



Memes as Digital Exegesis: Reinterpreting the Prohibition of Muslim Women Traveling Without a Mahram on the Instagram Account @ukhtiakhiantiselfie

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how Islamic memes on Instagram serve as digital interpretations of hadith, focusing specifically on the prohibition for Muslim women to travel without a mahram, as presented on the account @ukhtiakhiantiselfie. The study employs Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory consisting of pre-understanding, distanciation, and appropriation to analyze the process of meaning transformation that occurs when hadith is presented visually through social media. Using qualitative content analysis, the research examines how selected memes reflect, reinterpret, or even simplify the original meaning of hadith texts. The findings reveal that meme-based da'wah not only conveys religious messages in a concise and appealing format, but also opens space for new interpretations shaped by the readers' social context. While some memes tend to reinforce a literal understanding of hadith, others offer implicit room for contextualization. This indicates that meme culture participates in the dynamic construction of religious meaning in the digital era. However, the simplification of sacred texts into visual content poses interpretive challenges, particularly when context and scholarly explanation are omitted. This study concludes that social media can act both as a platform for religious dissemination and as a site of interpretative negotiation between text, media, and audience.

Keywords: Digital Interpretation; Hadith; Memes; Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics; Women

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana meme dakwah di Instagram berperan sebagai bentuk tafsir digital terhadap hadis, dengan fokus pada larangan muslimah bepergian tanpa mahram seperti yang disampaikan oleh akun @ukhtiakhiantiselfie. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan hermeneutika Paul Ricoeur yang mencakup pra-pemahaman, distansiasi, dan pemaknaan Kembali untuk menganalisis transformasi makna hadis ketika disajikan dalam format visual di media sosial. Dengan metode analisis konten kualitatif, penelitian ini menelaah bagaimana meme yang dipilih merepresentasikan, menafsirkan ulang, atau menyederhanakan makna hadis. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meme dakwah tidak hanya menyampaikan pesan keagamaan secara singkat dan menarik, tetapi juga membuka ruang tafsir baru yang dibentuk oleh konteks sosial pembacanya. Sebagian meme memperkuat pemaknaan literal hadis, sementara yang lain menyiratkan kemungkinan kontekstualisasi. Ini menandakan bahwa budaya meme ikut terlibat dalam konstruksi makna agama yang dinamis di era digital. Namun demikian, penyederhanaan teks hadis ke dalam bentuk visual menimbulkan tantangan penafsiran, terutama ketika konteks dan penjelasan keilmuan tidak disertakan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa media sosial dapat berfungsi ganda: sebagai sarana penyebaran dakwah dan sebagai arena negosiasi makna antara teks, media, dan pembaca.

Kata Kunci: Hermeneutika Paul Ricoeur; Meme; Perempuan; Hadis; Tafsir Digital

Introduction

At present, the development of science and technology are developing very rapidly. Governments, academic communities, and various social groups often face

challenges in keeping pace with these changes. This condition is also influenced by the uneven understanding of the direction and impact of technological development. At the same time, young people especially children and adolescents demonstrate remarkable creativity on social media (Alfani et al., 2025). They do not only use technology but also produce new forms of knowledge through digital platforms (Restendy, 2019). Instagram has become a popular medium used to deliver Islamic preaching through a more engaging visual approach. Through this platform, many da‘wah accounts present various themes including religious issues related to women. One account that has gained attention is @ukhtiakhiantiselfie which frequently discusses topics related to the lifestyle of contemporary Muslim women including the issue of women traveling without a mahram.

In the modern era marked by rapid technological progress and social change, discussions about women’s freedom and mobility have become increasingly prominent. One issue that often generates debate concerns long distance travel undertaken by women. Social change has made mobility an essential part of everyday life. Many women today work outside the home in order to support themselves and their families. Some of them also travel long distances or even work abroad without being accompanied by a mahram (Istifarin & Rochmawati, 2024). One hadith narrated by Imam al Bukhari No. 1030 is often cited as the basis for this prohibition. The hadith clearly states that a woman should not undertake *safar* without a mahram. This issue becomes increasingly relevant when many contemporary Muslim women, including those active on social media such as Instagram, share experiences of traveling alone. Such practices raise questions about how they understand and interpret the hadith within the context of modern life (Al-Asqalani, 2008).

Studies on meme interpretation in social media indicate that memes are no longer merely humorous content, but rather cultural practices that collectively produce and distribute meaning. Shifman (2013) conceptualizes memes as *units of popular culture* embedded with ideology, while Milner (2018) and Wiggins and Bowers (2015) frame them as participatory media and discursive artifacts operating through intertextuality and the negotiation of user-generated meanings. In religious contexts, Bunt (2018) highlights the emergence of decentralized interpretive authority, further reinforced by Nisa (2018) and Kloos et al., (2025), who argue that the logics of virality and platform algorithms encourage simplification and the dominance of particular narratives, thereby enabling rapid yet potentially biased meaning-making processes. This dynamic is evident in the study by Putri Ghoida’ Habibillah and Miski, which demonstrates that memes on the prohibition of *tabarruj* based on Q.S. al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 not only convey normative messages but also construct myths through layered visualizations scriptural citation, legal framing, and supplementary narratives that shape public perceptions of women (Habibillah

& Miski, 2023). This finding resonates with Nadia's study, which shows that memes themed around "women's deceit" generate mythologies through the decontextualized amalgamation of Qur'anic verses, thereby reinforcing misogynistic tendencies (Nadia, 2022). Meanwhile, Nurdin illustrates that social media platforms, such as the @Quranreview account, function as new discursive spaces that expand interpretive authority from traditional scholars to the broader public through accessible visual-thematic formats, while simultaneously transforming established patterns of authority and methodology (Nurdin, 2023). Accordingly, meme-based interpretation on social media can be understood as a form of popular hermeneutics that is visual, participatory, and decentralized, yet also problematic due to its tendency to oversimplify texts and reproduce ideological biases in digital spaces.

Building on this framework, the issue of the prohibition of women traveling without a mahram has likewise undergone reproduction and reinterpretation within digital spaces. Previous studies have examined this theme from various perspectives, such as Baykal (2023), who compares classical scholarly views between the Sunni majority and Ibn Ḥazm, and Miski and Istiqomah (2024), who demonstrate that the circulation of hadith on the prohibition of travel in meme form tends to reinforce patriarchal perspectives. Meanwhile, Sahran and Hasanah (2018), offer a contextual reading through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical approach, although their analysis remains largely theoretical and does not engage with the lived experiences of contemporary Muslim women, particularly in social media contexts. Therefore, despite the growing body of scholarship on memes and hadith, a significant gap remains in examining how meme-based digital practices specifically reinterpret the hadith on women's travel restrictions on Instagram. This gap is further underscored by the absence of studies focusing on the @ukhtiakhiantiselfie account through a Ricoeurian hermeneutical lens. Accordingly, this study seeks to fill this gap through an investigation entitled *Memes as Digital Exegesis: Reinterpreting the Prohibition of Muslim Women Traveling Without a Mahram on the Instagram Account @ukhtiakhiantiselfie*, with a particular focus on analyzing visual forms, narrative constructions, and the dynamics of interpretation within contemporary social media environments.

Based on this background, the article addresses several academic questions. The first question concerns how memes on the account @ukhtiakhiantiselfie reinterpret the prohibition of Muslim women traveling without a mahram. The second question explores how the hermeneutic approach of Paul Ricoeur can be used to understand the transformation of the meaning of this hadith in digital media. The study proceeds from the assumption that the prohibition of Muslim women traveling without a mahram is often discussed in theoretical terms and has not fully engaged with the realities of contemporary Muslim women. The novelty

of this research lies in combining modern theories of interpretation with the hermeneutic framework of Paul Ricoeur. The study therefore examines how a Muslim woman presents her travel experiences without a mahram through the Instagram account *@ukhtiakhiantiselfie* by employing the hermeneutic approach of Paul Ricoeur.

Research Methods

In this study, the researcher applies the hermeneutic approach of Paul Ricoeur to understand the hadith concerning the prohibition of women traveling without a mahram. This approach views a text not only from its linguistic dimension but also from the way its meaning may develop when it is interpreted by different readers in different times and contexts (Ricoeur, 1976). Through this framework, the study attempts to reread the hadith within the context of contemporary Muslim women, particularly in the environment of social media. The contribution of this research lies in its effort to connect classical interpretations of hadith with the lived experiences of modern women. It also seeks to open a space for a more contextual, reflective, and relevant understanding of religious teachings in response to contemporary social developments.

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative-interpretive design by analyzing selected memes from the Instagram account *@ukhtiakhiantiselfie* as primary data. These memes are treated as contemporary “texts” that reinterpret the hadith through visual and narrative elements. The analysis is conducted in three stages: first, a structural reading of the hadith and its classical interpretations to identify its original meanings and legal formulations; second, an examination of the memes’ visual and textual components to uncover how meaning is reconstructed in the digital space; and third, a hermeneutic interpretation that bridges the gap between the original context of the hadith and the present context of its reception among social media users, particularly Muslim women.

Results and discussion

This section discusses several key aspects of the study. First, memes on social media are understood as a form of digital interpretation that represents the dissemination of religious messages through visual culture in digital spaces. Second, the hadith concerning the prohibition of Muslim women traveling without a mahram is examined as the normative basis of the discourse represented in the meme. Third, Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics with its three stages of interpretation is presented as the theoretical framework for the analysis. Fourth, a content analysis of the meme posted by the Instagram account *@ukhtiakhiantiselfie* is conducted using Ricoeur’s hermeneutical approach in order to uncover the meanings embedded in its textual and visual representations. Finally, the study discusses the relevance of

Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics in the context of digital da'wah, particularly in understanding how religious messages are interpreted and disseminated through social media.

1.1. Memes on Social Media as Digital Interpretation

In modern communication, memes are understood as ideas, behaviors, or styles that are transmitted from one individual to another within a cultural community (Andi Nahya Assaba Sabina et al., 2025). The term was first introduced by Richard Dawkins in 1976 in his work *The Selfish Gene*. In this book, Dawkins describes memes as cultural units that develop, replicate, and spread among humans through imitation (Cahyaimani, 2025). Over time, internet memes have become an important element of digital culture. They commonly appear in the form of images, jokes, or symbolic expressions that circulate widely across online platforms. Their rapid circulation plays a significant role in shaping how people communicate and express ideas in the digital era (Rahmad Nur Munthe et al., 2026).

Within the field of da'wah, memes function as a form of visual communication used to convey religious messages in a concise, engaging, and accessible way. By combining images, videos, and creative text arrangements, da'wah memes are able to communicate Islamic values through a more relaxed and appealing approach. Their rapid and borderless distribution makes them an effective medium for religious outreach, especially for younger audiences who are closely connected with visual culture on social media platforms such as Instagram (Pratamanti et al., 2021).

Memes may also be understood as visual media that create opportunities for multiple interpretations in digital spaces. They do not only deliver explicit messages but also contain implicit meanings that may be interpreted differently by each individual. Such differences in interpretation are often shaped by the social and cultural backgrounds of the audience. In the context of da'wah, memes serve as a communication medium that allows audiences to interpret religious messages in diverse ways (Sunaryanto & Rizal, 2023). The meme concerning the prohibition of *safar* shared by the Instagram account @ukhtiakhiantiselfie illustrates how religious interpretation can appear in digital environments. This phenomenon shows that memes function not only as communication tools but also as representations of religious interpretation in digital media including, the dissemination of hadith related to the prohibition of *safar*.

1.2. The Prohibition of Muslim Women Traveling Without a Mahram in Hadith

The discussion of women traveling without a mahram continues to attract scholarly attention. This issue is closely related to several prophetic traditions that state that women should not undertake long journeys without being accompanied by a mahram. These traditions are recorded in a number of well-known hadith collections. One example appears in the narration of Imam al-Bukhari no. 1030 in

the chapter on shortening the prayer and the duration of stay that still permits the practice of qasr prayer. The chapter also discusses the distance of travel that allows a person to shorten the prayer (Al-Asqalani, 2008).

حَدَّثَنَا مُسَدَّدٌ قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى عَنْ عُثَيْدٍ اللَّهِ أَخْبَرَنِي نَافِعٌ عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا عَنِ النَّبِيِّ قَالَ: «لَا تُسَافِرُ الْمَرْأَةُ ثَلَاثًا إِلَّا مَعَ ذِي مَحْرَمٍ». تَابِعَهُ
أَحْمَدُ عَنْ ابْنِ الْمُبَارَكِ عَنْ عُثَيْدٍ اللَّهِ عَنْ نَافِعٍ عَنْ ابْنِ عُمَرَ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ.

Translation:

Musaddad narrated to us: He said that Yahya narrated to us from 'Ubayd Allah: Nafi' reported to me from Ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with them both) from the Prophet (peace be upon him) who said: A woman should not travel for more than three days except with a Dhi-Mahram (Bilal, 2012).

The hadith concerning the prohibition of women traveling without a mahram has become an important legal reference in Islamic jurisprudence when discussing women's mobility. This hadith is recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari no. 1030, which states: لَا تُسَافِرُ الْمَرْأَةُ ثَلَاثًا إِلَّا مَعَ ذِي مَحْرَمٍ meaning "A woman should not travel for three days except with a mahram." This narration is often used by Muslim scholars as a basis for formulating legal regulations that restrict women's travel, particularly in order to ensure their safety and protection. In the study of fiqh this hadith plays a significant role in explaining the rules and conditions related to women's journeys, both for long distance travel and for situations that may involve potential risks if undertaken without the presence of a mahram (Istifarin & Rochmawati, 2024).

During the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), travel conditions were very different from those of the present day. The available means of transportation were limited to riding animals such as camels and horses. Travel routes often passed through vast desert areas far from residential settlements. Journeys under these conditions frequently involved serious risks including, crime and attacks by bandits (Al-Suyuthi, 2009). In addition, social perceptions at that time viewed women who traveled alone as facing a high risk to their safety and personal dignity (Aini, 2025). For this reason the prohibition of women traveling without a mahram mentioned in the hadith was essentially intended to provide protection from potential dangers that could arise during travel in that historical context.

Travel in the modern era has undergone significant changes compared to the time of the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him. Transportation today is faster, safer, and more comfortable. It is also supported by more reliable security systems. Many Muslim women now travel independently for purposes of education, employment, and social activities both within their countries and abroad (Tyrer & Fauzia, 2006). This situation creates a need to reinterpret the hadith concerning the prohibition of travel without a mahram so that it remains relevant to contemporary conditions (Shakona et al., 2015). In this regard, contemporary scholars such as

Yusuf al Qardhawi emphasize the importance of considering aspects of public benefit and security. This perspective raises an important question about whether the prohibition should still be understood as an absolute rule in a modern context where travel conditions are generally safer and more organized (Sadijah, 2024).

In the development of digital da‘wah, the issue of the prohibition of women traveling without a mahram is also frequently discussed on social media. One example can be found in the Instagram account *@ukhtiakhiantiselfie*, which often uses memes as a medium for conveying religious messages. This account presents hadith messages in a communicative visual format and employs simple language that is easily understood by the millennial generation. The memes shared do not merely display the text of the hadith in a literal manner; they are also complemented by engaging illustrations that reflect everyday situations, such as images of women traveling with modern equipment. Such a presentation makes memes an effective form of digital interpretation, as they enable audiences to quickly understand, discuss, and even reproduce religious messages within social media spaces (Miski, 2021). Through memes, therefore, the hadith message concerning the prohibition of safar is not only disseminated but also interpreted and recontextualized within the dynamics of digital culture.

One of the memes uploaded by the account *@ukhtiakhiantiselfie* presents the question: “Is it permissible for a Muslim woman to have a hobby of traveling without being accompanied by her mahram?” Visually, the meme depicts an illustration of a veiled woman standing beside a large suitcase, set against a pink background that conveys a soft and feminine atmosphere. The text and illustrations are presented in a simple and communicative manner, making them easily understandable for social media users. The message conveyed explicitly emphasizes that traveling without a mahram particularly for personal purposes such as traveling as a hobby is considered inconsistent with the provisions of Islamic law.

Based on this description, the meme uploaded by *@ukhtiakhiantiselfie* functions not only as a medium for disseminating religious messages but also as a representation of hadith interpretation within the digital sphere. The visuals, text, and context presented in the meme indicate a process of meaning-making that goes beyond the literal transmission of the hadith, involving the construction of meanings shaped by social media culture and the experiences of its users. Therefore, the following subsection will provide a more in-depth analysis of the meme’s content to examine how the hadith message concerning the prohibition of women traveling without a mahram is represented, interpreted, and contextualized within the practice of religious communication on social media.

1.3. Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics: Three Stages of Interpretation

Paul Ricoeur posits that a text is an open entity, perpetually subject to new interpretations because its meaning is not fixed but continuously evolves in accordance with the social, cultural, and historical context of its reader. In his approach, Ricoeur explains that the understanding of a text cannot be separated from the reader's experience and horizon, allowing the text's meaning to be reconstructed over time (Ricoeur, 1976). This idea is developed through three stages in the hermeneutic process, pre-understanding (the initial background of understanding brought by the reader), distanciation (which creates a distance between the text and the author's intention), and appropriation (the stage of integrating meaning into the reader's personal experience). Within this framework, each reading becomes an active and reflective process of constructing meaning that is relevant to the contemporary reader's reality (Fernandes et al., 2025).

In Interpretation Theory, Ricoeur explains that every reader understands a text based on a pre-understanding shaped by their experiences and background (Ricoeur, 1976). This pre-understanding is not an obstacle but rather the foundation for interpreting meaning dynamically. The process of interpretation seeks not only the author's intent but also establishes a connection between the text and the reader's context, allowing its meaning to continuously develop. Ricoeur rejects traditional approaches that are fixated on the original meaning of the text, and instead emphasizes that a text acquires new meaning when read by different generations. In his view, understanding is the result of a dialogue between the text and the reader's context, which is constantly changing over time (Mubarak & Yushi Mahabbatun Nafsi, 2024).

Paul Ricoeur emphasizes that distanciation occurs when a written text detaches itself from its author's original intent and its historical context. This process allows the text to become an independent entity, open to various new interpretations. This distance actually enriches meaning, as the text can be reread and interpreted according to the reader's social and cultural context, making it a source of continuously evolving understanding (Nensilanti et al., 2025).

Appropriation is a crucial stage in hermeneutics that demonstrates the reader's active engagement in interpreting a text according to their social and cultural context. Once the text is detached from its author's original intent through the process of distanciation, it becomes open to being reinterpreted in a way that is contextual and relevant to the contemporary reader's situation (Ricoeur, 1976). In this process, the reader does not merely understand the text's content passively but also connects it with the values, needs, and challenges encountered in their lives. Consequently, the meaning of a text is not fixed but is continually renewed through a dialogue between initial interpretations and new understandings born from the experiences of readers across different eras.

1.4. Analysis of Memes from @ukhtiakhiantiselfie Through Paul Ricoeur’s Theory of Interpretation

Before presenting the detailed discussion of the content analysis, this section first outlines a summary of the analysis of da'wah memes from the Instagram account @ukhtiakhiantiselfie using Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutical approach. The presentation in table form is intended to facilitate readers’ understanding of the relationship between the three stages of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, pre-understanding, distanciation, and appropriation and the key findings derived from the analytical process. Through this summary, readers are expected to obtain a systematic and comprehensive overview of how the hadith concerning the prohibition of traveling without a mahram is reinterpreted within the context of social media and contemporary realities.



Figure 1. Meme Depicting the Prohibition of Muslim Women Traveling (*Safar*) without a *Mahram*

Table 1. Content Analysis of the @ukhtiakhiantiselfie Meme through Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics

Hermeneutical Stage	Analytical Focus	Key Findings
Pre-understanding	The prior knowledge and experiences that readers bring before interpreting the text presented in the meme.	Contemporary Muslim women tend to possess a pre-understanding that women’s mobility is a normal phenomenon in the modern era, supported by advances in transportation and an increased sense of safety in travel.

		Consequently, readers do not automatically perceive the prohibition of <i>safar</i> as an absolute rule, but rather consider it conditionally based on contextual factors such as safety and the urgency of the journey.
Distanciation	The detachment of the text (hadith) from its historical context and original authority through its re-presentation in meme format.	The meme fragments and simplifies the hadith without including its historical background (e.g., security conditions during the Prophet's time) or its chain of transmission. This process creates a distance between the sacred text and its original context, thereby opening space for modern readers to reinterpret the message more flexibly in accordance with contemporary realities such as improved security and considerations of public welfare.
Appropriation	The process by which readers relate the meaning of the text to their personal experiences and present social context.	Readers connect the hadith's message with contemporary life. Two interpretive tendencies emerge: (1) understanding the prohibition as an expression of absolute obedience to religious teachings, and (2) interpreting it contextually, allowing travel without a <i>mahram</i> when it is conducted safely and for legitimate purposes in accordance with Islamic principles. This process indicates that interpretations of religious teachings are dynamic and continually adapt to changing social contexts.

The meme examined in this study was uploaded by the Instagram account @ukhtiakhiantiselfie. "The content presents a rhetorical question "Is it permissible for a Muslim woman to enjoy traveling without being accompanied by her mahram?"

placed at the top of the post, accompanied by a quotation of a hadith concerning the prohibition of women undertaking long journeys without a mahram." Functionally, this question is not merely rhetorical; rather, it also conveys a da'wah-oriented stance toward the phenomenon of women's mobility in the contemporary era.

From a visual perspective, the meme features an illustration of a veiled woman standing beside a red suitcase, set against a pink background that conveys a soft and feminine atmosphere. This simple and communicative design enables the religious message to be conveyed quickly to social media users. Such a presentation represents a contemporary pattern of digital da'wah that integrates appealing visual elements with excerpts of religious texts in order to broaden audience reach. Explicitly, the meme communicates that traveling without a mahram particularly for personal purposes such as a hobby of traveling is not in accordance with Islamic legal provisions as understood from the cited hadith. Through the simplification of the text and the omission of the hadith's historical context, the meme also opens space for the emergence of new, more popular and direct interpretations, although this process risks reducing the complexity of its original meaning.

The stage of pre-understanding refers to the knowledge and experiences that shape the reader's perspective in interpreting a text. In the context of this da'wah meme, contemporary Muslim women bring with them a prior understanding that women's mobility has become a common phenomenon in the digital era, in line with advances in transportation technology and the increasing sense of safety in travel (Istifarin & Rochmawati, 2024). This condition influences how they interpret hadiths concerning the prohibition of travel, which are no longer viewed as absolute restrictions but rather as regulations that require contextualization. For instance, readers who are accustomed to traveling independently for educational or professional purposes tend to understand the prohibition as conditional, taking into account factors such as safety and the urgency of the journey (Baykal, 2023). This pre-understanding also shapes the reader's initial response to the meme's content, allowing the message to be interpreted in diverse ways: some perceive it as an absolute prohibition, while others view it as a rule dependent on particular circumstances and contexts.

The stage of distanciation occurs when a text becomes detached from its original context and the author's intent, thereby opening possibilities for new interpretations. In this regard, memes function as a medium that encourages the process of distanciation through the simplification, fragmentation, or repackaging of hadith into an appealing visual format without including its historical background or chain of transmission (Miski & Istiqomah, 2024). For example, the meme posted by @ukhtiakhiantiselfie presents a hadith quotation regarding the prohibition of travel without explaining the security context that underlies it from the time of the Prophet. The absence of this information detaches the text from its

socio-historical setting such as threats of robbery or limitations in transportation, thus allowing contemporary readers to interpret the message in accordance with the realities they experience. This interpretive space enables the hadith to be understood more flexibly by considering aspects of safety and public welfare in the present era (Sadijah, 2024).

The stage of appropriation refers to the moment when readers relate the meaning of the text to their own lived experiences and social situations. In the analysis of this meme, the process of appropriation becomes evident when readers adjust the hadith's message to the realities of contemporary life. Some readers interpret the prohibition of travel as an expression of absolute obedience to religious teachings, while others interpret it more contextually, for instance by permitting travel without a mahram as long as the purpose is legitimate (*shar'ī*) and conducted under safe conditions (Sahran & Hasanah, 2018). As a form of digital interpretation, memes not only present messages in a concise manner but also stimulate religious reflection that invites further responses and discussions. This process of appropriation underscores that the understanding of religious teachings is dynamic and continuously adapts to the contexts and challenges of its time (Fernandes et al., 2025).

1.5. Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics in the Context of Digital Religious Discourse

In the digital era, social media has evolved into a dynamic and expansive space for da'wah (Islamic propagation), capable of reaching a wide audience rapidly and across geographical boundaries (Fadhilah et al., 2025). Preachers no longer rely solely on conventional methods such as sermons in mosques or religious gatherings, but increasingly utilize platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to deliver religious messages in ways that are more interactive, visual, and contextually relevant. Features such as live streaming, comment sections, and algorithm-driven content distribution enable a more dialogical form of engagement, where audiences are not merely passive recipients but active participants in the communication process (Al Kahfi et al., 2024). As a result, digital da'wah fosters a two-way communication model that enhances accessibility and inclusivity, allowing religious messages to resonate with diverse audiences while maintaining their presence within the fast-paced flow of global information (Yulia Rahmawati et al., 2024).

The interactive and boundary-crossing nature of digital da'wah strongly aligns with Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework, which views texts as inherently open to multiple interpretations (Fadhilah et al., 2025). Ricoeur argues that meaning is not confined to the author's original intent but continues to evolve through the processes of *distanciation* and *appropriation*. In the context of digital media, this theoretical perspective becomes particularly relevant, as religious texts are frequently detached from their original historical and textual settings and re-

presented in new formats that invite reinterpretation (Rahman & Atie Rachmiate, 2025). Through *distanciation*, texts—such as Qur’anic verses or hadith—gain autonomy and become accessible to broader audiences, while *appropriation* allows individuals to internalize and reinterpret these texts based on their own social, cultural, and experiential contexts. Consequently, digital da'wah is not merely about transmitting religious knowledge but also about facilitating ongoing interpretive processes shaped by contemporary realities (Mubarok & Yushi Mahabbatun Nafsi, 2024).

In line with the hermeneutic approach that emphasizes the importance of reader engagement in shaping textual meaning, memes as a form of visual expression in digital da'wah demonstrate significant potential for conveying religious values contextually and communicatively (Salma et al., 2025). Memes, along with infographics and short videos, serve as effective visual media for delivering religious messages in a concise, engaging manner that aligns with the communication style of the digital generation. The flexible nature of memes allows religious messages not only to be understood literally but also to be reinterpreted according to the social, cultural backgrounds, and experiences of their readers (Alfani, 2023). This positions memes not merely as tools for message dissemination but also as new interpretive spaces that expand the reach of da'wah and strengthen its relevance amidst instantaneous and interactive communication flows.

In line with this hermeneutic perspective, memes emerge as a particularly significant form of visual expression in digital da'wah. As condensed and symbolic media, memes combine text, imagery, and cultural references to convey messages in ways that are both engaging and easily shareable (Mukhsin et al., 2024). Their brevity and visual appeal align with the communication patterns of digital audiences, especially younger generations who are more responsive to concise and visually driven content (Rizki, 2023). At the same time, memes operate as interpretive spaces, where religious messages are not only simplified but also recontextualized through humor, symbolism, and everyday experiences. This flexibility allows for multiple layers of meaning, enabling audiences to interpret religious teachings in ways that reflect their own social and cultural backgrounds (Alfani & Mukhsin, 2024). In this sense, memes function not merely as tools of dissemination but as sites of meaning-making that embody the principles of participatory hermeneutics.

Moreover, the strategic use of memes in digital da'wah highlights the shifting nature of religious authority and communication. The millennial and Gen Z audiences, who dominate social media platforms, tend to engage more actively with content that is informal, relatable, and visually appealing, such as memes, quotes, and short videos (Mukhsin et al., 2024). This trend indicates that effective da'wah in the digital age requires not only theological accuracy but also communicative

adaptability. Memes, with their ability to distill complex religious concepts into accessible formats, play a crucial role in bridging the gap between traditional religious discourse and contemporary modes of communication (Aguilar et al., 2017). However, this process also entails a tension between simplification and depth, as the reduction of complex texts into brief visual messages may risk oversimplifying or even distorting their original meanings.

The integration of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics with meme-based digital media thus offers a nuanced and responsive approach to contemporary da'wah. Ricoeur's emphasis on interpretation as a dynamic and dialogical process provides a valuable framework for understanding how religious messages are continuously reconstructed in digital environments. Within this framework, da'wah is no longer a one-directional transmission of fixed meanings, but a dialogical space in which diverse interpretations emerge through the interaction between text, media, and audience. Memes, as concise and communicative visual texts, serve as bridges that connect classical religious teachings with the evolving realities of digital society. Therefore, incorporating Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach into digital da'wah not only enriches the interpretive depth of religious communication but also expands its scope to become more inclusive, reflective, and responsive to the challenges and opportunities of the contemporary era.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that memes on social media function not merely as tools of communication, but as forms of digital exegesis that actively reinterpret religious texts within contemporary contexts. The meme produced by the Instagram account *@ukhtiakhiantiselfie* illustrates how the hadith on the prohibition of women traveling without a mahram is transformed into a simplified, visual, and accessible message that resonates with digital audiences. Through Ricoeur's hermeneutical stages, it becomes evident that interpretation is shaped by the reader's pre-understanding, particularly the normalization of women's mobility in modern society, which leads to diverse readings of the hadith – ranging from absolute prohibition to contextual flexibility. The process of distanciation further reveals how the meme detaches the hadith from its original historical context, allowing new meanings to emerge in line with contemporary realities, while also risking the reduction of its original complexity. Furthermore, the stage of appropriation highlights that audiences do not passively consume religious messages but actively relate them to their lived experiences, producing dynamic and sometimes contested interpretations. This confirms that meaning-making in digital spaces is participatory and continuously evolving. In this regard, Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics proves to be highly relevant for understanding digital da'wah, as it provides a framework to analyze how religious messages are

reconstructed through visual culture and audience interaction. The study ultimately shows that memes serve as a bridge between classical Islamic teachings and modern social realities, enabling religious discourse to remain relevant, yet also revealing the tension between simplification and depth in digital interpretation.

However, this study has several limitations. First, it focuses on a single Instagram account, @ukhtiakhiantiselfie, which may not fully represent the broader landscape of digital da'wah or the diversity of meme-based interpretations across different platforms. Second, the analysis is limited to textual and visual content without direct engagement with audience responses, such as comments or user interactions, which could provide deeper insight into reception and interpretation processes. Third, while Ricoeur's hermeneutics offers a strong theoretical lens, the study does not incorporate comparative approaches from other interpretive frameworks that might enrich the analysis. Therefore, future research is encouraged to expand the scope of data, include audience reception studies, and employ interdisciplinary approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding of digital religious interpretation.

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