



Beyond Interpretation: Reception Theory and the Transformation of Qur'anic Meaning Across Cultures

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Abstract

The Qur'an is a universal sacred text whose meanings continue to evolve through diverse cultural contexts without altering its normative authority. However, existing approaches in *Qur'anic Studies*, including classical tafsir, contemporary hermeneutics, and *Living Qur'an* studies, have not sufficiently explained the mechanisms through which Qur'anic meaning is transformed across different socio-cultural settings. This study aims to examine how Reception Theory explains the transformation of Qur'anic meaning across cultures and to develop a new theoretical framework specifically for *Qur'anic Studies*. Employing a qualitative conceptual research design based on library research, this study synthesizes Hans Robert Jauss's Reception Theory, Wolfgang Iser's Reader Response Theory, Abdullah Saeed's contextual approach, and contemporary *Living Qur'an* scholarship. Data were collected through a systematic review of books and recent scholarly articles and analyzed using conceptual analysis and theory synthesis. The findings reveal that the transformation of Qur'anic meaning does not occur at the level of the sacred text but at the level of cultural reception, where readers' horizons, cultural mediation, historical experience, and social practices shape the actualization of Qur'anic values. Based on these findings, this study proposes Qur'anic Reception Theory (QRT), consisting of five interconnected dimensions: Textual Authority, Reader's Horizon, Cultural Mediation, Social Embodiment, and Meaning Transformation. The proposed framework extends Reception Theory beyond literary studies and offers a new paradigm for understanding the dynamic relationship between revelation, culture, and society. This study contributes theoretically to the advancement of *Qur'anic Studies* by providing an interdisciplinary framework for analyzing the reception and transformation of Qur'anic meaning across cultures.

Keyword: *Qur'anic Reception Theory; Living Qur'an; Cross-Cultural Interpretation; Meaning Transformation.*

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is a holy book that has a universal character, transcending geographical, language, and cultural boundaries. Since its revelation in the seventh century, the Qur'an has been understood not only as a normative text that contains instructions for Muslims, but also as a text that continues to live in various social and cultural spaces. The spread of Islam to Southeast Asia, Africa, Europe, and America shows that the verses of the Qur'an are not present in a homogeneous cultural space. Instead, the same text is accepted, understood, and embodied in the form of social practices, religious rituals, cultural symbols, and different value systems according to the historical experience of each community. This phenomenon shows that the dynamics of the meaning of the Qur'an are not only determined by the structure of language or the methodology of interpretation, but also by the process of *reception* that takes place in a particular cultural context.¹

In the Islamic scientific tradition, the study of the Qur'an has been dominated by the

¹ Syukron Affani, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an in the History of Its Development* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2019).



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approach of tafsir, ulumul Qur'an, and hermeneutics. The development of contemporary studies then presented a contextual approach pioneered by Abdullah Saeed, which emphasized the importance of considering social contexts, history, and societal changes in understanding the message of the Qur'an. This approach succeeded in expanding the scope of interpretation so that the Qur'an remained relevant to various contemporary issues.² However, this approach is still oriented towards the process of interpreting the text and has not specifically explained how the reader as a cultural subject shapes the meaning of the Qur'an through his social experience.

The development of *Living Qur'an* studies in recent years shows a shift in academic attention from texts to social practices. Various studies prove that the Qur'an is not only interpreted, but also brought to life through the traditions of khataman, yasinan, ruqyah, calligraphy, medicine, and local cultural rituals. This study shows that people do not just read the Qur'an, but also reproduce its meaning through social activities influenced by local culture. However, the majority of *Living Qur'an research* is still oriented towards the description of phenomena so that it has not produced a conceptual model that explains how the meaning of the Qur'an undergoes a transformation when it moves from one cultural space to another.³

In humanities studies, *the Reception Theory* developed by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser explains that the meaning of a text is not singular, but is formed through the interaction between the text and the reader who has different *horizons of expectations*, social experiences, and cultural backgrounds. This perspective has developed widely in literary and cultural studies, but its implementation in *Qur'anic Studies* is still relatively limited. Some studies only use reception theory as a tool to identify the form of public acceptance of the Qur'an without developing a theoretical model that is in accordance with the character of the holy book that has normative authority and transcendent dimensions.

The changing global communication landscape through migration and digital media increasingly shows that the reception of the Qur'an is undergoing an increasingly complex transformation. Digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have given birth to new forms of religious authority that allow people to build an understanding of the Qur'an through digital interaction. In this context, the reception process is not only influenced by clerics or religious institutions, but also by media algorithms, virtual communities, and user experiences in digital space. This phenomenon shows that the transformation of the meaning of the Qur'an is the result of a dynamic interaction between texts, cultures, technology, and readers.⁴

Based on these developments, there are still theoretical gaps in contemporary Qur'an studies. Tafsir research focuses on the interpretation of the text, while the *study of the Living Qur'an* describes social manifestations more without offering a conceptual model of the process of transforming meaning across cultures. Therefore, this study proposes the development of Qur'anic Reception Theory, which is a conceptual framework that explains that the meaning of the Qur'an undergoes a transformation at the level of cultural reception, not at the level of the text of revelation. This model integrates the authority of the text, the reader's horizon, cultural context, and social practices into a single analytical framework so as to be able to explain the dynamics of the meaning of the Qur'an in various Muslim societies in a more systematic manner.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a library research design that is oriented

² Randy Putra Alamsyah and Daud Lintang, 'Cultural Integration and Political Consciousness in Qur'anic Exegesis: A Study of the Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Karim by Binjai's Ulama Tiga Serangkai', *Fikri: Journal of Religious, Social and Cultural Studies* 10, no. 1 (2025): 355–67, <https://journal.iainnumetrolampung.ac.id/index.php/jf/article/view/6161>.

³ Rifki Agus Ridwan, *LIVING QUR'AN CONTEMPORANE: Dynamics of Practice, Meaning, and Social Transformation* (Yogyakarta: KBM Indonesia Publishers, 2026).

⁴ Ahmad Syukron et al., 'Digitalizing the Living Qur'an: Religious Authority and the Transformation of Qur'anic Knowledge in Indonesia', *JURNAL INDO-ISLAMIKA* 16, no. 1 (2026): 191–207, <https://doi.org/10.15408/jii.v16i1.51744>.

towards conceptual research. This approach was chosen because the main purpose of the research was not to test hypotheses through empirical data, but to build and develop a new conceptual framework, namely Qur'anic Reception Theory, as a theoretical paradigm in *Qur'anic Studies*. Conceptual research aims to produce theoretical synthesis through critical analysis of existing concepts, theories, and literature so as to be able to offer new models of analysis that have a contribution to the development of science.⁵

The source of the research data is entirely derived from secondary data obtained through literature studies. The literature analyzed consisted of four main groups. First, the literature on Reception Theory, especially the works of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser which explain the concept of *horizon of expectations*, *reader response*, and the process of forming meaning through the interaction between text and reader. Second, the literature on Qur'anic Studies, including the study of classical interpretation, Qur'anic hermeneutics, contextual approaches, and *Living Qur'an*. Third, literature on cultural studies and interpretive anthropology that explains the relationship between culture, social practices, and the construction of meaning. Fourth, the latest scientific articles published in nationally and internationally reputable journals over the past five years (2021–2026) to obtain the latest developments regarding the reception of the Qur'an, cross-cultural studies, and the dynamics of religious authority in the contemporary era.

Data collection was carried out through systematic literature review by browsing various scientific databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, Dimensions, Crossref, Google Scholar, and national journals accredited by SINTA. Literature is selected based on several criteria, namely: (1) it has relevance to reception theory, Qur'an studies, or cultural studies; (2) published by a credible academic publisher or journal; (3) have a conceptual contribution to the development of theory; and (4) published within the last five years to ensure the actuality of the study. In addition to journal articles, this study also uses several classical works as a theoretical foundation because they are primary sources in the development of *Reception Theory*.

Data analysis uses conceptual analysis combined with theory synthesis. Conceptual analysis is carried out through the process of identifying, classifying, and comparing various main concepts contained in reception theory, Qur'anic hermeneutics, *Living Qur'an*, and cultural studies. Furthermore, theoretical synthesis is carried out to integrate these concepts into a new conceptual model. According to Jaakkola (2020), theory synthesis is a method that allows researchers to generate new conceptual relationships by combining theories that were previously developed separately. In this study, a synthesis was carried out on three main components, namely the authority of the Qur'an text, the reader's horizon, and the cultural context, thus resulting in the framework of Qur'anic Reception Theory.

The analysis process is carried out through four stages. The first stage is concept identification, which is to inventory the main concepts in reception theory, hermeneutics, *the Living Qur'an*, and cultural anthropology. The second stage is comparative analysis, which is comparing the similarities and differences between approaches to identify the advantages and limitations of each theory in explaining the transformation of the meaning of the Qur'an. The third stage is conceptual integration, which is connecting interrelated concepts so as to form a coherent theoretical relationship. The fourth stage is the development of a model, which is to formulate Qur'anic Reception Theory as an analytical framework that explains that the transformation of the meaning of the Qur'an occurs through the interaction between fixed texts, readers' horizons, historical experiences, cultural contexts, and social practices of the community.

To ensure conceptual validity, the study applied triangulation of literature sources by comparing various theories and research results from different disciplines, including *Qur'anic Studies*, hermeneutics, reception theory, sociology of religion, and cultural anthropology. In addition, a critical reading of each literature was carried out to identify the epistemological assumptions, theoretical arguments, and conceptual contributions of each source. This approach

⁵ Elina Jaakkola, 'Designing Conceptual Articles: Four Approaches', *AMS Review* 10, no. 1 (2020): 18–26, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13162-020-00161-0>.

allows research to produce synthesis that is systematic, logical, and has a strong academic foundation.

Through this approach, this research not only describes the phenomenon of the reception of the Qur'an, but also builds a new theoretical framework that can be used as an analytical basis in explaining the transformation of the meaning of the Qur'an when it moves to various cultural spaces. Thus, this research method is oriented towards theory building, so its main contribution lies in the development of a conceptual paradigm in the field of *Qur'anic Studies*.

RESULT AND DISSCUSSION

The Limitations of the Classical Interpretation Approach in Explaining the Transformation of the Meaning of the Qur'an Across Cultures

The study of the Qur'an for centuries flourished under the dominance of the tradition of interpretation that placed the text as the main center of the production of meaning. This tradition has produced very rich intellectual treasures through the works of classical mufasir such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurṭubī. Through philological, grammatical, historical, and historical approaches, the mufasir seeks to explain the meaning of the verse in accordance with the context of the descent of revelation and Islamic scientific authority. The contribution of the classical interpretation tradition is very important in maintaining the authority of the Qur'an text while building an epistemological foundation for the development of Islamic sciences. However, the development of increasingly diverse Muslim societies geographically, culturally, politically, and technologically suggests that the classical interpretation approach has not been able to fully explain why a single verse of the Qur'an can give birth to different forms of meaning, practice, and cultural expression when accepted by different Muslim communities.⁶

The classical interpretation paradigm is basically built on the assumption that the meaning of the Qur'an can be found through the reconstruction of the meaning of the text based on Arabic linguistic devices, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, hadith, and the opinions of the companions and tabi'in. Thus, the main focus of interpretation is to find the meaning that is considered the most authoritative according to the initial context of revelation. This approach has the advantage of maintaining the continuity of the interpretation tradition, but methodologically emphasizes the process of interpretation rather than reception. As a result, more attention is directed to the question "what is the meaning of the verse?" rather than "how the verse is received, understood, and embodied by people from different cultural backgrounds". This difference in orientation is important because in social reality, religious meaning is not only shaped by the text, but also by the reader's experience, social structure, collective memory, and the cultural practices that surround it.⁷

The development of the global Muslim community shows that the text of the Qur'an lives in a wide variety of culturally diverse contexts. The practice of reading Surah Yāsīn in Indonesia, for example, has a different social function than it does in the Middle East. Similarly, verses about deliberation, justice, family, or gender relations get different actualizations when practiced in Southeast Asian, African, European, and North American societies. These differences do not indicate a change in the text of the Qur'an, but rather indicate a transformation of meaning at the level of cultural reception. This kind of phenomenon is difficult to explain only through the classical interpretation approach because the focus is more directed on the reconstruction of the

⁶ Baidhowi Baidhowi, *Anthropology of the Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Lkis Pelangi Aksara, 2009).

⁷ Faris Maulana Akbar, *Thematic-Social Interpretation: A Study of the Encyclopedia of the Qur'an and the Paradigm of the Qur'an* by M. Dawam Rahardjo (Serang: A-Empat Publishers, 2021).

initial meaning than on the dynamics of the reception of meaning in various social spaces.⁸

These limitations then gave birth to various contemporary hermeneutic approaches that sought to connect the text of the Qur'an with the changes in modern society. One of the figures who has a great influence is Fazlur Rahman through the theory of *double movement*. According to Rahman, the process of interpretation does not simply stop at the literal meaning of the text, but must move from the historical context of revelation to universal moral principles, then return them to contemporary reality.⁹ This approach opens up a wider space for the actualization of the Qur'an's message in the face of modern problems. However, Rahman's main focus remains on the process of normative interpretation and has not paid special attention to how culturally different societies shape different receptions of the text of the Qur'an.

Further development was carried out by Abdullah Saeed through a contextual approach that places social change as an integral part of the interpretive process. Saeed emphasized that the verses of ethics and laws must be understood by considering the historical context of the descent of revelation as well as the context of modern society. He develops stages of interpretation that connect the text, the initial context, universal values, and the needs of contemporary society so that interpretation is not trapped in literalism.¹⁰ This approach makes a major contribution to the development of modern Qur'anic hermeneutics because it shows that the meaning of the Qur'an has a dynamic dimension without eliminating the authority of revelation. However, Saeed's framework is still oriented to *interpreter-centered approaches* so it has not explicitly explained how the community of readers as social actors collectively builds meaning through culture, traditions, and daily practices.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd also developed the idea that the Qur'an should be understood as a text that is always in dialogue with human reality. According to him, the meaning of text is never completely closed because it is always reproduced through the interaction between the text and the reader. This perspective allows room for a plurality of interpretations and avoids the claim that there is only one absolute meaning. Despite this, Abu Zayd's hermeneutical approach still centers on the relationship between the text and the individual interpreter. He has not systematically explained how cultural structures, social institutions, local traditions, and the collective memory of the community shape the reception of the Qur'an differently in different regions of the Islamic world.¹¹

The limitations of the interpretation and hermeneutics approach are increasingly seen when it is associated with the development of *the study of the Living Qur'an*. This field of study shows that the Qur'an is not only understood through intellectual activities in the form of interpretation, but is also presented in the form of rituals, symbols, art, education, medicine, and daily social practices. The recitation of certain verses for medicine, the tradition of the Qur'anic khataman of the Qur'an, calligraphy as an aesthetic expression, or the use of certain verses in various rituals of society is a form of reception that cannot be understood only through linguistic or historical analysis. The study of *the Living Qur'an* has succeeded in showing that the social life of the community is a space where the Qur'an continues to produce its meaning. However, most

⁸ Wirda Afriani et al., 'Living Qur'an as A Method to Turn on Quranization in the Community', *GIC Proceeding* 1 (2023): 408–14.

⁹ Faziur Rahman, 'Islamic Methodology in History', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 87, no. 2 (April 1967): 221, <https://doi.org/10.2307/597503>.

¹⁰ Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203016770>.

¹¹ Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū-Zaid, *Reformation of Islamic Thought: A Critical Historical Analysis*, First edition, WRR Verkenningen (Abingdon: Routledge, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789053568286>.

of the research in this field is still descriptive with a focus on documenting social practices so that it has not produced a theory that explains the mechanism of transformation of meaning across cultures in a systematic manner.¹²

It is at this point that the difference between interpretation and reception becomes very important. *Interpretation* seeks to explain what the text means through a set of interpretive methods, while *reception* seeks to understand how the meaning is received, negotiated, modified, and embodied in social life. In other words, interpretation centers on the relationship between the text and the interpreter, while reception places the reader as a cultural subject who actively shapes meaning based on his or her historical experience, social identity, and cultural environment. Therefore, variations in religious practices in different Muslim communities cannot be understood simply as variations in interpretation, but rather as variations in reception to the same text.

This perspective is in line with *the Reception Theory* developed by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. Jauss introduced the concept of *horizon of expectations* which explains that each reader understands the text based on his experiences, traditions, and expectations. Meanwhile, Iser explained that the meaning of the text is born through active interaction between the structure of the text and the reader. Both theories suggest that meaning is not entirely in the text, but is also formed through the process of acceptance by the reader.¹³ Although developed in literary studies, these principles have high relevance to explain the dynamics of the reception of the Qur'an when moving to various cultural spaces.

In the context of *Qur'anic Studies*, the application of *Reception Theory* certainly cannot be done directly without conceptual modification. In contrast to literary works, the Qur'an is a sacred text that has normative authority and a theological dimension that is believed to be fixed. Therefore, this research departs from the assumption that what undergoes changes is not the text of the Qur'an, but the process of acceptance and actualization of meaning by the reading community. Thus, the transformation of meaning must be understood as a transformation at the level of cultural reception, not a change in the authority of revelation. This approach allows researchers to explain why the same verse can be embodied in the form of different traditions, values, institutions, and social practices without having to assume that the Qur'anic text has changed its meaning ontologically.¹⁴

Based on this description, it can be understood that the classical interpretation approach and contemporary hermeneutics have made a very great contribution to the development of the study of the Qur'an. However, both still have limitations in explaining the dynamics of meaning when the Qur'an is accepted by people who have different cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, the study of *the Living Qur'an* has succeeded in showing the diversity of social receptions, but has not built a theoretical framework that comprehensively explains the mechanism of meaning transformation. Therefore, a new paradigm is needed that integrates the authority of the text, the reader's horizon, cultural context, and social practices into a single conceptual model. This paradigm is formulated in this study as Qur'anic Reception Theory, which is an analytical

¹² Sholihan and M. Ulil Abshor, 'Hermeneutics in Contemporary Qur'an Interpretation in Indonesia: Integration, Criticism, and Relevance in Answering Social Problems', *AR ROSYAD: Journal of Islamic and Social Humanities* 4, no. 2 (2026): 111–25, <https://doi.org/10.55148/880exc55>.

¹³ Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, Theory and History of Literature, ed. Timothy Bahti and Paul De Man (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

¹⁴ Eva Farhah, 'Between Ideality and Reality in The Islamic Literature and Al-Quran: Reception Analysis', *LISANIA: Journal of Arabic Education and Literature* 6, no. 1 (2022): 32–52, <https://doi.org/10.18326/lisania.v6i1.32-52>.

framework that explains that the dynamics of the meaning of the Qur'an are the result of continuous interaction between the text that is fixed and the community of readers that continues to change according to the development of culture, space, and time. This framework is not intended to replace interpretation or hermeneutics, but rather to complement it by explaining the dimensions of cultural reception that have not received adequate attention in contemporary Qur'anic studies.

Reception Theory as a New Lens for Understanding Qur'anic Meaning Across Cultures

The development of *contemporary Qur'anic Studies* shows a paradigm shift from a *text-centered approach* to an approach that pays more attention to the relationship between text, readers, and social contexts. This shift has arisen in response to the fact that the Qur'an is not only understood as a holy book to be read and interpreted, but also as a text that continues to live on in the cultural practices, religious traditions, digital media, and social life of Muslims in different parts of the world. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of the meaning of the Qur'an is no longer enough through linguistic and historical analysis alone, but also requires an approach that is able to explain how people receive, internalize, and reproduce the meaning of the Qur'an according to their cultural experiences. It is in this context that *Reception Theory* offers a new perspective that is able to complement the limitations of conventional interpretation approaches.

Conceptually, *Reception Theory* developed in the German literary tradition through the thought of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser in the late 1960s. In contrast to the structuralism approach that views meaning as entirely within the text, Jauss asserts that meaning is born through the historical relationship between the text and the reader. Every reader has a horizon of expectations, which is a set of experiences, knowledge, cultural values, and social backgrounds that shape the way a person understands a text.¹⁵ Thus, the meaning is not static, but always undergoes reconstruction when the text is accepted by different communities of readers.

The concept of *horizon of expectations* has very strong relevance in the study of the Qur'an. Although the Qur'an is believed to have a fixed authority of revelation, readers come from very diverse cultural backgrounds. A Muslim in Indonesia reads a verse about deliberation in the context of Pancasila democracy, while Muslims in the Middle East might associate it with a different political system. Similarly, minority Muslim communities in Europe often understand verses about tolerance, pluralism, and religious identity through the experience of living as a minority. These differences show that the process of accepting the Qur'an is influenced by different social horizons so that it produces various forms of actualization of meanings.¹⁶

Wolfgang Iser kemudian memperluas perspektif tersebut melalui Reader Response Theory. Menurut Iser, makna tidak berada sepenuhnya di dalam teks maupun pembaca, tetapi muncul melalui interaksi keduanya. Teks menyediakan struktur makna, sedangkan pembaca mengaktualisasikannya melalui pengalaman, pengetahuan, dan proses interpretasi. Dalam perspektif ini, pembaca bukan lagi penerima pasif, melainkan aktor yang secara aktif berpartisipasi dalam pembentukan makna.¹⁷ Konsep tersebut memberikan dasar teoritis yang

¹⁵ Hans Robert Jauss, 'Toward an Aesthetic of Reception: Theory and History of Literature', *Transl. T. Bahti. Minneapolis: Univ. Minn. Press (From German)*, 1982.

¹⁶ Lathifatul Asna and Nasihun Amin, 'Hermeneutics of Reception by Hans Robert Jauss: An Alternative Approach Toward Quranic Studies', *International Journal Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* 24, no. 2 (December 2022): 160–71, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ihya.24.2.13092>.

¹⁷ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

penting bagi pengembangan studi resepsi Al-Qur'an karena memperlihatkan bahwa pengalaman keagamaan umat Islam merupakan bagian yang tidak terpisahkan dari proses pemaknaan terhadap wahyu.

Nevertheless, the application of *Reception Theory* in *Qur'anic Studies* requires epistemological adjustments. In contrast to the literary works that are the main objects of Jauss and Iser, the Qur'an is a sacred text that has normative and theological authority. Therefore, the application of reception theory should not be interpreted as relativizing the truth of revelation, but as an effort to explain the dynamics of human acceptance of revelation. In other words, the theory of reception in the context of the Qur'an does not change the authority of the text, but explains why the same text can produce different social expressions, cultural practices, and religious experiences when present in different cultural environments.

In recent years, the reception approach has begun to gain attention in the study of the Living Qur'an. Ahmad Rafiq said that the reception of the Qur'an does not only take place in the form of interpretation (*exegetical reception*), but also through aesthetic reception (*aesthetic reception*) and functional reception (*functional reception*). The division shows that people's relationship with the Qur'an goes far beyond reading and interpreting activities. The verses of the Qur'an are treated as a source of blessings, cultural identity, artistic expression, educational media, and even as part of the social practices of society. This perspective shows that the meaning of the Qur'an does not stop at the semantic level, but develops into a social experience that continues to be produced in daily life.¹⁸

Recent research on *the Living Qur'an* further strengthens the importance of the reception perspective in understanding the dynamics of the meaning of the Qur'an. Robbani (2026), for example, shows that the reception of the Qur'an in Indonesia develops in five main dimensions, namely the hermeneutical, exegetical, aesthetic, functional, and performative dimensions. These five dimensions show that people do not only understand the Qur'an through intellectual activities, but also through social actions, cultural symbols, and religious practices that are inherited from generation to generation. Thus, the meaning of the Qur'an is the result of interaction between texts, local culture, and the collective experience of the community.

A similar phenomenon is also seen in the development of the digital space. The transformation of information technology has changed the way Muslims access, learn, and disseminate the knowledge of the Qur'an. Studies on the digitization of *the Living Qur'an* show that social media is not only a means of disseminating interpretation, but also forms a new pattern in the production of religious authority. Digital algorithms, virtual communities, and interaction between users contribute to the formation of a reception of the Qur'an that differs from traditional learning models. As a result, the meaning of the Qur'an is increasingly influenced by global communication networks that allow for the rapid exchange of cross-cultural experiences.

However, most research on the reception of the Qur'an still uses *Reception Theory* as a descriptive instrument. The focus of research is generally directed at the identification of forms of community reception, such as the ritual reading of the Qur'an, the use of verses in medicine, khataman traditions, or the aesthetic practice of calligraphy. This approach has indeed succeeded in showing the diversity of social practices, but it has not been able to explain the conceptual mechanisms that cause the transformation of meaning when the Qur'an moves from

¹⁸ Dzuriyyatun Toyyibah Akhyar, 'Functional Reception of The Practice of Shalawat Syajaratul An-Nuquud at The Nurul Ishlah Islamic Boarding School in Jeraeng', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 2 (2025): 17–22, <https://doi.org/10.56566/jki.v2i2.379>.

one culture to another. In other words, reception theory is still used to document social phenomena, not as a paradigm that explains the process of forming meaning systematically.

These limitations show that there is room for the development of theories that are more in line with the characteristics of *Qur'anic Studies*. If in Jauss's theory the focus lies on the relationship between the text and the reader, then in the study of the Qur'an it is necessary to add the dimension of the authority of revelation as an element that does not change. In addition, cultural factors, religious institutions, communication media, and the collective memory of the community must also be positioned as variables that affect the reception process. Thus, the transformation of the meaning of the Qur'an is not understood as a change in the content of revelation, but as a result of the interaction between the authority of the text and the ever-changing social context.

Abdullah Saeed's contextual approach has actually opened up space for such a perspective by emphasizing the importance of considering social changes in understanding the verses of the Qur'an. However, Saeed's focus is still on interpretive methodology so it has not explained how the community of readers collectively produces different cultural practices of the same verse.¹⁹ Therefore, *Reception Theory* can serve as a complement to contextual hermeneutics by extending attention from interpretive activities to the social process of meaning-formation.

In addition, the reception approach also contributes to the dialogue between *Qur'anic Studies* and the social sciences. In the perspective of interpretive anthropology, culture is understood as a system of meaning constructed through symbols and social practices. When the Qur'an enters a community, the text does not exist in an empty space, but interacts with the local traditions, power structures, language, education, and historical memory of the community. This interaction is what leads to the formation of various different forms of actualization of the Qur'an without changing the normative status of the text. Therefore, reception theory allows *Qur'anic Studies* to move from textual analysis to relational analysis that connects texts, readers, cultures, and social practices within a single conceptual framework.

Thus, *Reception Theory* not only expands the scope of analysis in the study of the Qur'an, but also offers a new perspective on the relationship between revelation and society. This approach shows that the dynamics of the meaning of the Qur'an are the result of a continuous process of dialogue between the text that is fixed and the ever-changing community of readers. However, classical reception theory is still not entirely adequate to explain the special character of the Qur'an as a holy book with normative authority. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a new conceptual framework that integrates the authority of the text, the reader's horizon, cultural context, social practices, and the process of actualization of meaning into a single analytical paradigm. This need is the basis for the development of Qur'anic Reception Theory, which will be discussed in the next section as the main contribution of this research.

Developing Qur'anic Reception Theory: A Conceptual Framework for Cross-Cultural Meaning Transformation

The discussion in the previous section shows that the classical interpretation approach, contemporary hermeneutics, and the study of *the Living Qur'an* have made a significant contribution to the development of *Qur'anic Studies*. Classical interpretation manages to maintain the textual authority of the Qur'an through linguistic, historical, and normative analysis. Contemporary hermeneutics expands the space of interpretation by taking into account

¹⁹ Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*.

changing social contexts, while the study of *the Living Qur'an* shows how the Qur'an is present in the cultural practices and daily lives of Muslim communities. However, these three approaches still have limitations in explaining the conceptual mechanism of how the meaning of the Qur'an undergoes transformation when moving from one cultural space to another. This condition indicates the need to develop a new theoretical framework that specifically explains the relationship between the Qur'anic text, readers, culture, and social practices in the process of meaning-making.

The need for new theories is also driven by the changing global social landscape. Human mobility, migration, globalization, the development of digital media, and cross-cultural interaction have created new spaces for the dissemination and acceptance of the Qur'an. The same verse is now read by communities that have different languages, historical experiences, political systems, and cultural structures. As a result, the actualization of the values of the Qur'an no longer takes place homogeneously, but is influenced by various social factors that shape the way society understands and implements the message of revelation. In such a situation, a theory that is only oriented to the interpretation of the text is not sufficient to explain these dynamics.²⁰

Based on the synthesis of *Hans Robert Jauss's* Reception Theory, Wolfgang Iser's *Reader Response Theory*, Abdullah Saeed's contextual approach, and the development of *the study of the Living Qur'an*, this study proposes a new conceptual framework called Qur'anic Reception Theory (QRT).²¹ In contrast to the theory of literary reception which places the reader at the center of the formation of meaning, the Qur'anic Reception Theory departs from the assumption that the authority of the Qur'anic text remains normative and unchanged, while transformation occurs at the level of cultural reception carried out by the community of readers. Thus, this theory does not view meaning as something completely relative, but as the result of the interaction between a fixed text and a dynamic social context.

The main proposition of the Qur'anic Reception Theory is that the textual meaning of the Qur'an is stable, while its social meaning is dynamic through the process of cultural reception. That is, revelation as a divine text remains a constant authority, but the actualization of meaning in people's lives is influenced by the reader's experience horizon, cultural structure, social institutions, technological developments, and collective memory. Therefore, this theory makes a clear distinction between textual meaning and received meaning. *Textual meaning* refers to the normative meaning contained in the text of the Qur'an, while *received meaning* is a meaning that is brought to life through social practices, cultural symbols, and people's religious experiences. To explain this process, the Qur'anic Reception Theory is built on five main dimensions.

First, Textual Authority. This dimension affirms that the Qur'an is the main source of meaning that has normative and theological authority. The entire process of reception departs from the same text, so this theory does not assume that revelation undergoes a change in substance. Thus, the differences that arise in society are not due to changes in texts, but due to differences in the way society accepts and actualizes the text.

Second, Reader's Horizon. Adopting the concept of *horizon of expectations* from Hans Robert Jauss, this theory views that each individual and community brings with it historical experiences, education, language, social identity, and cultural traditions when interacting with the Qur'an. The horizon affects which aspects of a verse are considered most relevant to the needs of society. Therefore, readers in Indonesia, Turkey, Africa, and Europe can give different

²⁰ Akhmad Sujai, 'Study of the al Qur'an with a Modern Approach', *Jurnal AlifLam: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 3, no. 1 (2022): 70–79, <https://doi.org/10.51700/aliflam.v3i1.430>.

²¹ Jauss, 'Toward an Aesthetic of Reception: Theory and History of Literature'.

emphasis to the same verse without having to change its normative content.

Third, Cultural Mediation. This dimension is a new development that has not yet been explicitly described in classical reception theory. Once the reader interacts with the text, the meaning is not directly embodied in social actions, but is first mediated by culture. Local languages, customs, education systems, religious authorities, social organizations, and even digital media serve as mediators that shape the way people understand the Qur'an. Therefore, culture is seen as a space for transformation of meaning that explains why religious expression differs in different Muslim regions.

Fourth, Social Embodiment. The meaning of the Qur'an is then manifested in concrete actions through rituals, education, traditions, art, law, and social behavior. At this stage, the Qur'an is not only understood as a text, but becomes part of people's daily lives. The tradition of tahlilan, khataman, calligraphy, Qur'an learning, Islamic philanthropy, and digital da'wah are examples of how reception has developed into a social practice that strengthens the collective identity of Muslims.

Kelima, Meaning Transformation. Dimensi terakhir menjelaskan bahwa makna Al-Qur'an mengalami transformasi pada tingkat sosial dan budaya, bukan pada tingkat teks. Transformasi tersebut berlangsung secara berkelanjutan mengikuti perubahan zaman, perkembangan teknologi, mobilitas masyarakat, dan interaksi antarbudaya. Dengan demikian, satu ayat dapat menghasilkan berbagai bentuk aktualisasi sesuai dengan konteks sosial tanpa menghilangkan otoritas normatif wahyu.

These five dimensions show that the Qur'anic Reception Theory not only adopts the theory of literary reception, but also reconstructs it to fit the epistemological character of the Qur'an as a holy book. Therefore, this theory offers a new perspective that the dynamics of the meaning of the Qur'an must be understood as a process of continuous dialogue between revelation, readers, culture, and social practices.

Based on the five dimensions described earlier, this study proposes a conceptual model called Qur'anic Reception Theory (QRT). This model was developed to explain how the meaning of the Qur'an moves from textual authority to social actualization through the process of cultural reception. In contrast to the theory of interpretation which focuses on the search for the meaning of the text and *the classical Reception Theory* which places the reader as the center of the formation of meaning, QRT views that the process of interpreting the Qur'an is a dialogical relationship between the text, the reader, culture, and social practices. In this framework, meaning is not understood as something that is completely attached to the text or fully formed by the reader, but is the result of an ongoing interaction between normative revelation and dynamic cultural reality.

Conceptually, the process can be explained through five interconnected stages. The first stage is Textual Authority, which is the existence of the Qur'an as the main source of Islamic values and norms. At this stage, the text is positioned as an epistemological foundation that has not undergone substantial changes. The second stage is Reader's Horizon, which is the process when individuals or communities read the Qur'an based on their historical experiences, education level, language, social identity, and living conditions. It is this reader's horizon that causes attention to certain aspects of the verse to differ from one community to another.

The third stage is Cultural Mediation, which is the process when the meaning obtained by the reader interacts with the cultural structure. In this stage, educational institutions, religious organizations, local traditions, mass media, digital media, and even the political system function as mediators that determine how the message of the Qur'an is understood and disseminated. The fourth stage is Social Embodiment, which is the process of actualizing

meaning in the form of social actions. The values of the Qur'an are then realized through worship practices, religious rituals, philanthropy, education, law, art, and other social activities. The last stage is Meaning Transformation, which is the emergence of different forms of meaning actualization according to the cultural characteristics of each community. This transformation does not mean changing the content of revelation, but rather shows the flexibility of the Qur'anic values when implemented in different social contexts. Based on this model, this study proposes four theoretical propositions as the basis of Qur'anic Reception Theory.

The first proposition is that the textual authority of the Qur'an is fixed, while the cultural reception is dynamic. That is, revelation as a divine text has an unchanging normative authority, but its understanding and actualization evolves according to social, cultural, and historical changes in society. Thus, this theory clearly distinguishes between text stability and reception dynamics.

The second proposition, the reader's horizon is the main factor that influences the formation of the social meaning of the Qur'an. Life experiences, education, intellectual traditions, cultural identity, and social position cause each community to have a different focus of reading on the same verse. Therefore, the variation in reception is a logical consequence of the diversity of human experience, not a deviation from the text.

The third proposition is that culture functions as a mediator in the process of transforming the meaning of the Qur'an. Meaning does not move directly from text to social practice, but first undergoes a negotiation process through cultural values, language, symbols, institutions, and social structures of society. Therefore, culture becomes a space where the meaning of the Qur'an is translated into actions that are relevant to local needs.

The fourth proposition, the transformation of the meaning of the Qur'an is a process of social reception, not a change in the text of revelation. In other words, the diversity of religious practices in various Muslim regions does not indicate a change in the content of the Qur'an, but rather shows the diversity of ways in which people bring the messages of the Qur'an to life in their lives.

These four propositions distinguish the Qur'anic Reception Theory from previous approaches. In classical interpretation, primary attention is directed to the explanation of the meaning of the verse through the analysis of language, history, and the context of revelation. The relationship built is linear, that is, from text to interpretation. Meanwhile, contemporary hermeneutics expands analysis by connecting the text and the reader's context, but still puts the process of interpretation as the center of attention.²² The *Living Qur'an* focuses on the social manifestation of the Qur'an through community practice, but most of the research is still descriptive and has not formulated a conceptual mechanism that explains how the process of transformation of meaning takes place.

In contrast, the Qur'anic Reception Theory integrates the advantages of all three approaches. From the commentary, this theory maintains the principle of textual authority. From hermeneutics, this theory adopts the importance of the context of the reader. From the *Living Qur'an*, this theory takes the dimension of social practice as a form of actualization of meaning. These three elements are then combined with Reception Theory through the addition of the dimension of cultural mediation, resulting in a model that explains the process of transforming the meaning of the Qur'an more completely. Thus, QRT is not just an adaptation of

²² Dedi Masri and Randy Putra Alamsyah, 'Force Majeure in Abortion: A Review of Ulama Fatwas and Indonesian Health Law', *Malaysian Journal of Syariah and Law* 14, no. 1 (April 2026): 61–76, <https://doi.org/10.33102/mjssl.vol14no1.1179>.

the theory of literary reception, but a theoretical reconstruction that is adapted to the epistemological character of the Qur'an as a holy book.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in the effort to expand the scope of *Qur'anic Studies* from an interpretation-centered paradigm to a reception-centered paradigm. So far, the study of the Qur'an has asked more questions about "what is the meaning of verses?" or "how should verses be interpreted?". Through Qur'anic Reception Theory, the question is expanded to "how do societies construct the meaning of the Qur'an in different cultural contexts?" This shift in perspective opens up a wider space for dialogue between *Qur'anic Studies*, anthropology, sociology of religion, cultural studies, and communication sciences. Thus, the study of the Qur'an not only serves to explain the content of the text, but also to explain the social dynamics that arise as a consequence of society's interaction with sacred texts.

The methodological implications of this theory are also quite significant. Research on the Qur'an is no longer only oriented to interpret analysis, but can be directed to examine the process of reception through ethnographic approaches, phenomenology, cultural anthropology, discourse analysis, and digital media studies. For example, research on the tradition of Qur'anic khataman in Indonesia, the use of Qur'anic verses in digital da'wah, Qur'an-based philanthropic practices, or the formation of diaspora Muslim identity can be analyzed using the five dimensions of Qur'anic Reception Theory. This shows that the theory developed in this study has a wide range of explorations to explain various social phenomena related to the Qur'an.

In addition to making a methodological contribution, Qur'anic Reception Theory also has practical implications for the development of Islamic education and intercultural dialogue. The understanding that the transformation of meaning occurs at the level of reception, not at the level of revelation, can encourage a more inclusive attitude towards the diversity of religious expression of Muslims in different regions of the world. Differences in social practices are no longer seen as a threat to the authority of the Qur'an, but as a form of actualization of universal values influenced by the cultural context of each society. This perspective is important in building tolerance, strengthening cross-cultural dialogue, and developing Qur'anic studies that are more responsive to the dynamics of global society.

Thus, Qur'anic Reception Theory offers a new paradigm in *Qur'anic Studies* that connects the authority of the text, the reader's horizon, cultural mediation, social actualization, and the transformation of meaning in one integrated analytical framework. This model complements the approaches to interpretation, hermeneutics, and *the Living Qur'an* without replacing it. Rather, this theory serves as a conceptual bridge that explains how the Qur'an retains its normative authority while being able to exist dynamically in various cultural spaces. Therefore, Qur'anic Reception Theory can be positioned as a new conceptual contribution to the development of contemporary *Qur'anic Studies* while opening up a new research agenda regarding the relationship between revelation, culture, and society in the global era.

Theoretical and Practical Implications of Qur'anic Reception Theory for Contemporary Qur'anic Studies

The development of Qur'anic Reception Theory (QRT) not only offers a new conceptual framework for understanding the transformation of the meaning of the Qur'an across cultures, but also has far-reaching implications for the direction of development of *contemporary Qur'anic Studies*. Over the past few decades, the study of the Qur'an has developed through three main currents, namely tafsir, hermeneutics, and *the Living Qur'an*. Each approach has an important contribution to enriching the understanding of the Qur'an, but all three tend to work in different areas of analysis. Tafsir is oriented to the meaning of the text, hermeneutics focuses on the

process of interpretation, while *the Living Qur'an* examines the social manifestations of the Qur'an in people's lives. As a result, there is no paradigm that comprehensively describes the relationship between textual authority, readers, culture, and social practices in a single, integrated analytical framework. Qur'anic Reception Theory seeks to fill this void by presenting a perspective that places reception as the main process of transformation of meaning without shifting the normative authority of the Qur'an.²³

The first theoretical implication of QRT is the paradigm shift from a text-centered approach to a text-reader-culture approach. In the classical paradigm, meaning is understood primarily as the result of the analysis of the text through linguistic, historical, and historical devices. In QRT, text remains the primary source of authority, but social meaning is understood as the result of interactions between text, readers, and cultural contexts. Thus, this theory does not replace the methodology of interpretation, but rather expands the space for analysis so that it is able to explain why a single verse can give birth to different social expressions in various Muslim communities.²⁴

The second implication is the strengthening of the interdisciplinary character in *Qur'anic Studies*. So far, the study of the Qur'an has interacted more with Islamic sciences such as tafsir, hadith, fiqh, and fiqh proposals. Through QRT, the study of the Qur'an can build a more intensive dialogue with cultural anthropology, sociology of religion, communication science, media studies, and cultural studies. This interdisciplinary perspective allows researchers to understand the Qur'an as a *living text* in the dynamics of society, not solely as an object of normative interpretation. This kind of approach is in line with the development of contemporary religious research that increasingly emphasizes the importance of social, cultural, and historical dimensions in understanding religious practice.

The third implication is related to the development of research methodologies. Qur'anic Reception Theory opens up opportunities to use various empirical approaches to study the reception of the Qur'an. Ethnographic research can be used to understand the practice of Qur'an recitation in a particular community. Phenomenological approaches can explain an individual's religious experience when interacting with the Qur'an. Discourse analysis can examine how the verses of the Qur'an are reproduced in mass media and social media. Meanwhile, *digital ethnography* can be used to analyze the transformation of the reception of the Qur'an in the digital space. Thus, this theory expands the *research methods of Qur'anic Studies* from the dominance of textual studies to research that connects texts with social reality.

In the context of the global community, QRT also contributes to the understanding of the diversity of Islamic expressions. So far, differences in religious practices are often understood as differences in interpretation that have the potential to give rise to claims of a single truth. Through the perspective of reception, the diversity is understood as a consequence of the difference in cultural context that affects the actualization of the values of the Qur'an. Thus, this theory encourages a more inclusive approach to understanding the diversity of Islamic practices without necessarily reducing the authority of revelation as the primary source of teaching.

Another equally important implication is in the field of Islamic education. The learning of the Qur'an has often been oriented towards the ability to read, memorize, and understand the

²³ Abu Bakar et al., 'From Precarity to Divine Sufficiency: A Qur'anic Response to the Neoliberal Structuring of Marriage Delay', *Kalam* 20, no. 1 (2026): 119–42, <https://doi.org/10.24042/202620131019>.

²⁴ Lathifatul Asna and Nasihun Amin, 'Hermeneutics of Reception by Hans Robert Jauss: An Alternative Approach Toward Quranic Studies', *International Journal Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* 24, no. 2 (2022): 160–71, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ihya.24.2.13092>.

content of verses. QRT offers the perspective that Qur'an education also needs to develop learners' ability to understand how Qur'anic values are implemented in various cultural contexts. This approach will help students see that the universality of the Qur'an is actually seen through its ability to dialogue with diverse social realities. Therefore, learning the Qur'an not only produces textual understanding, but also cultural sensitivity and the ability to read the dynamics of contemporary society.

In the digital era, the implications of QRT are increasingly relevant. Social media, video platforms, podcasts, and Qur'an apps have changed the pattern of Muslims' interaction with their holy book. Religious authority is no longer only in educational institutions or traditional clerics, but is also formed through digital networks that allow the rapid dissemination of knowledge. This condition results in new forms of reception that are influenced by algorithms, virtual communities, and digital culture. Therefore, QRT can be an effective analytical framework to explain how the transformation of the meaning of the Qur'an takes place in the digital space without relinquishing the relationship with the authority of the text.

In addition to making academic contributions, QRT has practical implications for the development of cross-cultural dialogue. By understanding that the variation in religious practices is the result of the process of cultural reception, people can see diversity as a form of actualization of the values of the Qur'an in different contexts, not as a form of deviation from the teachings of Islam. This perspective can strengthen tolerance, expand dialogue between Muslim communities, and encourage the development of more contextual education and da'wah policies.

However, the Qur'anic Reception Theory also has some limitations. This article is a conceptual research so the model offered has not been tested through field research on various Muslim communities. Therefore, further research needs to test the validity of this theory through empirical studies in different cultural contexts, such as Muslim communities in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa, as well as Muslim diaspora communities in Europe and America. The empirical testing will strengthen the explorability of the theory while allowing the refinement of the interdimensional relationships that have been formulated.

Based on the overall discussion, Qur'anic Reception Theory can be positioned as a new paradigm that bridges the study of interpretation, hermeneutics, and *the Living Qur'an*. This theory asserts that the transformation of the meaning of the Qur'an does not occur at the level of the text, but rather at the level of cultural reception influenced by the reader's horizon, cultural mediation, and social practices. Thus, QRT makes a conceptual contribution to the development of *Qur'anic Studies* that are more interdisciplinary, responsive to social changes, and able to explain the dynamics of the relationship between revelation and society in a global context.

Conclusion

This research shows that the transformation of the meaning of the Qur'an in various cultural spaces cannot be adequately explained only through classical interpretation approaches, contemporary hermeneutics, and the study of *the Living Qur'an*. Classical interpretation focuses on textual authority and meaning, hermeneutics emphasizes the process of contextual interpretation, while the *Living Qur'an* describes more of the social manifestations of the Qur'an in people's lives. Although these three approaches have made significant contributions to the development of *Qur'anic Studies*, there is no theoretical framework that systematically explains how the meaning of the Qur'an undergoes a transformation when it is accepted by communities with different cultural, historical, and social backgrounds. Through a

synthesis between Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser's Reception Theory, Abdullah Saeed's contextual approach, and the development of the study *of the Living Qur'an*, this study confirms that the transformation of meaning does not occur at the level of a fixed and authoritative revelatory text, but rather at the level of cultural reception influenced by the reader's horizon, cultural mediation, and social practice.

Based on these findings, this study offers Qur'anic Reception Theory (QRT) as a new conceptual contribution to *Qur'anic Studies*. QRT is built on five main dimensions, namely Textual Authority, Reader's Horizon, Cultural Mediation, Social Embodiment, and Meaning Transformation, which integrally explain the relationship between the Qur'anic text, readers, culture, and social actualization. This framework expands the paradigm of Qur'anic study from an interpretation-centered approach to a culturally reception-oriented approach, thus being able to explain why the same verse can give birth to diverse religious expressions without changing the normative authority of the Qur'an. Thus, the Qur'anic Reception Theory is not intended to replace interpretation or hermeneutics, but complements it through a more interdisciplinary perspective in understanding the relationship between revelation and society. Further research is expected to test this conceptual model through cross-cultural empirical studies so that the validity and explorability of the theory are stronger in explaining the dynamics of the reception of the Qur'an in the global era.

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