The Commodification of Holy Verses: Recitation of the Qur'an on TikTok Platform

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Abstract

This study examines the commodification of religion in the content of the TikTok accounts @sahabatguranofficial and @guran id by observing the visual forms of content presented by content creators in their recitations of the Qur'an to attract audiences, encourage them to listen, and prompt them to purchase the products being offered. This phenomenon raises fundamental questions: How is the recitation of the Qur'an represented in the TikTok content of these two accounts? And, what are the forms of religious commodification on the @sahabatguranofficial and @guran id accounts? This study uses a qualitative method, focusing on content analysis and discourse analysis. Data was collected from the TikTok accounts @sahabatquranofficial and @quran_id, as well as from audience comments and responses to their content. Data was analysed using thematic analysis to identify key themes related to the commodification of religion. Data collection was conducted through participant observation and documentary study. Data analysis was conducted in three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and verification to extract field knowledge. The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the commodification of religion in the TikTok content of @sahabatguranofficial and @guran_id. The content shows that the Quran is being commodified as a business by marketing religious-themed products. Additionally, the commodification of religion is also evident in the packaging of Islamic educational or motivational content through excerpts from Quranic verses, hadith quotes, or statements by Islamic scholars.

Keywords

commodification of religion, recitation of the Qur'an, TikTok

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Introduction

Religion is one of the most important aspects of human life. It provides meaning, purpose, and values for many people. In recent years, religion has become increasingly prevalent on social media. It is used by more than 3.6 billion people worldwide (Dixon 2022), Social media reshapes religious identities, practices, and communities (Campbell and Tsuria 2021), This includes the TikTok app. Small pieces of text, flyers, short videos, and online networks have now become the core of social interaction in new media (Zuhri 2021). TikTok has become extremely popular in recent years. The platform has been used for various purposes, including the dissemination of religious content. One phenomenon that has attracted attention is the proliferation of Quran recitations on the platform. Religious activities disseminated on social media have been disrupted and their values diluted, as these activities are carried out solely to pursue economic needs (Fianto and Ghofur 2023).

So far, many studies have been conducted on the commodification of religion. Research of (Fianto and Ghofur 2023) aims to comprehensively and analytically examine the extent of disruption and erosion of religious values occurring on the social media platform TikTok. Article of (Lestari, Sugeng, and Harits 2023) provides explanations and examples of how a brand attempts to construct market perceptions using Mosco's theory of Political Economy and Communication through commodification, spatialisation and structuration. Meanwhile, (Asri and Soehadha 2022) state that the representation of religion on Instagram provides a great opportunity for religion to appear online and, at the same time, to develop the economy in various forms, thereby providing exchange value. (Husna 2018) reveals how the commodification of religion in business practices has a real impact on shifting consumers' understanding of their religious identity. From the above studies on the commodification of religion, it appears that there have not been many studies that discuss the phenomenon of reading the Qur'an holistically, especially on the social media platform TikTok.

The purpose of this study is to address the gaps in previous research that have not thoroughly analysed the phenomenon of Qur'an recitation on the TikTok accounts @sahabatquranofficial and @quran_id. There is a complexity of issues surrounding Qur'an recitation on social media, where the sacred Qur'an has the potential to become profane. Content related to the recitation of the Qur'an on social media can be exploited for commercial purposes, such as promoting products or services, which can tarnish the sanctity and dignity of the Qur'an (Fadli 2023).

This study raises a crucial issue regarding the commercialisation of Qur'an recitation, a practice that transforms sacred worship into a profane commodity. Indications of religious commodification are evident in the @bumitauhidofficial account, which has 325,000 followers and has sold a total of 306,100 copies of the Mushaf al-Qur'an Duo Latin Algosbah. The account @bacaan_alguran, with 178,800 followers, successfully sold 3,774 copies of the Triple Qur'an. Meanwhile, the account @sahabatguranofficial, with 1.5 million followers, and @guran id, with 620,700 followers, have also profited from the sale of the Duo Latin Algosbah Qur'an, with total sales of 306,100 copies sold. Researchers have targeted the last two accounts based on the number of followers and the highest sales volume. The argument of this article focuses on how this practice reduces the spiritual meaning of Qur'an recitation to a financially motivated action, shifting the focus away from sincerity and purity of heart. The social and spiritual consequences of this phenomenon require thorough examination, including its impact on social inequality, exploitation, and potential manipulation. This article advocates constructive solutions, such as education, non-material rewards, and the enforcement of spiritual values in the recitation of the Qur'an.

Method

The focus of this study lies on the unit of analysis in the form of the commodification of religion, specifically the recitation of the Qur'an. This unit of analysis was chosen for several reasons. First, for Muslims, reciting the Qur'an is a sacred act of worship. It contains a profound spiritual moment, in which a servant dialogues with the Creator. However, ironically, the recitation of these sacred verses is not immune to commodification, being transformed into a 'commodity' with economic and political value. Second, there is concern that the divine essence of the Qur'an is reduced to a mere pursuit of profit. The noble values of religion are displaced, replaced by the pursuit of material gain and popularity. Thirdly, the commodification of religion can be exploited for political purposes. The practice of reciting the Qur'an on social media can be used as a tool to influence public opinion, legitimise power, or even justify violence.

This research is qualitative in nature, using a phenomenological approach to explore the issue of the commodification of religion in the content of the TikTok accounts @sahabatquranofficial and @quran_id by observing the visual form of the content presented by content creators in their recitations of the Qur'an in order to attract audiences, encourage them to listen, and persuade them to purchase a

product being offered. The reason for choosing this research design refers to the specificity of phenomenology that occurs on social media. Religion, which should be a source of spirituality and moral guidance, is now faced with the dangers of profanation and commodification. Its sanctity is threatened with defilement, reduced to a product that is bought and sold for profit alone. The use of a phenomenological study design allows researchers to maintain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the real-life events being observed. Phenomenological studies are also an approach that aims to maintain the wholeness of the research object, to develop in-depth knowledge about the commodification of religion in the form of Qur'an recitations on the social media platform TikTok as the object in question.

Phenomenology is essentially a tradition of inquiry used to explore human experience. As stated by (Littlejohn and Foss 2010), that phenomenology is a tradition for exploring human experience. In this context, there is an assumption that humans actively understand the world around them as their life experience and actively interpret that experience. Meanwhile, Hegel argues that phenomenology refers to knowledge that arises from consciousness, namely knowledge that describes something experienced by humans (Moustakas 1994). This method was used in this study because the researchers wanted to see how people experienced using the social media platform TikTok. As Littlejohn previously stated, phenomenology is a tradition for exploring human experiences. By using this method, researchers will find it easier to look deeper into the experiences that have occurred and the motives behind all the activities they have done and experienced while using TikTok on a daily basis.

The data in this study was obtained from several sources. Primary data was obtained from in-depth and involved observations of thousands of informants who are followers of the account. In-depth observation was conducted to obtain initial data and access information that informants could share openly. Participatory observation was conducted personally by following the activities of the TikTok accounts @sahabatquranofficial and @quran_id, which included live TikTok streams. Through this involvement, deeper data could be obtained regarding personal and sensitive questions surrounding the recitation of the Qur'an on these accounts. The stories and testimonies of informants in direct interactions provide a comprehensive and in-depth picture of experiences and tendencies in listening to, understanding, and responding to the recitation of the Qur'an.

The data collection method used in this study involved searching for virtual community data on the TikTok accounts @sahabatquranofficial and @quran_id in the form of follower comments on several Qur'an recitation videos. The search for virtual community data was conducted using keywords and hashtags. The data collected from computer-mediated communications (CMC) was then categorised through coding, which was done using keywords. CMC studies how human behaviour is shaped or altered through information exchange using computer-based media. In its development, communication via computer-based media has seen a fusion between mediated (intermediated) and immediate communication. Mediation refers to the process of exchanging messages, where messages are conveyed through technological media, ranging from the simplest forms such as paper to advanced technologies such as computers and the internet (Shabrina, Setyabudi, and S Sos 2017).

To process and analyse the data obtained, this study utilised a qualitative descriptive interactive analysis method that emphasised data reduction, data display, and data verification. Data reduction is carried out through the classification of data into themes related to the research question on the commodification of religion: the recitation of the Qur'an on the TikTok accounts @sahabatquranofficial and @quran_id. Several parties have provided information related to the commodification of religion through the recitation of the Qur'an, which is sufficiently comprehensive to serve as the basis for data mapping and understanding of what is occurring. Data display is done by presenting the findings in the form of tables and descriptive narratives. Observation data is presented in the form of a table consisting of columns containing the observed aspects in the form of descriptive narratives. Meanwhile, data verification is carried out by re-examining the data obtained to check its authenticity and relevance to the research theme. Once all the data presented is valid and credible, the data is interpreted by discussing it in conjunction with the concepts and theories used in this research.

Results and Discussion

The Commodification of Religion and the Recitation of the Qur'an

The commodification of religion, whereby sacred values are transformed into commodities for economic gain, poses a dilemma between spirituality and materialism. On the one hand, commodification risks degrading religious values and opening up opportunities for exploitation. On the other hand, it can help spread religious teachings and boost the economy of religious communities. Navigating

this phenomenon requires a critical and comprehensive approach, taking into account cultural and social contexts and long-term impacts. (Wibowo 2020) The commodification of religion is rampant in Indonesian television media, especially in religious programmes and soap operas with religious themes. Examples include the soap operas 'Tukang Bubur Naik Haji' (RCTI), 'Haji Medit' (SCTV), and 'Azab' (Indosiar). These programmes are packaged with commercial elements to attract viewers and boost ratings. This commodification becomes even more evident during the month of Ramadan. This momentum is exploited to produce religious programmes with sensational and bombastic formats, sparking controversy and provoking viewers' emotions.

Social media platforms like Instagram open up opportunities for religion to reach its followers online. Accounts like @kembalijijrah, @literasiislamcinta, @kajianmalamminggu, @santun.inv, and @duniajilbab are leveraging this opportunity in various ways, such as through business ventures, producing educational content, and spreading religious teachings. However, the use of religion for economic purposes can be categorised as the commodification of religion (Asri and Soehadha 2022). This is also evident in Aishaderm's content through the use of the hijab symbol and verses from the Quran. These Islamic elements are found in the photos and captions of the posts (Firasikha 2019). The acculturation of religious teachings, the development of digital technology, and the lifestyle of the middle class have influenced the way aqiqah is celebrated, with aqiqah now being packaged as a practical and easily accessible service. The Instagram account @aqiqahnurulhayat shows an example of how religious messages can be transformed into marketable services in the digital age (Darojatun, Mukarom, and Muhibuddin 2022).

The term commodification comes from the English word commodification, which is a combination of the words commodity, meaning an object produced for sale, and modification, meaning a change from the previous form and size to a new form and size (Trifita 2023). The commodification of religion is a form of transformation that results in the conversion of religious symbols into commodities that are traded for profit (Hakam, Pamungkas, and Budiwanti 2016). The concept of 'commodification of religion' has been explored in various contexts in the literature. (Geertz et al. 2017) discusses the influence of Javanese culture on religious practices in Indonesia, highlighting the complex interaction between culture, religion, and communication in the commodification of religion. Meanwhile, (Fuad 2022) discusses religious behaviour related to the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages, which have

become forms of religious commodification. The Hajj and Umrah, as two types of worship in Islam, not only give rise to various meanings for those who perform them, but have also become a tourism industry with a large and promising market share.

Case studies on religion in the modern era cannot be separated from commodification. The paradigm shift in religion that governs human life, which was previously conveyed through studies in religious gatherings or mosques, is now beginning to shift towards a culture of commodification through advertisements on television (Aryasatya 2018). The commodification of religion in South Korea also reveals how aspects of religion are commercialised and become an attractive market (Hakam et al. 2016). Video game companies are also "selling religion" to a predominantly secular society. Ubisoft, the largest company in the world's largest cultural industry, created a best-selling franchise about the conflict over biblical artefacts between Muslim Assassins and Christian Templars (De Wildt and Aupers 2023). Research of (Chang 2020) analyses the controversy surrounding the use of temple assets amid the widespread commodification of state-managed religion in China. Research of (Handoko et al. 2020) shows the pattern of relations between teachers and members of the Nagsabandiyah group in local political action in Rokan Hulu Regency. More specifically (Asri and Soehadha 2022) talk about religious posts on Instagram that are judged by (Fianto and Ghofur 2023), religion is constructed and reduced in such a way that what was originally sacred becomes profane.

Literally, the Qur'an is a perfect reading (Mubarok and Romdhoni 2021). Reading the Qur'an is one of the recommended acts of worship in Islam. This is because when someone reads the Qur'an, they are understanding the source of Islamic teachings and at the same time communicating with Allah. In addition, there are many virtues of reading the Qur'an, such as receiving help (intercession), rewards, and blessings. Reading the Qur'an was a daily routine for the Prophet Muhammad. Imam al-Tirmidzi, in his book asy-Syamail al-Muhammadiyyah, mentions that the Prophet would always read the Qur'an on various occasions, whether during formal worship or in casual settings. Not only that, but his daily behaviour also reflected the Qur'an he read (Velasufah and Nasriva 2022). The recitation of the Qur'an does not only occur in the offline world. The same thing also happens in the online world, especially in social media spaces (Fahrudin 2020).

Existing studies on the practice of reading the Qur'an can be categorised into three trends, namely studies that examine methods of reading the Qur'an (Nur and Aryani 2022), (Asy-Syahida and Rasyid 2020), (Palufi and Syahid 2020); capability

analysis (Syaifullah et al. 2022), (Saepurrohman and Fazani 2023); and social reception of the Qur'an (Fahrudin 2020), (Hasan 2020), (Rakhman and Zakiyah 2019). Studies on methods of reading the Qur'an focus on exploring various alternative methods, one of which is the yanbu'a method. This method is considered successful because students not only learn to read the Qur'an but also learn how to write and memorise it (Palufi and Syahid 2020). A study on the analysis of the ability to read the Qur'an through the Iqra' method at TPQ Nurussholihin Pamulang, South Tangerang City, in the 2021/2022 academic year to measure how effective the method is. Meanwhile, social reception of the Qur'an describes the community's response to the Qur'an, which in the current era can be done in offline media as well as social media (online). Existing studies indicate that research on Qur'anic reading encompasses broad and critical aspects that warrant further investigation.

The commodification of religion on @sahabatquranofficial and @guran id

The term social media is composed of the words media and social. The meanings of these two words are also different. However, in terms of terminology, social media can be defined as a collection of software in the online world (the internet) that is used as a place to gather, communicate, share, collaborate, play and form virtual social bonds between people. The interactions that occur in social media also involve emotions and feelings, just like those that occur in the offline world (Fahrudin 2020). Currently, the most popular social media platform is TikTok. In 2020, the TikTok app was downloaded 63.3 million times, with Indonesia being the country with the most downloads, accounting for 11% of the total TikTok app downloads. Based on this fact, the TikTok app has the potential to become an effective promotional medium for marketing the culinary industry, especially in the Special Region of Yogyakarta (Dewa and Safitri 2021). TikTok is also used as a learning medium with an online system (Ramdani, Nugraha, and Hadiapurwa 2021). On the other hand, TikTok also plays a major role in digital business marketing as a promotional medium (Mulyani, Wibisono, and Hikmah 2022).

Content creators on TikTok use various methods to attract attention, including packaging religious content such as recitations of the Qur'an in interesting and creative ways. This has led to the commodification of Qur'an recitations, whereby such content is used to promote products and increase sales. (Madhani, Sari, and Shaleh 2021) state that although TikTok has a negative influence because it is time-consuming, causes procrastination, and makes people lazy, this platform is also used (positively) to search for information on various topics, ranging from general knowledge and religion to business. In fact, (Ghozali, Mursyid, and Fitriana

2022) are supported by previous research, it has been proven that social media plays an important role in supporting the process of reading, teaching, and interpreting the Qur'an.

In this digital age, social media platforms such as TikTok have become popular for a variety of content, including religious content. One interesting phenomenon that has emerged is the commodification of Quran recitation. The use of social media, particularly TikTok, has grown rapidly in recent years. This platform allows users to create and share short videos on various topics, including religious content. One emerging trend is Quran recitation on TikTok accounts. This trend raises questions about the commodification of religion in the digital age. Accounts like @sahabatquranofficial and @quran_id have gained extraordinary popularity with their epic and engaging Quran recitation content, attracting millions of followers. This phenomenon highlights the potential of social media to disseminate religious values to a wide audience. However, it also raises questions about the impact of commodification on the meaning and values of the Quran itself. Data related to this can be seen in the images below:

Figure 1. Account profile of @sahabatquranofficial

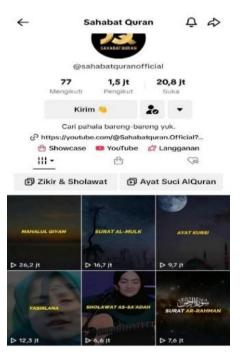


Figure 2. *Murattal* al-Qur'an content on @sahabatquranofficial



Figure 3. Zikr & Sholawat Content at @sahabatquranofficial



Figure 4. Promotional of *Mushaf* al-Qur'an Content on @sahabatquranofficial

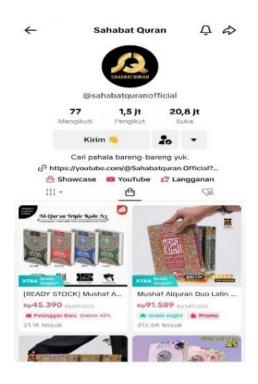


Figure 5. Account profile of @quran_id

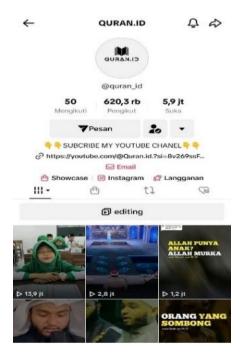


Figure 6. *Murattal* al-Qur'an Content on @quran_id



Figure 7. Motivational Content on @quran_id



Figure 8. Promotional Content for the *Mushaf* al-Qur'an on @guran_id



The Desacralisation of Qur'an Recitation on Social Media

The new trend of reciting the Qur'an on social media platform TikTok has sparked debate about the desacralisation of religious values. On the one hand, this trend is seen as positive because it spreads Islamic teachings and increases spiritual awareness among the public. However, on the other hand, there are concerns that such content could degrade the sanctity of the Qur'an and its profound meaning. The short video format and focus on visual aesthetics are feared to shift the focus away from the spiritual message of the Quran. It is important to consider various aspects when evaluating this trend, including the intentions of content creators, its impact on society, and how to preserve the sanctity of the Quran in the digital age. A balanced and thoughtful approach is needed to ensure that this trend benefits Muslims and does not distort religious values. Data related to Qur'an recitation content on social media can be used for commercial purposes, such as promoting products or services, which could tarnish the sanctity and dignity of the Qur'an (Firdaus, Alfathah, and Rusmana 2022). Social media platforms can take advantage of the popularity of Qur'anic content by displaying advertisements and turning it into commercial content, which can raise doubts about the sincerity of spreading the message of the Qur'an. Some of the documented processes of desacralising the reading of the Qur'an can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Desacralisation of Qur'an recitation on the	e TikTok accounts
@sahabatguranofficial and @guran	_id

No.	Desacralisation Aspects	Account @sahabatquranofficial	Account @quran_id
1.	The use of verses from the	-	
	Qur'an for motivational content	V	\checkmark
2.	The use of Quranic verses as clickbait	\checkmark	\checkmark
3.	Emphasis on the aesthetic aspects of reading the Quran	√	\checkmark
4.	The use of non-religious backgrounds for reciting the Quran	V	\checkmark
5.	The use of background music during the recitation of the Quran	-	\checkmark
6.	Commercialisation of Quran recitation by promoting products	-	V

Source: primary data tabulated by researchers

Table 2, an analysis of the two TikTok @sahabatquranofficial and @quran_id reveals several aspects of desacralisation in the recitation of the Quran. This is evident in the use of Quranic verses for motivational content, excerpts of verses as clickbait, emphasis on the aesthetics of use of non-religious backgrounds, background commercialisation through product promotions. This desacralisation can lead to various negative impacts, such as reducing the sacred values of the Quran to mere tools for attracting attention, entertainment, or financial gain. It can also distort the meaning of the Quran and obscure its spiritual messages. However, it is important to note that desacralisation is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. On the one hand, desacralisation can be a tool to reach a wider audience and spread religious values in a more accessible way. On the other hand, desacralisation can also lead to trivialisation and profanation of religion. It is important to take a critical and balanced approach in responding to this phenomenon of desacralisation. Education and a deep understanding of the meaning and values of the Quran are needed so that the reading of the Quran on social media maintains its sacredness and does not fall into profanation. Further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the desacralisation of Quran recitation on social media, the factors

behind it, and its impacts. Efforts in religious education and literacy also need to be enhanced to guide social media users in using the Quran appropriately and responsibly.

Recitation the Qur'anic Verses: A Commercials-like Content

Research on the commodification of religion in the reading of the Quran on the TikTok accounts @sahabatquranofficial and @quran_id found three important findings: First, the Mushaf al-Quran as a business. The content of these accounts markets religious-themed products, such as religious books, majmu', and holy books. Second, the packaging of Islamic learning or motivational content. The content of these accounts features excerpts from the Quran, hadiths, or quotes from scholars to attract attention and provide motivation. Third, the commodification of religion is not always negative: Religion needs to be continuously disseminated, especially through social media. On the other hand, religious fervour encourages its followers to live comfortably, including through business. This study shows that the TikTok accounts @sahabatquranofficial and @quran_id use the commodification of religion to spread Islamic content and market religious-themed products. This commodification is not always negative, as it can help spread religion and encourage its followers to live comfortably.

The phenomenon of religious commodification depicted from two TikTok accounts @sahabatquranofficial and @quran_id presents a complex picture of how sacred religious values are packaged and commercialised in the digital age. On one hand, religious commodification can be an effective tool for spreading spiritual messages and reaching a wider audience, especially the younger generation who are active on social media. Islamic educational and motivational content, packaged in an attractive and aesthetically pleasing manner, can spark interest and encourage them to study and practise religious teachings. However, on the other hand, the commodification of religion also has the potential to reduce sacred values to mere commodities for attracting attention, entertainment, and financial gain. The use of Quranic verses for clickbait, excessive emphasis on the aesthetics of recitation, and commercialisation through product promotion can obscure the spiritual meaning and shift the focus away from the core message of religion.

Studies on the commodification of religion in Quran recitation on social media have been widely found in previous research. This study shares similarities with previous research (Ulfah 2024) which discusses the commodification of religion on social media. The difference is that this study focuses on two TikTok accounts

(@sahabatquranofficial and @quran_id) that discuss Quranic content, while Ulfah's research is broader and focuses on the platforms @gurungajiqu and @gifariputraw. Although the commodification of religion is often associated with negative connotations, these findings show that the commodification of religion is not always negative. On the one hand, religion needs to be continuously disseminated, especially through social media. On the other hand, religious spirit encourages its followers to live comfortably, including through business. This shows that the commodification of religion can be an effective way to spread religious messages and help its followers achieve well-being.

The findings in this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the commodification of religion in the TikTok content of @sahabatquranofficial and @quran_id. The content shows that the Quran is used as a business commodity by marketing religious-themed products. Additionally, the commodification of religion is also evident in the packaging of Islamic educational or motivational content through Quranic verses, hadith excerpts, or statements by religious scholars. It is important to note that this study focuses solely on two TikTok accounts and cannot be generalised to all TikTok accounts featuring Islamic content. However, these findings provide valuable insights into how religion is commodified on social media and how this commodification can have both positive and negative impacts. Further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the commodification of religion on social media and how this can be maximised to spread religious messages and help believers achieve well-being in life.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the phenomenon of reading the Qur'an on TikTok social media needs to be understood comprehensively by considering various aspects, both from a religious and business perspective. The findings of this study are expected to be taken into consideration by policymakers, religious preachers, and the wider community in utilising social media wisely and responsibly. The role of religious scholars and government officials is very important in guiding and directing the public in the use of social media, especially in the context of reading the Qur'an. Religious scholars can provide in-depth education and understanding of the meaning and values of the Qur'an, as well as how to read it correctly and in accordance with religious guidance. The government can create regulations and policies that encourage positive and responsible use of social media, as well as prevent the misuse of social media for inappropriate purposes. Cooperation

between religious scholars and government officials, as well as active participation from the public, is essential to create a digital ecosystem conducive to the dissemination of positive religious values that are beneficial to humanity.

This study has several areas for further development. First, the scope of the study needs to be expanded by analysing more TikTok accounts that present Quran recitation content, as well as other social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube. This would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of the commodification of Quran recitation on social media. Second, this research could investigate in greater depth the impact of commodification on the religious beliefs and practices of the community. The use of qualitative and quantitative methods could help reveal its influence in more detail. Third, the role of social media platforms in controlling and taking responsibility for religious content needs to be examined more deeply. Analysing platform policies and regulations related to religious content, as well as exploring the contribution of platforms in creating a digital space conducive to the dissemination of responsible religious messages in line with religious values, can enrich our understanding of these dynamics. By addressing these limitations, further research is expected to provide a more complete picture of the phenomenon of the commodification of Quran recitation on social media, its impact on society, and the role of social media platforms in managing religious content. This can ultimately contribute to the more responsible and beneficial use of social media for the dissemination of religious values.

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