Asian Review: Journal of Asian University of Bangladesh *ISSN (Print): 1729-5122*
Volume 6, Number 1, February 2026

Digital Revolution: The role of Artificial Intelligence in Interpreting and Understanding the Qur'an in the Modern Era

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Abstract

The digital revolution has transformed nearly every dimension of human knowledge and intellectual inquiry, including the study and interpretation of sacred texts. In the context of Islamic scholarship, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is emerging as a revolutionary tool for engaging with the Qur'an in ways that were once unimaginable. This paper critically examines the evolving role of AI in interpreting and understanding the Qur'an within the modern digital framework. It explores how machine learning, natural language processing (NLP), and data-driven semantic analysis are being applied to Qur'anic exegesis (tafsīr), linguistic study, and thematic classification. While traditional exegetical methodologies rely upon the intellectual rigor of scholars and classical hermeneutics, AI-based tools offer rapid data retrieval, pattern recognition, and linguistic comparison across vast Qur'anic databases. This study also investigates the epistemological boundaries and ethical implications of employing AI in Qur'anic studies, questioning whether algorithmic interpretation can align with the divine and spiritual dimensions inherent in revelation. Drawing on examples from emerging digital Qur'anic platforms and AI-assisted translation systems, the research highlights both the promises and limitations of integrating technology into sacred scholarship. Ultimately, the paper argues that AI should be viewed not as a substitute for human interpretation but as a complementary means to enhance accessibility, accuracy, and interdisciplinary engagement with the Qur'anic text. By bridging classical Islamic scholarship with contemporary computational advancements, this study underscores the potential of AI to enrich the intellectual tradition of Qur'anic understanding in the modern era while maintaining fidelity to its spiritual essence.

Keywords: Qur'an, Artificial Intelligence, Digital Revolution, Tafsīr, Islamic Scholarship, Machine Learning, Hermeneutical

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1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology in recent decades has significantly transformed various aspects of human life, including the field of Islamic studies (Ista & Ista, 2024; Isti'ana, 2024; Sari dkk., 2023). One of the remarkable breakthroughs in this regard is the utilization of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in applications related to religious scholarship, particularly Qur'anic exegesis. Traditionally, Qur'anic interpretation has been conducted through classical methodologies based on sanad, linguistic analysis, and historical context (Fitriono, 2025; Nurhidayati dkk., 2025; Toyyib dkk., 2025). However, a new form has emerged in the digital era, namely digital exegesis produced through AI-based platforms and applications. This innovation offers greater accessibility, faster analysis, and personalized engagement for users in understanding the Qur'an. Nevertheless, alongside these opportunities, critical challenges arise concerning interpretive authority, scholarly validity, and the risk of reducing the Qur'an's profound meanings when sacred texts are interpreted by machines.

The lack of comprehensive research examining how AI functions in digital tafsir and its implications for classical exegetical methodology highlights the urgency of this study. The central problem addressed is how the use of Artificial Intelligence in digital tafsir influences authority, methodology, and validity in Qur'anic interpretation. The involvement of AI in Qur'anic exegesis has been discussed in a growing body of literature that addresses digital religion, modern hermeneutics, and the use of technology in sacred text studies. Previous studies generally emphasized the role of digitalization in improving access to tafsir literature and expanding the scope of academic inquiry. However, such research has mainly focused on digitizing texts and disseminating Islamic literature through online platforms, without providing an in-depth analysis of how AI generates Qur'anic interpretations. From the perspectives of contemporary tafsir theory, digital hermeneutics, and classical epistemology, there remains no comprehensive answer regarding how AI maintains the validity, authority, and integrity of exegesis (Bisri, 2025; Wildan, 2025). This academic gap indicates the significance of conducting a study that directly examines AI-driven Qur'anic interpretation. Thus, the connection between the rapid development of technology and the limitations of existing literature underlines the necessity of a more critical and focused scholarly analysis. Based on the issues outlined above, this study aims to achieve several objectives. First, it seeks to describe the form and mechanism of AI-based Qur'anic exegesis applications in a systematic manner. Second, it intends to analyze the potential, strengths, and limitations of Artificial Intelligence in the process of Qur'anic interpretation. Third, it aims to explore the epistemological and methodological implications of employing AI in digital tafsir, particularly in relation to the classical exegetical tradition. Fourth, the study aspires to present a critical perspective on the position of AI-driven tafsir within the framework of contemporary Qur'anic studies. By pursuing these objectives, this research seeks to contribute significantly to academic discourse and to open a dialogue between traditional exegetical methodologies and modern technological developments, thereby fostering a more comprehensive understanding of digital tafsir.

The importance of this research lies in the urgent need to balance the opportunities and challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence in Qur'anic interpretation. Considering the fact that AI has entered the realm of religious practice and that scholarly investigations into its epistemological implications remain limited, this study is both timely and relevant. Its objectives, which focus on description, analysis, and critical assessment of AI-based digital tafsir, aim to provide a more proportional understanding of its place within the broader exegetical tradition. Furthermore, this research seeks to fill an academic gap by addressing unresolved questions regarding validity, authority, and methodology in the context of AI- driven exegesis. Thus, this study is not only exploratory but also contributes meaningfully to contemporary tafsir discourse, particularly in addressing the challenges of integrating Qur'anic scholarship with digital technology. Digital tafsir refers to the development of Qur'anic interpretation methodologies that utilize information technology, particularly digital tools, to present, access, and analyze the interpretation of Qur'anic verses (Abidi dkk., 2025; Dahnial, 2024; Putra, 2024). This concept emerged in response to the modern demand for quick, practical, and broad access to exegetical literature. Digital tafsir is not limited to the conversion of printed texts into digital formats but also involves the use of software, applications, and algorithms to assist users in comprehending Qur'anic meanings. Its emergence reflects a paradigm shift from conventional tafsir, which typically requires specific time, place, and resources, toward more adaptive forms aligned with technological advancement. Within this framework, digital tafsir represents an integration between Islamic scholarly tradition and modern innovation. Therefore, digital tafsir may be defined as the process of Qur'anic interpretation supported by digital media to expand accessibility, accelerate dissemination, and provide alternative methodologies in contemporary tafsir studies (Jafar dkk., 2025; Zakiyyah, 2024).

The manifestations of digital tafsir can be observed in various forms, ranging from mobile applications and tafsir websites to AI-based platforms. In its initial stages, digital tafsir emerged through the digitization of classical tafsir works that were later published as PDFs or e-books, making them more accessible to the wider public.

The next stage produced interactive applications that allow keyword searches, verse-to-tafsir matching, and thematic connections across the Qur'an. The introduction of artificial intelligence added a new dimension, where digital tafsir is no longer limited to text presentation but also includes automated analysis generated by algorithms. This innovation creates tafsir that is more dynamic, personalized, and efficient. However, its manifestations also spark debates regarding interpretive authority, as technological involvement in interpretation may reduce the role of scholars and mufassir. Thus, digital tafsir can be categorized as a spectrum ranging from simple digitization to AI-driven exegetical systems. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is defined as a branch of computer science concerned with creating intelligent systems capable of performing tasks that normally require human intelligence (Kushariyadi dkk., 2024; Rifky dkk., 2024a; Widjaja, 2022a). This concept encompasses a machine's ability to learn, process language, recognize patterns, and make decisions based on data. Generally, AI is classified into two major categories: weak AI, which performs specific tasks, and strong AI, projected to replicate the full cognitive abilities of humans (Mahendra dkk., 2024; Rifky dkk., 2024b; Widjaja, 2022b). In academia, AI has been applied across various fields, including medicine, economics, education, and more recently, religious studies. Within the context of this research, AI refers to the use of computational algorithms—particularly Natural Language Processing (NLP) and machine learning—to process Qur'anic texts and tafsir literature, producing outputs in the form of interpretations or explanations of verses according to recognized patterns. Thus, AI functions as the central technology shaping the emergence of modern digital tafsir.

The manifestations of Artificial Intelligence can be found in diverse applications that integrate machine learning, natural language processing, and large-scale data analysis. In the religious domain, AI supports digitalization of sacred texts, semantic analysis of verses, and the development of tafsir applications capable of instantly responding to user queries (Mauluddin, 2024). Within digital tafsir, AI can be categorized into systems such as keyword-based Qur'an search engines, thematic classification algorithms, and generative models that construct interpretations from existing tafsir databases. These manifestations demonstrate AI's role as a digital assistant for Muslims seeking to understand the Qur'an, even though limitations remain regarding contextual depth and sensitivity to religious nuances. Hence, AI in digital tafsir may be classified along varying levels of capability, from technical assistance tools to semi- interpretive systems that attempt to present verse meanings through algorithmic processes. The Qur'an is the holy scripture of Islam, believed to be the word of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through the Angel Gabriel in the Arabic language (Hamid, 2022; Ramadhan & Kurniawan, 2025). It serves as a comprehensive guide encompassing faith, law, and morality for humanity. In Islamic tradition, the Qur'an is regarded as the primary source of law, moral principles, and epistemological foundation for knowledge development. Conceptually, the Qur'an is not confined to its textual form but also includes the meanings and wisdom contained within it. Hence, understanding the Qur'an requires comprehensive methodological approaches, most notably tafsir. With technological progress, Qur'anic studies have entered a new phase in which the scripture is presented digitally to improve accessibility. Nonetheless, such digitalization must be accompanied by theological awareness that the Qur'an is divine revelation and cannot be reduced merely to computational objects. The manifestations of the Qur'an in Islamic scholarly tradition appear in textual, oral, and digital forms. Textually, the Qur'an is preserved in printed mushafs that remain the standard for reading and memorization. Orally, it is manifested through recitation, qira'at, and memorization practices that ensure the continuity of revelation across generations. With technological advancements, the Qur'an also manifests in digital formats such as electronic mushaf applications, tajwid learning software, and AI-based tafsir platforms. These manifestations illustrate the Qur'an's flexible modes of presentation while retaining its sacred essence. Therefore, the categorization of Qur'anic manifestations includes printed mushaf, oral traditions, and digital representations, each serving unique roles in preserving, transmitting, and deepening engagement with the divine word. This highlights that despite changes in medium, the Qur'an's status as divine revelation remains irreplaceable.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The object of this research is the phenomenon of how digital technology, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI), has transformed various aspects of human life, including Islamic scholarship. Traditionally, Qur'anic exegesis was carried out using classical methodologies rooted in sanad, linguistic analysis, and historical context. However, the emergence of digital tafsir through AI-based applications and platforms has introduced a new paradigm. This development brings opportunities such as wider accessibility, faster analysis, and personalized engagement with the Qur'anic text. At the same time, it raises significant epistemological challenges related to interpretive authority, scholarly validity, and the potential reduction of meaning when sacred texts are processed by machines. Despite its growing relevance, there is still a lack of comprehensive research that critically examines how AI functions in digital tafsir applications and its implications for traditional exegetical methodologies. The central problem addressed by this research is how the use of Artificial Intelligence in digital tafsir influences authority, methodology, and validity in Qur'anic interpretation. This object of inquiry underpins the urgency and direction of the study.

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as its primary research design. SLR is a structured and rigorous approach to literature review that allows the researcher to systematically identify, assess, and synthesize findings from relevant studies. The primary data for this research consist of scholarly works and studies addressing digital technology, the role of AI, and its implications for Islamic scholarship, particularly Qur'anic exegesis. These include journal articles, academic books, and published research focusing on digital tafsir and AI in religion. Secondary data are obtained from supporting literature, such as classical tafsir works, studies on hermeneutics, and references on digital religion. This dual use of primary and secondary data ensures that the analysis is both comprehensive and well contextualized. By adopting the SLR method, the study aims to provide a balanced synthesis of existing knowledge while minimizing bias, making it possible to derive academically robust insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The research is grounded in several theoretical frameworks that serve as the foundation for data analysis and interpretation. Contemporary Tafsir Theory explains the shift from traditional exegetical methodologies toward modern, technology-influenced approaches, highlighting the role of digitalization. Digital Hermeneutics provides a lens for understanding how sacred texts are interpreted through digital platforms and algorithms. Digital Religion Studies is also employed to analyze the integration of religion and technology, particularly how religious practices and scholarship transform within the digital space. Additionally, Artificial Intelligence Theory, especially concepts of machine learning and natural language processing (NLP), is essential in explaining the technical mechanisms by which AI processes Qur'anic texts and generates interpretive outputs. Finally, the Epistemology of Qur'anic Exegesis is used to assess the validity, authenticity, and authority of AI-based tafsir in comparison with interpretations rooted in sanad, riwayat, and classical ijtihad. These theoretical perspectives collectively provide a comprehensive basis for evaluating the phenomenon under study. The research procedure follows the established stages of Systematic Literature Review (SLR), ensuring transparency and rigor throughout the process. The first stage involves formulating precise and focused research questions that address the objectives of the study. Next, a review protocol is developed, including detailed search strategies, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and methods for data extraction and analysis. Data collection is conducted by searching multiple electronic databases and repositories using carefully selected keywords such as "Digital Tafsir," "Artificial Intelligence," and "Qur'an." Once relevant literature is identified, the quality of each study is critically appraised using standardized assessment tools. The subsequent step involves extracting key data and organizing them systematically to facilitate synthesis. Finally, the researcher performs an integrative analysis to highlight significant patterns, similarities, and differences across the studies. This structured procedure ensures that the findings are reliable and minimize potential bias.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature review on Digital Tafsir highlights the emergence of a new paradigm in Qur'anic studies that utilizes technological platforms to facilitate access and engagement. Various studies document the development of digital applications, online tafsir databases, and interactive platforms that allow users to explore multiple interpretations of the Qur'an in real time. These resources range from digitized versions of classical tafsir works to modern applications that integrate multimedia features such as audio, video, and hyperlinked commentaries. The availability of digital tafsir resources is consistently emphasized as a response to the increasing demand for accessible religious knowledge in the digital era. Further examination of the literature indicates that Digital Tafsir is not merely a digitalization of traditional works but also involves innovation in how tafsir is accessed and presented. Researchers note that platforms often provide search engines, keyword indexing, and thematic categorization to help users navigate through vast tafsir materials efficiently. Additionally, some applications incorporate user-friendly interfaces and personalized study tools, enabling both scholars and laypeople to interact with the Qur'an's meanings at different levels of depth. The literature also highlights the global reach of these platforms, which transcend geographical and linguistic barriers.

The reviewed studies reveal that while Digital Tafsir expands accessibility and user engagement, it also intersects with the research problem concerning authority, methodology, and validity of interpretation. The digital medium changes the dynamics of how tafsir is consumed, raising questions about the reliability of sources, the qualifications of digital content curators, and the extent to which technological mediation influences interpretative authenticity. These aspects demonstrate a close relationship between the descriptive data of Digital Tafsir and the broader epistemological challenges identified in this study. The literature on Artificial Intelligence (AI) provides insights into its definition, development, and applications in various domains, including religious studies. A significant portion of the reviewed works outlines AI's ability to process large datasets through machine learning, natural language processing, and semantic analysis. In the context of Qur'anic studies, several recent sources highlight the use of AI-powered platforms that can translate, categorize, and even generate interpretative content related to the Qur'an. These studies underline AI as a transformative tool that can handle complex textual data with unprecedented speed and efficiency. Explanations derived from the reviewed literature suggest that AI in Qur'anic interpretation is primarily manifested in tools that automate tasks such as keyword recognition, contextual mapping, and multilingual translation. Scholars highlight how AI can support researchers by providing data-driven insights into thematic patterns, intertextual references, and linguistic variations within the Qur'an. Several sources also emphasize AI's role in offering personalized interpretative suggestions, which adapt to user preferences or learning objectives. The reviewed literature points to both the technological sophistication of these applications and their growing influence in shaping religious knowledge consumption. The data from AI-related studies connect directly to the research problem by illustrating how the integration of AI into Qur'anic tafsir introduces epistemological and methodological implications. While AI enhances accessibility and analytical precision, the reviewed literature notes uncertainties regarding the interpretative authority of machine-generated content and its alignment with classical tafsir methodologies. These connections show that AI not only provides opportunities for innovation but also amplifies the challenges of maintaining validity and safeguarding the authenticity of Qur'anic interpretation in the digital age.

The literature on the Qur'an consistently affirms its position as the central and sacred text of Islam, regarded as divine revelation and ultimate guidance for Muslims. Sources emphasize its linguistic, theological, and historical dimensions, along with the interpretative traditions that have evolved around it. Scholarly works highlight that the Qur'an has been the subject of extensive exegesis, ranging from early tafsir bi al-riwayah (narrative-based exegesis) to tafsir bi al-ra'y (opinion-based exegesis), and more contemporary thematic or contextual approaches.

Literature also shows that the Qur'an continues to be studied within diverse frameworks that address both traditional and modern contexts.

Explanatory accounts from the reviewed literature suggest that the Qur'an's interpretative richness lies in its multidimensional engagement with linguistic subtleties, theological doctrines, and socio-historical contexts. Several sources detail the layered nature of Qur'anic interpretation, where classical methodologies relied heavily on Arabic grammar, hadith transmission, and juristic reasoning. In contrast, modern approaches tend to incorporate interdisciplinary perspectives, including sociology, psychology, and digital humanities. These insights indicate the continuity of interpretative tradition while simultaneously adapting to new intellectual and technological contexts.

The findings from Qur'an-related literature establish a link to the research problem by situating AI-driven tafsir within the broader history of Qur'anic interpretation. While the Qur'an has always been subject to evolving methodologies, the incorporation of AI represents a significant transformation that raises fundamental questions about the boundaries of interpretation, authority, and epistemology. The reviewed data underline that the challenge lies in reconciling technological mediation with the enduring principles of tafsir, thereby directly aligning with the central issues of this research.

Table 1. Research Findings

NO.	Research Objective	Findings
1	To describe the forms and mechanisms of AI-based Qur'anic interpretation applications	AI-driven tafsir applications operate through algorithms that structure textual analysis, semantic recognition, and contextual suggestion. These mechanisms allow users to access interpretations in multiple layers—literal, thematic, and comparative—while offering interactive features such as search functions, audio integration, and cross-references to classical tafsir sources.
2	To analyze the potential, advantages, and limitations of AI in Qur'anic interpretation	The potential of AI lies in its ability to process large datasets efficiently, provide multilingual accessibility, and enhance user engagement with Qur'anic texts. Its advantages include speed, interactivity, and the democratization of access to tafsir. However, limitations persist in areas such as the lack of spiritual depth, insufficient contextual sensitivity, and risks of over-reliance on algorithmic authority in matters of faith and hermeneutics.
3	To examine the epistemological and methodological implications of AI in digital tafsir compared classical traditions	Epistemologically, AI introduces a shift from interpretive authority rooted in scholarly expertise to machine-generated analysis, raising questions of authenticity and legitimacy. Methodologically, AI emphasizes data-driven approaches that differ from traditional hermeneutics grounded in linguistic mastery, historical context, and spiritual insight. This creates both opportunities for innovation and challenges for preserving the integrity of tafsir.

4	To provide a critical perspective on the position of AI-based digital tafsir within contemporary tafsir studies	AI-based tafsir occupies a transitional position in contemporary scholarship: it is neither a replacement for classical exegesis nor a mere technological supplement. Instead, it emerges as a hybrid model that reshapes the landscape of Qur'anic interpretation. This positioning highlights the need for a critical framework that balances innovation with tradition, ensuring that AI serves as a tool for knowledge facilitation rather than an authoritative voice in matters of faith.

The findings of this study reveal that digital exegesis has evolved into a distinct field within Qur'anic studies, characterized by the integration of technological tools, particularly artificial intelligence, into interpretive practices. The analysis demonstrates that AI-based applications in tafsir provide new mechanisms for text processing, semantic analysis, and user- oriented customization. These developments reflect a shift from traditional methodologies toward more accessible and interactive interpretive models, though they remain closely tied to the core objectives of Qur'anic exegesis.

When compared with previous studies, this research highlights a unique focus on the epistemological and methodological dimensions of AI in Qur'anic exegesis, an area that earlier literature often overlooked. Prior works on digital tafsir largely emphasized technological descriptions or general accessibility benefits, whereas this study critically examines the implications for interpretive authority and validity. Such a comparative perspective demonstrates the added value of this research, positioning it as a more comprehensive contribution to contemporary discourse on digital religion and Qur'anic interpretation. The results further suggest that AI-driven tafsir platforms not only offer technical advantages but also serve as indicators of broader transformations within Islamic scholarship. By uncovering the potentials and limitations of AI in Qur'anic exegesis, this study reflects how Islamic interpretive traditions are negotiating with modern technologies. This reflection underscores the utility of the research in bridging traditional interpretive frameworks with contemporary demands for speed, accessibility, and personalization in religious studies. The implications of these findings are multifold. On an academic level, they contribute to the development of tafsir studies by expanding the methodological discourse to include digital and AI-driven approaches. Practically, they provide a critical foundation for evaluating existing AI applications in Qur'anic exegesis, informing both developers and users about the potentials and risks involved. More broadly, the results have implications for Islamic education and digital literacy, encouraging the integration of AI responsibly in religious pedagogy while safeguarding epistemological integrity. The reason why the results point toward both opportunities and challenges lies in the dual nature of AI itself. While its algorithmic capabilities enable faster and broader access to Qur'anic interpretations, the absence of human hermeneutical judgment raises questions of depth, contextual nuance, and interpretive authority. This tension reflects the fundamental epistemological divide between machine-based processing and human scholarship, explaining why AI cannot fully replicate the interpretive richness of traditional tafsir. Based on these findings, it is essential to adopt a cautious yet innovative stance toward AI in Qur'anic exegesis. Actions that need to be taken include developing hybrid models where AI serves as a supportive tool rather than a replacement for human scholarship, establishing ethical guidelines for digital tafsir platforms, and fostering collaborations between Islamic scholars and technologists. These measures would ensure that AI contributes positively to the field of tafsir without undermining its scholarly rigor or spiritual depth.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals a striking and perhaps unexpected finding: artificial intelligence, a technology often perceived as detached from spiritual and textual traditions, has begun to play a concrete role in shaping contemporary approaches to Qur'anic exegesis. The integration of AI into digital tafsir platforms is not merely a matter of technological innovation but represents a profound epistemological shift. It demonstrates that sacred interpretation, traditionally bound by human scholarship and hermeneutical nuance, can now be partially mediated through algorithmic processes, creating both new opportunities and new tensions in the field of Islamic studies. The contribution of this research lies in its dual value—both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it expands the discourse of tafsir studies by introducing AI not only as a tool but also as an epistemic actor that redefines the boundaries of interpretation. Practically, the study provides critical insights for developers of digital tafsir applications, educators in Islamic institutions, and scholars seeking to balance tradition with innovation. By situating AI within the continuum of interpretive practices, this research enriches the academic understanding of digital religion while also guiding real-world applications of Qur'anic exegesis in the digital age. Despite its contributions, this study recognizes certain limitations that should be seen as opportunities for further inquiry. The focus on conceptual and methodological analysis, while illuminating, does not encompass empirical evaluations of user engagement or long-term impacts on religious authority. Future research may therefore explore how AI-driven tafsir platforms are received in diverse Muslim communities, how they influence interpretive authority, and how ethical frameworks can be designed to safeguard their use. These directions open promising avenues for continued exploration of the dynamic relationship between AI and Qur'anic interpretation.

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Blue Economy for Sustainable Development in Bangladesh: Empirical Insights, Sectoral Contributions, and Policy Pathways

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Abstract

The blue economy has gained prominence as a development paradigm that integrates economic growth with the sustainable use of ocean and coastal resources. For Bangladesh, a lower–middle-income coastal country with a vast maritime jurisdiction in the Bay of Bengal, the blue economy represents both an opportunity and a necessity for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water). Unlike much of the existing literature that remains largely conceptual, this article draws on secondary quantitative data, sectoral statistics, and documented indicators to empirically assess the contribution of the blue economy to Bangladesh's economy. Using gross value added (GVA), employment shares, export earnings, and sectoral composition data, the study analyzes fisheries and aquaculture, maritime trade and shipping, tourism, energy, and emerging marine industries. The findings show that the marine economy contributes approximately 3.3% of national GVA, supports millions of livelihoods, and underpins nearly 90% of external trade, yet remains constrained by governance fragmentation, technological gaps, and climate vulnerability. The article argues that evidence-based policy, integrated marine spatial planning, and ecosystem-based management are essential to transform Bangladesh's blue economy into a driver of sustainable and inclusive development.

Keywords: Blue economy; Sustainable development; SDG 14; Marine economy; Bangladesh; Bay of Bengal

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1. Introduction

The increasing pressure on land-based resources, combined with climate change and rapid population growth, has renewed global attention on oceans as a frontier for sustainable development. The concept of the blue economy, first articulated by Pauli (2010) and later mainstreamed through the Rio+20 Conference, emphasizes the sustainable use of marine and coastal resources to promote economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental integrity. Oceans already account for nearly 70% of the Earth's surface and facilitate around 90% of global trade by volume, making them central to the contemporary global economy. For Bangladesh, the relevance of the blue economy is particularly pronounced. The country possesses a 710 km coastline and sovereign rights over an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 200 nautical miles in the Bay of Bengal, following the resolution of maritime boundary disputes with Myanmar (2012) and India (2014). These legal settlements expanded Bangladesh's access to marine living and non-living resources across approximately 118,813 square kilometers. Despite this strategic advantage, Bangladesh's marine resources remain underutilized, and their contribution to long-term sustainable development is far from optimal. This article seeks to bridge the gap between conceptual discussions and empirical evidence by incorporating

sectoral data, tables, and figures derived from existing national and international sources. It evaluates how the blue economy currently contributes to Bangladesh's economy, identifies structural constraints, and proposes policy pathways aligned with SDG 14.

2. Objectives of the Study

The study aims to examine the linkage between the Blue Economy and SDG 14, and to assess the current status of sea-based economic activities in Bangladesh. The specific objectives are:

01. To clarify the concept and scope of the Blue Economy.
02. To review global Blue Economy trends and performance.
03. To analyze the relationship between the Blue Economy and SDG 14.
04. To evaluate the contribution of Blue Economy sectors—such as fisheries, aquaculture, and tourism—to Bangladesh's economy.
05. To analyze the relationship between the Blue Economy and SDG 14.

3. Need for the Study

This study is motivated by the need to develop a comprehensive understanding of the Blue Economy and its potential contribution to Bangladesh's economic development. Many countries—including the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, China, Japan, and Australia—as well as members of the European Union, have effectively harnessed their marine resources to drive substantial economic growth. In contrast, despite possessing significant maritime potential, Bangladesh has historically underutilized its Blue Economy due to limited policy focus, institutional capacity, and coordinated initiatives. Recent efforts to develop this sector have highlighted both new opportunities and emerging challenges. This study therefore seeks to clarify how the Blue Economy aligns with United Nations SDG 14 (Life below Water) and to examine how strategic development of sea-based resources can contribute to sustainable national growth.

4. Statement of the Problem

In Bangladesh, the concept and potential of the Blue Economy remain poorly understood among the public and insufficiently integrated into policy and planning. While many maritime nations have advanced economically by strategically utilizing ocean resources, Bangladesh has not translated its significant marine endowments into comparable economic gains. The core problem lies in the gap between resource potential and effective utilization—driven by limited policy coherence, weak institutional coordination, inadequate investment, and low public awareness. As a result, sea-based sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, and marine services remain underdeveloped, and their contribution to national growth is below potential. This study addresses the need to identify these structural and knowledge gaps and to examine how aligning Blue Economy development with SDG 14 can support sustainable economic progress.

5. Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design based entirely on secondary data due to limited availability of primary data. It evaluates the role of the Blue Economy in promoting sustainable development and its socio-economic impact in Bangladesh through systematic analysis of existing datasets, reports, and scholarly literature.

Data Sources: Secondary information is collected from government publications—particularly reports of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and national SDG reports—along with peer-reviewed journals, books, and credible newspaper reports related to the Blue Economy and sustainable development. Data were compiled from (BBS), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Bank reports, and peer-reviewed academic studies. Sectoral indicators such as gross value added (GVA), employment shares, export earnings, and production volumes were synthesized to assess the economic significance of the blue economy.

Data Collection Method: A systematic review of relevant literature and datasets is conducted to extract quantitative evidence on the performance and potential of Blue Economy sectors.

Ethical Considerations: All data are drawn from reliable sources and properly cited, ensuring compliance with data-use policies and academic integrity.

6. Literature Review

The Blue Economy emphasizes the sustainable use of ocean and marine resources to foster economic growth, environmental integrity, and social well-being. For Bangladesh, endowed with an extensive maritime zone in the Bay of Bengal, this framework offers substantial potential to advance sustainable development. This review synthesizes findings from over ten scholarly studies on Bangladesh's Blue Economy, highlighting key sectors, challenges, opportunities, and pathways for aligning marine resource development with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

1. **Concept and Scope of the Blue Economy:** Islam, M.S., et al. (2021): The study defines the blue economy and highlights its potential to transform Bangladesh's economic landscape by addressing SDGs such as poverty alleviation, food security, and climate action.
2. **Rahman, A.A. (2020):** Explores the interconnection between coastal and marine resources and their strategic importance for the national economy. The blue economy in Bangladesh encompasses diverse sectors, including fisheries, maritime transport, renewable energy, and marine tourism. The studies emphasize the critical role of an integrated approach to fully realize the economic and environmental benefits of marine resources.
3. **Marine Fisheries and Aquaculture:** Hossain, M.A., et al. (2019): Highlights the sustainable management of marine fisheries as essential for maintaining biodiversity and ensuring long-term economic gains.
4. **Ahmed, N., et al. (2021):** Discusses the rapid expansion of aquaculture in coastal areas and its implications for livelihoods and food security. Marine fisheries contribute significantly to Bangladesh's GDP, but overfishing and habitat degradation pose serious challenges. Innovative aquaculture practices, aligned with environmental sustainability, are proposed to enhance productivity and ensure ecological balance.
5. **Maritime Transport and Trade:** Chowdhury, S., et al. (2020): Analyzes the impact of port infrastructure on maritime trade and economic growth in Bangladesh.

6. **Das, S., et al. (2021):** Discusses policies aimed at promoting sustainable shipping practices to reduce carbon emissions and enhance trade efficiency. Modernizing port facilities and adopting green shipping technologies are essential for positioning Bangladesh as a regional trade hub. These measures also align with global commitments to reducing maritime carbon footprints.
7. **Renewable Energy:** Islam, M.R., et al. (2018): Assesses the potential for offshore wind energy development along the coastline of Bangladesh.
8. **Rahman, S., et al. (2020):** Explores opportunities for wave and tidal energy generation to diversify the energy mix. Harnessing renewable energy from marine sources is pivotal for reducing dependency on fossil fuels. Despite promising prospects, the high initial investment and technological gaps remain significant barriers.
9. **Marine Tourism: Kabir, R., et al. (2021):** Highlights the potential of marine tourism in generating revenue and creating employment in coastal regions.
10. **Rahman, T., et al. (2019):** Explores the environmental considerations necessary for developing sustainable marine tourism. Marine tourism offers a dual opportunity to boost the economy and raise awareness about marine conservation. Implementing eco-tourism initiatives is vital to preserving fragile ecosystems while benefiting local communities.

7. Conceptual Linkage between Blue Economy and SDG 14

SDG 14 emphasizes the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas, and marine resources. Targets under SDG 14—including the reduction of marine pollution, sustainable fisheries management, and marine protected areas, and enhanced scientific cooperation—closely align with the core principles of the blue economy. In the context of Bangladesh, operationalizing SDG 14 through a blue economy framework allows the country to simultaneously address food security, employment generation, export diversification, and climate resilience.

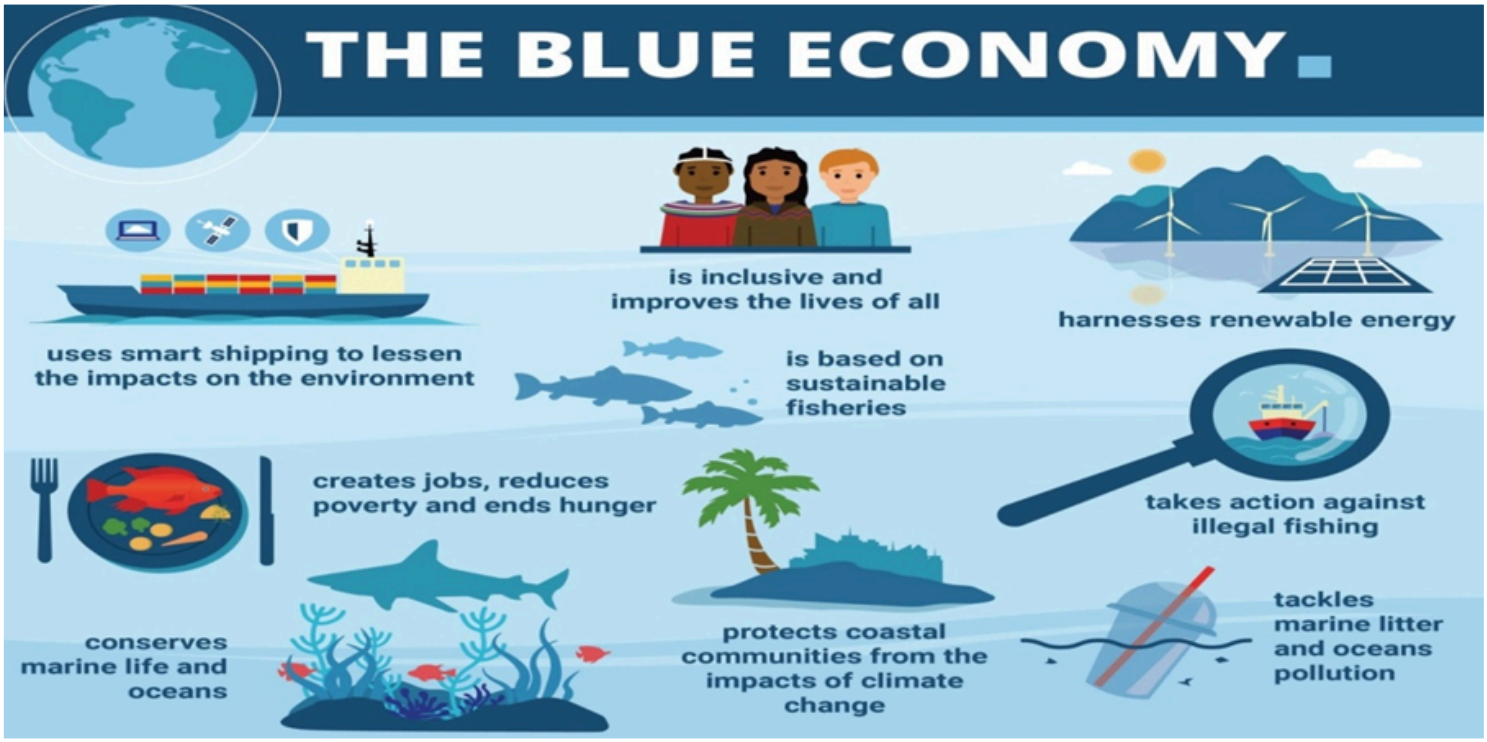
8. Empirical Overview of the Blue Economy: Global Context

Globally, the ocean economy contributes trillions of US dollars annually. Table 1 summarizes selected country-level contributions of the blue economy to GDP, illustrating the scale of marine-based economic activities.

Table 1: Contribution of Blue Economy to GDP in Selected Countries

Country/Region	Contribution to GDP	Employment (Approx.)	Source
United States	US$359–373 billion (2–3%)	3 million	NOAA, 2020
European Union	€500 billion (3.5%)	5 million	EC, 2017
China	10% of GDP	9 million	Zhao et al., 2014
Australia	AU$47.2 billion (3%)	—	NMSC, 2015

The global evidence demonstrates that countries with coherent marine policies, advanced technology, and strong institutions extract significantly higher economic value from their oceans.



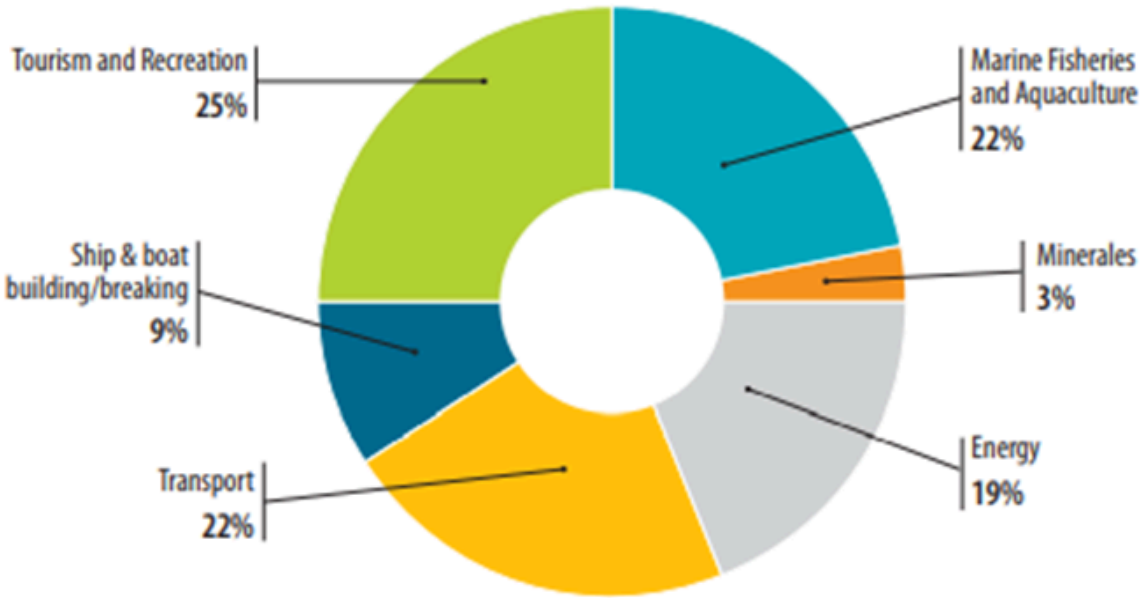
(Source- the UNDP report; 26th November, 2018)

9. Blue Economy in Bangladesh: Sectoral Contributions

9.1 Overall Contribution

In fiscal year 2014–15, Bangladesh's marine economy generated approximately US$6.2 billion in gross value added, accounting for about 3.3% of national GVA. Figure 1 illustrates the sectoral composition of the blue economy.

Figure 1: Sectoral Composition of Bangladesh's Blue Economy (GVA Share, %)



(Source- Composition of the Ocean Economy in Bangladesh, Percent of Gross Value)

This graph shows that Tourism sector contributes 25%), Fisheries & Aquaculture 22%, Transportation & Shipping 22%, Energy 19%, others contributes 12% of GVA.

9.2 Fisheries and Aquaculture

Marine fisheries constitute nearly 19.4% of Bangladesh's total fish production and provide livelihoods for approximately 17 million people directly and indirectly. However, despite an estimated 8 million tons of fish potential in the Bay of Bengal, annual marine catch remains below 1 million tons, indicating significant underexploitation.

Table 2: Marine Fisheries Indicators in Bangladesh

Indicator	Value
Share in total fish production	19.40%
Estimated potential catch	8 million tons
Actual annual catch	0.7 million tons
Employment (direct & indirect)	17 million people

9.3 Maritime Trade and Shipping

Nearly 90% of Bangladesh's international trade is conducted by sea, underscoring the strategic importance of ports, coastal shipping, and logistics services. Expansion of domestic shipping capacity and modernization of ports such as Chattogram and Mongla remain critical priorities.

9.4 Tourism and Coastal Economy

Coastal tourism accounts for a substantial share of marine GVA, with Cox's Bazar alone attracting over 80% of international tourists visiting Bangladesh. Sustainable tourism development across offshore islands presents opportunities for employment and foreign exchange earnings, provided environmental safeguards are enforced.

10. Results: Empirical Evidence from Bangladesh's Blue Economy

This section presents empirical findings derived from secondary quantitative data to illustrate the current contribution of the blue economy to Bangladesh's economic structure. The analysis focuses on gross value added (GVA), sectoral composition, employment generation, and trade dependency.

10.1 Contribution to Gross Value Added (GVA)

Available national statistics indicate that Bangladesh's marine economy generated approximately US$6.2 billion in GVA during the 2014–15 fiscal year, accounting for about 3.3% of total national GVA. Although this share may appear modest, it is significant when compared with other emerging coastal economies at similar stages of development.

Table 3: Contribution of Blue Economy to Bangladesh's GVA (2014–15)

Indicator	Value
Total Marine GVA	US$6.2 billion
Share of National GVA	3.30%
Estimated EEZ Area	118,813 sq. km

10.2 Sectoral Composition

The marine economy of Bangladesh is dominated by tourism, fisheries and aquaculture, maritime transport, and energy-related activities. Tourism accounts for approximately one-quarter of marine GVA, followed by fisheries and aquaculture (22%), transportation and shipping (22%), and energy (19%). This distribution highlights the dominance of service-oriented activities over capital-intensive offshore industries.

10.3 Employment and Livelihoods

The blue economy supports millions of livelihoods, particularly in coastal and near-coastal regions. Fisheries and aquaculture alone provide direct and indirect employment to an estimated 17 million people. In addition, port services, shipbuilding, ship recycling, and coastal tourism create substantial employment opportunities, often for low- and semi-skilled labor.

10.4 Trade Dependency

Empirical trade data reveal that nearly 90% of Bangladesh's international trade by volume is conducted through maritime routes. This underscores the strategic importance of ports, shipping services, and coastal infrastructure in sustaining export-led growth.

11. Discussion: Interpreting the Results in a Sustainable Development Context

The empirical findings suggest that while Bangladesh's blue economy already plays a measurable role in national income and employment, its performance remains below potential when benchmarked against global and regional comparators. The relatively low GVA share reflects limited diversification beyond traditional sectors such as fisheries and shipping.

From an SDG 14 perspective, the dominance of fisheries highlights both opportunity and risk. On the one hand, marine fisheries contribute significantly to food security and livelihoods; on the other hand, overfishing, habitat degradation, and weak regulatory enforcement threaten long-term sustainability. Similar concerns arise in coastal tourism, where rapid growth without environmental safeguards risks ecosystem degradation.

The results also reveal a structural imbalance between Bangladesh's vast maritime jurisdiction and its limited capacity to exploit offshore resources such as renewable ocean energy, marine biotechnology, and seabed minerals. This gap can be attributed to technological constraints, insufficient investment, and fragmented institutional governance.

Comparative evidence from countries such as China, Norway, and Australia demonstrates that higher returns from the blue economy are closely linked to integrated marine policies, sustained investment in research and development, and ecosystem-based management approaches. For Bangladesh, translating marine potential into sustainable economic outcomes requires moving beyond sector-specific interventions toward a coordinated blue economy strategy.

12. Policy Implications and Recommendations

The empirical evidence suggests that Bangladesh requires an integrated blue economy strategy anchored in marine spatial planning, ecosystem-based management, and institutional coordination. Priority actions include investment in marine research and human capital, strengthening fisheries governance, promoting renewable ocean energy, and ensuring inclusive participation of coastal communities through public–private partnerships.

Bangladesh's maritime potential is not limited merely to the abundance of natural resources; it is a matter of strategic policy, good governance, and integrated management. Recent research and evidence-based analysis indicate that to harness the full potential of the blue economy, isolated initiatives are not enough—rather, adopting an integrated and long-term strategy is essential—one grounded in marine spatial planning, ecosystem-based management, and institutional coordination.

In this context, the following recommendations are particularly important:

1. Formulation and implementation of Marine Spatial Planning (MSP): Adopting scientific mapping and planning to ensure the balanced use of maritime zones.
2. Strengthening Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM): Ensuring sustainable use of resources while protecting biodiversity.
3. Increasing institutional coordination: Establishing effective coordination among relevant ministries, agencies, and research institutions.
4. Investment in marine research and human resources: Long-term investment in marine science, technology, and skilled workforce development.
5. Strengthening good governance in the fisheries sector: Controlling overexploitation, enhancing surveillance, and ensuring sustainable fisheries management.
6. Development of marine-based renewable energy: Policy support and investment for offshore wind, wave, and tidal energy.
7. Expanding Public–Private Partnership (PPP): Increasing private sector engagement while ensuring the participation of coastal communities.

13. Conclusion

This article demonstrates that Bangladesh’s blue economy already makes a measurable contribution to national income, employment, and trade, yet remains far below its potential. By aligning sectoral development with SDG 14 and grounding policy decisions in empirical evidence, Bangladesh can transform its marine resources into a sustainable engine of long-term growth. The challenge is not the absence of resources, but the need for coherent governance, strategic investment, and ecological stewardship.

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