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Epistemic Distortion in Qur'anic Interpretation: Hustle Culture and Digital Religious Narratives on Instagram

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Abstract

This study uses qualitative methods, combining textual and visual analyses, to investigate how Qur'anic verses are interpreted, manipulated, and circulated in frenzied cultural narratives on Instagram. This research focuses on the content of three Instagram accounts: @alqurancustomku, @lanternoflightofficial, and @sssheikh00, supported by secondary literature on Islamic epistemology and digital religion. The study finds that Qur'anic interpretations on these platforms often reflect selective reading and cherry-picking of verses that support entrepreneurial and motivational narratives, frequently detaching scriptural meaning from scholarly traditions. Authority over interpretation shifts from ulama to digital influencers, creating a fragmented epistemic environment that privileges virality over exegetical rigor. This research contributes to the growing field of digital religion by articulating how algorithm-driven content production facilitates new forms of textual reception, theological authority, and spiritual branding. It integrates insights from the theory of text reception and epistemic distortion to frame this trend as a reconfiguration of Qur'anic meaning under the pressures of digital capitalism. The findings call for greater literacy in Qur'anic hermeneutics within digital media spaces and encourage religious authorities, educators, and policymakers to develop guidelines for ethical and theologically sound online da'wah practice. This study focuses on a small number of Instagram accounts and does not fully explore platform-based variation (e.g., TikTok, YouTube) or broader demographic responses, such as youth and inter-sectarian interpretations. Future research should expand the comparative scope and include quantitative engagement metrics

Keywords: Qur'anic Hermeneutics; Digital Religious Authority, Hustle Culture; Epistemic Distortion, Algorithmic Authority.

1. Introduction

The increasing attention to the phenomenon of hustle culture in contemporary Islamic discourse is an interesting conversation, particularly in relation to how religious texts - especially Qur'anic verses - are used to construct narratives of success, perseverance, and endurance in the digital space. This phenomenon is not only sociologically relevant, but also epistemologically significant, especially when viewed through the lens of Islamic epistemology and digital tafsir practices. The culture of relentless work promoted by hustle culture is increasingly entrenched in modern society, including among Muslims, and has surfaced as a public discourse on social media, particularly Instagram.

This phenomenon presents an important epistemological issue, namely how Qur'anic verses, which have a depth of theological meaning, undergo a process of selection, reinterpretation, and decontextualization to support the narrative of productivity promoted by hustle culture. In practice, content creators on social media no longer refer to traditional interpretive frameworks, but instead interpret Qur'anic verses based on rhetorical and aesthetic needs that fit the logic of digital media and audience expectations. Narratives about hard work, optimism, patience, and life balance are structured in such a way through the selection of certain verses, which often experience a shift in meaning from the original message.

Furthermore, media such as Instagram not only facilitate the dissemination of religious messages but also shape new ways of interpreting and constructing the meaning of Qur'anic verses. Islamic messages produced on this platform are not only delivered in the form of text but are packaged in visual formats and short narratives that are adapted to the information consumption culture of digital society, which is more concerned with speed, brevity, and visual aesthetics than in-depth analysis of the meaning of the text (Harun & Umar, 2024; Nisa, 2018; Purnama, 2020; Syatar et al., 2024).

Islamic messages produced on this platform are not only delivered in the form of text but are packaged in visual formats and short narratives adapted to the culture of digital information consumption, which values speed, brevity, and aesthetics. Gade notes that digital Qur'anic engagement is not limited to recitation or reading, but becomes a performative and visual act of piety, deeply embedded in contemporary Islamic visual culture (Gade, 2012).

In this context, social media transforms from a tool for disseminating information into an active mediation space that helps reshape people's perspectives and patterns of interpretation of the Qur'an. The narrative of hustle culture associated with Qur'anic verses reflects how religious discourse in the digital era not only moves with social change, but is also affected by the logic of algorithms, visualisation, and the dynamics of the attention market that prevails on social media.

2. Literature Review

The hustle culture phenomenon has been the focus of several studies, especially regarding work productivity, life balance, and criticism of overwork ideology. One of them concluded that productivity in achieving success is positive and even highly recommended (Esti Nur Wakhidah, Diksi Metris, Maman Sulaeman, 2023). However, a culture of overwork should still be avoided as it is detrimental to the individual. While this study successfully delineates the boundary between productivity and healthy work, it has not reviewed the legitimacy of overwork culture from a religious perspective.

On the other hand, other research offers a different approach through the concept of harmonizing the world and the hereafter (Siti Mutiara Fatimah, Rini Maharani, Siti Salma Safitri, Sila Khayrani, 2025). This research encourages Generation Z to transform from a culture of hustle and bustle to a balanced culture by integrating spiritual values in daily activities. However, this study has not analyzed in detail the use of Qur'anic verses in digital media as a reference in shaping productivity awareness.

Meanwhile, another study analyzed Quranic verses related to the balance of life, both in terms of natural balance and social balance (Fauziah Nurdin, 2022). The advantage of this research is that it provides a clear jurisprudential basis for Muslims regarding the concept of life balance. However, this research does not directly address contemporary phenomena such as rabid culture.

In addition, research on hustle culture on social media platforms reveals how hustle culture trends construct an idealized image of a modern, productive, and inspiring lifestyle, thereby equating the image of success on social media with real success (Athifah Chairunnisah & Lilawati Kurnia, 2023). The strength of this study lies in its explanation of the relationship between social media images and social perceptions of success. However, it does not highlight the role of Quranic verses in shaping this narrative.

Moreover, another study argues that hustle culture is a modern manifestation of slavery in contemporary society (Jefri Andi Saputra, 2024). This research attempts to deconstruct the hustle culture version of success by offering a more holistic perspective. The strength of this research lies in its sharp critique of the ideologies embedded in the culture of hustle. However, this research is limited by the absence of visual data and the lack of specific analyses of hustle culture content in digital media.

While prior research has explored Islamic ethical responses to hustle culture, there is limited scholarly attention on how Qur'anic verses are framed, decontextualized, and recirculated in digital narratives, especially from an epistemological and hermeneutical standpoint. This study fills that gap by offering a critical examination of how digital content creators use Qur'anic verses to frame narratives of productivity, revealing shifts in interpretive authority and religious meaning in the algorithmic era.

This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on the epistemological distortions that occur in the process of utilising Qur'anic verses amid hustle culture narratives. This research offers a different perspective by not merely testing the theological correctness of the quoted verses, but rather examining how these verses function as framing instruments in shaping narratives of success and perseverance in the digital space. Therefore, this research is directed at answering three main questions: What is the form of Qur'anic verse selection used in reflecting hustle culture on Instagram? How is the consideration of meaning in the process of selecting Qur'anic verses to support the narrative of hustle culture on Instagram? What are the epistemological implications of the use of Qur'anic verses in shaping the narrative of hustle culture in the digital space?

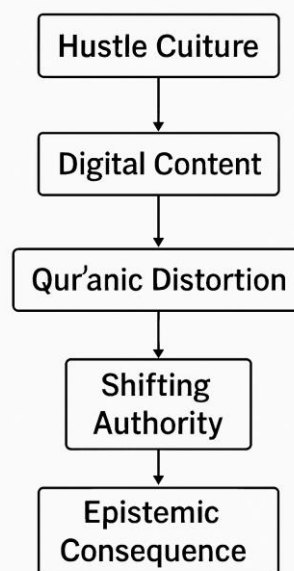


Figure 2. 1. Framework of Epistemic Distortion in Qur'anic Interpretation within Hustle Culture Narratives on Instagram

3. Methods

Through a qualitative approach using text and visual analysis methods, this study critically examines the content of three Instagram accounts, namely @alqurancustomku, @lanternoflightofficial, and @ssheikh00. These accounts were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) Regular use of Qur'anic verses in their content, (2) Clear thematic engagement with hustle culture or productivity discourse, (3) Visual use of Islamic symbols and textual framing relevant to Qur'anic interpretation. Data was collected through direct observation of posts that explicitly display Qur'anic verses and associate them with hustle culture narratives, complemented by supporting references such as journal articles, books, and previous studies on hustle culture.

To strengthen the analytical framework, this study employs text reception theory, framing theory, and a hermeneutic approach to explore the dynamic

relationship between text, context, and audience. The selection criteria for the verses analyzed are based on their explicit appearance in the posts and their relevance to the theme of hustle culture. These verses are strategically used by content creators to deliver specific messages — either reflectively, normatively, or argumentatively — in line with the intended communicative purpose.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings, this research applies source triangulation by comparing the content of the three Instagram accounts, which represent different interpretive approaches to hustle culture. Theoretical triangulation is also employed through the integration of a hermeneutic approach, framing theory, and text reception theory to reinforce analytical depth. Furthermore, a peer debriefing process was conducted during the analysis stage to maintain consistency of interpretation and reduce potential bias. The data were then analyzed using structural analysis, which facilitates the interpretation of symbolic language in the reciprocal relationship between content creators and audiences (Hjelmslev, 1947).

Table 3.1. Triangulation Table

Type of Triangulation	Application in This Study
Source	Comparison of three Instagram accounts to observe variations in Qur'anic interpretation and framing strategies.
Theoretical	Integration of three frameworks: Text Reception Theory Framing Theory Hermeneutic Approach
Validation	Use of peer debriefing during analysis to ensure interpretive consistency and minimize researcher bias; cross-checking of visual and textual elements in each post.

Source: Adapted from triangulation logic of creators and audiences (Hjelmslev, 1947)

4. Result

The results of this study reveal how Qur'anic verses are used by Instagram accounts to frame and legitimise the narrative of hustle culture in the digital space. The findings show that the use of these verses does not only act as normative text references but has undergone a process of reinterpretation and repurposing that adapts to the logic of productivity, self-motivation, and aesthetic demands in social media. The data analysis is presented in three thematic tables to show the epistemic patterns behind the practice. Table 2 illustrates the various forms of utilisation of Qur'anic verses by the Instagram accounts studied, whether in the form of text quotations, creative visual design, selection of specific themes, or interaction techniques that encourage audience participation. Table 3 details the verse selection considerations made by the content creators. The findings confirm

that verses are strategically selected to build narratives that align with the values of hustle culture, either to affirm, negotiate, or criticise aspects of the culture, depending on the message they wish to assert and the expected reception from their community of followers. Table 4 highlights the epistemological implications of this pattern of using verses in this context. The data shows that Qur'anic verses tend to be reduced from the complexity of their theological meanings to easy-to-consume motivational quotations, demonstrating a shift in interpretive authority from formal scholars into the hands of digital content creators. This phenomenon displays the fluid and problematic relationship between sacred texts, contemporary lifestyles and social media algorithms that reshape the way the public understands and responds to religious values. All the findings of this research are presented in detail and systematically in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

Table 4.1 Forms of Qur'anic Verse Selection in Reflecting Hustle Culture on Instagram

No.	Instagram Account	Qur'anic Verse Used	Focus Meaning	Forms of Content	Engagement (Like/Share/Comment)
1.	@alqurancustomku	QS. al-Qaṣaṣ [28]: 73	The importance of time balance between work and rest by the nature of time creation	Image with critical text 'Hustle Culture Shortcut to Rich Hell'	28 Like / 4 Share / 0 Comment
2.	@lanternoflightofficial	QS. al-Takwīr [81]: 26	A reminder of the purpose of spiritual life amid worldly bustle	Pastel coloured images, Qur'anic symbols & prayer beads	23 Like / 8 Share / 0 Comment
3.	@sssheikh00	QS. al-Zariyat [51]: 56 dan QS. al-Talaq [65]: 3	The nature of human creation to worship and the importance of tawakal over material ambition	1-minute video, serious expression, firm text	11 Like / 1 Share / 1 Comment

The table presents the forms of Qur'anic verse use across three Instagram accounts that engage with hustle culture narratives. Each account adopts a different visual and textual strategy. For instance, @alqurancustomku integrates QS. al-Qaṣaṣ [28]: 73 with bold text in an image that reads "*Hustle Culture: Shortcut to Rich Hell*", signaling a direct response to overwork. Meanwhile, @lanternoflightofficial uses pastel tones and symbolic imagery to pair QS. al-Takwīr [81]: 26 with reminders about spiritual direction. @sssheikh00 delivers a more direct theological message through videos quoting QS. al-Zariyat [51]: 56,

emphasizing worship over ambition. These forms reflect how Qur'anic verses are visually embedded to resonate with the values or critiques of hustle culture.

Table 4.2 Considerations of Qur'anic Verse Selection in Constructing Hustle Culture Narratives on Instagram

No.	Instagram Account	Selected Verse	Consideration of Verse Selection	Pattern of Reflection on Hustle Culture
1.	@alqurancustomku	QS. al-Qaṣaṣ [28]: 73	The word <i>litaskunu</i> is translated as 'rest'. The verse was chosen to criticise the culture of non-stop work that neglects rest.	It invites balancing work and rest as a form of religious reflection.
2.	@lanternoflightofficial	QS. al-Takwīr [81]: 26	The diction <i>fa aina tadzhabun</i> ('Where are you going?') is used as a reflection on the excessive busyness of life.	Building a reflective narrative about spiritual awareness in the busy routine of life.
3.	@sssheikh00	QS. al-Zariyat [51]: 56	The verse about the purpose of human creation to worship is used to reject hustle culture as the main purpose of life	Rejecting hustle culture as an Islamic life orientation.
4.	@sssheikh00	QS. al-Talaq [65]: 3	The verse about sustenance coming from Allah is used to undermine the argument that tireless hard work guarantees success.	Emphasising the importance of <i>tawakal</i> and life balance, not just worldly productivity.
5.	@diartiindah	QS. al-Nur [24]: 31	The verse about the modesty and obedience of Anshar women is linked to the values of hustle culture: obedience, speed, and dedication.	Forming a positive perception that hustle culture aligns with the value of obedience in Islam

This table shows how verse selection is often driven by the communicative goals of the content creators rather than classical exegetical reasoning. For example, the use of "*Fa aina tadzhabun?*" from QS. al-Takwīr [81]: 26 is intended to

provoke self-reflection amid busyness. In contrast, verses like QS. al-Talaq [65]: 3, selected by @sssheikh00, stress dependence on divine providence (*tawakkul*) rather than self-driven success. These considerations indicate a pragmatic use of verses tailored to platform dynamics and motivational messaging.

Table 4.3 Epistemological Implications of Qur'anic Verse Use in Hustle Culture Narratives on Instagram

No.	Epistemological Implication	Explanation
1.	Formation of stereotypes	Verses are used to form positive or negative perceptions of hustle culture, depending on the framing by the content creator.
2.	Simplification of meaning	Verse selection is often linked to the hustle culture phenomenon without an in-depth study of the original context of the verse.
3.	Opinion formation strategy	The verse is used more as a social framing tool in the media, not purely a comprehensive reflection of interpretation.
4.	Shifting the authority of interpretation	From scholars to content creators, showing the recontextualisation of meaning in the digital space according to the needs of the audience.

The fourth table summarizes the broader implications of how Qur'anic verses are framed in digital spaces. Common patterns include simplification of complex meanings, strategic selection to support a moral stance, and shifting interpretive authority from scholars to content creators. Although these practices differ in tone and purpose, they share a tendency to adapt religious text to fit within fast, visual, and emotionally engaging social media formats. This has significant consequences for how Islamic knowledge is consumed and reproduced online.

5. Discussion

Forms of Qur'anic Verse Selection in Reflecting Hustle Culture on Instagram

In the digital era, content creators play an important role in shaping people's understanding of various issues, such as the hustle culture phenomenon. Hustle culture is a culture that encourages people to work hard and continuously to achieve success (Elma and Wahab, 2024). As a culture that emphasises relentless hard work to achieve material success, hustle culture is often criticised for neglecting aspects of life balance, which can potentially lead to various negative impacts on mental and spiritual health.

In the context of hustle culture, some content creators have begun to raise the Islamic view by referring to Qur'anic verses to emphasise the importance of

tawazun (balance) between work, worship, and rest. This approach is in line with the theory of work-life balance, which explains that humans need a balance between physical, mental, and spiritual aspects to achieve true happiness (Jeffrey H, 2011). Furthermore, the conservation of resources theory explains that a person who continuously expends their energy without adequate rest can experience physical and emotional exhaustion, which in the long run results in decreased productivity and quality of life (Hobfoll, 1989). Thus, content creators are not only agents of digital culture but also serve as informers of Islamic values that are relevant to the challenges of the times, especially in teaching the concept of balance so that people are not trapped in a culture of overwork that can be detrimental to themselves.

The labelling of hustle culture using the Qur'an represents the tendency of different views identified in content creators. The data shows three categories of verses used to refer to the conception of specific tendencies. First, ignoring the nature of time creation. The Instagram account @alqurancustomku displays QS. al-Qaṣaṣ [28]: 73, which contains information about the wisdom of creating night and day so that night is used as a time to rest. This meaning is reinforced to support the tagline displayed on the feed with the title 'Hustle Culture: Shortcut to Hell'. Reinforcement of the tendency to go against nature, which has consequences for destruction, is reinforced in the captions,

Who would have thought that hustle culture, which has been considered the key to success, could turn out to be a shortcut to destruction...which hustle culture team are you?

The strengthening of the Qur'anic values contained in the content emphasises the aspect of Allah's love for people who work hard, but if done excessively to the point of sacrificing prayer time, family, and health can be something that is hated by Allah. This post received 28 likes and was shared 4 times, and there were no comments on the post. Despite low audience engagement, the use of QS. al-Qaṣaṣ [28]: 73 by the @alqurancustomku account can still function as a reflection of Islamic values against the culture of overwork. The @alqurancustomku account uses a visual approach that directly shows the criticism of hustle culture clearly. In the uploaded image, there is a sentence *Hustle Culture Shortcut to Rich Hell*, with the word 'Rich' crossed out and replaced with the word 'Hell'. The message conveyed shows that hustle culture, which is often considered a path to success, can actually bring losses in the afterlife.

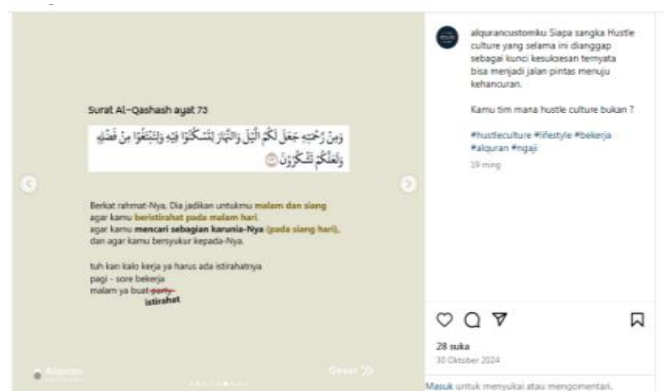


Figure 5.1. QS. al-Qaṣaṣ [28]: 73 on Instagram @alqurancustomku
Source: @alqurancustomku Instagram account

Second, the purpose of life. The @lanternoflightofficial account displays QS. al-Takwīr [81]: 26, which contains a reflection to find out whether human life activities are in line with their spiritual goals. This meaning is corroborated in the captions used,

Whilst in the busyness of this material life, where is your spiritual heart leading you? Toward Him or away? Are you running toward purpose or just running aimlessly?

Are we going through life or growing through life?

Allah isn't just asking; He's calling you back. Will you turn toward the One who has never left you?

The use of QS. al-Takwīr [81]: 26 in the @lanternoflightofficial account shows how Islamic teachings call humans to always remember the true purpose of life. In the context of hustle culture, this verse can be a reminder for humans to not only focus on worldly achievements, but also to consider their spiritual goals. Audience response to @lanternoflightofficial account uploads also show relatively low engagement, but still shows a form of acceptance of the message conveyed. This can be seen in the account's upload, which received 23 likes and has been shared 8 times, and also no comments appear in it. The number of audiences who share the upload more than commenting indicates that the audience considers the message worth sharing with others, even if they do not directly comment on it. In terms of visuals, the images uploaded in the @lanternoflightofficial account use a pastel green background, with a faint image of the Qur'an and prayer beads in the background. This colour selection serves to provide calmness and support the message conveyed. The symbol of the Qur'an and prayer beads is used as a strong marker to return to the real purpose of life.



Figure 5.2. meaning of QS. al-Takwir [81]: 26 on Instagram

@lanternoflightofficial Source: @lanternoflightofficial Instagram account

Third, the essence of creation. In addition to @alqurancustomku and @lanternoflightofficial accounts, content creators such as @sssheikh00 also explained the shortcomings of hustle culture in a one-minute video. According to him, hustle culture is a flaw in Islam because it encourages non-stop work at the expense of worship, health, and family. Meanwhile, Islam teaches balance.

There are two verses used by the Instagram account @sssheikh00 to reflect the meaning of the Qur'an. Firstly, al-Zariyat [51]: 56 which provides information that jinn and humans were created to worship Allah. Second, al-Talaq [65]: 3 which emphasises that putting one's trust in Allah is the main key in achieving sufficiency and tranquillity in life. This is corroborated through @sssheikh00's explanation in his account, which states that the Prophet also rested by spending time with his family and trusting Allah in his every endeavour. Furthermore, @sssheikh00 explains that if success comes at the expense of peace, is it really success? Work hard and strive for success, but don't let the illusion of a busy culture pull people away from what really matters. What good is health if it takes you away from Allah? Remember sustenance has been arranged, so work but don't worship those who arrange, worship those who provide sustenance.

Unlike the previous two accounts, the @sssheikh00 Instagram account features content in the form of one-minute videos with a much lower and limited level of audience engagement. This post received 11 likes, 1 share, and 1 comment from the audience. The comment was a short, well-written, and spoken compliment. This shows that despite the low engagement rate, the message was successfully received by the audience. Visually, the video uploaded by the @sssheikh00 account shows a serious facial expression using large text highlights, as well as a simple but powerful composition to criticise hustle culture from the perspective of the Qur'an. This account uses a modern da'wah approach by conveying Islamic values with strong and easy-to-understand language, and is supported by Qur'anic verses that are directly listed in the uploaded video.



Figure 5.3. The meaning of QS. al-Zariyat [51]: 56 and QS. al-Talaq [65]: 3

Source: Instagram account @ssheikh00

The three Instagram accounts—@alqurancustomku, @lanternoflightofficial, and @ssheikh00—demonstrate varied strategies in integrating Qur'anic verses into critiques of hustle culture. While differing in tone and presentation, all three selectively frame Qur'anic messages to align with or challenge dominant narratives of productivity. This convergence reveals a shift in interpretive authority from classical scholarship to digital influencers, signaling an epistemological reconfiguration where visual style, algorithmic reach, and audience relatability increasingly shape scriptural meaning. These findings show that even in posts with low engagement, Qur'anic verses are employed not simply as religious citations, but as tools of moral persuasion and identity branding within digital discourse. As we move forward, the next section examines how these epistemic shifts relate to broader debates on theological authority, digital religious literacy, and the ethical boundaries of online da'wah.

Considerations of Qur'anic Verse Selection in Constructing Hustle Culture Narratives on Instagram

Readers receive texts not passively, but through a process of interpretation that is influenced by certain cultural, social, and ideological contexts. In hermeneutic studies, texts often experience appropriation, which is the adjustment of the meaning of the text to meet the needs of certain readers or communities (Paul Ricoeur, 1981). This can be seen in how Qur'anic verses are labelled to support or oppose certain issues, such as the hustle culture phenomenon, which shows that meaning does not only come from the text itself, but also from the way the text is interpreted by the community. This interpretation often involves a framing process, where the reader or discourse maker selects certain parts of the text to support the argument they want to convey (Enmant, 1993). As a result, Qur'anic verses used to justify a phenomenon may take on a limited meaning, while other verses that potentially offer a different perspective are often ignored. Thus, the way a reader receives a sacred text reflects not only an understanding of

the text as a whole, but also how it creates meaning that can influence public opinion on a particular issue.

The selection of Qur'anic verses by content creators in reflecting hustle culture shows that the Qur'an can develop according to the needs of the times. The popularity of Instagram as a media that is in demand by young people who provide space for sharing activities is enhanced as a media provider of religious narratives. In the Instagram account @alqurancustomku, photos and videos uploaded to the Instagram feed often lead to modern issues that are relevant to Gen Z. One of the modern issues discussed by the @alqurancustomku account is hustle culture. This account utilises popular trends to better suit Gen Z. For example, in the upload of a photo that reads already tired of working, rich also not, eh tortured when in the grave.

The @alqurancustomku account interprets hustle culture as continuous work that minimises rest time. This is evidenced in the uploaded photo, which contains the text that if you work, there must be a break, morning-afternoon work at night for rest. Thus, in reflecting the hustle culture, the @alqurancustomku account uses QS. al-Qaṣaṣ [28]: 73. The consideration of choosing this verse is based on the editorial words contained in surah al-Qaṣaṣ: 73, one of which is the word *litaskunu*, which can be interpreted as rest. This verse is suitable as a reflection of the hustle culture that often neglects rest time at work.

Next, the @lanternoflightofficial Instagram account. In the @lanternoflightofficial account, the content delivered tends to lead to inspirational quotes and life reflections. For example, in one of the uploads featuring the text learn to trust the process and the path Allah swt paves for you, as if He can part the sea for Musa, He can do anything for you!. Inspirational quotes and life reflections are also explained in posts that discuss hustle culture. In reflecting on the hustle culture, the @lanternoflightofficial account uses QS. al-Takwīr [81]: 26. Selection of surah al-Takwīr [81]: 26 in his upload, because this verse has a deep meaning, namely, where will you go? In the context of hustle culture which is full of busyness, this verse can be used as a reflection of life. The form of reflection of hustle culture is expressed in a picture that reads Pause. Breath. Reflect. In the @lanternoflightofficial upload, it also states that Allah isn't just asking; He's calling you back. Meanwhile, the Instagram account @sssheikh00 chose QS. al-Zariyat [51]: 56 and al-Talaq [65]: 3. Based on @sssheikh00's explanation in his account that hustle culture is a flawed culture.

The selection of Qur'anic verses by content creators in reflecting hustle culture shows that the main reason behind this selection is not only because of the meaning of the verse in classical interpretation, but also the strategy of delivering messages by the main purpose of the account and the needs of the audience. In some cases, the selection of verses is based on the suitability of the wording and the relevance to the theme to be discussed, as seen in the use of QS. al-Qaṣaṣ [28]: 73 by @alqurancustomku, where the word *litaskunu*, which means rest, is used as a basis for reflection to remember the importance of balance between work and

rest. This shows that the meaning of the verse is the main consideration to criticise the hustle culture that often neglects rest and happiness. In contrast, in the @lanternoflightofficial account that uses QS. al-Takwir [81]: 26, the tendency that emerges is more on how the verse can be used to build a reflective narrative. The diction *fa aina tadzhabun*, which means 'So, where are you going?' is used to encourage the audience to reflect on their busy lives. In this case, the meaning of the verse is still taken into consideration, but by using a more flexible approach, where the verse is used as a rhetorical tool to build a reflective discourse on hustle culture.

Meanwhile, the selection of QS. al-Zariyat [51]: 56 and QS. al-Talaq [65]: 3 by account @ssheikh00 shows that there is something stronger to emphasise the incompatibility of hustle culture with Islamic values. In this case, the form of verse selection leads more to the desire to reject hustle culture than to explore the meaning of the verse in depth. QS. al-Zariyat [51]: 56, which states that humans were created to worship Allah, is used as an argument that working hard to achieve worldly success is not the main purpose of life. Similarly, QS. al-Talaq [65]: 3, which suggests that sustenance comes from Allah, is used to undermine the logic of working relentlessly to achieve worldly success (Forward, 1995; Yusuf Al-Qardhawi, 2000) This shows that in the context of this account, the selection of verses is more focused on creating theological arguments against hustle culture than analysing the relevance of the meaning of the verse to the phenomenon. It can be seen that there are two patterns in verse selection: first, considering the meaning of the verse in building a narrative and reflecting on hustle culture, as done by me @alqurancustomku and @lanternoflightofficial; second, using the verse as a justification tool to reject the phenomenon, as seen in @ssheikh00's upload. Thus, the selection of verses does not always come from a deep analysis of meaning, but is also influenced by the ideological interests and communication strategies to be achieved.

The selection of verses in reflecting hustle culture on Instagram reveals hidden meanings that reflect the shift in interpretation from scholars to digital individuals, showing how the Qur'an is recontextualised according to audience desires and communication strategies. As in the use of QS. al-Takwir [81]: 26, which was originally a commemoration of the Last Day but was utilised as a reflection on hustle culture. This indicates that the utilisation of religion in the digital space is not always based on a deep exploration of meaning, but rather on a strategy to build an interesting and appropriate social discourse for the audience. Thus, the Qur'an in digital discourse not only functions as a spiritual guide but also as an instrument of framing issues that follow popular culture trends.

Epistemological Implications of Qur'anic Verse Use in Hustle Culture Narratives on Instagram

The use of Qur'anic verses as a reflection of hustle culture reflects how religious texts can be interpreted based on specific social and economic needs. Some verses that emphasise the importance of hard work and effort are often

explained partially without considering the overall context, resulting in an inaccurate understanding of Islamic teachings. This is in line with the concept of cherry-picking interpretation, where individuals or groups only take the part of the data that can fulfil their point of view without looking at all the other facts offered (Statistical Trap : Cherry Picking - Exsight, 2021). As a result, despite the principle of *tawazun* in Islam that emphasises the balance between the world and the hereafter, hustle culture that emphasises relentless productivity can still gain religious legitimacy. In addition, the hustle culture phenomenon shows how the interpretation of the Qur'an in digital culture is increasingly influenced by popular narratives that often focus more on capitalistic economics than deeper theological understanding. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth study of the use of Qur'anic verses in reflecting hustle culture, both to avoid misinterpretation and to ensure that the understanding of the Qur'an still reflects Islamic values as a whole.

The tendency of different choices in determining the basic basis of the Qur'an in explaining the phenomenon of hustle culture has an impact on the shift in perception in determining the meaning of both. The data shows two implications that encourage changes in understanding orientation. First, the formation of stereotypes over hustle culture. The stereotypes formed adjust to the framing of the meaning of the verse chosen to suit the purpose of the content creator. The positive association of the hustle culture phenomenon is carried out by the @diartiindah account using QS. al-Nur [24]: 31. The values of speed to be the first, perfectionism governed by obedience, and dedication in achieving work targets are used as a basis for identifying hustle culture in Ansar women. Linking the meaning of QS. al-Nur [24]: 31 with the phenomenon of hustle culture has an impact on the formation of good perceptions.

The formation of good perceptions built through framing efforts on the choice of verses also applies to the formation of bad perceptions of the hustle culture phenomenon. The choice of QS. al- Qaṣaṣ: 73, which explains the signs of Allah's power in creating day and night, is used to frame hustle culture as not utilising the function of the day-night. Custom Qur'an (@alqurancustomku, 2024) . The issue of branding of hustle culture that reflects the spirit of work turns into actions that are against religion with the inclusion of QS. at-Takwir [81]: 26, (Lantern of Light (lanternoflightofficial), 2025). QS. al-Zariyat [51]: 56, (Sahan (@sssheikh00), 2025) and al-Talaq [65]: 3 (Sahan (@sssheikh00), 2025). The framing built in labelling hustle culture against QS. al-Takwir [81]: 26 accentuates the escape of a servant to get away from God so that the diction *fa aina tadzhabun*, as if giving reinforcement to the negligence of people who fall into the category of hustle culture to remember God. (Lantern of Light (lanternoflightofficial), 2025). The same prominence through QS. al-Zariyat [51]: 56, which contains the essence of creation for servitude, encourages a change in perception that working hard for success is not why humans were created (Sahan (@sssheikh00), 2025). In fact, the framing of hustle culture that is contrary to religious teachings is strengthened by

presenting QS. al-Talaq [65]: 3, which contains information that piety will lead a person to get sustenance from an unexpected path.

Second, simplification of meaning. The Qur'an's shift to labelling new phenomena has resulted in a vulnerability to inferring meaning, without involving an in-depth investigation. Significant gaps in meaning can be seen in the use of QS. al-Nur [24]: 31 as an argument to relate the awareness and obedience of Anshar women to the phenomenon of hustle culture. The coercion of different context spaces in making the connection pattern is more clearly seen in the effort to build the hustle culture phenomenon as a negative phenomenon that is contrary to religion (Sahan (@sssheikh00), 2025). Al-Zariyat [51]: 56, which is used to label hustle culture as not part of the purpose of creation, actually shows rejection of the view that God needs humans, which arises from the rejection of the Prophet's preaching. Unequal context switching becomes a conception of meaning that is produced only towards the purpose of shaping the discourse carried out by the account owners.

The selection of Qur'anic verses in reflecting hustle culture shows a subjective tendency in framing meaning that focuses on the interests of the discourse maker. This phenomenon occurs because the interpretation of verses is often done through a proof-texting approach, which is the use of sacred texts to support certain claims without considering the general context. In @diartiindah's account, the relationship between QS. al-Nur [24]: 31 with hustle culture shows how the construction of meaning can be used to strengthen the legitimacy of a phenomenon. This is in line with agenda-setting theory, which explains how mass media or individuals can influence public perception of an issue (Galih Gerald Primayana, 2022). In contrast, the use of QS. al-Qaṣaṣ: 73, QS. al-Takwir [81]: 26, QS. al-Zariyat [51]: 56, and QS. al-Talaq [65]: 3 to criticise hustle culture shows how religious texts can function as tools to stigmatise a social phenomenon. As a result, the different objectives in interpreting hustle culture through Qur'anic verses reflect more of a public opinion-shaping strategy than a reflection on Islamic values as a whole.

The framing of hustle culture through the selection of Qur'anic verses not only reflects differences in textual interpretation but also reveals power dynamics in the production of religious meaning in the digital era. From the perspective of interpretative analysis, this phenomenon shows how sacred texts are considered as legitimizing tools that can be adjusted to the ideological interests of content creators. For example, the hidden meaning in the use of QS. al-Nur [24]: 31 by the account @diartiindah, shows an attempt to link the value of obedience with productivity as well as a tendency to construct the image of hustle culture as something positive in an Islamic perspective. This reflects the process of sanctification of work, where hard work and dedication are considered an ideal form of servitude (Weber, 2001, p. 32).

In contrast, the selection of QS. al-Qaṣaṣ: 73, QS. al-Takwir [81]: 26, QS. al-Zariyat [51]: 56, and QS. al-Talaq [65]: 3 to reflect on hustle culture as something

that is against religion indicates a rejection of the work culture influenced by contemporary capitalism. This approach has hidden meanings related to criticizing the use of labor that does not consider aspects of spirituality and life balance. In other words, these verses do not only function as informative propositions, but also serve as a tool of deconstruction against the dominating narrative that considers productivity as the standard of individual morality. This shows how the meaning of religion in the digital world is not just a reflection of the text, but also the result of a tug-of-war between economic, social, and ideological interests (Brown & Mondon, 2020).

Furthermore, the simplification of meaning carried out in these two approaches shows that the verse is used in the hustle culture discourse as a rhetorical device rather than as part of an authoritative interpretive process. This process is in line with the hermeneutics of suspicion theory, which shows that religious texts are often used to support certain claims without going through an in-depth analysis of the context and original meaning of the text (Jonas Tellefsen Hejlesen, 2024). Therefore, the hidden meaning in this phenomenon is that the transformation of the Qur'an has changed from a book of guidance that requires deep contemplation to just a legitimization tool that can be adjusted to the narrative desired by the content creator.

An interpretive analysis of the use of Qur'anic verses in reflecting hustle culture provides an explanation of hidden meanings that reflect power dynamics and the construction of social reality in the digital era. Related research shows that the Qur'an teaches a concept of productivity that not only focus on material achievement, but also includes spiritual, social, and personal aspects. This is in line with the finding that the use of certain verses to support or criticize hustle culture reflects the content creators' efforts to adapt religious messages to the narrative they want to build. For example, the use of QS. al-Nur: 31 to highlight the positive aspects of hustle culture associated with the productivity of Anshar women. In addition, other studies emphasize that the Qur'an prohibits workaholism and advocates a balance between the life of this world and the hereafter (Lulu Jamilah, 2016). Therefore, both interpretative analysis and related research emphasize the importance of understanding the teachings of the Qur'an as a whole in the context of hustle culture

6. Conclusion

The study reveals that the use of the Qur'an in digital religious narratives has become increasingly prevalent, especially in the context of hustle culture that dominates contemporary social media spaces. Through a comparative textual analysis of three prominent Instagram accounts, two distinct interpretive patterns were identified: the use of verses for spiritual reassurance and narrative affirmation, and the selection of verses for critical resistance against productivity-centered ideology. These patterns are shaped not by classical exegetical rigour but by the social imaginary of platform audiences and the logic of algorithmic visibility. The digital environment accelerates the fragmentation and

simplification of Qur'anic meanings, detaching them from the theological and ethical depth typically provided by traditional scholars. Instead of fostering nuanced reflections, these interpretations often cater to fast-paced content trends and audience expectations. This study also uncovers a broader epistemic shift, where interpretive authority transitions from ulama to digital influencers. Consequently, the Qur'anic text becomes a dynamic but contested space in contemporary meaning-making.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the growing field of digital Islam by integrating theories of framing, text reception, and algorithmic epistemology. It advances the discourse on epistemic distortion, highlighting how Qur'anic verses are selectively framed to legitimize both conformity and resistance to hustle culture. The originality of the study lies in its examination of how sacred texts are entangled with algorithmic infrastructures, shifting the Qur'an from a source of contemplative guidance to a tool of cultural performance. Unlike previous studies that focus on digital piety as devotional expression, this research focuses on the semiotic and power-laden functions of scripture in the attention economy. It also builds on but critically expands earlier scholarship on online da'wah by mapping out the narrative logics and interpretive slippages that emerge in popular religious content. The findings underscore the need for a rethinking of tafsir ethics in digital spaces, where commodification risks overriding theological fidelity. In this regard, the study opens up an important conversation about restoring interpretive depth in technologically mediated religion.

Nevertheless, this research is not without limitations. Its primary focus on Instagram content, while insightful, narrows the scope of generalization to other platforms and user demographics. The study also centers heavily on female content creators and audiences, leaving male-dominated religious discourse underexplored. While the textual and visual analysis offers strong interpretive insights, a deeper ethnographic engagement with content producers and consumers would enrich understanding of their intentions and reception practices. Moreover, the study's reliance on selected accounts may overlook the broader spectrum of Qur'anic interpretation in digital spaces, particularly those with different ideological leanings. Future research should consider cross-platform analysis, inter-gender comparative studies, and participatory methods to capture the full complexity of digital Qur'anic hermeneutics. It would also be valuable to explore how religious institutions respond to and potentially re-regulate scriptural interpretation in the algorithmic era. Ultimately, this study calls for a critical and constructive engagement with digital religion, where sacred texts are treated not merely as content, but as ethical trust.

7. Reference

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