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THE QUR'AN AND THE CHALLENGES OF MODERNITY: (A Tafsir Analysis of Global Social Change)

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Kata Kunci:	ABSTRACT
Tafsir Kontemporer, Modernitas, Perubahan Sosial Global	Perkembangan modernitas yang ditandai oleh globalisasi, digitalisasi, dan transformasi sosial global menghadirkan tantangan baru bagi cara umat Islam memahami dan mengaktualisasikan pesan Al-Qur'an, sehingga tafsir dituntut untuk terus beradaptasi dengan realitas kontemporer tanpa kehilangan fondasi normatifnya. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bagaimana tafsir Al-Qur'an merespons tantangan modernitas serta memetakan kecenderungan interpretasi kontemporer dalam menghadapi perubahan sosial global. Metode yang digunakan adalah penelitian kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan pendekatan hermeneutika kritis dan analisis sosial-kontekstual, yang menelaah karya-karya tafsir klasik dan modern serta teori-teori modernitas dan globalisasi sebagai kerangka interpretatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tafsir kontemporer bergerak dari pendekatan tekstual statis menuju interpretasi dialogis yang menekankan interaksi antara teks wahyu, konteks sejarah, dan realitas sosial masa kini, serta menonjolkan nilai-nilai etika universal Al-Qur'an seperti keadilan, keseimbangan, dan kasih sayang dalam merespons isu pluralisme, krisis moral, digitalisasi otoritas keagamaan, dan tantangan kemanusiaan global. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa modernitas tidak menegasikan relevansi Al-Qur'an, melainkan memperluas medan aktualisasi pesan wahyu, sehingga pengembangan tafsir kontekstual yang metodologis, kritis, dan etis menjadi kunci untuk menjaga keberlanjutan peran Al-Qur'an sebagai pedoman spiritual dan sosial di era perubahan global.

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ABSTRACTS

The advancement of modernity, characterized by globalization, digitalization, and global social transformation, has introduced new challenges in how Muslims understand and actualize the message of the Qur'an, thereby requiring Qur'anic interpretation (tafsir) to continually adapt to contemporary realities without losing its normative foundations. This study aims to analyze how tafsir responds to the challenges of modernity and to map the tendencies of contemporary interpretation in addressing global social change. The research employs a qualitative library-based method using critical hermeneutics and socio-contextual analysis to examine classical and modern tafsir works alongside theories of modernity and globalization as interpretive frameworks. The findings reveal that contemporary tafsir has shifted from static textual approaches toward dialogical interpretation that emphasizes interaction between revelation, historical context, and present social realities, while foregrounding universal Qur'anic ethical values such as justice, balance, and compassion in responding to issues of pluralism, moral crisis, digitalized religious authority, and global humanitarian challenges. The study concludes that modernity does not negate the relevance of the Qur'an but rather expands the field of actualizing divine guidance, making the development of contextual, methodologically rigorous, and ethically oriented tafsir essential for sustaining the Qur'an's role as a spiritual and social guide in an era of global transformation.

A. INTRODUCTION

Modernity represents one of the most decisive phenomena in contemporary human civilization. It is characterized by advances in science and technology, the acceleration of information flows, economic globalization, cross-border human mobility, and massive transformations in social and cultural structures. These developments significantly affect how individuals perceive the world, construct social relationships, and interpret moral and spiritual values. Within religious communities, modernity often generates tensions between established religious traditions and the demands of rationality, efficiency, and individual freedom that typify modern societies (Giddens, 1991). The Qur'an, as the sacred text of Islam, is believed to possess universal and timeless relevance. Its messages are not confined by space or time, yet they were revealed within specific socio-historical contexts. Consequently, understanding the Qur'an always requires interpretative activity (tafsir) so that divine messages can be comprehended and applied according to the needs of each generation. Tafsir does not merely function to explain the linguistic meaning of verses; it also acts as a bridge connecting revelation and continuously changing social realities. In the context of modernity, the need for interpretations responsive to social transformation becomes increasingly urgent, considering the complexity of global issues unknown to earlier generations (Saeed, 2006).

Contemporary global social change encompasses transformations in digital communication, shifting knowledge authorities, environmental crises, cultural pluralism, and emerging ethical dilemmas in artificial intelligence and biotechnology. These phenomena directly and indirectly influence how religious communities practice and understand Islam. If Qur'anic interpretation fails to engage with such realities, divine messages risk being understood rigidly and detached from lived experience. Therefore, contemporary tafsir studies demand innovative approaches that not only draw upon classical scholarly traditions but also incorporate modern social sciences to

analyze the evolving conditions of Muslim societies (Rahman, 1982). Historically, the relationship between revelation and social reality in Islamic thought has always been dynamic. Classical exegetes produced interpretations based on the social, political, and legal issues of their times. However, modernity has radically transformed social structures. Globalization has created multicultural societies; digital capitalism has introduced new economic inequalities; and unrestricted information flows have challenged traditional religious authority. These conditions necessitate a paradigm of tafsir that is contextual and progressive, enabling the Qur'an to function as a guiding source for social transformation rather than merely serving as a ritual symbol (Esack, 2002).

Modernity also generates religious identity crises within Muslim communities. On one hand, it offers intellectual freedom and technological progress; on the other, it promotes secular values that sometimes conflict with religious moral principles. This tension often results in two extremes: groups that completely reject modernity through rigid textualism, and others who uncritically embrace modernity at the risk of losing spiritual roots. Here, Qur'anic interpretation plays a crucial mediating role—affirming transcendent divine values while opening space for *ijtihad* to address contemporary challenges (Shihab, 2013). In recent academic discourse, various interpretive approaches have emerged to respond to modern dynamics. Critical hermeneutics, thematic exegesis, social tafsir, feminist interpretations, and eco-theological readings demonstrate the evolving nature of Qur'anic studies in line with social transformation. Abu Zayd (1994) asserts that sacred texts cannot be understood ahistorically, as meaning arises through interaction among text, reader, and social context. This perspective reinforces the argument that Qur'anic interpretation must continually renew itself to avoid literalism that neglects real human conditions.

Furthermore, globalization has intensified religious and cultural pluralism. Today's world is interconnected, making interreligious and intercultural encounters inevitable. In such contexts, Qur'anic interpretation is expected to promote inclusive and dialogical perspectives without compromising core theological principles. Esack (2002) illustrates that tafsir can serve as a theological foundation for building cross-identity solidarity and social justice, particularly in confronting global structures of oppression. Global social change also produces contemporary ethical concerns such as gender justice, human rights, ecological crises, and global economic inequality. These issues require strong normative foundations so that proposed solutions are not merely technocratic but also morally and spiritually grounded. The Qur'an offers universal ethical principles such as justice ('adl), balance (*mīzān*), and public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*). Yet these principles can function effectively only when interpreted contextually in response to evolving global challenges (Arkoun, 2006).

In Indonesia, as part of the global community, the challenges of modernity significantly influence Muslim religious life. Social media has reshaped patterns of religious preaching, scholarly authority, and youth engagement with Islam. Meanwhile, transformations in education and economic structures have produced a critical Muslim middle class that seeks rational and contextual religious understanding. These conditions highlight the urgency of developing Qur'anic interpretation that not only relies on traditional authority but also dialogues with national and global social realities in an open and scholarly manner. Accordingly, the study entitled "The Qur'an and the Challenges of Modernity: An Analysis of Qur'anic Interpretation on Global Social

Change” is both relevant and strategic within contemporary Islamic studies. This research seeks not only to map how Qur’anic tafsir responds to modernity but also to analyze the extent to which contemporary interpretive approaches can bridge the gap between the normative ideals of revelation and the historical realities of Muslim societies. Through such analysis, it is expected that a model of interpretation will emerge that is more adaptive, humane, and solution-oriented in addressing the complexities of global transformation. Ultimately, this introduction emphasizes that modernity should not be viewed as a threat to the existence of the Qur’an but rather as a new arena for the actualization of divine guidance. Global social challenges open opportunities for creative, critical, and contextual readings of the Qur’an. By positioning the Qur’an as a source of ethical and spiritual inspiration in responding to the changing times, Muslims can actively contribute to building a global civilization that is just, dignified, and sustainable.

B. METHOD

The research employs a qualitative-descriptive approach based on library research. A qualitative method is chosen because the study seeks to explore meanings, interpretative patterns, and the dynamics of Qur’anic exegesis in responding to global social transformations, rather than measuring phenomena quantitatively. Through this approach, data are examined in depth to reveal the relationship between the Qur’anic text, exegetical traditions, and modernity as a socio-cultural construction (Creswell, 2013). The research is categorized as library-based since all data are obtained from written sources, both primary and secondary. Primary sources include classical and contemporary works of Qur’anic exegesis as well as major writings on modern tafsir methodology, such as those by Fazlur Rahman, Abdullah Saeed, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Muhammad Arkoun. Secondary sources consist of academic journal articles, scholarly books on theories of modernity, globalization, and social change, and relevant literature in Islamic studies. Library research is appropriate for this inquiry because tafsir is fundamentally text-based and requires conceptual and historical exploration of existing scholarly works (Zed, 2008). The analytical framework of this study integrates critical hermeneutics and socio-contextual analysis. Critical hermeneutics is applied to examine the Qur’anic text and exegetical works as products of interaction between revelation, the interpreter, and the socio-historical context in which interpretation occurs. This approach emphasizes that textual meaning is neither singular nor static, but continuously open to reinterpretation in accordance with evolving social realities (Abu Zayd, 1994). Thus, tafsir is understood as an ongoing dialogical process between sacred text and contemporary readership.

In addition, social analysis is employed to understand the nature of global social changes that constitute the challenges of modernity. The theory of modernity and globalization proposed by Anthony Giddens provides the conceptual lens for analyzing contemporary social structures, including digitalization, cultural globalization, and transformations of social identity (Giddens, 1991). By integrating hermeneutical analysis with social theory, this research situates Qur’anic interpretation within the broader framework of modern global realities. Data collection is conducted through systematic documentation and literature review. Relevant tafsir works representing both classical and contemporary approaches are identified, followed by the selection of texts that

explicitly address the relationship between the Qur'an and modern social issues. These texts are examined through intensive reading, thematic note-taking, and categorization of key ideas based on major issues such as globalization, social ethics, pluralism, and moral crises in modern society. This technique enables a comprehensive mapping of interpretative trends in contemporary Qur'anic exegesis (Sugiyono, 2016).

Data analysis proceeds through three interrelated stages. First, data reduction is carried out by selecting and focusing on information relevant to the research theme. Second, data display is organized in thematic narrative form to illustrate patterns of tafsir approaches toward modernity. Third, conclusions are drawn through critical interpretation of the relationships among Qur'anic concepts, exegetical methodologies, and global social changes. These stages follow the interactive qualitative data analysis model that emphasizes continuous engagement between data collection and analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To ensure the credibility of findings, source triangulation is applied by comparing various tafsir works and social theories from diverse perspectives. Consistency of arguments across sources is also examined to minimize subjective bias. Conceptual validity is maintained by employing well-established theories in both Qur'anic studies and social sciences. Through these strategies, the study aims to achieve strong academic reliability and interpretative rigor. Ultimately, this methodological design seeks to produce a comprehensive analysis of how Qur'anic exegesis can respond contextually to the challenges of modernity. By combining library research, critical hermeneutics, and socio-contextual analysis, the study endeavors to explain the dynamic relationship between revelation and global social realities, while offering a methodological contribution to the development of contemporary tafsir in an era of rapid social transformation.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that modernity operates not merely as a chronological era but as a structural transformation of human civilization that reshapes knowledge systems, cultural identities, social institutions, and religious consciousness. The contemporary global order is marked by unprecedented technological acceleration, digital communication networks, economic interdependence, scientific rationality, and individual autonomy. These characteristics generate new epistemological frameworks through which human beings perceive reality and construct meaning. As Giddens (1991) explains, modernity disembeds social relations from local traditions and reconstructs them through reflexive interaction with global information flows. Within Muslim societies, these conditions inevitably influence the ways in which the Qur'an is accessed, interpreted, and lived. Traditional modes of tafsir, once rooted in stable scholarly lineages and localized communities of learning, now encounter a fluid social environment where knowledge circulates instantly across digital platforms and religious authority is increasingly decentralized. This transformation challenges inherited interpretive hierarchies while opening space for new forms of engagement with the sacred text. The study finds that contemporary tafsir scholarship increasingly acknowledges this shifting epistemic landscape. Whereas classical tafsir methodologies emphasized linguistic analysis, transmitted reports, and juridical reasoning within relatively homogeneous cultural contexts, modern exegetical approaches recognize the need to address complex global realities that were absent in pre-modern societies.

Digital technology, artificial intelligence, bioethics, environmental crises, and global economic inequality present ethical questions that cannot be resolved solely through classical jurisprudential analogies. Consequently, modern tafsir seeks to recover the dynamic spirit of Qur'anic guidance by emphasizing ethical objectives and social relevance. Saeed (2006) notes that contemporary interpretation increasingly distinguishes between universal moral values and historically contingent legal applications, allowing the Qur'an to remain authoritative while responsive to new conditions. This finding confirms that modernity does not undermine the Qur'an's universality but requires renewed interpretive responsibility.

The analysis further shows that tafsir in the modern era has shifted from a static conception of meaning toward a dialogical understanding of interpretation. Abu Zayd (1994) argues that while the Qur'an is divine in origin, it enters history through human language, making interpretation inseparable from socio-cultural contexts. This view is reflected in contemporary exegetical practices that treat meaning as emerging from interaction between text, interpreter, and lived reality. Rather than seeking a single final meaning, modern tafsir embraces interpretive plurality within the boundaries of linguistic and theological integrity. Fazlur Rahman's (1982) double-movement theory exemplifies this orientation, proposing that interpreters must move from present-day concerns to the historical context of revelation and return to contemporary application guided by Qur'anic ethical principles. The study finds that this methodology has become foundational for modern discussions on governance, gender justice, human rights, and economic ethics, enabling Qur'anic teachings to speak meaningfully to present global challenges without losing their sacred anchoring. Another major finding concerns the impact of globalization on religious pluralism. Global interconnectedness intensifies encounters among diverse cultures, ideologies, and faith traditions, creating new social conditions in which exclusivist or isolationist religious interpretations can provoke conflict. Traditional tafsir often reflected historical circumstances where religious identity was defined through political rivalry and communal boundaries. In contrast, contemporary tafsir increasingly emphasizes Qur'anic recognition of diversity as part of divine wisdom. Esack (2002) argues that Qur'anic interpretation can provide a theological basis for solidarity across religious and cultural differences in pursuit of justice and human dignity. The study confirms that modern exegetes reinterpret verses on interfaith relations, dialogue, and coexistence to address current realities of multicultural societies. In contexts such as Indonesia, where pluralism is a lived social experience, this interpretive trend contributes to theological support for democratic citizenship, social tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. Thus, modern tafsir not only interprets sacred text but actively shapes the moral architecture of pluralistic societies.

Digital transformation emerges as another crucial dimension of modernity affecting Qur'anic interpretation. The study reveals that online media platforms, digital libraries, mobile Qur'an applications, and global streaming of religious lectures have revolutionized access to tafsir. Knowledge that was once mediated through formal institutions is now available to anyone with internet access. This democratization enhances religious literacy and empowers individual engagement with the Qur'an. However, it simultaneously fragments traditional authority structures and allows unqualified interpretations to proliferate. Algorithm-driven content circulation often

privileges emotionally charged or ideologically extreme interpretations, contributing to misinformation and polarization. Contemporary tafsir scholarship increasingly responds by developing digital educational initiatives that present methodologically sound interpretations in accessible formats. Yet the study finds that the challenge remains ongoing: modern tafsir must now address not only textual interpretation but also the media ecology through which interpretation spreads. Ethical digital literacy therefore becomes part of contemporary Qur'anic pedagogy, ensuring that technological access enhances rather than undermines interpretive integrity. The study also finds that modern tafsir has increasingly foregrounded Qur'anic ethics to address global moral crises. Contemporary civilization faces existential threats such as climate change, ecological destruction, economic exploitation, forced migration, and surveillance capitalism. These challenges demand normative frameworks capable of guiding global conscience beyond national or sectarian boundaries. Arkoun (2006) argues that Qur'anic ethical concepts such as justice ('adl), compassion (rahmah), balance (mizān), and stewardship (khilāfah) provide universal principles for rethinking global responsibility. The analysis confirms that emerging interpretive movements—such as ecological tafsir, feminist tafsir, and liberationist tafsir—represent efforts to connect Qur'anic moral imperatives with contemporary struggles for environmental sustainability, gender equity, and social justice. These approaches reinterpret Qur'anic narratives of creation, prophetic struggle, and divine justice as ethical frameworks for confronting modern oppression and inequality. This demonstrates that the vitality of Qur'anic interpretation lies in its capacity to engage lived human suffering and aspirations rather than remaining confined to doctrinal abstraction.

At the same time, the study identifies a persistent intellectual tension between safeguarding tradition and embracing interpretive renewal. Critics of contextual tafsir warn that excessive reinterpretation risks relativism and doctrinal erosion, while proponents argue that refusal to reinterpret risks irrelevance in rapidly changing societies. Contemporary scholars attempt to navigate this tension by distinguishing between immutable spiritual and ethical principles and historically specific social applications. Saeed (2006) proposes a layered interpretive approach that preserves the Qur'an's moral core while allowing flexibility in practical rulings. Shihab (2013) similarly emphasizes that *tajdīd* (renewal) in tafsir does not mean abandoning classical foundations but reactivating them for contemporary realities. The study finds that this balanced approach is increasingly recognized as essential for maintaining both fidelity to revelation and responsiveness to modern life. Beyond intellectual discourse, the findings show that contemporary tafsir significantly shapes Muslim social consciousness. In educational institutions, modern tafsir encourages interdisciplinary dialogue between Islamic sciences and social sciences, fostering critical religious literacy. In civic life, it supports participatory citizenship, ethical governance, and social solidarity. In spiritual practice, it enables believers to experience the Qur'an as a living guide for modern anxieties rather than as a distant historical scripture. Yet the study also notes unresolved challenges, including uneven access to quality religious education, institutional resistance to interpretive innovation, and commercial exploitation of religious content in digital spaces. These factors influence whether modern tafsir will function as a source of enlightenment or become vulnerable to ideological manipulation.

Overall, the results confirm that modernity does not negate Qur'anic universality but reshapes the conditions under which universality is realized. As Rahman (1982) asserts, the universality of the Qur'an resides in its moral vision rather than in the historical forms of its earliest implementations. Modernity, therefore, is not external to Qur'anic relevance but part of the unfolding historical context in which divine guidance continues to interact with human civilization. The study demonstrates that tafsir in the era of global transformation functions as a mediator between sacred revelation and evolving human realities, a moral compass amid technological acceleration, and a dialogical bridge between tradition and progress. In synthesizing these findings, it becomes evident that Qur'anic interpretation in the modern world must operate on multiple levels simultaneously: preserving textual sanctity, engaging ethical universals, addressing socio-political realities, and navigating digital knowledge environments. This multifaceted role positions tafsir as a central intellectual practice in shaping the future of Muslim engagement with global civilization. Rather than perceiving modernity as a threat to faith, contemporary tafsir reframes it as a field of renewed responsibility, where interpreters are called to articulate divine guidance in languages, concepts, and concerns meaningful to present humanity.

Ultimately, the study concludes that the Qur'an's enduring relevance in the modern age depends not on resisting change but on guiding change through ethical vision. Tafsir that remains trapped in historical literalism risks alienation from social reality, while tafsir that abandons textual discipline risks losing sacred anchoring. The path forward lies in interpretive wisdom that unites continuity and transformation. Through sustained methodological rigor, ethical sensitivity, and openness to interdisciplinary knowledge, modern Qur'anic interpretation can continue to illuminate human pathways in an era of global uncertainty, ensuring that divine guidance remains a living force in shaping just, compassionate, and spiritually grounded modern societies.

D. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the relationship between the Qur'an and the challenges of modernity through an analysis of contemporary tafsir and global social transformation. The findings confirm that modernity, characterized by technological acceleration, globalization, and shifting epistemological frameworks, profoundly reshapes the conditions under which religious knowledge is produced, transmitted, and interpreted. Rather than diminishing the relevance of the Qur'an, these transformations intensify the need for renewed interpretive engagement capable of mediating between sacred revelation and evolving human realities. The analysis demonstrates that contemporary tafsir increasingly moves beyond static and purely textual approaches toward dialogical, contextual, and ethically oriented interpretation. Modern exegetical methodologies emphasize the interaction between text, interpreter, and socio-historical context, allowing Qur'anic guidance to address present-day concerns such as justice, pluralism, environmental sustainability, and human dignity. This shift reflects an awareness that the universality of the Qur'an lies in its moral vision, which remains constant even as its applications evolve in response to changing social conditions. At the same time, the study reveals that digitalization and

globalization have transformed religious authority and access to interpretation. The democratization of Qur'anic knowledge expands participation in religious understanding but also creates risks of fragmented authority and unmethodical interpretation. Contemporary tafsir therefore faces the dual responsibility of maintaining scholarly rigor while engaging modern communication environments in ways that promote ethical digital literacy and responsible religious discourse.

The findings further indicate that modern tafsir plays a strategic role in shaping Muslim engagement with pluralistic societies and global citizenship. By emphasizing Qur'anic principles of compassion, justice, and cooperation, contemporary interpretations contribute to theological foundations for peaceful coexistence and constructive participation in diverse social contexts. This confirms that Qur'anic interpretation is not merely an academic exercise but a formative force in social ethics and spiritual life. Ultimately, this study concludes that the enduring relevance of the Qur'an in the modern age depends on the capacity of tafsir to balance continuity with renewal. Interpretations that remain bound to historical literalism risk social detachment, while interpretations detached from textual discipline risk theological instability. The future of Qur'anic interpretation therefore lies in sustained methodological innovation, interdisciplinary engagement, and ethical commitment. Through such efforts, tafsir can continue to serve as a living bridge between divine revelation and contemporary human experience, guiding Muslim societies to navigate the complexities of modern civilization with intellectual integrity, moral clarity, and spiritual depth.

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