

THE SHIFTING VISIBILITY OF *TAFSĪR* AUTHORITY IN THE AI ERA: ISLAMIC EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE DIGITALIZATION OF QUR'ANIC STUDIES

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Abstract: The digitization of the Qur'an has reconfigured how Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsīr*) is produced, mediated, and perceived, particularly as artificial intelligence (AI) enters a tradition grounded in *sanad*, the chain of scholarly transmission. This study aims to examine the development of AI in digital tafsir, compare algorithmic interpretation with classical tafsir methodology, and assess how algorithmic visibility relates to epistemic authority and the validity of interpretation. Using a descriptive-analytical-critical approach combined with comparative and critical (*naqd*) methods, this library research draws on scholarly literature on digital religion, AI, and tafsir, including a secondary comparative study of ChatGPT and classical tafsir. The analysis is framed by Islamic epistemology, namely *sanad*, *uṣūl al-tafsīr*, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. The findings indicate that AI has evolved from digitization and curated repositories into generative systems that are effective for access, linguistic analysis, and the preservation of *turāth*. However, the generative model examined shows limitations regarding *sanad*, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *maqāṣid*, and verifiable references, although this evidence is limited and cannot be generalized to all AI systems. Aspects that have undergone a shift is the visibility and perceived authority of interpretation, not demonstrably its epistemic legitimacy. These findings demonstrate that the shift is an epistemological tendency rather than an empirically proven displacement of scholars, and that integrating scholarly authority with digital innovation should follow four principles of a digital *sanad*: source traceability, scholarly accountability, methodological transparency, and the separation of visibility from legitimacy.

Keywords: Algorithmic Authority, Artificial Intelligence, Digital Tafsir, Islamic Epistemology, *Sanad*.

Abstrak: Digitalisasi Al-Qur'an telah mengubah cara penafsiran diproduksi, dimediasi, dan dipersepsikan, terutama ketika kecerdasan buatan (AI) memasuki tradisi penafsiran Al-Qur'an yang berpijak pada *sanad*, yakni rantai transmisi keilmuan. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji perkembangan AI dalam tafsir digital, membandingkan tafsir algoritmik dengan metodologi tafsir klasik, serta menilai hubungan antara visibilitas algoritmik dengan otoritas epistemik dan

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validitas penafsiran. Dengan pendekatan deskriptif-analisis-kritis yang dipadukan dengan metode komparatif dan kritik (*naqd*), penelitian kepustakaan ini menelaah literatur ilmiah tentang agama digital, AI, dan tafsir, termasuk studi komparatif sekunder atas ChatGPT dan tafsir klasik. Analisis dikerangkai oleh epistemologi Islam, yakni *sanad*, *uṣūl al-tafsīr*, dan *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa AI berkembang dari digitalisasi dan repositori terkurasi menjadi sistem generatif yang efektif untuk akses, analisis linguistik, dan pelestarian turats. Namun, model generatif yang dikaji menunjukkan keterbatasan pada *sanad*, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *maqāṣid*, dan rujukan yang dapat diverifikasi, meskipun bukti ini terbatas dan tidak dapat digeneralisasi pada seluruh sistem AI. Aspek yang mengalami pergeseran adalah visibilitas dan persepsi otoritas penafsiran, bukan legitimasi epistemiknya yang terbukti. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pergeseran tersebut merupakan kecenderungan epistemologis, bukan penggantian ulama yang terbukti secara empiris, dan bahwa integrasi otoritas keilmuan dengan inovasi digital perlu berpijak pada empat prinsip *sanad* digital: keterlacakan sumber, pertanggungjawaban keilmuan, transparansi metodologis, dan pembedaan visibilitas dari legitimasi.

Kata-kata Kunci: Epistemologi Islam, Kecerdasan Buatan, Otoritas Algoritmik, *Sanad*, Tafsir Digital.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the ways in which Muslims interact with sacred texts. This transformation necessitates a clear conceptual distinction: the Qur'an, as the essence of divine revelation, remains eternal, whereas the *muṣḥaf* (the compilation of the Qur'anic text in physical form) has increasingly shifted into digital formats, which in turn have reconfigured the landscape of *tafsīr* (the interpretation of Qur'anic meanings). One manifestation of this transformation is the Qur'an Kemenag application, which integrates the standardized Qur'anic text based on the *rasm 'Uthmānī* (the orthographic conventions of Qur'anic writing established during the caliphate of 'Uthmān), *tafsīr*, and interactive features (Fahmi and Layyinnati 2025, 148). Nevertheless, this increased accessibility has generated serious epistemological challenges. The authority of *tafsīr*, traditionally grounded in *sanad* (a continuous chain of scholarly transmission), is increasingly displaced by what may be termed algorithmic authority, which prioritizes search-engine visibility over methodological validity. This dynamic of digital religion has been examined by Campbell and Evolvi in relation to the recontextualization of cyber rituals; by Bunt in relation to the decentralization of Islamic authority; by Pink in relation to transformations in media and the genealogy of contemporary *tafsīr* (Pink 2019, 112–15), and by Saifullah, Wahid, and Fazrian in relation to the computational tensions involved in reconstructing *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* (tradition-based Qur'anic exegesis) in the face of computational interpretation (Saifullah et al. 2026, 470–75).

Nevertheless, previous studies that specifically address AI and Qur'anic *tafsīr* have largely concentrated on three areas that differ from the focus of this article: mapping the opportunities and ethical challenges of using AI in *tafsīr* more generally (Purnamawati 2025, 40–45), negotiating the boundaries of interpretive authority between scholars and machines at the level of local

religious practice (Azizi and Nurullah 2025, 165–78), and providing systematic literature reviews of digital *tafsīr* discourse in a broadly descriptive manner, without examining authority through the epistemological framework of *‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* or conducting a concrete comparative analysis of AI-generated *tafsīr* on specific Qur’anic verses (Abdullah and Zulfiqar 2026, 1–9). The novelty of this study therefore lies not in reiterating these mappings, but in advancing an epistemological critique that explicitly distinguishes between algorithmic visibility and the legitimacy of epistemic authority grounded in the *sanad*-based scholarly tradition in determining the validity of Qur’anic interpretation. This conceptual distinction has not yet been the explicit focus of the four aforementioned studies.

Building upon this novelty, the primary objective of this study is to critically examine the epistemological shift in Qur’anic *tafsīr* in the era of artificial intelligence (AI) and to evaluate its implications for the validity of Qur’anic interpretations, rather than approaching the issue solely from the perspective of media studies. In light of this epistemological gap, the research problem is formulated into three research questions: (1) How has artificial intelligence developed and been integrated into the current digital *tafsīr* ecosystem? (2) What are the strengths and limitations of algorithmic *tafsīr* when compared with classical *tafsīr* methodologies? (3) What are the implications of the shift toward algorithmic authority for the validity of Qur’anic *tafsīr* in the digital era?

These three issues are addressed integratively through a sequence of methodological approaches. A descriptive approach is employed to map the dynamics of the AI-based *tafsīr* ecosystem and address the first research question. A comparative method is then applied to examine the computational capabilities of AI vis-à-vis the methodological principles of classical *mufasssīrūn*, thereby addressing the second question. Finally, a critical (*naqd*) approach based on library research is integrated to evaluate the epistemological parameters and examine the limits of the validity of algorithmic *tafsīr*, thereby addressing the third research question.

Digital Transformation in Qur’anic Studies

The emergence of digital Qur’ans and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in Islamic studies constitute part of the broader dynamics of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which has driven transformations across various sectors, including education and religious studies. Digital transformation can be understood as a comprehensive change in modes of operation, knowledge production, and patterns of interaction through the utilization of information and communication technologies to create more effective and innovative systems (Ningsih et al. 2023, 345–58). Within the field of Qur’anic Studies, however, this transformation extends beyond the technical and material dimensions. Also, it reshapes three interrelated aspects: who produces *tafsīr* knowledge (production), through which channels such knowledge is disseminated (mediation), and how it is perceived as

authoritative by its audiences (perception). These three aspects provide the central thread of the following discussion, as digital transformation is fundamentally not merely a matter of improving accessibility but also involves a shift in the structure of scholarly authority within *tafsīr* itself (Zaid et al. 2022, 5–8).

At the material level, the *muṣḥaf*, the physical form of the Qur'anic manuscript that serves as the textual medium, which conceptually needs to be distinguished from the Qur'an as the *kalām Allāh* itself and from *tafsīr* as a product of explanation and interpretation, has now taken digital forms through applications, e-books, and online platforms, facilitating access across spatial and temporal boundaries (Arifah 2025, 503–15). This transformation in the form of the *muṣḥaf* has shifted the dimension of production: the publication and distribution of Qur'anic texts, which were previously largely controlled by official religious institutions, now also involve application developers and platform providers as new actors. Digitalization has also contributed to the preservation of the rasm, the orthographic conventions of the Uthmanic *muṣḥaf*, which serve as a reference for authenticating the text against classical Qur'anic manuscripts while simultaneously providing broader access for researchers (Déroche 2025, 112–20). Beyond the transformation of the *muṣḥaf*, the dissemination of *tafsīr* works through digital media, such as the digitization of *Tafsīr al-Mishbah* through YouTube and interactive applications, demonstrates a shift at the level of mediation. Works of *tafsīr* that were previously accessed primarily through *majelis taklim* or printed editions now circulate across algorithmically mediated platforms, a pattern described in contemporary digital religion scholarship as a new form of the digitalization of religious learning that expands reach while simultaneously reshaping the governance of religious engagement (Fakhruroji 2018, 205–9).

Nevertheless, digital transformation is not without epistemological and ethical challenges, particularly at the level of *perception*. When the *muṣḥaf* as a material medium is reduced to merely a digital file without due regard for its etiquette (*adab*) and sacred character, what may diminish is the symbolic aura of the *muṣḥaf* as a material manifestation, not the status of the Qur'an as the *kalām Allāh*, whose authenticity does not depend on the medium through which it is conveyed. The integration of AI into the field of *tafsīr* poses a similar risk at the level of knowledge production. Algorithmic bias and the possibility of interpretive distortion may arise when technology is employed without an adequate scholarly foundation. This is reflected in studies of hybrid forms of digital religious authority, in which algorithms increase the visibility of a particular interpretation. At the same time, its scholarly legitimacy remains determined by institutional recognition and scholarly *sanad* (Akhmetova et al. 2026, 4–7). At the same time, excessive reliance on technology may weaken the tradition of *talaqqī*, a method of direct, face-to-face learning between student and teacher that constitutes a link in the scholarly *sanad* (chain of scholarly transmission), which has long served as a foundation for

the transmission of Islamic scholarly authority (Syahir et al. 2025, 542–85).

One of the most visible changes resulting from digital transformation can be observed in patterns of Qur’anic learning, which represent the clearest intersection between technological transformation and shifts in scholarly authority. Traditional learning, which emphasizes *sanad*, *talaqqī*, and teacher authority, is gradually shifting toward digital models based on applications, virtual classes, and AI-powered tutors. This shift directly transfers part of the scholarly gatekeeping function from teachers with established *sanad* to digital systems and platform providers (Ningsih et al. 2023, 345–58). Applications such as Tilawati Mobile demonstrate how digital media can enrich the learning process through the integration of audiovisual features. Meanwhile, recent research on digital religious authority emphasizes that such an expansion of algorithmic visibility does not necessarily replace *sanad*-based legitimacy but instead generates a hybrid form of authority that continuously negotiates with institutional and scholarly authority (Atallah 2026, 3–5). Moreover, AI-based systems enable more personalized learning approaches and provide immediate feedback on aspects of *tajwīd*, pronunciation, and memorization. Thus, this transformation demonstrates that technology is no longer merely a technical support tool but has become both an integral component and a new actor within the contemporary ecosystem of Qur’anic knowledge production, mediation, and reception (Basir et al. 2024, 386).

The expansion of the digital landscape in Qur’anic Studies has occurred not only at the level of popular applications but also through academic platforms specifically designed to support *tafsīr* research. The case of Altafsir.com, for instance, demonstrates how a non-generative website that compiles dozens of classical *tafsīr* works in an online format can serve as a bridge between manuscripts and contemporary readers without severing the chain of reference to the original works (Wildan 2025, 99–113). This model differs fundamentally from platforms based on generative AI. In the former, the authority of the texts presented remains grounded in the established works of *mufasssīrūn*, while technology is primarily limited to indexing and search functions. This distinction is important to emphasize because not all forms of *tafsīr* digitalization entail the same epistemological risks. Such risks increase significantly when a system begins to autonomously generate new interpretive texts rather than merely reproducing or displaying existing ones.

At the same time, a review of the digital Qur’an application ecosystem indicates that the majority of widely available applications continue to focus on recitation, memorization, and translation, while generative AI features such as *tafsīr* question-and-answer chatbots have only begun to emerge as a trend in recent years (Yusof et al. 2025, 646). Another study examining the impact of digital applications on Qur’anic learning among students found that ease of access was positively associated with reading frequency but did not necessarily enhance depth of understanding. Many users tended to stop at the level of literal translation

without further examining the accompanying *tafsir* (Hasanah et al. 2025, 146–59). This pattern indicates that digital transformation in Qur’anic Studies has advanced more rapidly in terms of accessibility than methodological literacy. This gap, in turn, creates greater space for algorithmic authority to fill the resulting gap in understanding, as will be examined further in the following section.

From the perspective of Islamic educational institutions, this digital transformation has also reshaped the patterns of interaction among students, lecturers, and sources of religious knowledge. Several Islamic higher education institutions have begun incorporating AI literacy into Islamic studies curricula; however, implementation remains varied and is often not yet accompanied by adequate strengthening of classical methodological competencies. This condition demonstrates that digital transformation is not merely a matter of providing technological infrastructure but also concerns the epistemological readiness of Islamic educational institutions to respond to these changes. Without strengthening the methodological dimension, the presence of technology may widen the gap between the ease of accessing religious information and the depth of understanding it. This paradox constitutes one of the central arguments of this article.

The effects of this shift are also evident among younger Muslims who have grown up as *digital natives*. For this generation, initial encounters with the Qur’an increasingly take place through smartphone screens rather than through physical *mushafs* or *majelis taklim*. Consequently, their perceptions of *tafsir* authority may also be shaped by the logic of digital interfaces: ease of search, appealing presentation, and rapid response, rather than by the depth of the scholarly *sanad* underlying the sources they consult. This condition does not necessarily indicate a decline in young Muslims’ interest in engaging with the Qur’an in depth. Rather, it underscores the need to redesign strategies for digital Islamic education so that they continue to cultivate awareness of the importance of *sanad*-based sources while taking advantage of the accessibility offered by digital technology.

Regional variations in the patterns of *tafsir* digitalization also merit attention. In Southeast Asia, for instance, the development of digital Qur’an applications and the integration of AI tend to proceed alongside the strengthening of the role of official religious institutions, as illustrated by a review of the application ecosystem in Malaysia, which demonstrates the active involvement of state religious authorities in the curation and validation of content (Yusof et al. 2025, 646–50). This pattern differs from that of several global generative AI platforms that operate across national borders without being formally affiliated with particular religious authorities, making their content validation standards more difficult to monitor institutionally. These regional differences demonstrate that the epistemological implications of *tafsir* digitalization are neither uniform nor universal; rather, they are also shaped by the institutional contexts and religious regulatory frameworks

of individual regions.

Another aspect that contributes to shaping the landscape of digital transformation is the business logic underlying platforms that provide digital *tafsīr* services. Most platforms, whether mobile applications or AI-based chatbots, operate through business models that depend on the intensity of user engagement. As a result, their underlying algorithms are inherently designed to maximize visibility and usage time rather than to prioritize the methodological accuracy of *tafsīr* (Syarifudin et al. 2025, 27). Consequently, content that is shorter, easier to digest, and emotionally engaging tends to be algorithmically displayed more prominently than content containing more complex methodological explanations but offering less visual appeal. This pattern creates a structural incentive that, when not balanced by users' critical literacy, may potenti.

The Development of Digital Qur'ans and the Integration of Artificial Intelligence

The development of digital Qur'ans today is no longer limited to the conversion of the *muṣḥaf* from print into PDF or e-book formats but has entered a new phase characterized by the emergence of AI-based analytical and interactive features. Applications such as Muslim Pro, Al Qur'an Apps (Tafsir & Perkata), and *tafsīr* chatbots demonstrate that digital Qur'ans now function not only as reading media but also as tools for analysis and learning (Arifah 2025, 505).

Historically, the development of digital Qur'ans can be traced through several interconnected phases. The initial phase began in the 1980s, when the Qur'anic text was first converted into simple digital formats and stored on media such as CD-ROMs and floppy disks, primarily to accelerate the processes of printing and distribution. From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, computer-based Qur'an software emerged with features for keyword searches, translations, and tracing Arabic word roots, allowing researchers and students to rely less exclusively on printed works. The subsequent rise of the internet gave rise to online reference websites providing multilingual translations, collections of *tafsīr* work by various scholars, and Qur'anic recitations, which eventually developed into *mobile* applications featuring memorization reminders and verse bookmarking. A structured review of the literature on mobile Qur'an applications categorizes this phase into three main themes: learning and memorization, text analysis and information retrieval, and user experience (Isa et al. 2023, 117–20).

The most recent phase has been marked by the incorporation of artificial intelligence and *big data*, enabling systems to map Qur'anic themes and provide personalized *tafsīr* recommendations according to users' needs (Hasanah et al. 2025, 148–50). This four-phase genealogy aligns with recent research mapping trends in digital Qur'anic studies, which indicates a shift from the mere digitalization of texts toward artificial intelligence-based systems (Yusof et al. 2025, 646–48). This

genealogy demonstrates that the integration of AI into Qur'anic Studies is not a sudden leap, but rather the culmination of a process of digitalization that has unfolded over more than four decades.

The diversity of these platforms demonstrates the high demand for digital means of interacting with the Qur'anic text. However, this condition has also generated debates concerning authority and sacredness, particularly as interaction with the *muṣḥaf* becomes increasingly mediated through digital screens (Arifah 2025, 507). Accordingly, several studies have advocated the use of AI not merely to expand access, but also to maintain the quality and authenticity of religious content. One proposed approach is to employ AI to filter and verify digital *tafsīr* content through semantic matching with authoritative *tafsīr* sources (Sahimi et al. 2025, 326).

A concrete example of a stage of digitalization that preceded the era of generative AI is the website *Altafsir.com*, which was established in 2001 by Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad through the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Jordan. Unlike AI-based *tafsīr* chatbots, this platform is a non-generative digital repository that compiles more than 150 *tafsīr* works from various schools and traditions, including Sunni, Sufi, Salafi, Shi'i, and Ibadi works with translations into 30 languages. Each text is manually transcribed and verified by a team of scholars before publication (Wildan 2025, 105–6). This type of curation demonstrates that efforts to preserve scholarly authority in the digital realm can be pursued without generative algorithms, although it still presents challenges, including the dominance of Arabic, limited interactivity, and insufficient transparency regarding the critical-edition verification methods employed. This comparison underscores that the validity of digital *tafsīr* is not merely a matter of whether AI is involved, but also of the transparency of the curation methodology itself, before this study turns into more generative and interactive forms of AI integration. As a complementary resource, *Altafsir.com* also operates a partner website, *greatafsirs.com*, which provides additional collections of *tafsīr* works and Qur'anic sciences, supplemented by audio recordings of recitations for studying variations in *qirā'āt*. This further demonstrates that the digitalization of *tafsīr* had already developed considerably before the emergence of generative AI-based chatbots (Wildan 2025, 108).

The integration of AI into Qur'anic Studies generally relies on Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Machine Learning (ML) technologies. NLP enables systems to process the linguistic complexity of the Qur'anic Arabic language, including morphological analysis, word-root tracing, and speech-recognition-based recitation correction. In contrast, ML enables models to be trained on classical *tafsīr* corpora so that they can identify patterns and structures of meaning, as comprehensively mapped in a systematic review of Arabic NLP research for Qur'anic studies (Bashir et al. 2023, 6849). The need for specialized AI models is particularly important

because the linguistic characteristics of the Qur'an cannot simply be equated with those of Modern Standard Arabic, as also demonstrated by a semantic-search model based on *word embeddings* specifically designed for Qur'anic texts (Mohamed and Shokry 2022, 934–45). The implementation of a Qur'anic Tafsir Chatbot based on Chainlit and the Groq approach represents a concrete effort toward developing AI systems with greater academic orientation (Maulana et al. 2025, 921).

Empirical evidence concerning the limitations of generative AI in interpreting Qur'anic verses can be observed in a comparative study that examined ChatGPT's responses to three verses representing the dimensions of *'aqīdah* (QS Yūnus [10]: 26), law (QS Āl 'Imrān [3]: 130), and narrative (QS Yūnus [10]: 89), and compared the results with the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Sa'dī (Andrean and Harahap 2025, 658–70). The findings indicate that ChatGPT was able to identify literal meanings accurately—for example, interpreting *al-ḥusnā* as Paradise and *ziyādah* as the blessing of beholding the face of Allah—but consistently failed to elaborate on the underlying transmitted reports, the nuances of classical Arabic, the wisdom underlying particular legal rulings, or the circumstances of revelation, all of which are characteristic features of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* and *tafsīr bi al-dirāyah*. These findings reinforce the argument that AI operates primarily at the level of statistical syntactic and semantic processing rather than through hermeneutical reasoning that simultaneously integrates transmitted reports, rational reflection, and revelation. A similar pattern can also be observed in the narrative dimension, particularly in the interpretation of the prayer of Prophets Moses and Aaron in QS Yūnus [10]: 89. ChatGPT was able to capture the general themes of patience and steadfastness (*istiqāmah*), but did not reach the classical grammatical discussion concerning why the response to the prayer is attributed in the plural form even though only Moses verbally uttered the prayer, nor did it incorporate transmitted reports concerning the interval between the prayer and the destruction of Pharaoh (Andrean and Harahap 2025, 658–70). Such gaps consistently emerged across all three dimensions examined: *'aqīdah*, law, and narrative, thereby reinforcing the conclusion that the limitations of generative AI in *tafsīr* are structural rather than merely attributable to insufficient data in particular cases.

However, various tests have also revealed significant limitations. When AI is used to interpret particular Qur'anic verses, the resulting interpretations tend to be literal, synthetic, and insufficiently sensitive to historical context. AI is capable of generating linguistically coherent responses, but it often overlooks important aspects such as *asbāb al-nuzūl* and *maqāsid al-sharī'ah* (Suhada and Ningrum 2025, 51–64). Therefore, AI is more appropriately positioned as a tool for preliminary exploration rather than as an authority for Qur'anic interpretation.

The historical genealogy, the case study of the non-generative platform Altafsir.com, and the empirical testing of ChatGPT consistently point to the same pattern: AI's technical capacity to process and present *tafsīr* data continues to increase,

while its normative capacity to engage with transmitted reports, socio-historical contexts, and *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* does not develop at the same pace. In other words, the evolution of digital Qur’an technologies has progressed substantially in terms of accessibility but has remained relatively limited in terms of scholarly authority. Accordingly, AI’s position within the digital *tafsīr* ecosystem is more appropriately understood as an extension of tools for information retrieval and data mapping, rather than as a substitute for the process of *istinbāt*, which requires a scholarly *sanad* and intellectual responsibility.

Epistemological Differences between Classical *Tafsīr* and AI-Based *Tafsīr* and an Analysis of Their Validity

From an epistemological perspective, classical *tafsīr* and AI-based *tafsīr* rest on fundamentally different foundations. Classical *tafsīr* is grounded in the authority of *al-naql* through *sanad* and is developed through a structured methodology of *uṣūl al-tafsīr* (Kamal 2016, 67–84). AI-based *tafsīr*, by contrast, draws on computational capabilities through NLP and ML to process data at scale (Azhar et al. 2025, 97–124). Although both aim to understand the Qur’an, they differ in epistemic legitimacy: AI can produce technically accurate linguistic analyses, but it lacks the spiritual dimension, scholarly *sanad*, and methodological responsibility embodied by a *mufasssīr* (Andrean and Harahap 2025, 658). Consequently, AI cannot validly perform the process of *istinbāt*, particularly in matters that require contextual judgment and consideration of *maqāṣid* (Mukmin et al. 2025, 39–59). This difference gives rise to questions concerning the authority of knowledge in contemporary Islamic studies. Within the Islamic scholarly tradition, *tafsīr* is not merely an intellectual activity but also a scholarly trust that requires competence, integrity, and scholarly legitimacy (Azhar et al. 2025, 100). Therefore, the use of AI should be subject to ethical and methodological limitations: AI may be utilized as a computational tool to facilitate access to and processing of data, but it cannot replace the *mufasssīr* as the authoritative subject of Qur’anic interpretation (Rohmah 2025, 64).

These epistemological differences become increasingly evident when examined at the level of everyday reading practices. The digitalization of the Qur’an has transformed how Muslims interact with the sacred text, particularly through platforms such as *Quran.com*, *Tanzil*, *Ayat*, and mobile Qur’an applications, marking a shift from traditional textual reading toward interactive digital reading. Previously, Qur’anic study relied heavily on physical *muṣḥafs*, printed *tafsīr* works, and the authority of scholars within scholarly learning assemblies; today, interaction with the Qur’an increasingly takes place through touchscreens, hyperlinks, and automated search features (Mahfudz and Munib 2026, 141–60).

According to Duderija, the digital era has introduced new forms of *engagement* with the Qur’an: readers can now move from one verse to another and from one *tafsīr* to another within seconds (Azahrah et al. 2026, 1278). This transformation

is technological as well as potentially epistemological, insofar as it changes patterns of access to structures of authority and interpretive strategies, not in the sense that scholarly authority itself has empirically shifted from scholars with established *sanad* to machines. This tendency can be observed concretely in the comparative study of ChatGPT's interpretations of three verses spanning the dimensions of *'aqīdah*, law, and narrative discussed in the preceding subsection. The results showed that AI performed well in rapidly retrieving literal meanings but consistently failed to elaborate on transmitted reports, linguistic nuances, and the *maqāṣid* underlying particular interpretations. Thus, the empirical evidence currently available indicates that what has shifted is the *pattern of access and visibility* of *tafsīr*, rather than its epistemic legitimacy itself. Digitalization has made the Qur'anic text and classical *tafsīr* works more accessible by removing geographical and financial barriers. *Tafsīr* works that were once available primarily in university libraries can now be accessed by general readers through mobile devices. This phenomenon has been described as a cyber-Islamic environment, namely, a digital space in which Muslims engage with religious knowledge beyond the boundaries of formal institutions (Bunt 2018, 54). This development has the potential to expand religious literacy, but it also increases the risk of disseminating information that has not been adequately verified.

Despite its substantial benefits, digitalization has also altered traditional patterns of learning, such as *talaqqī* with a teacher. Instant access to digital *tafsīr* may lead some users to overlook traditional methodologies that emphasize the accuracy of *sanad*, depth of Arabic-language understanding, the methodological discipline of *uṣūl al-tafsīr*, and gradual processes of learning.

This epistemological issue can be further sharpened through the ethical framework and scholarly boundaries of Islamic knowledge formulated by Mohd Azhar and his colleagues, who argue that the use of AI in *tafsīr* must adhere to four fundamental principles of Islamic scholarly epistemology: clarity of sources (*wuḍūḥ al-maṣḍar*), *sanad* traceability, the moral responsibility of the *muftī* or religious authority issuing a ruling, and conformity with *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. Structurally, these four principles cannot be fully satisfied by algorithmic systems that operate primarily through statistical patterns (Azhar et al. 2025, 97–124). This argument is consistent with the digital verification framework proposed by Sahimi and colleagues, which emphasizes the need for multilayered certification mechanisms for AI-based *tafsīr* outputs before they are disseminated to the public. The absence of a *sanad* accompanying algorithmic outputs creates opportunities for erroneous interpretations to be disseminated rapidly and on a large scale (Sahimi et al. 2025, 325–30).

The epistemological weaknesses of AI are also evident at the technical level, with direct implications for scholarly validity. Athaluri and colleagues demonstrate that generative language models are susceptible to hallucinations, namely, the tendency

to generate information or references that appear convincing but in fact lack a factual basis (Athaluri et al. 2023, e37432). This risk becomes considerably more serious when applied to Qur'anic *tafsīr*, because such errors may be misconstrued as legitimate religious opinions. The problem is further compounded by the limitations of processing classical Arabic itself. A systematic review of natural language processing for Qur'anic research indicates that contemporary NLP models still face significant challenges in handling complex Arabic morphology, contextual semantic ambiguity, and the richness of rhetoric (*balāghah*) that is essential for a comprehensive understanding of Qur'anic verses. In other words, the limitations of AI in *tafsīr* concern not only the absence of scholarly *sanad*, but also structural limitations at the level of language processing, which constitutes the very foundation of semantic analysis.

Similar critical findings have also been reported in a study that specifically examined ChatGPT's interpretation of several legal and theological verses. The study concluded that the system tended to generate generic and repetitive responses without adequately considering differences of opinion (*ikhtilāf*) among Islamic legal schools, which constitute an important feature of the richness of the classical *tafsīr* tradition (Janabi 2024, 112–44). Such a tendency toward homogenization highlights another epistemological risk associated with algorithmic authority, namely, the narrowing of methodological plurality that has characterized Islamic *tafsīr* scholarship for centuries. This risk is further reinforced by the potential for *cognitive offloading*, referring to the tendency of users to increasingly rely on AI systems for their thinking processes, thereby gradually reducing their capacity to independently evaluate the quality and validity of an interpretation (Gerlich 2025, 6). When this tendency occurs in the religious domain, its consequences extend beyond a decline in cognitive skills to include the weakening of the culture of *tabayyun* (verification) and critical inquiry, both of which should constitute integral components of the Islamic scholarly tradition (Fitriansyah et al. 2025, 338–54).

The Malay-Indonesian perspective on this issue further strengthens the foregoing argument. A study proposing a digital validation framework for AI-based *tafsīr* products emphasizes that the authenticity of a *tafsīr* cannot be assessed solely on the basis of the linguistic accuracy of machine-generated outputs. Rather, it must undergo a validation process conducted by religious institutions possessing the requisite scholarly competence and institutional legitimacy (Zakaria 2025, 1). Such a framework essentially seeks to bridge the gap between the speed of AI-generated textual production and the comparatively slower process of conventional scholarly verification. Nevertheless, its practical implementation continues to face challenges, particularly regarding who has the authority to establish validation standards and how such mechanisms can be applied across global and decentralized platforms.

A synthesis of the various findings above demonstrates that the epistemological differences between classical *tafsīr* and AI-based *tafsīr* operate simultaneously across three layers: the source layer (*sanad* versus statistical data), the methodological layer (*uṣūl al-tafsīr* versus language-processing algorithms), and the accountability layer (the *mufasssīr*, who is bound by the ethics of scholarship, versus a system that has no moral subjectivity). These three layers are interrelated and cannot be separated from one another: technical strength at one layer, for example, the speed of data processing, does not necessarily compensate for weaknesses at another, particularly at the level of scholarly accountability, which lies at the core of the concept of authority within the Islamic tradition. This three-layer mapping will serve as the analytical framework for the following section, in which the strengths and limitations of AI-based *tafsīr* will be examined in greater detail across each dimension.

Another implication of this epistemological difference is the urgent need for *digital religious literacy* among Muslims, particularly the ability to distinguish between AI-generated responses intended for preliminary exploration and *fatwa* or *tafsīr* that has undergone a valid process of *istinbāt*. Without such literacy, the potential for error lies not necessarily in the technology itself. Still, users treat its outputs as definitive references, even though their epistemological status is not equivalent to that of *tafsīr* produced through a responsible scholarly process. The need for such literacy is becoming increasingly urgent given that the speed of information dissemination in digital spaces far exceeds the pace of *tabayyun* and conventional scholarly verification. Consequently, the gap between publication and scholarly correction creates a vulnerable space that may facilitate the mass dissemination of erroneous understandings.

This epistemological difference also implies that the integration of classical *tafsīr* and AI-based *tafsīr* cannot be achieved simply through a mechanical combination of the two, as though the limitations of AI could be remedied merely by incorporating a database of transmitted reports and the principles of *uṣūl al-tafsīr* into an algorithmic system. The issue is not merely a lack of data, but the absence of an epistemic subject who bears moral and scholarly responsibility for the resulting interpretation, something that cannot be structurally replicated by any computational system, regardless of the volume of data at its disposal. Therefore, an appropriate framework for integration should not position AI as a substitute for the *mufasssīr*, but rather as an instrument operating under the supervision and scholarly responsibility of scholars with established *sanad*. This argument will be examined further in the subsequent discussion of models for integrating technology and scholarly authority.

To clarify this epistemological contrast, it is important to note that classical *mufasssīrūn* operated within a multilayered framework of accountability: accountability to the teachers who transmitted their scholarly *sanad*; to the

scholarly community, which subjected their works to critical examination through the traditions of *sharḥ* and *ḥāshiyah*; and to Allah, as an eschatological form of accountability for the truth they conveyed. AI systems, by contrast, do not possess such a multilayered structure of accountability. They are accountable only in a technical sense to their developers through model-performance evaluation mechanisms, whose parameters are fundamentally different from those governing the validity of *tafsīr* within the Islamic scholarly tradition. This difference in accountability structures constitutes the core of this study's epistemological argument. Regardless of how sophisticated an AI system's linguistic capabilities may be, the absence of a structure of scholarly and spiritual accountability means that it cannot categorically replace the position of the *mufasssīr*. Rather, it can function only as an auxiliary instrument operating under the supervision of legitimate scholarly authority.

A further consequence of this epistemological difference can be observed in how each tradition addresses verses that are *mutashābihāt* (ambiguous in meaning) as well as legal verses involving scholarly *ikhtilāf* across different legal schools. Classical *tafsīr* has developed sophisticated mechanisms for accommodating such differences of opinion, for example, by presenting multiple *aqwāl* (opinions) together with the respective arguments supporting them. This enables readers to recognize that differences of opinion are not signs of weakness, but rather a form of methodological richness arising from differences in the principles of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *uṣūl al-tafsīr* employed by different schools. Generative AI systems, by contrast, tend to produce a single, most-probable answer based on patterns in their training data, without an explicit mechanism for presenting the plurality of scholarly opinions proportionally (Janabi 2024, 112–44). This tendency risks creating the false impression among non-specialist users that religious issues that are legitimately contested within the Islamic tradition actually have one definitive and singular answer—a simplification that runs counter to the Islamic scholarly ethos of valuing *ikhtilāf* as a source of intellectual richness.

Furthermore, this difference also has implications for the relationship between text and context. Classical *tafsīr*, particularly *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* (tradition-based interpretation), consistently connects the meaning of a verse with its *asbāb al-nuzūl* and the socio-historical context in which the revelation occurred. As a result, the resulting interpretations are contextual while remaining rooted in historically traceable realities transmitted through the scholarly *sanad*. Generative AI, by contrast, processes texts as statistical data represented within a vector space. Consequently, the relationship between a verse and the context of its revelation is not understood in causal-historical terms, but rather as a correlation based on the occurrence of words within the training corpus (Mohamed and Shokry 2022, 934–45). This difference in the treatment of context helps explain why AI can generate responses that appear linguistically coherent yet are substantively erroneous or

superficial when dealing with verses whose interpretation depends heavily on reports concerning their *asbāb al-nuzūl*, as demonstrated in the comparative study of ChatGPT and classical *tafsīr* discussed in the preceding section. Thus, the epistemological gap between the two traditions is not merely a matter of the depth of their answers but reflects a fundamental difference in the historical epistemology underlying the methodology of *tafsīr* itself.

Analysis of the Strengths and Limitations of Artificial Intelligence-Based *Tafsīr*

This difference in epistemological foundations provides the basis for a more detailed assessment of the strengths and limitations of algorithmic *tafsīr*—that are models of interpretation that utilize computers, artificial intelligence, or automated linguistic analysis, which have emerged alongside the development of Natural Language Processing (NLP) and *machine learning* (Kayacan 2025, 9). Despite these differences in epistemological foundations, a number of contemporary studies emphasize that the presence of AI in Qur'anic Studies should not be viewed solely as a threat, but also as an opportunity for advancing the field of *tafsīr*. Nehru Millat Ahmad, for example, positions AI as a complementary epistemic instrument capable of expanding linguistic analysis, mapping intertextual relationships among verses, and systematically processing *tafsīr* data, without necessarily replacing the *mufasssīr* as the authoritative subject of interpretation. This perspective is consistent with the broader phenomenon of digital Islamic discourse, in which algorithmic infrastructures are considered to contribute to the democratization of the production and circulation of religious knowledge (Sulistio 2026, 30).

More specifically, the use of AI in *tafsīr* studies can be categorized into three main forms: information-retrieval tools, automated *tafsīr* generators, and thematic and contextual *tafsīr* analysis tools, each of which presents its own potential and challenges when assessed through the ethical and epistemological framework of Islam (Azhar et al. 2025, 107). From a technical perspective, the principal strengths of AI in this context lie in its ability to process texts rapidly on a large scale, automatically match the context of verses with authoritative (*mu'tabar*) *tafsīr* sources through natural language processing approaches, and generate indicators of the level of confidence associated with a particular interpretation (Sahimi et al. 2025, 337). AI facilitates access to information by enabling users to search for verses, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, and interpretive literature using specific keywords. It can also conduct more extensive textual analysis through algorithms that detect patterns and relationships among verses, while simultaneously providing interactive learning experiences. Its accessibility through smartphones enables it to be used by a wide range of users. It is further supported by its contribution to the preservation of classical Qur'anic manuscripts through digitization, as well as by its processing speed, which makes it possible to examine the entire *mushāf* and hundreds of *tafsīr* works within seconds (Suhada and Ningrum 2025, 51–64).

Despite these technical advantages, the ability of AI to process Qur'anic texts does not necessarily correspond to the validity of its interpretive outputs. In principle, AI operates through a quantitative logic of data and algorithms, whereas *tafsīr* requires sensitivity to values, *sharī'ah* contexts, and divine guidance. AI therefore lacks the inherent capacity to distinguish between valid *tafsīr* and interpretations that deviate from the truth conveyed by revelation (Azhar et al. 2025, 106). The diversity of *tafsīr* schools further complicates this issue. These approaches, including Sufi, philosophical, and contemporary hermeneutical approaches, do not always align with the logic of literal matching employed by AI. This limitation is compounded by the constraints of natural language processing models, which are generally trained on corpora of Modern Arabic and may therefore be less sensitive to the nuances of Classical Arabic (Sahimi et al. 2025, 337–38).

At the level of meaning production, these limitations become even more apparent. Theoretically, AI systems process symbols without understanding meaning in its semantic and existential dimensions—a structural characteristic inherent in the operation of language models rather than merely a deficiency of data in particular cases (Ahmad 2026, 66). This theoretical tendency is consistent with the pattern identified in the comparative study of ChatGPT across three verses representing the dimensions of *'aqīdah*, law, and narrative discussed in the preceding subsection, in which AI was able to identify literal meanings accurately but failed to elaborate on transmitted reports, linguistic nuances, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. It should be emphasized, however, that the sample of three verses is indicative rather than representative of the Qur'an as a whole. Therefore, the generalization that AI operates only at the level of statistical syntactic and semantic processing is more appropriately understood as a structural tendency supported by theoretical arguments and reinforced, rather than conclusively demonstrated, by the limited empirical findings. Consequently, AI outputs tend to reconstruct and normalize dominant meanings that have already been canonized within written *tafsīr* corpora. This tendency corresponds to what Dody Sulistio terms *algorithmic reductionism*, namely, the compression of the complexity of jurisprudential and theological discourse into concise content in order to meet the demands of engagement on digital platforms (Ahmad 2026, 68–69).

The methodological limitations of AI are also particularly evident in its inability to adequately account for the socio-historical context of Qur'anic verses. AI-generated interpretations often fail to address important factors such as *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, and *munāsabah* (Basid et al. 2024, 641–53). In addition, AI-based *tafsīr* lacks a spiritual foundation and scholarly *sanad*. By relying primarily on datasets without critical verification and authorization by qualified scholars, AI faces difficulties in producing interpretations that are sufficiently profound, ethically grounded, and religiously legitimate (Mainuddin

et al. 2025, 612–27). The absence of *sanad* and scholarly authorization is further compounded by problems concerning references: AI responses often fail to provide complete and specific sources, instead offering general bibliographies whose authenticity and traceability are difficult to establish. A similar tendency has also been empirically documented in other generative AI legal studies outside the field of *tafsīr*, in which language models have frequently been shown to generate references that appear convincing but cannot be verified as existing (Athaluri et al. 2023, e37432). This limitation substantially weakens the academic validity of AI-generated *tafsīr*, as it prevents users from conducting cross-verification against authoritative primary sources in the Islamic scholarly tradition. Furthermore, AI has difficulty capturing complex and plural meanings because the data on which it relies may contain biases; it may fail to reconstruct the socio-cultural and historical context of revelation adequately; and it may foster a form of user dependence that undermines critical reasoning when information is accepted without validation and expert supervision. This pattern is empirically supported by a large-scale study involving 666 respondents, which found a significant negative correlation between the intensity of AI-tool use and critical-thinking ability, with *cognitive offloading* functioning as a mediating factor. Taken together, these limitations are consistent with Bunt’s warning that AI can manage data but cannot understand the spiritual messages or religious-legal values embedded within them (Bunt 2018, 88). Accordingly, AI-based *tafsīr* is most appropriately positioned as an auxiliary instrument that provides preliminary understanding rather than as a final reference for deriving legal conclusions or forming religious understandings that require scholarly precision and accountability.

AI-Based Digital *Tafsīr* as a New Form of Authority in Qur’anic Interpretation

The development of digital technology has given rise to a phenomenon of shifting scholarly authority in Qur’anic Studies, from the authority of scholars grounded in *sanad* and scholarly competence toward new forms of authority shaped by algorithms and digital platforms (Jannah and Hutagalung 2026, 18–23). It should be emphasized from the outset that the claim of such a shift, in a study based on library research such as this one, is more appropriately understood as an epistemological tendency observed through patterns of production and circulation within digital religious discourse, rather than as an empirically and quantitatively established finding that machines have completely replaced scholarly authority. This distinction is important because the two claims carry substantially different evidentiary requirements: the former requires conceptual analysis of discourse patterns, whereas the latter requires longitudinal data on religious communities’ behavior and trust in an empirical domain beyond the scope of this study.

In the classical Islamic tradition, the legitimacy of Qur’anic interpretation rests on the scholarly competence of the *mufasssīr*, mastery of the Arabic language, the

methodology of *uṣūl al-tafsīr*, and a clearly established scholarly *sanad*. Within the digital ecosystem, however, this authority faces new competitors in the form of technical mechanisms such as search algorithms, recommendation systems, and platform-based curation of Qur'an applications. Consequently, *tafsīr* that appears at the top of search results or is recommended most frequently may often be perceived as more authoritative, even when it does not necessarily possess a strong methodological foundation (Bunt 2018, 53–60). This is precisely where the central issue distinguishing this study from digital religion scholarship more generally lies. What can be empirically observed is a change in the patterns of visibility and accessibility of *tafsīr*. In contrast, its epistemic legitimacy, namely, its validity as an interpretation recognized as sound according to the principles of *uṣūl al-tafsīr*, continues to depend on mechanisms of *sanad* and institutional scholarly recognition that algorithms cannot simply replicate. Visibility and authority constitute two distinct axes: a *tafsīr* may be highly visible, frequently appearing in searches, receiving numerous views, or ranking highly in search results without ever receiving epistemic legitimacy from the scholarly community of *tafsīr*. Conversely, a *tafsīr* that is authoritative in scholarly terms may have lower visibility than content that is shorter and more readily consumable by algorithmic systems.

Within the context of *Qur'anic Studies*, algorithms determine the visibility of *tafsīr*, sermons, and explanations of Qur'anic verses according to technical parameters such as popularity, user engagement, and data optimization, rather than scholarly *sanad*. Gary Bunt emphasizes that digital spaces have created *cyber-Islamic environments* that structurally transform how religious authority is formed, perceived, and consumed by Muslim audiences. In such environments, digitally literate scholars can expand the reach of their influence, while the distinction between genuinely *sanad*-based voices and those that are merely rhetorically articulate becomes increasingly blurred for non-specialist audiences (Tahiev 2024, 176–80). This condition contributes to what has historically been recognized in the study of Islamic religious authority as the *fragmentation of religious authority*, namely, the dispersal of scholarly authority across diverse sources that are not always academically verified. This concept, however, is not exclusively a product of the digital age. It was first systematically formulated by Robinson in his study of the impact of print media on scholarly authority in the early twentieth century and was subsequently developed by Eickelman and Piscatori in their analyses of contemporary Islamic politics and discourse (Robinson 2009, 339).

The digital era, therefore, did not create the fragmentation of authority from scratch; rather, it accelerated and transformed a pattern that had already emerged with the introduction of print technology into the Muslim world. What distinguishes the era of generative AI from both the print era, and the early Internet era is the speed and scale of this fragmentation. Whereas print media required decades to disseminate alternative interpretations and the early Internet could do

so within hours, generative AI can produce thousands of variations of explanations of Qur'anic verses within seconds, each linguistically convincing yet without any guarantee of methodological traceability. Recent research on digital mediation and *fatwa* authority refers to this specific condition as *epistemic fragmentation*, namely, the fragmentation of authoritative religious discourse resulting from algorithmic amplification that prioritizes user engagement over institutional credibility (Atallah 2026, 350). In practice, users of Qur'an applications or religious social media platforms may frequently consume brief *tafṣīr* explanations, excerpts from sermons, or AI-generated summaries without being aware of the methodological background or scholarly *sanad* underlying them.

Furthermore, the presence of artificial intelligence in Qur'anic interpretation both reinforces and intensifies this shift, as generative AI eliminates the temporal intervals that previously allowed for processes of collective curation and verification within scholarly communities. AI models can instantly generate *tafṣīr* summaries or explanations of Qur'anic verses, but they do not possess the normative, historical, and theological capacities characteristic of *mufasssīrūn* (Ahmad 2026, 43). Al-Janabi's study demonstrates that the use of AI in the context of *Qur'anic Studies* risks producing interpretations that appear linguistically convincing but are epistemologically weak because they are not grounded in established *tafṣīr* methodologies (Janabi 2024, 141). This finding is consistent with the empirical evidence discussed in the preceding subsection: a comparative study of ChatGPT's interpretations of three verses spanning the dimensions of *ʿaqīdah*, law, and narrative concretely revealed the same pattern. AI performed well in producing *surface-level fluency* (high linguistic visibility), yet consistently failed to elaborate on transmitted reports, nuances of Classical Arabic, and *maqāṣid* considerations (low epistemic legitimacy). The correspondence between these conceptual and empirical findings provides the principal basis for this article's argument. What has shifted in the AI era is not epistemic authority itself, but rather the *channels and speed* through which both legitimate and illegitimate claims to authority can circulate and gain public visibility. Therefore, although algorithms and platforms offer efficiency and broad access, they cannot replace the role of scholars as interpretive authorities. What they can and have done is transform the competition to *be heard*, rather than the competition to be *methodologically sound*.

Accordingly, the shift in authority from scholars toward algorithms and platforms in *Qur'anic Studies* should be understood as an epistemological challenge at the level of visibility and discourse circulation. It calls for a proportionate critical response, neither a moral panic that assumes scholarly authority has become obsolete nor a naïve optimism that assumes AI can replace the function of collective *ijtihād*. The appropriate response is not to reject technology, but to integrate traditional scholarly authority with digital technology through scholarly curation, source transparency, and the involvement of scholars in the design and

oversight of digital Qur'anic systems. The technical implications of this agenda will be elaborated further in the concluding section of this article.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the integration of artificial intelligence into the digital *tafsīr* ecosystem represents the culmination of a gradual process of digitalization: from the conversion of the *muṣḥaf* into digital formats, to manually curated *tafsīr* repositories such as Altafsir.com, mobile applications, and finally *tafsīr* chatbots based on Natural Language Processing (NLP) and *machine learning*. At each stage, what has changed is not merely the mode of access, but also three dimensions related to interpretive authority. Production has changed as Qur'anic texts and the *tafsīr* tradition have been digitized into machine-processable corpora. Mediation has changed as search algorithms, recommendation systems, and platform-based curation now stand between readers and *tafsīr* sources. Perception has changed because *tafsīr* appearing at the top of search rankings tends to be perceived as more authoritative. These findings indicate that the role of AI in Qur'anic Studies today is most accurately understood as an instrument for data mapping and analysis—such as verse retrieval, linguistic and thematic analysis, and the preservation of *turāth*—rather than as an interpretive subject. The comparison with Altafsir.com further demonstrates that the presence or absence of AI does not determine the validity of digital *tafsīr*, but rather the transparency of the curation methodology underlying it.

A comparison with classical *tafsīr* methodology reveals differences in epistemological foundations. Classical *tafsīr* is grounded in the authority of *naql* transmitted through *sanad*, the principles of *uṣūl al-tafsīr*, and the scholarly accountability of the *mufasssīr*. Algorithmic *tafsīr*, by contrast, is grounded in large-scale data processing. The strengths of AI lie in its speed of access, its ability to trace intertextual patterns among verses, and its efficiency in linguistic analysis. Its limitations include the absence of *sanad*, constraints in accounting for *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *munāsabah*, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, limited sensitivity to the nuances of Classical Arabic, and references that are difficult to verify. These conclusions, however, require qualification. The comparative evidence analyzed in this study is limited to a single generative model, ChatGPT, tested on three verses spanning the dimensions of *'aqīdah*, law, and narrative, and compared with the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Sa'dī, together with supporting literature. These findings provide strong indications of the limitations of the generative AI system examined under those conditions, but they cannot be generalized to all AI systems. Specialized models trained on or connected to authoritative (*mu'tabar*) *tafsīr* corpora, as proposed within digital verification frameworks, were not tested in this study. Therefore, the defensible conclusion is that the generative AI examined here demonstrates strengths at the level of data processing but has not yet demonstrated hermeneutical reasoning that integrates transmitted reports, linguistic analysis,

and the objectives of Islamic law. Further testing using broader samples of verses, AI models, and expert evaluations by *tafsīr* scholars is still required.

With regard to the third research question, the implications of the shift toward algorithmic authority for the validity of *tafsīr* must be clearly distinguished between the influence of algorithms on visibility and perceptions of authority and the replacement of the epistemic legitimacy of scholars with established *sanad*. Because this study is based on library research, the shift referred to here constitutes an epistemological tendency inferred from patterns of production and circulation within digital religious discourse, rather than empirical evidence that machines have replaced scholarly authority. What can be demonstrated is a shift in the visibility, accessibility, and speed of circulation of *tafsīr* claims. In contrast, epistemic legitimacy according to *uṣūl al-tafsīr* continues to depend on *sanad* and recognition by the scholarly community. The concept of authority fragmentation employed in this study should likewise be situated appropriately: it is applied as an analytical lens for examining digital Qur'anic *tafsīr*, rather than presented as a new empirical finding. Based on this analysis, the integration of scholarly authority and digital innovation can initially be formulated into four principles as the foundation of a digital *sanad* model: (1) source traceability, whereby every AI output must refer to an authoritative (*mu'tabar*) *tafsīr* work whose source can be verified; (2) scholarly accountability, whereby *mufasssīrūn* or recognized scholarly institutions oversee the design, corpus, and validation of the system; (3) methodological transparency, whereby the system clearly indicates how *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *munāsabah*, and *maqāṣid* are taken into consideration, as well as the limits of its capabilities; and (4) the distinction between visibility and legitimacy, whereby platform rankings or recommendations are explicitly identified as indicators of visibility rather than indicators of *tafsīr* validity, and AI outputs are presented as preliminary rather than as *fatwa*. These four principles remain preliminary conceptual formulations and have not yet been empirically tested. Further research should therefore examine them through empirical studies, such as surveys or interviews concerning users' perceptions of algorithmic *tafsīr* authority, the operational development of a digital *sanad* model, and the evaluation of various AI models using broader corpora of Qur'anic verses.

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