to another. It requires a reasoned account of the relationship between the original text, the circumstances in which it communicated its message, and the questions raised by later readers. The contemporary relevance of a Qur'anic passage cannot be established merely because a modern situation appears generally similar to the situation addressed in the text. The interpreter must first establish the passage's textual and historical meaning and then explain the basis on which that meaning may inform a different context. Such an approach helps prevent contemporary concerns from determining the interpretation in advance and reduces the risk of extending a Qur'anic concept beyond what its linguistic and contextual evidence can support (Fadilah 2019, 1–17).

Building on these developments, the present study understands contextual interpretation through three interconnected dimensions: textual context, historical context, and audience context. Textual context establishes the linguistic and rhetorical basis of interpretation; historical context clarifies the social and communicative circumstances of the revelation; and audience context explains how the Qur'anic message is received and engaged by interpretive communities across changing historical circumstances. These dimensions are analytically distinguishable, but they are not independent sources of meaning. Each contributes a different form of evidence to the process of interpretation and helps establish the

relationship between the wording of the text, its original setting, and its subsequent engagement (Saefudin et al. 2021, 79).

The textual dimension examines the internal organization of the passage, including lexical choices, grammatical relationships, rhetorical contrasts, and the sequence of statements. In Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6, this dimension requires attention to the relationship between *yastawfūn* and *yukhsirūn*, the movement from condemnation to behavioral description, and the rhetorical question concerning the Day of Resurrection. Such features are relevant because the ethical significance of the passage is not derived from the word *tatfīf* in isolation. It is also developed through the way the passage describes the conduct of those who insist on the fulfillment of their own claims while diminishing what others should receive (Thabari 2007, 82–83; Demir 2024, 1–8). Textual analysis therefore establishes the initial grounds for identifying the ethical relationship represented in the verses.

The historical dimension then situates this textual structure within the commercial and social circumstances addressed by the passage. Its purpose is to clarify the original referent of *tatfīf*, particularly deficient measurement and weighing, rather than to replace that referent with a generalized concept of injustice. Historical contextualization establishes the circumstances in which the prohibition acquired its immediate significance and helps identify which aspects of the original problem must remain central to subsequent interpretation. Without this dimension, a contemporary reading could detach the concept from its historical reference and treat it as an unrestricted label for various forms of misconduct. Conversely, historical analysis alone does not determine whether the ethical structure of the passage can illuminate circumstances that differ from the original commercial setting (Haleem 2018, 47–66).

The audience dimension addresses this subsequent interpretive process. Later readers encounter the Qur'anic message within social, economic, and cultural circumstances that may differ significantly from those of its first audience. Their questions and interpretive concerns may therefore differ, but such differences do not authorize the arbitrary redefinition of the text. Rather, audience-oriented interpretation examines how the established meaning and ethical significance of a passage may be understood in new circumstances while remaining accountable to textual and historical evidence. In this study, the audience dimension does not refer to an empirical investigation of reader responses. It functions as an interpretive category for considering how later audiences may engage the ethical structure of the passage in contemporary economic relations (Ridho et al. 2025, 645–74).

This three-dimensional framework is particularly relevant to the study of *tatfīf* because the research seeks to distinguish its specific lexical meaning from the wider ethical structure expressed through the Qur'anic discourse. The textual dimension identifies how the passage contrasts the fulfillment of one's own entitlement with the reduction of another's. The historical dimension preserves the original

reference to deficient measurement and weighing. The audience dimension provides a basis for examining whether a comparable ethical relationship can be identified in contemporary practices. Together, these dimensions enable the study to move from textual interpretation to contextual application without assuming that every modern economic injustice is equivalent to the conduct described in the verses (Fadilah 2019, 1–17).

This framework also clarifies the relationship between contextual interpretation and the analytical formulation of *asymmetrical entitlement* proposed in this study. The formulation is not presented as a lexical definition of *tatfīf* or as a term explicitly used by classical exegetes. Rather, it is an analytical description developed from the relationship between textual and exegetical evidence. Contextual interpretation helps determine whether this description remains faithful to the original passage and whether its application to contemporary economic relations can be justified. The process therefore requires both interpretive openness and methodological restraint: openness to examining the ethical significance of the passage under changing circumstances, and restraint in ensuring that contemporary applications remain demonstrably connected to its textual and historical meaning (Kerwanto et al. 2024, 451–70).

This three-dimensional framework does not treat the three dimensions as independent sources of meaning. Rather, they operate relationally. The textual dimension establishes what the passage says and how its meaning is linguistically constructed; the historical dimension clarifies the original social problem and communicative horizon; and the audience dimension examines how the established meaning and ethical structure can be engaged by later readers. This relationship provides the methodological foundation for examining *tatfīf* in Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6 without either reducing its significance to its original commercial setting or extending its lexical meaning without sufficient textual justification (Yunus 2026, 479–90). It also establishes the analytical sequence followed in the subsequent sections: internal textual analysis, historical contextualization, examination of audience-oriented interpretation, and assessment of the ethical structure's relevance to contemporary economic relations.

Internal Context Analysis of Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn

The internal context of Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn is particularly evident in Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6:

وَيْلٌ لِّلْمُطَفِّفِينَ^١ ۖ إِذَا كَتَلُوا عَلَى النَّاسِ يَسْتَوْفُونَ^٢ وَإِذَا كَالُوهُمْ أَوْ وَزَنُوهُمْ يُخْسِرُونَ^٣ ۚ أَلَا يَظُنُّ أُولَٰئِكَ أَنَّهُمْ مَبْعُوثُونَ^٤ لِيَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ^٥ يَوْمَ يَقُومُ النَّاسُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ^٦

“Woe to those who cheat in measuring and weighing! They are those who, when they receive a measure from others, demand that it be given in full. Conversely, when they measure or weigh for

others, they reduce it. They do not think that they will indeed be resurrected on a great day (the Day of Judgment), namely, on the day when all people will rise before the Lord of all the worlds."

The passage establishes a coherent rhetorical sequence in which condemnation, behavioral description, rhetorical questioning, and eschatological accountability are closely connected. Verse 1 opens with the emphatic warning "*Waylun lil-muṭaffifīn*," directly identifying and condemning those who engage in *tatfif*. Verses 2–3 then define the practice through a concrete behavioral contrast: when taking from others, they demand full measure, whereas when measuring or weighing for others, they reduce what is due. Al-Ṭabarī and al-Ālūsī explain *tatfif* within this concrete context of deficiency in measurement and weighing, thereby establishing its primary lexical and textual reference (Thabari 2007, 82–83; Ālūsī 1994, 68).

The opening warning establishes the interpretive direction of the passage before the particular conduct is described. The expression "*Waylun lil-muṭaffifīn*" functions as a declaration of condemnation, while the following verses identify the conduct that warrants such condemnation. This arrangement is significant because the text does not introduce *tatfif* as a neutral commercial activity that merely requires technical clarification. Instead, it places the practice within an explicitly negative moral evaluation. The description in verses 2–3 subsequently explains the basis of that evaluation by showing how the offenders behave when their own interests and the interests of others are involved (Thabari 2007, 82–84). The relationship between the opening warning and the subsequent behavioral description therefore provides a textual basis for interpreting the passage as a unified discourse rather than as a collection of independent statements (Dror et al. 2024, 869–96).

The internal context also directs attention to the relationship between lexical meaning and discourse function. The noun *al-muṭaffifīn* identifies the people condemned in the passage, whereas the subsequent relative clause, "*alladhīna idhā iktālū 'alā al-nāsi yastawfūn*," specifies their characteristic behavior. The relative clause thus provides an explanatory function: it identifies the group through the conduct associated with it. The transition from a general designation to a more specific behavioral description allows the reader to understand the moral category through observable actions (Thabari 2007, 82–84). Consequently, the meaning of *tatfif* emerges not only from the lexical meaning of the word itself but also from the relationship between the designation, the actions, and the evaluation established by the surrounding verses (Al-Ziyadi 2025, 594–644).

The contrast between *yastawfūn* and *yukhsirūn* is central to the ethical structure of the passage. *Yastawfūn* denotes taking or receiving one's full due, whereas *yukhsirūn* denotes causing another party to receive less than what is due. The problem addressed by the verses is therefore not merely technical inaccuracy in measurement but a deliberately unequal standard: the individual safeguards his or her own entitlement while diminishing the entitlement of another (Ṣābūnī

1981, 522). The rhetorical question in verse 4, “*Alā yazunnu ulā’ika annahum mab’ūthūn?*”, marks a significant shift from commercial conduct to moral and eschatological accountability. Verses 5–6 reinforce this shift by locating the conduct within the prospect of resurrection and judgment before the Lord of the worlds (Osaimi 2023, 1–28).

This lexical opposition deserves further attention because the two verbs represent different orientations toward entitlement. In verse 2, *yastawfūn* emphasizes the offenders’ insistence on receiving the full amount when they are the recipients of a transaction. In verse 3, *yukhsirūn* shifts the focus to the consequences of their actions for others. The first verb therefore presents the fulfillment of their own claims, while the second presents the reduction of what others should receive. Read together, these expressions expose an imbalance between the standard applied to oneself and the standard applied to another party. The text does not condemn the act of receiving one’s full entitlement in itself; rather, the ethical problem arises from combining that demand with the deliberate reduction of another person’s entitlement. This distinction is essential for avoiding an interpretation that incorrectly treats the pursuit of one’s legitimate rights as inherently blameworthy (‘Āshūr 1984, 189–93).

The construction of this contrast also makes the relationship between action and consequence explicit. The offenders’ conduct is not described only through an abstract judgment about their character. Instead, the passage identifies two corresponding transactional situations and demonstrates the unequal treatment that occurs between them. The contrast between receiving and giving, as well as between full measure and deficient measure, makes the ethical problem intelligible through the structure of the transaction itself. Such a reading is consistent with discourse-oriented approaches that examine how lexical selection, grammatical organization, and the positioning of information contribute to the meaning of a text (Dror et al. 2024, 869–96).

The passage further distinguishes between the technical form of the offense and the ethical structure that becomes visible through its description. At the lexical level, *tatfīf* remains associated with deficiencies in measuring and weighing. At the discourse level, however, the relationship between *yastawfūn* and *yukhsirūn* reveals a broader pattern of unequal treatment. This distinction does not require replacing the established meaning of *tatfīf* with a new definition. Rather, it allows the specific commercial reference to remain intact while clarifying the ethical significance of the behavior described in the verses. Contextual interpretation is particularly important here because the meaning of an expression is informed by its relationships with neighboring expressions, the sentence structure, and the communicative situation represented in the text (Shorbagy 2021, 8848–8914).

From a linguistic and pragmatic perspective, these textual features demonstrate how meaning is constructed through the relationship between linguistic form,

communicative function, and social interaction. Pragmatic approaches examine meaning in relation to communicative intention and situational context, while discourse analysis considers how linguistic choices organize relations, actions, and meanings within a communicative sequence (Terkourafi 2021, 77–84). Applied to Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6, these approaches illuminate the progression from warning to behavioral specification and finally to eschatological accountability. The rhetorical organization consequently transforms a seemingly specific commercial practice into a broader moral discourse concerning rights, reciprocity, and responsibility before God (Fattahizadeh and Langrodi 2022, 184–200).

A more detailed pragmatic analysis also requires distinguishing between the immediate referent of the verses and the wider ethical implications that can be drawn from their organization. The immediate referent is the conduct of people who demand full measure for themselves but provide less when they measure or weigh for others. The wider ethical implication emerges from the unequal treatment of parties within the same transactional relationship. This interpretation remains grounded in the text because it proceeds from the explicit opposition between verses 2 and 3 rather than from an unrelated contemporary concern. In this respect, the internal context provides the initial basis for identifying the ethical principle that may subsequently be examined in other situations. Contextual analysis of Qur'anic discourse similarly emphasizes the importance of examining linguistic elements alongside their textual relationships and communicative functions (Shorbagy 2021, 8848–8914; Dror et al. 2024, 869–96).

Verse 4 introduces an important rhetorical transition through the expression “*Alā yaẓunnu ulā'ika annahum mab'ūthūn?*” The interrogative particle *alā* gives the question an admonitory force, directing attention toward the inadequacy of the offenders' apparent moral awareness. The question is not presented as a neutral request for information about whether resurrection will occur. Rather, within the sequence of condemnation and behavioral description, it challenges the assumption that commercial conduct can be separated from ultimate accountability. The reference to resurrection thus provides a moral horizon within which the preceding actions must be reconsidered. The rhetorical question links everyday behavior with a larger framework of responsibility that extends beyond immediate material gain (Qurṭubī 2006, 176–77).

The transition is strengthened by verses 5–6, which develop the eschatological reference introduced in verse 4. The expression “*li-yawmin 'aẓīm*” identifies the greatness of the day toward which the question directs the reader, while “*yawma yaqūmu al-nāsu li-rabbi al-'ālamīn*” specifies the day in terms of the standing of humanity before the Lord of the worlds (Āshūr 1984, 192–94). The progression moves from the offenders' behavior in ordinary transactions to the universal setting of divine judgment. The commercial context is therefore not abandoned; instead, its moral significance is clarified through the prospect of accountability

before God. The structure suggests that the evaluation of human conduct cannot be restricted to the immediate advantages obtained through a transaction. It must also be considered in relation to the obligations and consequences that exceed the immediate situation (Osaimi 2023, 1–28).

This eschatological dimension is important for understanding the ethical force of the passage. If verses 2–3 describe an imbalance between what the offenders claim for themselves and what they provide to others, verses 4–6 challenge the moral outlook that permits such conduct to continue. The text connects the distribution of material rights with the recognition of divine accountability. In this way, the warning does more than regulate a particular commercial practice: it places that practice within a moral order in which individuals remain answerable for their treatment of others (Lahna 2020, 309–40). The relationship between the behavioral description and the eschatological conclusion is therefore central to the internal coherence of the passage. It connects the immediate consequences of human actions with their broader ethical and religious significance (Kurniawan and Purnama 2023, 57–71).

The internal organization of Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6 can consequently be understood through four related movements: condemnation, behavioral specification, rhetorical challenge, and eschatological accountability. Each movement contributes to the interpretation of the next. The initial condemnation identifies the seriousness of the conduct; the contrast between receiving and providing specifies the conduct in question; the rhetorical question challenges the moral awareness associated with that conduct; and the reference to resurrection establishes the ultimate horizon of responsibility. This organization shows how the passage develops its ethical argument through the cumulative interaction of lexical choices, grammatical constructions, and rhetorical transitions. Research on Qur’anic discourse similarly demonstrates that the relationship between linguistic form and discourse organization is important for identifying how textual meaning is developed across connected units (Dror et al. 2024, 869–96).

The internal context therefore establishes two interconnected features of *tatfīf*. First, its lexical reference remains specific: it concerns deficiency in measurement and weighing. Second, the rhetorical organization of the passage reveals an ethical structure underlying that practice, namely the asymmetrical protection of one’s own entitlement at the expense of another person’s entitlement. This distinction becomes important when the concept is subsequently examined in relation to its historical context and contemporary application (Qurṭubī 2006, 176; Thabari 2007, 82–84).

The distinction between lexical reference and ethical structure also provides a methodological safeguard for the subsequent analysis. It prevents the contemporary interpretation from becoming detached from the original wording while allowing the text’s ethical implications to be investigated beyond the immediate commercial

setting. The concept of *asymmetrical entitlement* can therefore be used as an analytical term for describing the pattern disclosed by the verses, rather than as a claim that the Qur'an explicitly employs this modern terminology. Its analytical value lies in making the relationship between full self-entitlement and reduced entitlement for others more explicit (Reinhart 2017, 51–82). Any application to contemporary economic, institutional, or social relationships must consequently establish that the relevant situation shares the defining features of the textual pattern instead of assuming that every form of inequality is equivalent to *tatfif*.

More specifically, the passage supports examining whether a party claims the full benefit of an entitlement while knowingly reducing the legitimate entitlement of another party within a reciprocal relationship. The relevant comparison must take account of the nature of the entitlement, the obligations of the parties, and the difference between legitimate self-interest and unjust reduction. Such an approach preserves the distinction between the historical practice of deficient measurement and the broader ethical analogy proposed for contemporary analysis. It also ensures that the argument remains proportionate to the evidence: the verses provide the textual foundation for the analogy, while its application to a particular modern practice requires additional contextual and substantive justification (Saeed and Akbar 2021, 527).

Accordingly, the internal context of Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn provides the textual foundation for the study's subsequent historical and contemporary analysis. Its significance lies not in replacing the established lexical meaning of *tatfif*, but in demonstrating how the Qur'anic passage connects a specific transactional offense with unequal treatment, moral awareness, and accountability before God. The progression from verses 1–3 to verses 4–6 establishes a coherent interpretive framework through which the relationship between entitlement and responsibility can be examined while maintaining a clear distinction between textual meaning and contemporary analytical extension.

External or Historical Context Analysis of Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6

The historical context situates Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6 within a social environment in which commercial transactions depended heavily upon honesty in measurement and weighing. Reports preserved in *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* associate the opening verses with fraudulent commercial practices, particularly the manipulation of measures and scales (Wāḥidī 1992, 289). Although the reports differ regarding the precise historical circumstances surrounding the revelation, they consistently point to fraudulent transactions and deficient measurement as the social problem addressed by the passage. This historical setting clarifies why *tatfif* is presented not simply as an isolated individual fault but as conduct with consequences for social relations. Al-Ṭabarī connects the prohibition of deficient measurement with the restoration of proper dealing between parties, while Ibn Kathīr emphasizes the harm caused to others and the seriousness of deliberately reducing their due

(Thabari 2007, 82–84; Kathīr 1998, 342–45). The historical context therefore demonstrates that the Qur’anic condemnation operates simultaneously at the individual and social levels: it addresses personal dishonesty while protecting the rights of parties involved in economic exchange. This relationship between individual responsibility and the protection of others’ rights is also relevant to contemporary discussions of Qur’anic commercial ethics, particularly studies that examine justice and honesty as foundations for fair trade (Ritonga and Jamal 2025, 325–32).

The historical reports associated with these verses are significant because they connect the Qur’anic warning with recognizable practices within the commercial environment of the early Muslim community. The reports transmitted by al-Wāḥidī describe situations in which traders manipulated measures or employed different standards when buying and selling. Although the details of the reports should not automatically be treated as identical historical accounts, their common emphasis is the abuse of commercial trust through unequal measurement. The interpretive importance of these reports lies in identifying the practical problem to which the opening verses respond: one party could exploit control over measurement to obtain an advantage while imposing a corresponding loss on another. The reports therefore provide a historical point of reference for understanding the relationship between the specific practice of *tatfīf* and the broader concern with fairness in economic exchange (Wāḥidī 1992, 289; Thabari 2007, 82–84). This historical relationship also provides a basis for examining the distinction between the original form of commercial fraud and the wider ethical principles that regulate contemporary transactions, without assuming that practices in different historical settings are identical.

The historical dimension also helps explain why the Qur’anic condemnation is directed toward a pattern of conduct rather than merely toward the use of inaccurate measuring instruments. Measurement and weighing constitute the immediate means through which the offense occurs, but the ethical problem concerns the intentional reduction of another party’s legitimate due. The distinction is important because an accidental measurement error and a deliberate manipulation of measurement are not ethically equivalent. The historical reports, when read alongside the wording of Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifin [83]: 1–3, direct attention toward the conduct of individuals who benefit from an unequal application of commercial standards. Thus, the historical setting clarifies the practical manifestation of the offense, while the Qur’anic wording establishes its moral evaluation. The distinction between a technical discrepancy and a morally consequential practice is important for interpreting the passage carefully: the existence of a difference in quantity alone does not establish deliberate wrongdoing, whereas evidence of intentional manipulation provides a stronger basis for identifying the ethical problem. This distinction is an analytical conclusion drawn from the historical

reports and the textual contrast between receiving full measure and reducing the measure given to others (Mujaddid et al. 2022, 1479–88).

The significance of this historical dimension is also consistent with broader scholarship on Qur'anic economic ethics, which identifies justice, trustworthiness, and the prevention of exploitation as important principles governing economic relations (Mulyany and Furqani 2019, 117–26; Suhada 2020, 197–214). Within this framework, Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifin can be understood as addressing an immediate and concrete commercial practice while simultaneously articulating an ethical concern with fairness in social exchange. The historical context therefore does not replace the internal textual analysis; rather, it clarifies the social problem to which the textual structure responds. The condemnation of deficient measurement becomes intelligible in relation to the expectations that make commercial exchange possible: parties must be able to rely on the declared quantity, the agreed terms, and the fulfillment of obligations. When these expectations are deliberately violated, the problem concerns not only the loss of goods or value but also the reliability of the transaction itself.

The relationship between historical circumstances and ethical principles requires a distinction between the particular form of the offense and the wider social harm associated with it. In its immediate historical setting, *tatfif* concerns the reduction of quantities in measurement and weighing. Its social significance, however, extends to the reliability of commercial dealings, the protection of legitimate rights, and the preservation of trust between parties. When one party manipulates a measure to secure an advantage, the transaction becomes unequal because the benefits and burdens are distributed according to a standard that favors one side. The resulting harm is not limited to the quantity of goods exchanged; it also concerns the integrity of the relationship through which the exchange takes place. Research on Qur'anic business ethics similarly examines the relevance of justice and honesty to contemporary trade, including the ethical challenges posed by digital commerce and information asymmetry (Khoirudin and Azzaki 2024, 73–87). This scholarship supports the relevance of commercial justice as a contemporary ethical concern, while the specific historical meaning of *tatfif* remains grounded in the Qur'anic passage and its classical interpretation.

Furthermore, the historical context demonstrates that the prohibition of *tatfif* cannot be reduced to a concern with private morality alone. Commercial transactions involve relationships among individuals whose rights and interests are mutually connected. A trader's decision to reduce the quantity delivered affects the other party's ability to receive what was agreed upon. The offense therefore has an interpersonal dimension: the advantage obtained by one party is accompanied by a loss imposed on another. From this perspective, prohibition contributes to a broader ethical framework in which personal conduct is evaluated according to its consequences for other people and the fairness of social interaction. The Qur'anic

condemnation of deficient measurement consequently has both a moral and a social function, protecting the integrity of individual conduct while affirming the importance of justice in economic relations (Thabari 2007, 82–84; Kathīr 1998, 342–45). The same distinction between personal virtue and responsibility toward others can be observed in broader Qur’anic discussions of *amānah*, accountability, and ethical integrity, which connect moral commitment with responsible conduct in professional and institutional settings (Firdaus and Aziz 2026, 279–96).

The historical context must nevertheless be distinguished from the contemporary analytical framework employed in this study. The classical reports establish the association between the verses and fraudulent measurement, but they do not themselves formulate the modern concept of *asymmetrical entitlement*. That concept is used here as an analytical category to describe the pattern of unequal treatment represented in the passage: a party insists on receiving the full extent of its own entitlement while reducing what another party is entitled to receive. The concept therefore emerges from the relationship between the historical practice and the textual contrast already identified in the internal analysis. It is not presented as a term used by al-Wāḥidī, al-Ṭabarī, or Ibn Kathīr. Maintaining this distinction allows the study to develop a contemporary interpretation without attributing modern terminology to classical exegetes. The analytical category is proposed to clarify the relational structure of the offense and to make the comparison with contemporary practices more systematic. It should therefore be understood as the researcher’s interpretive formulation, not as a historical term or an established expression in classical exegesis (Khodijah and Musafa’ah 2025, 26–39).

The historical setting also provides an important basis for evaluating the scope of contemporary application. The fact that the original verses address measurement and weighing does not mean that their ethical significance is necessarily restricted to the physical instruments used in early commercial transactions. Nevertheless, extending the interpretation to other forms of exchange requires a reasoned comparison between the historical practice and the contemporary situation. Such a comparison should identify whether the relevant case involves legitimate entitlement, a relationship in which the parties’ obligations are connected, an unequal standard of treatment, and an advantage obtained by reducing another party’s due. These criteria allow the contemporary application to remain anchored in the historical and textual evidence rather than relying on superficial similarities between different forms of economic conduct. They also help distinguish the specific ethical pattern examined in this study from other forms of economic injustice that may require different analytical categories. Consequently, the presence of an unequal outcome is not, by itself, sufficient to classify a practice as an instance of *tatfīf*; the relationship between entitlement, reduction, and advantage must also be established (Alwi et al. 2021, e07103; Calis 2022, 188).

This distinction is particularly important when the concept is applied to

contemporary economic and institutional settings. Modern transactions may involve contracts, financial services, digital marketplaces, information systems, and organizational procedures that differ considerably from the physical measurement practices described in the historical reports (Zac et al. 2026, 798–847). These differences prevent a direct identification of every modern commercial problem with the original practice of *tatfif*. Instead, the historical context supplies a point of comparison through which the ethical structure of a contemporary case can be examined. The central question is whether the modern practice reproduces the relevant pattern of unequal entitlement, rather than whether it merely occurs in an economic environment. Such a method preserves the historical specificity of the Qur'anic passage while permitting a carefully qualified ethical analogy. In practical terms, an investigation of a contemporary transaction must consider the agreed obligations, the rights of each party, the actual conduct, and the distribution of benefits and losses. This evidence-based approach avoids reducing the interpretation to a general moral judgment and enables the researcher to explain precisely why a particular case may or may not correspond to the ethical structure of *tatfif* (Ridho et al. 2025, 645–74).

Accordingly, the external context provides an important boundary for interpretation. It confirms that the primary referent of *tatfif* in Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifin [83]: 1–3 is fraudulent measurement and weighing. At the same time, the historical circumstances help explain why the practice is morally significant: reducing another person's due undermines and violates the integrity of social exchange. This relationship between textual structure and historical circumstance provides the basis for considering how the passage may subsequently be received by audiences living under different economic and social conditions (Khoirudin and Azzaki 2024, 73–87). The distinction between historical referent and ethical significance is crucial because it permits contemporary relevance without erasing the context in which the verses were revealed. The historical reports explain the concrete form of the conduct, while the textual structure makes visible the imbalance between what one party demands for itself and what it provides to another.

The historical and internal analyses therefore perform complementary functions in the overall argument. The internal analysis establishes how the verses construct their condemnation through the contrast between receiving full measure and reducing the measure provided to others, followed by a warning concerning resurrection and divine accountability. The external analysis situates this contrast within the commercial practices described in the historical reports and clarifies the social significance of the offense. Read together, these approaches distinguish the original historical referent from the ethical structure that can inform subsequent interpretation. This distinction is necessary for the study's proposed concept of *asymmetrical entitlement*, because it establishes both the textual basis for the concept and the historical limits within which its contemporary extension must

be justified. The concept does not replace the lexical meaning of *tatfif*; instead, it identifies a relational pattern that can be examined when a contemporary case presents sufficiently comparable features. The analysis thus remains connected to the primary text while acknowledging that contemporary applications require their own evidence and contextual assessment (Wijaya and Muzammil 2021, 449–78; Mujaddid et al. 2022, 1479–88).

The external context consequently supports a twofold conclusion. First, the historical reports and classical exegesis establish that *tatfif* in Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifin [83]: 1–3 refers primarily to fraudulent measurement and weighing. Second, the social implications of that practice reveal a concern with justice, trust, and the protection of legitimate rights within commercial relationships (Thabari 2007, 82–84). The first conclusion preserves the historical and lexical specificity of the passage, while the second provides a basis for examining its ethical relevance in different contexts. This distinction allows the subsequent analysis to investigate contemporary forms of unequal entitlement without claiming that the historical circumstances and modern practices are identical. It also establishes a methodological boundary for the next stage of the study: contemporary practices should be evaluated through a reasoned comparison with the textual and historical evidence, rather than included under *tatfif* merely because they are regarded as unjust. The resulting approach preserves the passage's original meaning while allowing its ethical implications to be explored in a disciplined and contextually responsible manner (Saeed and Akbar 2021, 527).

The Role of the Active Audience in Constructing Textual Understanding

Modern reception theory challenges the view of the audience as merely a passive recipient of an already completed meaning. Instead, interpretation involves an interaction between text and reader, as audiences approach texts from particular cultural, historical, and social horizons that shape how they understand, interpret, and respond to them. From this perspective, meaning is encountered not only through the text's linguistic and structural features but also through the questions, experiences, and expectations that readers bring to the interpretive process. This perspective is particularly relevant to Qur'anic studies because the Qur'an has been read, interpreted, transmitted, and applied by diverse communities across different historical and cultural settings. Examining the audience's role therefore helps explain how Qur'anic interpretation develops across contexts while maintaining the distinction between the text itself and how readers engage with it (Ghozali and Nadia 2023, 191).

The first audience of Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifin [83]: 1–6 encountered the passage within a concrete environment of commercial activity in which fraudulent measurement represented an identifiable social problem. The condemnation of *tatfif* directly addressed dishonest practices involving measurement and weighing, while also emphasizing honesty (*ṣidq*) and justice (*ʿadl*) as ethical

principles governing commercial relationships (Adam 2026, 1–15; Šābūnī 1981, 531). The initial reception of the verses was consequently inseparable from the economic practices and moral concerns of the community to which the message was first addressed. Nevertheless, the historical circumstances of the first audience should not be treated as the entirety of the passage's significance. They establish the original point of reference from which subsequent readers can examine the relationship between the specific practice condemned in the text and the broader ethical concerns expressed through its wording and structure (Ritonga and Jamal 2025, 325–32).

Classical Qur'anic exegesis generally assigned substantial authority to transmitted materials, including *asbāb al-nuzūl*, reports from the Companions, and early interpretive traditions. These materials helped exegetes situate verses within their historical circumstances and establish interpretive boundaries grounded in the transmitted tradition. Modern approaches have expanded this contextual orientation by paying greater attention to historical, social, linguistic, and reader-related dimensions of interpretation. This development does not necessarily displace textual or transmitted evidence; rather, it broadens the questions that can be asked about how the Qur'an is understood and applied under changing circumstances. Contextual interpretation consequently requires a dialogue between established exegetical knowledge and the interpretive challenges encountered by later audiences, rather than an unrestricted departure from the text's historical and linguistic foundations (Ichwan and Salisu 2024, 107–26).

The development of contextual approaches also raises the question of how contemporary readers relate the historical significance of a Qur'anic passage to its continuing ethical relevance. Contextual interpretation requires readers to distinguish between the circumstances in which a passage first addressed its audience and the circumstances in which it is subsequently interpreted. In the case of Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn, the first audience encountered deficient measurement and weighing as recognizable commercial practices, whereas later audiences may encounter economic relationships structured through contracts, financial services, digital transactions, and institutional procedures. These differences make contextual reasoning necessary, but they do not authorize interpreters to disregard the passage's original referent. Instead, the interpretive task is to establish a defensible relationship between the historical practice, the textual evidence, and the contemporary issue being examined (Asna and Amin 2022, 160–71).

Contemporary reception illustrates how audiences engage with the Qur'an through changing media and social environments. Digital platforms, for example, provide spaces in which Qur'anic passages are presented, interpreted, discussed, and circulated through visual content, short explanations, and interactive exchanges. Such platforms can broaden access to Qur'anic discourse and introduce interpretive practices shaped by the communication habits of contemporary

audiences. However, the accessibility and circulation of an interpretation do not automatically establish its exegetical validity. Digital reception must therefore be understood as a mode of engagement whose claims remain open to assessment through linguistic evidence, interpretive context, and established principles of Qur'anic interpretation. Its significance lies in showing how contemporary audiences participate in the circulation and practical reception of Qur'anic messages through media environments that differ from those of earlier generations (Fadoli et al. 2022, 150–59).

The diversity of Qur'anic reception is not confined to digital platforms or Muslim communities. Readers from different cultural and religious backgrounds may approach the Qur'an with distinct intellectual interests, historical experiences, assumptions, and expectations. These differences influence the questions readers ask, the themes they emphasize, and the ways they relate the text to their social environments. Consequently, the Qur'anic audience should not be understood as historically uniform or culturally homogeneous. At the same time, diversity in reception does not imply that every interpretation is equally supported by the text. Rather, the plurality of readers makes it necessary to distinguish between the historical meaning of a passage, the interpretive conclusions drawn from it, and the applications developed within particular social settings (Tolan and Touati 2024, 235–43).

The active role of the audience, however, should not be understood to mean that readers possess unrestricted authority to determine textual meaning. Reception involves an interaction between the text, its established historical context, and the horizon of its readers. The reader contributes to interpretation by recognizing questions that emerge from a particular social environment and considering how the text may illuminate them. Nevertheless, this process remains subject to the linguistic, rhetorical, historical, and ethical structures established by the text. The distinction is essential because the continuing relevance of a Qur'anic passage does not require its lexical meaning to change whenever the circumstances of its readers change. Audience activity is therefore better understood as a process of contextual engagement and reasoned application than as an independent authority to assign arbitrary meanings to the Qur'an (Abd 2026, 151–64; Safei 2026, 42–59).

This distinction is particularly important when reception theory is applied to Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6. The contemporary audience does not redefine *tatfif* according to every new form of economic injustice. The term's primary historical and lexical reference remains the fraudulent reduction of measure or weight. Later readers may nevertheless examine the ethical relationship represented by the passage and consider whether a contemporary practice displays a sufficiently comparable pattern. This requires a distinction between the lexical meaning of the Qur'anic term and the ethical application developed through interpretation. The former is established through linguistic and exegetical analysis, while the latter requires

a reasoned assessment of the relationship between the text and the circumstances under consideration. Maintaining this distinction prevents reception theory from becoming a justification for unrestricted semantic expansion (Thabari 2007, 82–84; Rezwandi 2025, 73–100).

For the present study, audience activity therefore functions as a bridge between established Qur'anic meaning and changing social circumstances rather than as an independent source of meaning. The reader's contribution lies in identifying contemporary questions, evaluating relevant evidence, and assessing whether the ethical structure of the passage illuminates the case being examined. In the analysis of *tatfif*, this process requires attention to the relationship between the entitlements of the parties, the conduct through which one party's due may be reduced, and the advantage that may result. These analytical considerations do not replace the original meaning of the passage; they help establish whether an ethical analogy is justified in a contemporary context. The proposed concept of *asymmetrical entitlement* is therefore used as an analytical category developed by this study, not as a term attributed to classical exegetes or as a substitute for the lexical meaning of *tatfif* (Maghribi and Hidayah 2023, 40–57; Fadoli et al. 2022, 150–59).

The role of the active audience thus has both an enabling function and a limiting condition. It enables the Qur'anic message to be examined in relation to changing economic and social realities, but it also requires interpreters to demonstrate the relevance of their applications rather than relying on general moral resemblance. A contemporary practice should not be classified as an instance of *tatfif* simply because it is considered unfair. Its relationship to the passage must be established through the textual and historical evidence and through careful examination of the practice itself. This approach preserves the interpretive contribution of the audience while maintaining the distinction between the Qur'an's original reference and the contemporary analytical categories used to investigate its ethical significance (Satria et al. 2025, 1143–52).

Accordingly, reception theory contributes to this study by explaining how later audiences may engage the ethical significance of Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6 without treating the historical meaning of *tatfif* as indefinitely changeable. The first audience encountered the condemnation of deficient measurement within a recognizable commercial environment, whereas contemporary audiences may consider the passage in relation to different forms of exchange and institutional practice. The interpretive task is to establish whether a meaningful correspondence exists between the original conduct and the contemporary case. This provides the basis for the subsequent analysis of *asymmetrical entitlement* as a proposed analytical category: it describes a particular pattern of unequal treatment that may be compared with the ethical structure of the passage, without being attributed to classical exegetes or presented as the lexical definition of *tatfif* (Lokman 2025,

1–15).

Reconceptualization of *Tatfif* Through Textual, Historical, and Audience Contexts

The reconceptualization of *tatfif* begins with the textual structure of Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6. The passage first condemns the *muṭaffifīn* (Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1), then describes their conduct as demanding full measure for themselves while giving others less than their due (Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 2–3) and finally connects this conduct with resurrection and divine accountability (Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 4–6). This progression establishes the central ethical tension within the passage: the asymmetrical treatment of entitlements in which one party insists on receiving its full due while diminishing the legitimate due of another. Nevertheless, this ethical structure must be distinguished from the lexical meaning of *tatfif*, which classical exegetes explain primarily in relation to deficient measurement and weighing. Al-Ṭabarī and al-Ālūsī provide the lexical and exegetical foundation for preserving this original referent (Thabari 2007, 82–83; Ālūsī 1994, 68).

The ethical significance of the passage emerges not only from the commercial practice it condemns but also from the way its linguistic and rhetorical elements are arranged. The contrast between *yastawfūn* and *yukhsirūn* presents two unequal standards of treatment: one demands full entitlement, while the other receives less than is due. The rhetorical question in verse 4 challenges the assumption that such conduct can be separated from accountability, while verses 5–6 place human actions within an eschatological horizon. Accordingly, the passage moves from the identification of a specific commercial offense to a moral judgment reinforced by the prospect of resurrection. This reading aligns with linguistic research on how Qur’anic meaning is constructed through the interaction of linguistic form and communicative function, though the precise ethical interpretation of Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6 must ultimately be grounded in the passage itself (Altamtamami 2025, 1512–53).

Table 1. Contextual Approaches and Their Roles in Reconceptualizing *Tatfif*.

Approach / Dimension	Main Analytical Finding	Significance for <i>Tatfif</i>	Role in Reconceptualization
Classical <i>Tafsīr</i>	<i>Tatfif</i> is primarily explained as deficiency in measurement and weighing, supported by linguistic analysis and transmitted reports.	Establishes the lexical and historical boundaries of the concept.	Preserves the foundational meaning.

Modern Linguistic Analysis	The contrast between <i>yastawfūn</i> and <i>yukhsirūn</i> constructs an unequal relationship between one's own entitlement and another's entitlement.	Identifies the ethical asymmetry expressed through the passage's wording.	Clarifies the internal ethical logic of the text.
Historical Context	The passage addresses fraudulent measurement and weighing within a concrete socioeconomic setting.	Confirms the historically specific referent of <i>tatfif</i> .	Prevents unrestricted abstraction.
Audience and Reception	Later audiences encounter the Qur'anic message within changing social, economic, and cultural circumstances.	Allows the passage's ethical significance to be considered in new circumstances without redefining its original lexical meaning.	Connects established meaning with contemporary interpretation.
Textual Context	The sequence of condemnation, behavioral description, rhetorical questioning, and eschatological accountability gives the practice broader moral significance.	Establishes that the offense concerns more than technical measurement; it also involves rights and accountability.	Grounds ethical interpretation in the passage's structure.
Integrated Contextual Synthesis	Textual, historical, and audience-oriented dimensions contribute to distinct but interrelated forms of evidence.	Preserves lexical specificity while allowing the ethical structure to be examined through analogy.	Establishes a sequence from textual analysis and historical contextualization to ethical identification, audience engagement, and contemporary application.

The table demonstrates that reconceptualization does not arise from a single interpretive approach. Classical *tafsīr* establishes the lexical and historical boundaries of the term; textual and linguistic analysis identifies the relational asymmetry expressed in the passage; historical contextualization clarifies the original social problem; and reception-oriented analysis explains how later audiences may engage

its ethical significance. These dimensions should not be treated as interchangeable. Rather, each contributes a distinct form of evidence to an integrated interpretive procedure. A contemporary contextual approach can maintain the relationship between historical particularity and continuing normative significance without assuming that the two are identical (Baaly 2025, 633–46).

On this basis, *tatfif* can be understood at two interconnected analytical levels. At the lexical level, it refers to reducing what is due in measurement or weighing. At the ethical level, the passage presents a relational pattern in which one party secures its own entitlement while reducing another party's legitimate due. The second level does not replace or broaden the dictionary meaning of the term itself; it identifies the ethical significance produced by the passage's contrastive wording, condemnation, and appeal to accountability. This distinction is essential because an interpretation must explain both what the term refers to and how the surrounding discourse evaluates the conduct it denotes. Research on Qur'anic language likewise demonstrates the importance of examining linguistic choices in their textual and syntactic environments, although such research does not independently establish the specific concept proposed here (Dror et al. 2024, 869–96).

The distinction between lexical continuity and ethical extension prevents two opposing interpretive tendencies. The first would restrict the significance of *tatfif* exclusively to its historical commercial form and leave its wider ethical implications insufficiently examined. The second would extend the term indiscriminately to every form of injustice, exploitation, or corruption, thereby weakening its lexical and textual specificity. Neither approach adequately distinguishes the original referent from the ethical reasoning through which the passage may be applied to later circumstances. A more defensible approach preserves the established meaning while asking whether a contemporary practice reproduces the relevant relational structure. Research on Qur'anic business ethics offers a broader framework for considering justice and integrity in commercial conduct, but any specific analogy with *tatfif* must still be demonstrated rather than assumed (Rosidin and Solahuddin 2025, 124–47).

The resulting reconceptualization can therefore be expressed through the relationship between lexical continuity and ethical extension. Lexical continuity means that *tatfif* remains grounded in the reduction of what is due in measurement or weighing. Ethical extension refers to the analytical examination of other practices that may reproduce the same pattern: one party demands or secures its full entitlement while reducing the legitimate entitlement of another. This extension is analogical rather than definitional. It does not establish that every contemporary instance of unequal treatment is literally *tatfif*; rather, it proposes that the relational logic identified in Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifin [83]: 1–6 can serve as a criterion for examining ethically comparable situations. This approach is compatible with scholarship that distinguishes a text's established linguistic meaning from the

interpretive processes through which its significance is discussed in new contexts (Musfiroh and Syamsuddin 2020, 321; Calis 2022, 188).

This distinction also provides the methodological basis for assessing contemporary practices. Practice should not be classified as *tatfif* merely because it is exploitative, corrupt, or economically unjust. Its relevance must be established by identifying the entitlement at stake, the relationship between the parties, the specific reduction of another party's legitimate due, and the advantage obtained through that reduction. These conditions make the proposed analogy more precise and prevent the concept from becoming a general label for wrongdoing. They also distinguish the present study's analytical proposal from the classical exegetical terminology: *asymmetrical entitlement* is a category developed here to describe a relational pattern inferred from the passage, not a term attributed to classical exegetes (Bushra and Pakeeza 2022, 1–19).

The analytical movement established in this study can consequently be formulated as a sequential process. Textual analysis identifies the linguistic and rhetorical basis of the passage; historical contextualization establishes its original social and communicative setting; ethical identification clarifies the relational structure implicated in the condemned conduct; audience engagement considers how later readers encounter that structure under changing circumstances; and contemporary application tests whether a later practice genuinely reproduces the relevant pattern. This sequence is not a substitute for exegesis. It is a methodological procedure for ensuring that contemporary ethical reasoning remains accountable to textual evidence and historical limits. Work on Qur'anic interpretation and business ethics provides relevant points of comparison for connecting normative principles with contemporary economic questions, while the particular sequence and criteria employed here constitute the framework proposed by this study (Kerwanto et al. 2024, 451–70).

Accordingly, this study does not propose a new lexical definition of *tatfif* detached from the Qur'anic text. It develops a contextual procedure for preserving the term's established meaning while making explicit the ethical structure that emerges from Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6. The contribution lies in distinguishing the original commercial referent from a carefully delimited ethical analogy. The next section applies this distinction by assessing contemporary practices against the proposed criteria rather than presuming that their economic or moral undesirability automatically makes them instances of *tatfif*.

Contemporary Application of *Tatfif*

The contemporary application of *tatfif* begins with the structure established by Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6, not with an unrestricted expansion of the term. A contemporary practice becomes relevant to the present analysis when it contains identifiable features corresponding to the passage's ethical pattern: a legitimate

entitlement, a relationship between parties in which their respective obligations or claims are connected, a reduction of one party's due, and an advantage secured through that reduction. These criteria provide a basis for evaluating analogical relevance while preserving the distinction between the original meaning of *tatfif* and its proposed contemporary ethical application. They also make the analysis falsifiable in a practical sense: if the relevant entitlement, reduction, or advantage cannot be established, the analogy remains insufficiently demonstrated (Has et al. 2026, 151–63; Qurṭubī 2006, 176).

Principles such as *ʿadl* (justice), *amānah* (trustworthiness), and social responsibility help situate this analysis within broader discussions of Qurʾānic economic ethics. These principles are relevant because economic relations involve not only the pursuit of individual interests but also obligations toward other parties whose rights may be affected by a transaction or institutional decision. Nevertheless, general ethical principles do not independently establish that a particular practice corresponds to *tatfif*. The analytical task is narrower: to determine whether the conduct reproduces the specific pattern in which one party secures its own entitlement while reducing another party's legitimate due. Contemporary research on Islamic business ethics and economic responsibility provides a relevant normative context for this question (Kanwal and Aziz 2025, 432–43; Geovani and Saputra 2023, 12–30).

The social consequences of unfair economic relationships can extend beyond the immediate loss suffered by an individual. When obligations are fulfilled selectively, or standards are applied unequally, the resulting conduct may undermine trust, mutual responsibility, and confidence in commercial or institutional relationships. These consequences help explain the broader significance of the Qurʾānic condemnation of deficient measurement, but they should not be confused with the criteria that establish an analogy. A practice may damage trust or collective well-being without necessarily reproducing the particular relational structure identified in Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6. The analysis must therefore distinguish the wider consequences of injustice from the more specific question of whether a party obtains an advantage by reducing another party's legitimate due (Alfian et al. 2024, 190–203).

For this reason, practices such as corruption, exploitation, contractual manipulation, or unfair treatment should not automatically be classified as contemporary *tatfif*. Their relevance depends on the circumstances. A contractual arrangement, for example, may warrant comparison when one party demands complete performance from the other but deliberately withheld a payment or benefit that is contractually due. An institutional practice may warrant examination when an organization insists on full compliance from those subjects to its rules while selectively denying them an entitlement it is obligated to provide. In both cases, the analogy requires evidence of the entitlement, the unequal treatment,

the actual reduction of what is due, and the advantage gained. The resemblance is therefore structural rather than merely superficial: it concerns how the parties' respective entitlements are treated, not simply whether the conduct appears unfair (Siregar et al. 2025, 568–86).

This approach avoids two opposing interpretive extremes. The first restricts the ethical significance of *tatfif* exclusively to historical practices of measurement and weighing, thereby leaving its relational implications unexamined in contemporary contexts. The second expands the term to cover every form of economic wrongdoing, obscuring the specific meaning established by the Qur'anic passage. The present framework avoids both extremes by maintaining lexical continuity while allowing a carefully justified ethical extension. The original meaning remains grounded in the historical practice of deficient measurement and weighing, while contemporary practices are examined by analogy only when the relevant relational features can be demonstrated. Such an approach is consistent with interpretive scholarship that considers historical situatedness and continuing normative significance together rather than treating them as mutually exclusive (Farj 2021, 1–20).

The transition from the Qur'anic passage to contemporary application therefore involves neither the replacement of historical meaning nor the automatic transfer of a historical label to modern circumstances. Instead, the interpreter identifies the ethical structure supported by the text and evaluates whether a contemporary case reproduces it. This requires attention to differences between the original commercial setting and the modern institution under consideration, as well as to the evidence needed to establish an actual reduction of legitimate entitlement. Contextual interpretation thus serves as a means of regulating analogy, not of authorizing unlimited reinterpretation. Contemporary discussions of Qur'anic interpretation similarly address the challenge of maintaining a relationship between the text's historical setting and its normative engagement with changing social realities (Abou-Bakr 2023, 1087).

The concept of *asymmetrical entitlement* provides the analytical vocabulary for this procedure. In this study, it denotes a relational arrangement in which one party secures or demands its own full entitlement while reducing another party's legitimate due. The concept is not presented as a lexical synonym for *tatfif* or as a definition supplied by classical exegetes. Rather, it functions as an author-developed analytical category for testing whether a contemporary practice exhibits an ethical pattern comparable to the one articulated in Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6. Its usefulness depends on maintaining this distinction: the Qur'anic term retains its established lexical reference, while *asymmetrical entitlement* identifies the relational pattern used for contemporary ethical comparison (Qurṭubī 2006, 176–83).

Accordingly, the contemporary relevance of *tatfif* lies in a disciplined process of

ethical comparison. A proposed case must be assessed in terms of the entitlement involved, the connection between the parties' claims and obligations, the reduction of a legitimate due, and the advantage derived from that reduction. If these elements are absent or cannot be substantiated, the classification should not be asserted merely because practice is undesirable. If they are present, the case may be examined as an ethical analogy to the relational structure of the Qur'anic passage, while its historical and legal differences remain explicit. This procedure preserves the specificity of the original text while allowing its ethical significance to inform a critical examination of contemporary economic relations.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the interpretation of *tatfif* in Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6 can be developed through a contextual approach that integrates internal textual context, historical context, and audience-oriented interpretation. The internal textual analysis reveals that the contrast between *yastawfun* and *yukhsirūn* establishes the central ethical concern of the passage: a party demands the full fulfillment of its own entitlements while reducing what another party is legitimately due. The progression of the verses, from condemnation in verse 1 and the description of specific conduct in verses 2–3 to the rhetorical question and eschatological accountability in verses 4–6, demonstrates that transactional behavior concerns not only economic practices but also moral and religious responsibility. Nevertheless, the historical analysis confirms that the primary meaning of *tatfif* remains associated with deficient measurement and weighing. Its broader ethical significance must therefore be developed through contextual reasoning without displacing its established lexical and historical meaning.

This study's principal conceptual contribution is to propose *asymmetrical entitlement* as an analytical category for explaining the relational pattern reflected in the passage. The term describes a situation in which an individual or party seeks full fulfillment of its own legitimate entitlement while simultaneously diminishing what another party is entitled to receive. This concept is an analytical formulation developed by the present study; it is neither a term explicitly employed by classical Qur'anic exegetes nor a lexical definition of *tatfif*. Its application is guided by four criteria: legitimate entitlement, a reciprocal or transactional relationship, the application of unequal standards, and an advantage gained by reducing another party's due. These criteria provide a basis for identifying contemporary practices that structurally correspond to the ethical pattern expressed in Q.S. Al-Muṭaffifīn [83]: 1–6, while distinguishing them from other forms of injustice that may not share these defining characteristics.

This study also emphasizes the audience's role in connecting textual meaning to contemporary economic concerns. Contemporary audiences may interpret the ethical message of *tatfif* in various forms of exchange, including contractual relationships, commercial activities, and institutional practices. However,

contemporary relevance cannot be established solely through general similarities or the judgment that a particular practice is unjust. Each proposed application requires an examination of the rights and obligations of the parties involved, the conduct through which another party's due is diminished, and the advantage obtained from that reduction. Audience engagement thus facilitates contextual application while remaining accountable to linguistic evidence, historical understanding, and textual interpretation.

Overall, this study offers a contextual framework for understanding the ethical significance of the Qur'an in contemporary life while preserving the distinction between lexical continuity and ethical extension. This approach avoids two tendencies: restricting the passage's relevance exclusively to the historical practice of reducing measurements and weights and extending *tatfif* indiscriminately to all forms of economic injustice. The proposed framework provides a foundation for further research into contemporary exchange practices using specific contractual, social, and institutional evidence. Future studies may apply the four criteria to documented cases to assess their analytical usefulness in explaining contemporary economic ethics. In this way, contextual interpretation can broaden the understanding of the Qur'an's ethical message without conflating contemporary analogy with the original meaning of *tatfif*.

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