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The Influence of Tafsir Medium on the Interpretive Process

A Case Study of Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual on Bangsaonline.com

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Abstract

Technological advances have transformed the presentation of *tafsir* (Qur'an commentary) across various media, from oral traditions to manuscripts, printed books, and now digital platforms. This study explores whether these platforms merely serve as vessels or actively influence a mufassir's (Qur'an interpreter's) approach. Focusing on *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual*, published on *Bangsaonline.com*, it examines how the medium affects interpretive processes. Written by Ahmad Musta'in Syafi'i, a prominent pesantren leader in East Java, this *tafsir* has appeared in *Harian Bangsa* newspaper since March 2000, marking the first Indonesian *tahlili tafsir* in a newspaper. Employing Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory, the study reveals that the newspaper medium shaped Musta'in's interpretations to accommodate lay readers. This influence is reflected in his language style, word choice, and the inclusion of Javanese terms. He also links verses to everyday events to ensure relevance for his audience. However, the study identifies instances of "overaccommodation," where Musta'in connects verses to contemporary sociopolitical issues, occasionally deviating from their original meanings. This phenomenon, termed "obsessive actualization," underscores the media's role in shaping a mufassir's interpretive process.

Keywords: *Tafsir aktual*, Musta'in Syafi'i, digital *tafsir*, *Bangsaonline.com*



Introduction

The unstoppable development of technology has given rise to a diversity of formats for the Qur'an (Archer et al., 2021, p. 384). The impact of this technology is not always uniformly positive; it can also lead to negative outcomes. This phenomenon was exemplified, for instance, by the early use of CD-ROMs for the Qur'an in the 1990s, which Rippin referred to as "e-texts." Qur'anic texts, translations, *tafsir* books, and even recitations of the Qur'an in Arabic were digitised on these CDs. This digitalisation brought several benefits. For example, a collection of *tafsir* books, translations, and the Qur'an, which would traditionally take up a significant amount of space on bookshelves, could now be stored on a single tiny CD. From an economic perspective, it was also much more affordable than spending thousands of dollars on printed versions of these works.

Nevertheless, this digitalisation also posed challenges. As Rippin pointed out, the primary issues with these e-texts were inaccuracies, particularly in the form of textual errors, such as misplaced quotation marks, commas, and unexplained textual changes compared to the printed versions (Rippin, 1999). Furthermore, the e-texts did not clearly indicate which printed edition had been digitised. Rippin thus argued that these e-texts would not replace printed books in the near future. However, since his article was published in 1999, many of the issues related to inaccuracies in e-texts have largely been addressed due to technological advances.

Today, the Qur'an and its variants (translations and *tafsir*) are presented on online websites and social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. Once again, this innovation has had positive impacts, particularly in terms of making the Qur'an and *tafsir* more accessible. However, negative effects have also followed. On the one hand, the presence of *tafsir* on social media has significantly improved accessibility for laypeople, offering *tafsir* in a more popular and relatable format compared to traditional scholarly approaches. On the other hand, it has challenged and undermined the authority of scholars with expertise in Qur'anic studies, as social media empowers ordinary individuals to engage with and participate in the interpretation of the Qur'an (Lukman, 2018). This trend is likely to continue in the future, as the digital divide has diminished, and more people now have access to the internet through electronic devices.

The literature discussed above focuses on the influence of media on the presentation of the Qur'an and *tafsir* and its challenge to intellectual authority. But what about the impact of media-based *tafsir* on the interpretative process of the mufassir? Do these various media platforms merely serve as new vessels for *tafsir*, or do they influence the interpretative process of the mufassir? These key questions lie at the heart of this study, yet they have not received much scholarly attention. As Pink (2019) stated, the media used to deliver a message profoundly impacts the nature and style of the message itself. The influence of media on the form, content, and transformation of *tafsir* cannot be overstated (Pink, 2019, p. 81). This is the context in which this study aims to contribute, by investigating *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual*, written by Ahmad Musta'in Syafi'i, a well-known mufassir from East Java

Province. *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* is a *tahlili tafsir* published in *Harian Bangsa* newspaper and on *Bangsaonline.com*. However, this study focuses specifically on the digital version of *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual*, which has been published on *Bangsaonline.com* since 2014.

Using Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory, this study seeks to uncover how online media influences Musta'in's interpretation in writing his *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual*. The findings suggest that the medium of tafsir does indeed influence the interpretative process of the mufassir. Proving this assumption requires rigorous, thorough, and in-depth investigation. Furthermore, the tafsir used as a case study must be appropriate for addressing the main research question. It is essential that the tafsir has been consistently presented and published in the media over an extended period. This condition ensures that the influence of the media on the mufassir's interpretative process becomes evident.

There are three key reasons why *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* is considered suitable and capable of addressing the central question of this study. First, *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* has been written and published continuously for over twenty-three years, from March 2000 to the present. During this period, Musta'in has discussed and interpreted more than 2,400 Qur'anic verses. Consequently, if the *Harian Bangsa* newspaper has influenced Musta'in's interpretation, this influence would likely be evident over time. Second, the medium of *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* is a newspaper, which inherently possesses certain tendencies and profit-oriented motivations, whether financial or business-related. Every space in a newspaper must contribute to economic objectives. In other words, when *tafsir* is published in a newspaper, it is designed to attract readers to enhance the newspaper's sales. Thus, it is assumed that this context influences how Musta'in interprets the verses. Third, the *Harian Bangsa* newspaper has undergone three stages of transformation: from a print newspaper in 2000 to an online website (*Bangsaonline.com*) in 2014, and later to a mobile application in 2019. This study assumes that these transitions have also impacted the *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* published through these mediums.

Several previous studies have examined *tafsir* presented in digital media, whether on Islamic websites or social media accounts managed by Muslim individuals and institutions. Muhammad, for instance, analysed the Qur'anic interpretation produced by Salman Harun on Facebook. Using Gadamer's hermeneutical approach, he found that Salman's interpretations were influenced by his surrounding realities (Muhammad, 2017). Similarly, Fadhli Lukman explored *tafsir* on social media, particularly Facebook. He examined the characteristics and tendencies of Indonesian *tafsir* circulating on social media. His findings revealed three tendencies in social media-based *tafsir*: textual, contextual, and *tafsir al-'ilmī* (scientific commentary). He also noted that the proliferation of *tafsir* on social media is driven by platform features that facilitate accelerated production and distribution, the availability of numerous Qur'an translations in both print and digital formats, and the growing trend of returning to the Qur'an and Sunnah (*al-rujū' ilā al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunnah*) (Lukman, 2016).

In another study, Azwar Hairul analysed Nouman Ali Khan's Qur'anic interpretations on YouTube, observing that Nouman's approach focused on linguistic analysis. Hairul

argued that Nouman's interpretations had three effects on his audience: cognitive, affective, and behavioural (Moh. Azwar Hairul, 2020). Similarly, Fitriani and Khaerani examined *tafsir* on three Indonesian websites: *TafsirQ.com*, *Tafsirweb.com*, and *Qur'an Kemenag*. They concluded that website-based *tafsir* tends to be simpler and more accessible for a general audience (Fitriani & Khaerani, 2021). Firdaus also analysed *tafsir* published on *Tanwir.id* and found that website-based *tafsir* is more practical for readers, although he cautioned that readers should critically engage with such *tafsir* and refer to classical works by prominent mufassir (Firdaus, 2023).

Research on *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* has also been conducted by several scholars since 2015. Aini's study focused on the content of the *tafsir* published between December 2014 and January 2015, revealing that it predominantly addressed socio-religious issues (Aini, 2015). Hidayati argued that *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* leans towards Islamic legal discourse (*fiqhy*-based *tafsir*) (Hidayati, 2018). Another study by Zaiyadi explored the epistemological dimensions of *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual*. He contended that the validity of this *tafsir* is evident in its logical, systematic, and consistent presentation of propositions (Zaiyadi, 2019).

In conclusion, existing studies have not thoroughly explored how changes in the medium of *tafsir* delivery influence the mufassir's interpretative process. This study seeks to address this research gap. By examining the case of *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* on *Bangsaonline.com*, it argues that the medium through which *tafsir* is delivered can significantly shape the interpretative processes of the mufassir.

Method

Since *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* is published in mass communication media, this study adopts a communication theory to analyse its dynamics. The aim is to explore how the *Harian Bangsa* newspaper influences Musta'in's interpretive process in composing his *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual*. To this end, the study applies Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). CAT is a sociolinguistic theory that examines how individuals adapt their communication style to align with others during social interactions. The theory is based on the premise that, as individuals interact, they tend to modify their speech patterns, including speech rate, tone, pitch, and body language, to accommodate the person with whom they are communicating. Accommodation is defined as the ability to adjust, modify, or regulate one's behaviour in response to others (West & Turner, 2000, p. 387). According to Giles and other theorists, there are several reasons for this accommodation: seeking the other person's approval or social acceptance, enhancing communication efficiency, maintaining a positive social identity, and asserting dominance (Giles et al., 1991; Giles, 2016).

Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory is particularly relevant to addressing the core issue of this study. Both the Qur'an and *tafsir* are fundamentally designed to accommodate their respective audiences. For example, the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic to address an audience whose primary language was Arabic (see QS Yusuf/12:2

and Az-Zukhruf/43:3). Additionally, the Qur'an acknowledges that earlier scriptures were revealed in the languages of their respective communities (see QS Ibrahim/14:4). Similarly, a *mufassir* strives to accommodate their audience by composing *tafsir* in a language and style that are familiar and accessible to their community. This process of communication accommodation ensures that the intended message is effectively conveyed and comprehended by the audience. The specific methods of accommodation may vary depending on the cognitive abilities of the audience and the context in which the *tafsir* is presented.

In this study, the *Harian Bangsa* newspaper and its digital platform, *Bangsaonline.com*, serve as the medium through which Musta'in's *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* is disseminated. Consequently, the study employs Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory to analyse the adjustments Musta'in makes in his *tafsir* as a result of its publication on these platforms, particularly the online newspaper.

Communication Accommodation Theory posits that, in conversation, individuals have choices. One may choose to accommodate another person without necessarily agreeing with them. Accommodation is typically undertaken to ensure that one's argument or explanation is effectively understood by the other party (West & Turner, 2000, p. 392). This study applies several key concepts from CAT that relate to the accommodation processes occurring during communication in the context of *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual*.

Communication Accommodation Theory suggests that in conversation, individuals have options. One may choose to accommodate another person without necessarily agreeing with them. Accommodation is typically undertaken to ensure that one's argument or explanation is effectively understood by the other party (West & Turner, 2000, p. 392). Several key concepts from CAT are applied in this study to analyse the accommodation processes that occur during communication:

Convergence: Convergence is the process by which individuals adjust their communicative behaviour to align with that of their interlocutors (Gallois & Callan, 1991, p. 7). During this process, individuals rely on their perception of how others communicate and behave. These adjustments can manifest in both verbal and non-verbal forms, such as speech pace, pauses, gaze, and word choice.

Overaccommodation: Overaccommodation refers to an excessive attempt by an individual to adjust their communication. According to Jane Zuengler, there are three types of overaccommodation that may occur during the accommodation process (West & Turner, 2000, p. 397): sensory overaccommodation, which occurs when a speaker assumes excessively that the listeners have limitations, such as physical or linguistic abilities; dependency overaccommodation, where the speaker positions the listeners in a subordinate role or lower status; and intergroup overaccommodation, which happens when the speaker generalises listeners as part of a specific cultural group, ignoring their individuality and uniqueness.

Underaccommodation: This concept is the opposite of overaccommodation, where individuals choose not to adjust their communication and instead persist with their original style.

For the data collection process, this study focused exclusively on *Tafsir Aktual* published

on the *Bangsaonline.com* website between 2014 and 2023. This limitation is due to the unavailability of earlier printed editions of the *Harian Bangsa* newspaper, as they are no longer accessible owing to their age.

Must'ain's Background: Between Traditionalist and Modernist Influences

Ahmad Musta'in Syafi'i, popularly known as Kyai Ta'in, was born on 3 December 1955 in Lamongan, East Java. He was raised in a deeply religious environment and shares close familial ties with two of Indonesia's largest Islamic organisations: Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. His mother, Ma'shumah, was an influential figure in Muslimat NU, an autonomous body of NU focusing on women's issues. Meanwhile, his grandfather was a prominent figure in Muhammadiyah (Zaiyadi, 2019). These organisations also played a significant role in shaping Musta'in's educational background. He attended Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Muhammadiyah Paloh, an elementary school in Paciran District, Lamongan, founded by his grandfather's younger sibling.¹ For his secondary education, Musta'in enrolled at Madrasah Mu'allimin Mazroatul Ulum, also in Paciran, which was established by NU figures in the area (Huda, 2019, p. 66). At the high school level, he studied at Madrasah Aliyah Salafiyah Syafi'iyah (MASS) in Tebuireng, Jombang, East Java, a school strongly associated with Nahdlatul Ulama. The idea for the school's establishment came from KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, NU's founder, and was realised by his son, KH. Wahid Hasyim, and later formalised by KH. Kholiq Hasyim in 1962 (Sidaq, 2019).

Nahdlatul Ulama is renowned for its emphasis on traditional teachings, while Muhammadiyah is celebrated as a modern Islamic organisation. The influence of these two traditions profoundly shaped Musta'in's Islamic thought, which reflects both traditionalist and progressive tendencies. For instance, in discussing the legality of female leaders (*imam*) in congregational prayers, Musta'in's interpretation departs from the views of most classical and modern scholars, showcasing his progressive outlook. He permits women to lead men in congregational prayers (Musta'in Syafi'i, 2004, p. 258). However, on the issue of electing political leaders, Musta'in aligns with the majority of traditionalist Muslim scholars, prohibiting Muslims from voting for non-Muslim political leaders.

In his Qur'anic studies, Musta'in began memorising the Qur'an under the guidance of his uncle and completed his memorisation at Madrasah Aliyah Salafiyah Syafi'iyah, under the tutelage of Kyai Adlan Aly, a Sufi *hāfidz* (memoriser of the Qur'an). During this time, he also deepened his knowledge of Qur'anic interpretation (Hidayati, 2018, pp. 37–40). He later expanded his studies to include various Islamic disciplines, such as the Arabic language and its branches (*Nahwu*, *Sharf*, and *Balāghah*), *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence),

1 In the Indonesian educational system, a *Madrasah* is a school governed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The primary distinction between a *sekolah* and a *madrasah* lies in the curriculum, with *Madrasah* placing greater emphasis on Islamic sciences.

Ush l al-Fiqh (principles of Islamic jurisprudence), Hadith (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), and *Aqīdah* (Islamic theology). These subjects significantly influenced his interpretative approach, evident in his focus on the literal meanings of Qur’anic words and their application to Islamic law.

Unlike many traditional religious scholars who are content with *pesantren* education, Musta’in pursued higher education. In 1979, he earned a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Sharia from UNHASY (Hasyim Asy’ari University). In 1985, he obtained another undergraduate degree in the Faculty of Tafsir and Hadith from the same institution. He then completed a master’s degree in Tafsir and Hadith at the Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic Institute, Yogyakarta. Subsequently, he earned a doctorate from the Sunan Ampel State Islamic Institute in Surabaya, with a dissertation entitled “Muta’aridhah and Mutradhifah Verses in the Qur’an” (Huda, 2019).

Musta’in’s exposure to Islamic studies at *pesantren* and Islamic universities paved the way for him to hold positions in both types of institutions. He became a lecturer at several Islamic universities in Indonesia, including Hasyim Asy’ari Islamic Institute (IKAHA), Bani Fatah College of Islamic Sciences (STIBAFSA), and the *Ma’had Aly* (Pesantren-Based College) at Tebuireng Islamic Boarding School. He is also renowned as the *Kyai* of Pesantren Madrasatul Qur’an in Jombang and a prolific writer for various publications, including *Risalah Nahdlatul Ulama* magazine, *Tebuireng Magazine*, and the *Harian Bangsa* newspaper (Zaiyadi, 2019).

Musta’in has authored several influential works, particularly in the field of *tafsir*. Notable among his publications are *Tafsir al-Qur’an Aktual* (2000), *Tafsir al-Qur’an Bahasa Koran* (2004), and *Memahami Makna al-Qur’an* (2004). His credentials as a *mufassir* are therefore well-established. He has reached the pinnacle of his career, excelling as a *Kyai* in the traditional *pesantren* setting and earning a doctoral degree in Qur’anic commentary at the university level. Musta’in’s religious thought has been shaped by both traditionalist influences from his NU family background and *pesantren* education, as well as by modernist perspectives encountered at Muhammadiyah schools and secular Islamic universities.

Tafsir al-Qur’an Aktual: A Pioneer of Indonesian Tahlili Tafsir in Newspapers

Over time, the Qur’an and *tafsir* in Indonesia have undergone significant development, mirroring advancements in communication and information technology. Miftahuddin categorised the history of Indonesian *tafsir* and its media into five distinct eras: oral *tafsir*, written *tafsir*, printed *tafsir*, electronic *tafsir*, and online *tafsir* (Miftahuddin, 2020).

The first era, oral *tafsir*, began during the Islamisation of Indonesia. At this stage, Qur’anic interpretation was not explicitly referred to as *tafsir* but was expressed in various forms, including art (Dalimunthe, 2016). The second era, written *tafsir*, started in the 16th century, with Hamzah Fansuri’s *Asrar al-Arifin* marking the beginning. However,

a manuscript of Surah Al-Kahfi by an anonymous author, dated 1620, is considered the first specific *tafsir* work (Gusman, 2013, p. 41). The third era, printed *tafsir*, was initiated by the publication of *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* by Abdurrauf as-Singkili (1615–1693 CE), the first complete Melayu-Jawi *tafsir* book. According to Riddel, as cited by Azra, the earliest surviving manuscripts of *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* date back to the 17th and 18th centuries (Putra, 2014, p. 74). The fourth era, electronic *tafsir*, saw radio and television become the primary media. This era began with Radio Alaikassalam Sejahtera in 1972 and included various television programmes, such as those hosted by M. Quraish Shihab, featuring his *Tafsir Al-Misbah* (Prasti, 2010). Finally, the fifth era, online *tafsir*, emerged with website-based *tafsir* and extended to social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual was first published in March 2000 in the *Harian Bangsa* newspaper, a local publication based in Surabaya, East Java. At that time, internet usage in Indonesia was limited and primarily accessible to the upper class. Over time, the *Harian Bangsa* newspaper transitioned into an online platform, launching its website, *Bangsa-online.com*, in 2014 while continuing its printed editions. By 2019, the publication had further evolved into an online application, reflecting the rapid growth of internet usage in Indonesia. According to the Ministry of Communications and Informatics (KOMINFO), internet users in Indonesia grew from 83 million in 2014 to 171 million in 2019 (KOMINFO, 2019).

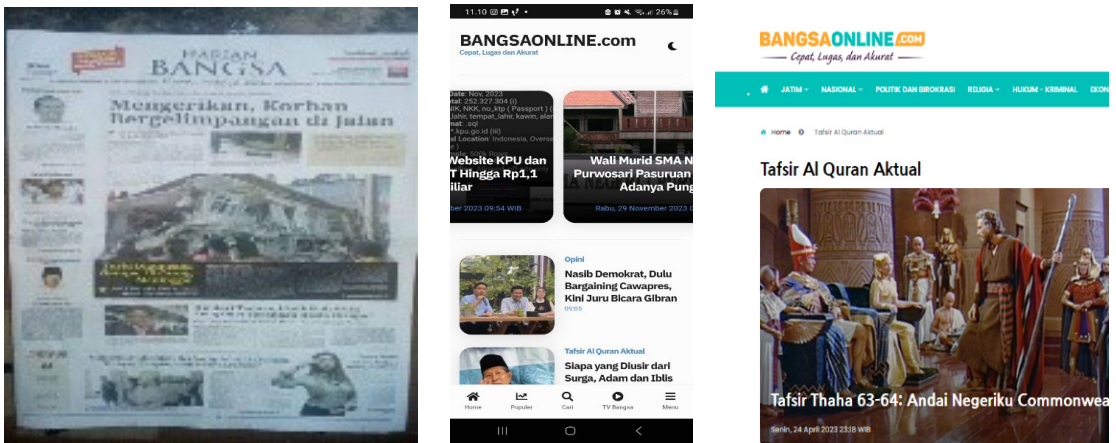


Figure 1: Transformation of Harian Bangsa from a Printed Newspaper to a Website and an Application

As a *tafsir* published in a newspaper, *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* is unique. It is the first—and arguably the only—Indonesian *tafsir* employing the *tahlili* approach in a newspaper

format.² Generally, *tafsir* published in newspapers typically adopts the *maudhū'i* (thematic) method instead of the *tahlili* approach. For example, the *Hikmah* column of the *Republika* newspaper features *tafsir* based on the thematic method (Suhendra, 2014).

The absence or rarity of *tahlili tafsir* in newspaper media can likely be attributed to the significant challenges associated with its composition. Historically, several prominent Indonesian *tafsirs*, such as *Tafsir Al-Azhar* by Buya Hamka and *Tafsir Al-Misbah* by Muhammad Quraish Shihab, have utilised the *tahlili* method. However, both were published as books rather than in newspapers. Writing *tafsir* in a newspaper using the *tahlili* approach demands considerable effort. As Musta'in himself stated, it requires consistency, unwavering commitment, and mastery of the scholarly tools necessary for Qur'anic interpretation (BANGSAONLINE.com, 2020). This may explain why newspaper *tafsirs* tend to favour the *maudhū'i* method over the *tahlili* approach.

Based on their sources, *tafsirs* are traditionally classified into two categories: *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* (tradition-based interpretation) and *tafsīr bi al-ra'yī* (reason-based interpretation). *Tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* relies on Qur'anic verses, *hadith*, and the narrations of early Muslims, including the companions of the Prophet and their followers (*tabi'in*) (Saeed, 2006, p. 42). In contrast, *tafsīr bi al-ra'yī* is characterised by interpretations based primarily on reason, or where reasoning plays a more dominant role than narration (*riway h*) (al-Qattan, 1994, p. 340). *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Aktual* does not fit neatly into either category. While Musta'in often employs reason and analogy in his interpretations, he occasionally, though not consistently, incorporates other Qur'anic verses and *hadith* as well.

Accommodation: Informal Language Style, Inclusion of Javanese Terms, and Actualisation

This section analyses how Musta'in accommodates *Harian Bangsa* readers in his *tafsir*. It is worth noting that the basic assumption of Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is that individuals, whether consciously or unconsciously, strive to accommodate the people they are communicating with (Giles, 2016). They seek to adjust their language style, speech rate, or vocabulary to facilitate comprehension for their audience. In practice, the Qur'an embodies this principle by being revealed in Arabic, the language of the Prophet Muhammad and the society in which he lived. Similarly, *tafsir* produced by *mufassirs* throughout history has continually adapted to the audiences they address. The medium through which a *tafsir* is delivered, along with the surrounding environmental factors, significantly influences how it is conveyed.

Understanding the characteristics of the *Harian Bangsa* newspaper and its readership is critical before examining its influence on *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual*. As previously men-

2 There are four methods of writing *tafsir*: *Tahlili* (analytical, following the *Mushaf Uthmani* order), *Ijmaly* (global interpretation), *Maudhu'i* (thematic interpretation), and *Muqaran* (comparative interpretation) (Al-Farmawi, *Metode Tafsir Maudhu'i dan Penerapannya*, 2002).

tioned, *Harian Bangsa* is a regional newspaper published in Surabaya, one of Indonesia's largest metropolitan areas, located in East Java and home to a population of three million. Since its establishment, *Harian Bangsa* has identified itself as an Islamic newspaper that often tackles controversial themes (Huda, 2019, p. 20). It operates under the Jawa Pos Group, one of Indonesia's most prominent national daily newspapers. The readership of *Harian Bangsa* primarily consists of residents of Surabaya and its surrounding areas. Anthropologically, these readers are predominantly native Javanese speakers. However, the Javanese language spoken in Surabaya and nearby areas is known for being harsher and more direct than the refined Javanese spoken in Central Java. Communities in East Java, particularly in Surabaya, are often described as more blunt and outspoken.

When Musta'in initially began writing *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* for *Harian Bangsa*, he faced criticism from the newspaper's editorial board. His writing was deemed overly formal and not aligned with the conversational style preferred by *Harian Bangsa* readers. In response, Musta'in underwent a three-month tutoring session with Dahlan Iskan, a renowned Indonesian journalist, to learn how to write popular articles suitable for a newspaper audience. The goal was to make *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* more accessible and conversational, catering to lay readers with varying levels of religious knowledge (Huda, 2019, p. 69).

The influence of *Harian Bangsa* in accommodating its readers is evident in Musta'in's writing style in *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual*, particularly in his use of language. While the *tafsir* is written in Bahasa Indonesia, Musta'in frequently incorporates Javanese terms into his interpretations. For instance, he interprets the phrase *hijāban mastūran* in Surah Al-Isra (17:45) with the Javanese word *sirep* (BANGSAONLINE.com, 2019a). This verse describes how Allah protects believers who recite the Qur'an, shielding them from disbelievers by placing a *hijāban mastūran* (a hidden barrier) so their enemies cannot see them.³ The term *sirep*, used by Musta'in in this context, originates from the Javanese word meaning "sleep." Additionally, it can refer to casting a spell to make someone fall asleep (Niam-muddin, 2017).

Moreover, the Javanese language used by Musta'in often reflects the rougher dialect typical of Surabayans and the East Java region. This inclusion of regional vocabulary enhances the cultural relevance of his *tafsir*. Examples of such terms in Musta'in's interpretations include *meniren* (tired of giving advice), *geregetno* (annoying), and *gawe perkoro ae* (troublemaker). These expressions not only reflect the linguistic characteristics of the Surabaya region but also demonstrate Musta'in's efforts to make his *tafsir* relatable and accessible to his audience.

Another notable influence of the *Harian Bangsa* newspaper on Musta'in's interpretation is his decision to quote Qur'anic verses in Latin script rather than Arabic. This is highly unusual, as *tafsir* works traditionally present Qur'anic verses in Arabic script. It is likely

3 The verse in question reads: "When you (the Prophet) recite the Qur'an, We (Allah) place a hidden barrier between you and those who do not believe in the Hereafter."

that Musta'in made this choice out of concern for the ethical implications of newspapers being discarded or misused. For example, newspapers in Indonesia are often scattered on the streets or used as food wrappers by street vendors. Such practices can inadvertently lead to the desecration of Qur'anic verses, which contravenes Islamic teachings that emphasise the importance of honouring and respecting the Qur'an by keeping it in elevated and clean places.

The influence of *Harian Bangsa* is evident not only in the writing style of Musta'in's *tafsir* but also in his interpretative process. One distinctive feature of *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* is a concept that Musta'in refers to as "actualisation." This differs slightly from the "contextualisation" that characterises much of contemporary Qur'anic interpretation. According to Abdullah Saeed, there are three primary approaches to interpreting the Qur'an: textualist, semi-textualist, and contextualist (Saeed, 2006, p. 3).

Textualists place significant emphasis on the literal text of the Qur'an, arguing that it should guide Muslims without being influenced by modern needs or interpretations. From their perspective, the text itself provides sufficient guidance for all aspects of life. Semi-textualists align with textualists in their focus on linguistic precision but tend to neglect the socio-historical context of the Qur'anic text. In contrast, contextualists prioritise the socio-historical circumstances of the ethical-legal verses. They argue that these verses should be understood in light of the political, social, cultural, and economic contexts in which they were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

Among the most prominent contextualists in the contemporary era are Fazlur Rahman, with his Double Movement Theory (Rahman, 1982), and Abou El-Fadl, with his Instructional Approach (Fadl, 2014). In the Indonesian context, scholars such as Sahiron with his *Ma'na-Cum-Maghza* approach (Syamsuddin et al., 2021) and Mustaqim with his *Maqāshidi* approach (Mustaqim, 2019) have contributed significantly to this discourse. These approaches emphasise understanding the ethical-legal verses of the Qur'an through a comprehensive examination of their macro and micro contexts, followed by an exploration of their *maqṣad* (the primary objective of the verses) and their application to contemporary issues.

In summary, while contextualisation typically places greater emphasis on the ethical-legal verses of the Qur'an, Musta'in's concept of "actualisation" focuses on adapting Qur'anic interpretation to address the realities and needs of modern-day readers. This distinction, influenced by the readership of *Harian Bangsa*, highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of Qur'anic exegesis in contemporary contexts. Meanwhile, the actualisation carried out by Musta'in is distinct in its approach. It seeks to connect the verses under discussion with everyday events that resonate with people's lives. Unlike contextualisation, which often focuses on legal verses, Musta'in's *actualisation* extends to verses related to morals, social issues, the afterlife, and more.

For instance, when interpreting the second verse of Surah Al-Baqarah, which states, "This is the Book about which there is no doubt, a guidance for those who fear Allah (*al-muttaqīn*)," Musta'in attempts to *actualise* the concept of *al-muttaqīn*. He critiques the conven-

tional understanding of *taqwa*, often restricted to fulfilling God’s commands—usually limited to ritual worship—and avoiding prohibitions outlined in the Qur’an, such as adultery, alcohol consumption, and murder. Musta’in argues that *taqwa* should be relevant to the everyday lives of Muslims. He links the concept to adherence to traffic regulations, such as wearing a helmet when riding a motorcycle, crossing the road at designated crossings, turning on motorcycle lights at night, and obeying traffic signals. According to Musta’in, those who claim to be *al-muttaqīn* must follow such rules, as violating them excludes one from this category. Furthermore, when interpreting the sixth verse of Surah Al-Baqarah, which says, “Indeed, those who disbelieve (*kafir*)—it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them—they will not believe,” Musta’in provocatively relates this to traffic violations, considering those who disregard traffic rules as *kafir*, though not in the sense of renouncing Islam.

Another example of Musta’in’s *actualisation* is found in his interpretation of the phrase “*Fas’alū ahl al-dzīkr in kuntum lā ta’lamūn*” (“Then ask those who have knowledge if you do not know”) from Surah Al-Anbiya (21:7). According to Musta’in, this verse applies not only to religious teachings but also to knowledge in general. He uses this phrase as the basis for the traditional *mufassir*’s stance that *taqlīd*⁴ (adhering to the guidance of experts) in religious matters is obligatory for laypeople (*al-‘ammah ‘alayhā taqlīd ‘ulamāihā*) (BANGSAONLINE.com, 2023).

To simplify this concept for readers, Musta’in employs an analogy involving a driver on the road. Suppose a driver is heading to Surabaya and arrives at an intersection where a sign indicates that the route to Surabaya is to the right. A sensible driver will follow the sign without question, trusting that the authority responsible for the “fatwa” (directive) knows better. On the other hand, an imprudent driver, acting as though he knows better, might ignore the sign and attempt to verify the route himself. Musta’in concludes that *taqlīd* is not a sign of ignorance but rather a mark of faith and humility. He argues that *taqlīd* is essential in the context of religion, as it ensures that issues are addressed by those with expertise. Like the sensible driver who follows the sign, a person practising *taqlīd* will arrive at the correct conclusions and solutions more efficiently (BANGSAONLINE.com, 2023).

Overaccommodation: Obsessive Actualisation

Musta’in’s efforts to accommodate the readers of *Harian Bangsa* newspaper through *actualisation* have successfully made the messages of the Qur’an more accessible to laypeople. The Qur’anic messages conveyed in most *tafsir* works are often highly sophisticated and primarily comprehensible to religious scholars. However, Musta’in’s method of *actualisation* allows people from all levels of society to easily grasp these messages.

Nevertheless, in certain cases, Musta’in tends to overaccommodate by over-actualising

4 *Taqlīd* refers to following the rulings of an authoritative interpreter of Islamic law, or a *mujtahid*, without independently knowing or questioning the underlying evidence.

the verses, linking them excessively to sociopolitical issues in Indonesia. This approach sometimes results in interpretations where the verses in question have little or no inherent connection to the issues he raises. I term this phenomenon “obsessive actualisation” as a reflection of the media’s influence on a *tahlili tafsir* published in a newspaper. To illustrate this argument, I examine two examples of Musta’in’s interpretations: first, Surah An-Nahl (16:99–100), and second, Surah Al-Isra (17:63).

An-Nahl (QS 16: 99-100)

Innahū laysa lahū sulthānūn ‘alā al-ladzīna āmanū wa ‘alā rabbihim yatawakkalūna #. Innamā sulthānuhū ‘alā al-ladzīna yatawallawnahū wa al-ladzīna hum bihī musyrikūna. (An-Nahl: 99-100)

“He (satan) certainly has no authority over those who believe and put their trust in their God. His authority is only over those who take him as a patron and who—under his influence—as-sociate others with Allah in worship.” (Quran.com, n.d.)

“Ayat ini ibarat implementasi dari pesan ayat sebelumnya terkait orang-orang beriman. Bahwa syetan tidak boleh ada menguasai orang-orang beriman dalam bidang apapun. (innahu lais lah sulthan ‘ala al-ladzin amanu). Dengan kata lain, orang beriman sama sekali tidak boleh menggunakan referensi syetan dalam bidang apapun. Sebab arahan syetan pastilah buruk menurut pandangan Tuhan. Tidak boleh ada arahan syetan yang masuk dalam teologi, tidak dalam pendidikan, ekonomi, kebudayaan apalagi politik. Semua tindakan orang beriman harus merujuk kepada-Nya, “wa ‘ala Rabbihim yatawakkalun”. Ayat selanjutnya (100) menyatakan, bahwa syetan hanya bisa menguasai para cecunguknya saja (innama sulthanuh ‘ala al-ladzin yatawallawnah) dan juga pada orang-orang musyrik, kafir, munafik, murtad dan sebangsanya (...wa al-ladzin hum bih musyrikun). Artinya, jika seorang muslim tidak lagi menggunakan keislaman sebagai acuan utama dalam berpolitik, dalam memilih pemimpin, dalam memilih pejabat publik, maka dia pasti bukan orang beriman sungguhan. Jika seorang muslim tidak rela ekonomi, pemberitaan, pendidikan, kebudayaan dikuasai nonmuslim, maka tandanya dia muslim sungguhan. Hal itu karena masih ada ketidakrealaan di hatinya dikuasi nonmuslim, meski kurang berdaya. Lalu berupaya bangkit dan merebut dengan sekuat tenaga. Itulah yang disebut dengan “ghirah” keimanan.” (BANGSAONLINE.com, 2016)

Translation:

“This verse is a continuation of the preceding verses related to the believers. Satan should not hold power over believers in any aspect of life (*innahū lais lahū sulthān ‘alā al-ladhīna āmanū*). In other words, believers must not refer to Satan in any area of their lives. Every action of a believer should be directed towards God, as expressed in the phrase *‘wa ‘alā Rabbihim yatawakkalūn*’ (‘and upon their Lord they rely’).

The subsequent verse explains that Satan’s influence is limited to his followers (*innamā sulthānuhū ‘ala-ladhīna yatawalaunahū*), such as *musyrik* (polytheists), *kāfir* (unbelievers),

munāfiq (hypocrites), and *murtad* (apostates). In other words, if a Muslim does not refer to Islamic teachings in political matters, particularly when electing political leaders, their faith may be called into question. Conversely, if a Muslim resists allowing their economic, educational, or cultural affairs to be dominated or ruled by non-Muslims, they demonstrate true faith. This is because their heart is unwilling to accept domination by non-Muslims, even if they lack the power to change the situation. This attitude reflects a strong spirit of faith (*ghīrah*).”

After explaining the overarching meaning of the verses, Musta’in, as is his usual practice, seeks to *actualise* them by linking them to contemporary social issues in Indonesia. At the time, the most prominent social issue was the 2016 Jakarta gubernatorial election. The first round featured three candidates, ultimately narrowing to two contenders in the second round: Anies Baswedan, a Muslim, and Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, popularly known as Ahok, a Christian of Chinese descent. Within this context, Musta’in attempted to relate the verses to the circumstances surrounding the 2016 Jakarta gubernatorial election. He elaborates as follows:

“Di negeri ini, keimanan sebagian umat islam terpuruk dalam nafsu kekuasaan, sehingga demi elektabilitas partai, keimanan disingkirkan, tidak lagi menjadi pertimbangan utama dalam berpolitik. Terlihat betapa banyak orang islam yang mendukung calon kepala daerah yang nyata-nyata non-muslim dan nyata-nyata dilarang Tuhan. Tapi larangan Allah SWT tidak digubris, sementara nasehat syetan justeru yang dipakai. Syetan telah berhasil memisah-misahkan antara masjid dengan pendopo. Syetan telah berhasil mencekoki juru bicaranya agar masjid, agama, al-Qur’an, al-Hadis tidak dibawa-bawa dalam kancah politik. Itu sama halnya dengan tidak boleh berpolitik atas dasar agama. Sungguh terdengar sebagai pernyataan yang manis demi menjaga kemurnian agama, tetapi sejatinya beracun, jahat dan sangat menjerumuskan. Ketahuilah, dengan dasar agama, dengan Allah SWT dan Rasul-Nya sebagai dasar berpolitik, maka politik syetan akan gagal dan hancur berantakan. Dengan tidak membawa serta Allah SWT ke gelanggang kekuasaan, maka syetan bebas beraksi menipu kroninya yang lemah iman.”

Translation:

“In this country, some Muslims have succumbed to the reprehensible desire for power. For the sake of political party electability, they have set aside their faith. This is evident in the support many have shown for non-Muslim candidates contesting political positions in various regions of Indonesia. They have disregarded the prohibition against electing non-Muslim leaders and aligned themselves with the devils (referring here to Ahok and his supporters). The devils have successfully created a divide between mosques (representing symbols of Islam) and *pendopo* (representing symbols of political affairs). They have effectively promoted their spokespersons—Muslims—who advocate for the exclusion of Qur’anic verses and Hadith texts from political discourse. On the surface, this may seem reasonable, but it is not. It must be understood that with Islam, Allah, and His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad, the devils’ political schemes will collapse. Conversely, by excluding Islam from politics, the devils will freely mislead those with weak faith.”

Tafsir An-Nahl 99-100: Sementara, Syetan Unggul di DKI Jakarta

Kamis, 06 Oktober 2016 16:24 WIB



Figure 2: *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual on An-Nahl, 99–100*

It is evident that Mustā'in connected these verses to the issue of non-Muslim political leaders, specifically Ahok, who was running for the position of Jakarta governor. He criticised Muslims who supported Ahok, describing them as having the weakest faith. Furthermore, Mustā'in explicitly stated that it is forbidden to vote for non-Muslims as political leaders. However, do these two verses actually address the issue of voting for non-Muslim political leaders? To assess this claim, we must refer to *tafsir* works considered *mu'tabar* (well-established) among Muslims.

In the book *Al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, *Al-Qurṭubī* interprets these verses by citing narrations from classical scholars during the era of the Companions and the *Tābi'in* (students of the Companions). According to a narration from *Sufyān*, verse 99 of Surah An-Nahl means that Satan has no power to compel believers to commit unforgivable sins. Similarly, Mujāhid argued that the verse emphasises Satan's inability to persuade true believers to commit acts prohibited by Allah (*Al-Qurṭubī*, 2006, p. 426).

In the same vein, the book *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Adhūm* by Ibn Kathīr, citing Al-Thawrī, explains that the verse means Satan will never be able to cause believers to commit sins from which they will not repent (Ibn Kathīr, 1998, p. 517). Other well-established *tafsir* works, such as *Tafsīr al-Baghawī* by Imam Al-Baghawī (Al-Baghawī, 1460, p. 95) and *Al-Durr Al-Manthūr* by Imam *Al-Suyūṭī* (*Al-Suyūṭī*, n.d., p. 166), provide similar explanations and narrations.

In summary, these verses do not address politics, let alone the issue of voting for non-Muslim political candidates. Thus, Mustā'in's *actualisation* of Surah An-Nahl verses 99–100 is misplaced. In other words, he has fallen into what I term “obsessive actualisation” by linking these verses to the 2016 Jakarta gubernatorial election.

Al-Isra (QS 17: 63)

Qāla idzhab faman tabi'aka minhum fa-inna jahannama jazāukum jazāan mawfūran (Al-Isra: 63).

Allah responded, “Be gone! Whoever of them follows you, Hell will surely be the reward for all of you—an ample reward. (Quran.com, n.d.)

Tafsir Al-Isra' 63: Mewaspadai Bahaya Laten PKI Bagian dari Agama

Editor: Redaksi Minggu, 22 September 2019 14:32 WIB



Figure 3 *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual on Al-Isra, 63*

Musta'in began his interpretation of this verse by connecting it to the preceding verses, which discuss the devil's rebellion against God's command. Accordingly, Surah Al-Isra (17:63) describes God's expulsion of Satan from heaven and further threatens those who follow Satan's path with hell. Musta'in draws two key lessons from this verse.

The first lesson is that it is obligatory to eliminate all harmful elements from our lives. This principle is rooted in an *uṣūl al-fiqh* maxim stating, “*dar' al-mafāsīd muqaddamun 'alā jalb al-maṣāliḥ*” (“avoiding harm takes precedence over pursuing benefits”). To illustrate this, Musta'in provides the example of teachers managing a school environment. He argues that teachers should prioritise addressing students who misbehave, break school rules, or engage in bullying over innovating teaching methods. If these disruptive students are not properly managed, they will hinder the learning process and negatively impact other students (BANGSAONLINE.com, 2019b).

The second lesson emphasises the importance of addressing the root cause of a problem. As demonstrated in Surah Al-Isra (17:63), the devil was not only punished but also

expelled from heaven. To prevent further issues, God also threatened Satan's followers with the punishment of hell. Musta'in highlights the broader implication of this verse: good or bad actions often have followers, and negative influences rarely operate in isolation—they are supported by loyal adherents. To illustrate, he references the cases of Lia Aminuddin, also known as Lia Eden, the leader of the Eden sect who claimed to receive divine revelations from Gabriel, and Kanjeng Dimas, a spiritual leader who purportedly had the ability to multiply money. Both individuals propagated deviant teachings but nevertheless attracted many loyal supporters, numbering in the thousands (BANGSAONLINE.com, 2019b).

Unexpectedly, Musta'in then connected this verse to the case of the Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*, PKI). He states:

“Di sini, seorang mukmin dituntut berpikir jauh dan mewaspada, tidak saja bertindak frontal dan selesai, melainkan terus bertanggungjawab atas eksekusi yang mungkin timbul di kemudian hari. Itulah sebabnya, maka pemerintah dulu terus mewaspada setiap keturunan dari anggota Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI). PKI pernah mengkhianati negeri ini, mengudeta dan membunuh sejumlah pejabat tinggi negara dan tokoh islam yang tidak sejalan. Maka benar sekali pemerintah menaruh waspada dan menutup jalan bagi mereka, karena sangat mungkin anak-anaknya melanjutkan perjuangan bapaknya di saat tepat. Dan itulah yang diistilahkan dengan bahaya laten PKI. Perkara sekarang ini ke-PKI-an sudah menyusup dan terbangun diam-diam atau tidak, itu soal lain. Yang jelas, ayat ini (...faman tabi'aka minhum... dst.) cukup kuat sebagai dasar pijakan, sehingga mewaspada bahaya laten PKI adalah bagian dari perintah agama. Seorang mukmin tidak boleh terkena sengatan berbisa dua kali dalam lubang yang sama. Allah 'alam.”

Translation:

“This verse requires a believer to think ahead and remain vigilant—not only to act decisively and thoroughly, but also to take responsibility for potential consequences that may arise in the future. This is why the government in the past exercised caution towards the descendants of members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). The PKI had betrayed the country, staged a coup d'état, and murdered several high-ranking state officials and dissident Islamic leaders. It was therefore entirely appropriate for the government to remain vigilant and to block their paths, as it is highly possible that their children could continue their fathers' struggles at an opportune moment. This is what is referred to as the latent danger of the PKI. Whether or not the PKI has secretly infiltrated and reawakened is a separate issue. What is certain is that this verse (Al-Isra 63: ...*faman tabi'aka minhum...* etc.) provides a strong basis for caution. Remaining aware of the latent danger of the PKI can thus be regarded as part of a religious obligation. A believer should not fall into the same trap twice. Allah knows best.”

Musta'in's interpretation, which links the 63rd verse of Surah Al-Isra to the descendants of PKI members, appears to be closely tied to the political climate surrounding the 2019 presidential election. Historically, the issue of a potential PKI revival has been a recurring topic in Indonesia, particularly as the end of September approaches. This issue is particularly sensitive for many communities, especially religious groups such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) (Fathoni, 2019). However, the discourse intensified during the 2019 elections, when presidential candidate Joko Widodo was rumoured to be a descendant of PKI members

(Johari, 2019).

As a prominent NU figure, Musta'in strongly opposed any discussion of opening political opportunities for the descendants of PKI members. He equated the PKI with the devil and its descendants with the devil's followers, as reflected in his interpretation. Musta'in went so far as to issue what could be considered a "fatwa," declaring that vigilance against the spread of PKI ideology was a religious obligation. He reminded readers of the brutality committed by PKI members during the G30S (30 September Movement) in 1965. According to Musta'in, a good Muslim should not make the same mistake twice by allowing the PKI to re-emerge.

On a textual level, the 63rd verse of Surah Al-Isra and the preceding verses clearly do not address political matters. In this interpretation, Musta'in once again demonstrates an excessive tendency to *actualise* Qur'anic verses by linking them to socio-political issues in contemporary Indonesian society. Additionally, Musta'in seems to transform his *tafsir* into a platform for critiquing socio-political conditions in Indonesia. Rather than focusing on elucidating the Qur'anic message, Musta'in's *tafsir* begins to resemble a political commentary column in a newspaper. This demonstrates the significant influence of *Harian Bangsa* newspaper on Musta'in's interpretative process in *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual*.

The next section aims to analyse the factors contributing to over-actualisation in Musta'in's interpretations.

Driving Factors Behind Over-actualisation

In the case of *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual*, the overaccommodation evident in Musta'in's interpretations can be categorised under two types of accommodation: sensory overaccommodation and dependency overaccommodation. Sensory overaccommodation occurs when a speaker excessively considers their audience to have limited abilities—whether physical, linguistic, or otherwise. Dependency overaccommodation happens when a speaker places their audience in a subordinate role or status.

This tendency is clearly visible in Musta'in's work, where he frequently simplifies his interpretations to ensure they are accessible to the readers of *Harian Bangsa*, who are, for the most part, laypeople with little knowledge of *tafsir*. To further enhance understanding, Musta'in often actualises the verses by linking them to everyday events familiar to the readers. However, there are instances where he exceeds the necessary level of accommodation, resulting in overaccommodation. This manifests as over-actualisation, where verses are excessively linked to socio-political issues that are not directly addressed by the Qur'anic text.

The influence of *Harian Bangsa* as a profit-oriented newspaper plays a significant role in shaping Musta'in's interpretative style. As noted earlier, during the early stages of his column, Musta'in faced criticism from the *Harian Bangsa* editorial board for his rigid and overly formal language, which contrasted with the conversational tone typical of newspaper articles. Consequently, Musta'in underwent intensive training with Dahlan Iskan, who taught him how to write in a newspaper-friendly style (Huda, 2019, p. 69). Following

this training, Musta'in's writing adapted to the preferences of *Harian Bangsa* readers, who were largely unfamiliar with religious discourse, particularly in the field of *tafsir*. This adjustment proved successful, attracting many new readers and allowing the *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* column to thrive for over twenty-three years.

Like most newspapers, *Harian Bangsa* frequently reports on socio-political events, and this focus inevitably influenced Musta'in's interpretations. He often connects the verses he interprets to socio-political issues trending at the time. In some cases, Musta'in's *tafsir* begins to resemble a political commentary column. While his actualisation has successfully helped readers understand the meaning of the verses, it occasionally crosses into overaccommodation, which I term "obsessive actualisation."

This tendency is further exacerbated by the *tahlili* method employed in his *tafsir*. If *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* had used the *maudhū'i* (thematic) method instead, such over-actualisation might have been avoided. For instance, the *maudhū'i* approach allows a mufassir to select verses from any chapter (*juz'*) of the Qur'an that are relevant to a specific issue. This flexibility would enable Musta'in to address trending socio-political issues without forcing unrelated verses into the discussion. Conversely, the *tahlili* method obliges Musta'in to interpret the verses sequentially as they appear in the Qur'an, regardless of their relevance to current events. For example, during the 2016 Jakarta gubernatorial election, Musta'in connected Surah An-Nahl (99–100) to the issue of electing Muslim political leaders, even though these verses are entirely unrelated to the topic.

What about the transformation of *Harian Bangsa* from a printed newspaper to an online platform and mobile application? Has this shift influenced Musta'in's approach to composing his *tafsir*? A closer analysis of the editor's foreword in the *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* section, whether on the website or the app version, suggests that Musta'in has not significantly adapted his work to accommodate a broader online readership. This readership now extends beyond Surabaya and the surrounding areas of East Java. As noted in the foreword:



Figure 4: Editor's Preface in the *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* Section

Translation:

“The *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual* section is written by Dr KH. A. Musta'in Syafi'i, a renowned *tafsir* expert and the Head of Madrasatul Qur'an at Tebuireng Pesantren in Jombang, East Java. In addition to being recognised as a proficient *mufassir*, Kiai Musta'in is also a *Hafidz* (someone who has memorised all 30 chapters of the Qur'an). Known for his casual demeanour, Kiai Musta'in also serves as the Chairman of the Masyayikh Council at Tebuireng Pesantren. This *tafsir* is written specifically for readers of *Harian Bangsa*, a newspaper headquartered at Cipta Menanggal I Street No. 35, Surabaya. It is published daily, except on Sundays. Currently, Kiai Musta'in is interpreting Surah Al-Anbiya (21:71). We hope you enjoy reading this series of *tafsir*, which is highly sought after by readers across Indonesia and beyond.”

The foreword indicates that Musta'in chose not to significantly adapt his *tafsir* for readers beyond the traditional *Harian Bangsa* subscribers in the East Java region. This is evident in his continued use of Javanese terms, which remain a defining feature of his interpretations. In other words, there is an element of under-accommodation in Musta'in's approach, even as *Harian Bangsa* transitioned from a printed newspaper to a digital platform. He continues to prioritise the preferences of the print readership, effectively placing the onus on online readers to adapt to his established writing style.

However, Musta'in has made some efforts to accommodate his online audience by expanding the scope of sociopolitical issues addressed in his *tafsir*. While his earlier works

focused primarily on local matters, the digital transformation of *Harian Bangsa* has seen him increasingly engage with national and even global issues, reflecting a broader perspective in response to the platform's wider reach.

Conclusion

The influence of the medium of *tafsir* on its form, style, and presentation is a significant yet underexplored topic. This study addresses this gap by examining *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual*, published on *Bangsaonline.com* by the *Harian Bangsa* newspaper, as a case study. It poses the question: how and to what extent does the medium of *tafsir* influence the interpretative process of the *mufassir*? The study applies Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory, which suggests that individuals adapt their linguistic and communicative styles—such as vocabulary, tone, and speech rate—to facilitate understanding among their audience. This concept of adaptation is also reflected in the Qur'an itself, revealed in Arabic to suit the language of its initial audience, namely the Prophet Muhammad and the Arab society of his time. Similarly, *mufassirun* adjust their exegeses to align with the linguistic and cultural contexts of their audiences. Using this theoretical framework, the study explores how the *Harian Bangsa* newspaper and *Bangsaonline.com* influenced Musta'in's composition of *Tafsir al-Qur'an Aktual*, necessitating specific forms of accommodation.

The findings demonstrate that the *Harian Bangsa* newspaper significantly shaped Musta'in's interpretative approach, compelling him to accommodate its readership. This accommodation is evident in the language style, choice of words, and inclusion of Javanese terms. Furthermore, Musta'in frequently "actualises" Qur'anic verses by linking them to contemporary events and everyday issues familiar to his readers. However, this approach occasionally results in over-accommodation, where verses are excessively contextualised with sociopolitical issues in Indonesia, even when there is no intrinsic connection between the verses and the topics discussed. This phenomenon is referred to in this study as "obsessive actualisation."

Nonetheless, the findings of this study are not necessarily generalisable to all *tahlili* (analytical) *tafsir* published in newspapers. Further research is needed to validate or challenge these conclusions by investigating other *tahlili tafsir* works in both printed and digital newspaper formats.

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