



Reconsidering Digital Text Interpretation: A Dialogical Engagement Between Derrida's Deconstruction and Gadamer's Hermeneutics

Meninjau Kembali Penafsiran Teks Digital: Keterlibatan Dialogis antara Dekonstruksi Derrida dan Hermeneutika Gadamer

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Abstract: This article examines a dialogical epistemological engagement between Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as a theoretical approach to interpreting contemporary digital texts. The digital era is characterized by fluid, multimodal, fragmented, and algorithmically mediated texts, which challenge classical assumptions about meaning, language, and interpretation. Derrida's deconstruction emphasizes the instability of meaning through the concept of *differance*, highlighting the continual deferral and relational movement of meaning within networks of signs. In contrast, Gadamer's hermeneutics underscores the role of productive prejudice, *wirkungsgeschichte* (history of effects), and the fusion of horizons in the process of understanding. Through philosophical and library-based research, this study demonstrates that despite their apparent differences, Derrida and Gadamer share important epistemological assumptions, including the non-finality of meaning, the centrality of language, the active role of the interpreter, and the relational positioning of texts. This dialogical engagement is proposed as an interpretive framework referred to as "Digital Deconstructive Hermeneutics," which is relevant for interpreting digital texts shaped by rapid change, intertextuality, and algorithmic mediation. The findings contribute to contemporary debates on interpretive epistemology in the digital age and offer insights for digital literacy and cultural studies.

Keywords: Deconstruction; Hermeneutics; Digital Texts; Derrida; Gadamer



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Abstrak: Artikel ini mengkaji suatu keterlibatan epistemologis dialogis antara dekonstruksi Jacques Derrida dan hermeneutika filosofis Hans-Georg Gadamer sebagai pendekatan teoretis untuk menafsirkan teks-teks digital kontemporer. Era digital ditandai oleh teks-teks yang bersifat cair, multimodal, terfragmentasi, serta dimediasi secara algoritmik, sehingga menantang asumsi-asumsi klasik mengenai makna, bahasa, dan penafsiran. Dekonstruksi Derrida menekankan ketidakstabilan makna melalui konsep *differance*, yang menunjukkan penangguhan dan pergeseran makna secara terus-menerus dalam jeiring tanda. Sebaliknya, hermeneutika Gadamer menegaskan peran prasangka produktif, *wirkungsgeschichte* (sejarah pengaruh), dan peleburan cakrawala dalam proses pemahaman. Melalui penelitian filosofis berbasis kajian pustaka, artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa meskipun kerap diposisikan secara berlawanan, Derrida dan Gadamer berbagi asumsi epistemologis penting, antara lain ketidakfinalan makna, sentralitas bahasa, peran aktif penafsir, serta posisi relasional teks. Keterlibatan dialogis ini kemudian diajukan sebagai suatu kerangka penafsiran yang disebut “Hermeneutika Dekonstruktif Digital”, yang relevan untuk membaca teks-teks digital yang dibentuk oleh perubahan cepat, intertekstualitas yang kaya, dan mediasi algoritmik. Temuan artikel ini berkontribusi secara teoretis terhadap pengembangan epistemologi penafsiran di era digital serta menawarkan implikasi praktis bagi literasi digital dan kajian budaya kontemporer.

Kata kunci: Dekonstruksi; Hermeneutika; Teks Digital; Derrida; Gadamer

Introduction

The development of philosophical debates on Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics has long highlighted their apparent differences in approaching meaning, language, and interpretation. Derrida is widely known for his critique of logocentrism and his emphasis on *differance*, which exposes the instability and relational movement of meaning within linguistic structures. In contrast, Gadamer foregrounds the dialogical character of understanding, emphasizing tradition, historical situatedness, and the fusion of horizons as constitutive elements of interpretation. Consequently, these two approaches are often positioned as theoretically opposed within modern philosophy of language.

However, the emergence of digital textuality, marked by multimodality, fragmentation, rapid circulation, and algorithmic mediation, poses new interpretive challenges that exceed the assumptions of classical text-centered hermeneutics. Digital texts are no longer static or linear; they are continuously reshaped through user interaction, platform architectures, and algorithmic processes that influence visibility, circulation, and meaning production. Despite this transformation, most Derrida–Gadamer studies remain confined to the analysis of printed or stable texts

and have yet to adequately address the epistemological implications of digital meaning-making.

This situation reveals a significant theoretical gap. While Derrida's insights into the play of signs and Gadamer's emphasis on historical dialogue both appear highly relevant to digital textual dynamics, their potential epistemological convergences in interpreting digital texts remain underexplored. This gap raises several fundamental questions: How can Derrida's notion of *differance* and Gadamer's concepts of productive prejudice and the fusion of horizons be brought into dialogue to interpret contemporary digital texts? What shared epistemological assumptions can be identified between these two approaches in explaining the fluid, polyphonic, and intertextual nature of digital meaning? And how might such a dialogical engagement contribute to a more reflexive framework for digital text interpretation?

Responding to these questions, this article proposes a dialogical epistemological engagement between Derrida's deconstruction and Gadamer's hermeneutics as an interpretive approach to digital texts. Rather than offering a total synthesis, this study articulates a conceptual framework referred to as Digital Deconstructive Hermeneutics, which integrates Derrida's critical awareness of the instability of meaning with Gadamer's emphasis on historical dialogue and interpretive situatedness. This framework suggests that digital meaning is not only fluid and open-ended but also shaped through ongoing interactions among texts, interpreters, technological mediation, and evolving discursive contexts.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, this approach holds important implications for fields concerned with textual interpretation in digital environments, including religious and cultural studies. In contexts such as Islamic Studies, where interpretive traditions emphasize historical continuity and authoritative transmission, digital media introduce new challenges related to algorithmic visibility, decontextualization, and the rapid circulation of religious content. Within this setting, a dialogical engagement between Derrida and Gadamer offers a reflective lens for understanding how religious meaning is negotiated amid the tensions between tradition, interpretation, and digital mediation, without reducing interpretation to either relativism or rigid textualism.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach and belongs to the category of library research. This approach is chosen because the data and discussions are derived from relevant literature: philosophical books, scholarly journals, academic articles, and reliable digital sources that discuss the thoughts of Jacques Derrida and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

By emphasizing conceptual and interpretative aspects, the qualitative approach is used to understand and interpret the meanings of texts and the ideas of both thinkers. Rather than collecting empirical field data, this study focuses on conducting critical analysis of texts and philosophical concepts.

Data collection is conducted through documentation study, which involves reviewing written sources that contain ideas on Derrida's deconstruction and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Subsequently, content analysis and comparative analysis are employed to analyze the collected data. The aim is to identify similarities, differences, and the relevance of both thinkers' ideas to issues of text interpretation within contemporary academic, cultural, and social contexts.

Therefore, this study is descriptive-analytical in nature because its objective is to systematically describe the thoughts of the two prominent figures and to analyze the relationships, comparisons, and philosophical implications of their ideas for the advancement of contemporary interpretive theory.

Derrida's Deconstruction in Reading Digital Texts

Jacques Derrida was born in Algeria on July 15, 1930. He migrated to France at the age of 19 and lived there until the end of his life. Derrida received an honorary doctorate from the University of Cambridge and taught at the École Normale Supérieure. Edmund Husserl and Ferdinand de Saussure had significant influence on Derrida's thought.

Derrida authored many works, most of which are commentaries on other philosophers and scholars such as Kant, Hegel, Freud, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Husserl. Among his most famous works are *L'écriture et la Différence*, *De la grammatologie* (1967), and *Marges de la philosophie* (1972).¹

Derrida's deconstruction begins with a fundamental critique of the Western philosophical tradition which, according to him, privileges presence and assumes meaning to be stable, final, and fully representable through language. This mode of thinking is called logocentrism.² In the digital context, Derrida's critique becomes even more relevant because digital texts reveal that meaning is not only unstable but constantly shifting, changing, and produced through endlessly unfinished relations.³

Derrida's central concept, *différance*, refers simultaneously to two processes: the deferral and the difference of meaning. Meaning is never fully present at any point but always shifts through a chain of signifiers (Derrida, 1968). In the digital world particularly on social media this concept is clearly observable. A single post may change meaning simply due to shifts in context, user comments, virality, remixing, or algorithmic structures that prioritize the circulation of certain content over others.⁴

For example, a post on X/Twitter or TikTok that initially carries an informative meaning may become satirical or ironic when it enters a new interpretive space reshaped by other users.⁵ The phenomenon of meme culture also demonstrates that meaning is never final. Every modification of a meme even a small textual adjustment or a shift in reading context produces new meaning through the differential play of signs.⁶ This aligns with Derrida's view that meaning is not given, but produced through the play of signifiers.⁷

Furthermore, Derrida's famous statement, “il n'y a pas de hors-texte” there is no outside-text⁸ does not mean that the empirical world does not exist. Rather, it means that meaning can never be accessed “purely” without the mediation of language, context, and surrounding power structures. In digital contexts, this becomes even more significant: users never encounter texts “as they are,” but as they are arranged by interfaces (UI), algorithms, filters, trending topics, and platform economic logics.⁹

Thus, digital texts are never “natural” or “value-free.” They are highly curated products. Phenomena such as algorithmic curation show that digital meaning is determined not only by the writer but also by invisible technological structures. Algorithms decide what appears before the user and what remains hidden, shaping how texts are read, interpreted, and assigned meaning. Derrida refers to such phenomena as traces absent presences that determine meaning.

In digital media, traces may include:

- algorithmic traces,
- traces of previous user interactions,
- metadata traces,
- viral-context traces,
- and traces of digital cultures embedded within platforms.

These traces condition meaning without ever fully appearing as identifiable entities.¹⁰

This demonstrates that what Derrida calls the absence of meaning is not nihilism, but rather the recognition that meaning is always the result of power relations, linguistic structures, and layered interpretations. On social media, the meaning of a text can be politically manipulated through framing, video clipping, bot amplification, or by exploiting echo chambers and filter bubbles.¹¹ This aligns with Derrida's idea that texts are never neutral; every text carries structural biases from the moment it is produced.

In addition, digitalization renders texts extremely intertextual. Posts are constantly connected to other posts through replies, quotes, stitches, duets, or comments. This intertextuality is what Kristeva (1980) refers to as a “mosaic space” of signs; from Derrida's perspective, this space is an arena of differential play

without a center. Thus, reading a digital text means reading a network of mutually influencing signs rather than a single unit of text.

Therefore, Derrida's deconstruction teaches that digital texts cannot be read linearly or by searching for a single primary meaning. Digital texts must be read as a system of signs that:

- are unstable,
- constantly shifting,
- full of sign-play,
- shaped by power structures (algorithms platforms), and
- lack a final meaning.

This paradigm helps us understand phenomena such as virality, misinformation, hoaxes, and meaning collapse that frequently occur in digital spaces. Deconstruction demonstrates that there is no "original meaning" that can serve as a final reference; rather, what exists is a continuous process of meaning production shaped by interactions between texts, users, technology, and social contexts.¹²

Gadamer's Hermeneutics and Digital Challenges

In 1900, Hans-George Gadamer was born in Marburg. He studied philosophy at high school in his hometown, with, among others, Nikolai Hartmann and Martin Heidegger. He also studied from Protestant theologian Rodolf Bultmann. He was recognized as a "doctor of philosophy" in 1922. Nine years later, he served as a private lecturer in Marburg. He became a professor after teaching for three years in 1937. However, Gadamer moved to Leipzig two years later and then to Frankfurt am Main in 1947. Finally, in 1949, he taught in Heidelberg until his retirement.¹³

Gadamer is a leading contemporary writer in the field of hermeneutics. He became a leading philosopher in the field of philosophical hermeneutics thanks to his masterpiece, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*. This book, first published in German in 1960, is considered one of the seminal events in modern German philosophy. In 1965, a second printing was published with an updated preface. In it, Gadamer explained his intentions and answered a number of criticisms that had been raised at the time. There are attachments too. In the third printing in 1972, an afterword was added. Furthermore, this book was translated into English with the title *Truth and Method*. Because this work is also an example of a model of reproductive interpretation and productive interpretation, hundreds of articles, dozens of books and dissertations have been produced, as well as special seminar papers discussing various aspects of the book *Truth and Method*. This great work made Gadamer the most famous historical hermeneutic thinker of this century.¹⁴

Gadamer Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics departs from the understanding that humans never interpret texts neutrally, because every reading is always within the horizon of history, tradition and prejudice (*Vorurteil*) which shape the way a person understands the world. Gadamer reverses the negative understanding of "prejudice" which was previously considered an obstacle to understanding the text; for him, prejudice is a condition for the possibility of understanding, the initial element that makes someone able to open themselves to meaning. In a digital context, this concept becomes very important because digital platform users always carry prejudices that are shaped by algorithmic environments, community culture, content personalization, as well as psychological dynamics driven by digital interactions.

a) Digital Prejudice and Meaning Formation

On social media, readers' preconceptions are shaped by "choice architecture",¹⁵ namely the way platforms organize what users may see, access, or ignore. The phenomena of filter bubbles and echo chambers expose users to a uniform point of view, so that their prejudices become increasingly hardened and are rarely challenged by alternative texts. In Gadamer's perspective, this creates a "narrow horizon", which inhibits horizon fusion.

Additionally, users carry prejudices shaped by digital community identities such as fandoms, political groups, meme culture, and certain ideologies. Narratives that emerge on digital platforms often reinforce these prejudices because algorithms tend to provide content that reinforces users' previous preferences.¹⁶ Thus, understanding digital texts is not simply an individual interpretation, but the result of a complex interaction between digital traditions, personal preferences, and platform structural biases.

Gadamer emphasized that understanding occurs through dialogue with the text, not the reader's domination of the text. However, in the digital world, dialogue is often disrupted because users seek confirmation rather than understanding. The phenomenon of digital confirmation bias¹⁷ shows how prejudice does not transform, but instead strengthens to the extreme. This raises a new epistemological challenge for hermeneutics: how is it possible for a fusion of horizons to occur when digital space actually strengthens the boundaries of the interpreter's horizons?

b) Horizon Fusion in the Digital Ecosystem

For Gadamer, true understanding occurs through *Verschmelzung* der Horizonte, a fusion of horizons between the reader's horizon and the text's horizon. This process requires openness, dialogue, and the reader's willingness

to allow himself to be influenced by the text. However, the digital space complicates this process.

First, digital texts do not exist as single entities, but rather as a series of multimodal interactions of comments, replies, stitches, memes, and remix content that create a more complex horizon of meaning than printed texts.¹⁸ Digital readers are no longer faced with one horizon, but with layers of horizons that often overlap and even conflict.

Second, the virality mechanism makes digital texts “move horizons” very quickly. A content that is initially humorous can turn into political criticism when it circulates in other communities. This creates a situation in which horizon fusion does not occur slowly and reflectively, as Gadamer envisioned, but occurs at extreme speed and is full of disruption. Thus, digital understanding is not only dialogical, but also discontinuous, because the context of interpretation can change drastically in a matter of minutes.

Third, digital hermeneutical analysis must take into account that digital texts are not only read by humans, but also by algorithms that regulate the circulation of meaning. Algorithms intervene in the horizon fusion process by determining the context, order, and relevance of the text.¹⁹ In other words, in a digital context, hermeneutical dialogue occurs not only between the reader and the text, but also between the reader, the text, and the machine.

c) Language as a Medium of Understanding in a Multimodal World

Gadamer emphasized that “Being that can be understood is language”, meaning that language is not just a means of communication, but an ontological condition for understanding the world. In the digital context, language experiences an expansion in form: it is no longer just text, but emojis, GIFs, memes, short videos, visual signs, digital sounds, to icon and symbol-based interactions.²⁰

In digital hermeneutics:

- 1) Emojis can replace intonation or emotional expressions.²¹
- 2) Memes can be a form of cultural argumentation.²²
- 3) GIFs can construct ironic meaning that is not captured in the text.²³
- 4) TikTok videos combine music, overlay text, facial expressions, and visual effects as a multimodal meaning package.²⁴

So, “language” in Gadamer’s sense must be expanded to mean “multimodal semiosis”. The process of understanding does not only occur through words, but through visual, audio, text and movement games that reinforce or even oppose each other. This enriches the possibilities of reading, but at the same time increases the ambiguity of interpretation.

This multimodal nature means that digital reading requires new hermeneutical sensitivities. Readers must carry out “multimodal horizon fusion”, namely uniting the horizons of understanding between text, images, sounds and visual symbols. This challenge never arose in the print era and is the reason why Gadamer’s hermeneutics needs to be revised or expanded in order to account for digital interpretive practices.

d) Hermeneutic Challenges in the Digital Era

There are at least three major challenges for hermeneutics in the digital era:

1) Digital Content Experiences Contextual Fragmentation

One of the most serious challenges in digital hermeneutics is context fragmentation, namely the condition when digital text or content is separated from the historical, social or discursive setting in which it first appeared. This fragmentation causes the meaning to change drastically, sometimes even the opposite of the original intention. In Gadamer’s hermeneutical tradition, understanding cannot be separated from the *wirkungsgeschichte* “history of influence” that is attached to the text and guides reading. However, in digital spaces, these histories of influence are often interrupted, truncated, or manipulated so that texts lose their original context and become vulnerable to extreme re-interpretation.

2) The Ruler of Meaning is No Longer Single

In the classical hermeneutic tradition, especially in pre-modern times, the authority of meaning generally resides in the author, institution, or tradition surrounding the text). However, Gadamer emphasizes that meaning does not belong to the author alone, but rather is the result of dialogue between the text and the reader in a certain historical context. Nevertheless, the digital world gives rise to a new, much more radical phenomenon: the authority of meaning does not just shift from author to reader, but is distributed even fragmented to many actors at once, including algorithms, digital communities, platforms, bots, and the logic of virality.

Thus, digitalization creates a polyphonic condition for interpretation, namely a condition where there is not a single voice that controls the meaning, but rather overlapping voices that negotiate the meaning of the text simultaneously.²⁵ This phenomenon poses a big challenge for Gadamer’s hermeneutics, because the interpretive dialogue he envisions now no longer takes place between two parties (reader-text), but between many masters of meaning who often conflict with each other.

3) Digital Speed Destroys Reflective Depth

Gadamer's hermeneutics rests on the fundamental assumption that true understanding requires time to reflect, dialogue with the text, let the text speak, and open oneself to the possibility of different meanings. The process of understanding is not an instant action, but a historical process that involves pause, reflection, and openness to *wirkungsgeschichte*, namely the history of influences that shape the horizons of the text and the reader. However, the digital world operates in a completely opposite logic of time: speed, simultaneity, impulsivity, and never-ending abundance of information. As a result, the reflective depth that is the main requirement for Gadamer's hermeneutics experiences systematic erosion.

Differences between Derrida's and Gadamer's thoughts in understanding meaning and interpretation

According to the deconstruction approach proposed by Jacques Derrida, the meaning of a text is never fixed, stable, or complete. He argues that language is an "uncontrolled play of signifiers", or a "play of signifiers", which produces meanings that are always deferred and open, which can be identified through the notion of difference and architectural writing. In addition, language weakens the belief that there is one essential meaning or truth. Derrida doubts Gadamer's notion of the experience of "known for certain" or "successful understanding" in dialogue and does not believe that understanding or dialogue can achieve perfect consensus.²⁶

Nevertheless, Hans-Georg Gadamer stands on the basis of a philosophical hermeneutic that values dialogue, tradition and historical continuity. Gadamer considers understanding to be a dialogic process involving a "fusion of horizons" between the reader's interpretation of a text and its historical context. According to him, meaning is formed through historical awareness and openness to tradition, with the aim of achieving correct understanding while remaining open to additional interpretations.

In summary, different views on stability and the purpose of understanding are the basis of these differences. The following table shows further differences between Derrida's and Gadamer's thoughts:²⁷

Indicators	Deconstruction	Hermeneutics
Objective	Uncovering and questioning hidden assumptions and hierarchies in texts and discourse.	Understanding the basic conditions of human understanding through dialogue with tradition and history.
Focus	Instability of meaning, ambiguity, and uncertainty.	The role of tradition, prejudice, and history in understanding.

Views about Meaning	Meaning is never stable or single, always open to interpretation.	Meaning is historical and contextual. Meaning emerges through a “horizon fusion” between the reader/interpreter and the text/tradition.
The Role of Language	Language is a sign system that never fully represents reality. Language is ambiguous, unstable, and filled with differences. Meaning is always postponed and never fully present.	Language is a medium of understanding. Understanding occurs through conversation and interpretation in a linguistic context.
Attitude towards Tradition	Critical of the Western philosophical tradition, seeking to dismantle its underlying assumptions and biases.	Tradition is seen as a positive force that shapes our understanding and provides a basis for the formation of meaning. Understanding involves engagement with tradition.
Final destination	Revealing ambiguity and uncertainty in meaning, indicating the existence of another meaning.	Achieve deeper understanding through dialogue with tradition and history.
Views about truth	There is no single, stable truth.	Truth is not absolute but is found in the historical and cultural context of understanding. Objectivity is achieved through openness to the “other” of the text.
Lack	Tends to be negative and destructive, even leading to nihilism	too conservative and relativistic.
Application Example	Literary criticism, discourse analysis, legal analysis, art criticism, and cultural studies.	Interpretation of legal texts, history, and theology and religious studies

“Table number 1.1: Conceptual Comparison of the Deconstruction and Hermeneutic Approaches”

Derrida–Gadamer Epistemological Tensions

The relationship between Derrida’s and Gadamer’s thinking has become a deep debate in contemporary philosophy of language and hermeneutics. In general, both reject the positivistic view that meaning can be presented objectively and finally, but they differ significantly regarding how meaning works, how interpretation takes place, and the extent to which understanding can achieve a certain stability.

Derrida’s rejection of the stability of meaning vs. Gadamer’s Rejection of Free Relativism

Derrida criticizes hermeneutics’ ambition to achieve a relatively stable meaning through a dialogical process. For him, every text contains aporias and differences which make meaning always delayed and never fully present. He emphasized that language works through a play of signifiers which has no center and therefore

meaning is always open, ambiguous and endless.²⁸

On the other hand, Gadamer rejected extreme relativism which seemed to state that all interpretations were unlimitedly valid. For Gadamer, understanding is not arbitrary reading, but rather a “horizon encounter” between the reader and the historical tradition present in the text. He believes that dialogue, openness, and *wirkungsgeschichte* can guide readers toward responsible understanding, although never final.

This epistemological tension suggests two different models of uncertainty of meaning:

- Derrida: radical and structural uncertainty.
- Gadamer: productive uncertainty that can be mitigated through dialogue.

Agreement: Completely Absent of Objective Meaning

Even though they are contradictory, Derrida and Gadamer agree that independent objective meaning never exists.

Derrida rejects logocentrism and the idea that texts have stable and present meaning. Meanwhile, Gadamer rejects the positivistic scientific method which believes that meaning can be captured objectively and value-free.

Both agree that every understanding is influenced by context: for Derrida, context is always open and never complete; whereas for Gadamer, historical context and tradition shape the reader's horizons.

Nevertheless, they differ in assessing the epistemological consequences of the absence of objective meaning: Derrida: non-objectivity is the permanent condition of the text. Gadamer: non-objectivity can be overcome through open dialogue.

Language Never Perfectly Represents Reality

This is the strongest meeting point between the two. Derrida emphasizes that language is never able to “present” reality completely, because reality is always interpreted through a play of signs. Language is a differential system, not a direct bridge to reality.

Gadamer also stated that “Being that can be understood is language”, meaning that we never access reality directly, but through the medium of language filled with history, tradition and prejudice. Language is not a mirror of reality, but a play space for meaning.

The difference:

- Derrida sees language as a game without center or stability.
- Gadamer saw language as a house of meaning that mediates historical understanding.

Understanding is Open to New Interpretations

Gadamer argues that meaning is always “more” than our understanding, and therefore texts are always open to new interpretations. This is why horizon fusion is dynamic, not final.

Derrida even goes so far as to state that meaning cannot be structurally closed; *différance* ensures that interpretation never reaches a stopping point.

What they both have in common:

- There is no final interpretation.
- Every meaning is always open.
- Meaning continues to change as context changes.

However, the difference is the degree of openness:

Gadamer: openness guided by tradition.

Derrida: bottomless and limitless openness.

Text is always in a network of relationships

Both Derrida and Gadamer reject the idea that texts stand alone. For Derrida, text is part of an infinite intertextual network, where each sign refers to other signs without a central point. This is in line with the concept of paratext in Genette's theory (1997), where the text is surrounded by inseparable layers of context.

For Gadamer, texts are always situated in a history of influences (*wirkungsgeschichte*) that shape and limit interpretation. The text cannot be understood without the context of the tradition that surrounds it.

Thus, both agree that the text can only be understood through a network of relationships:

Derrida → differential relations between signs.

Gadamer → historical relationship between tradition and reader.

This Tension Opens Space for Epistemological Synthesis

The meeting between Derrida and Gadamer gave rise to a productive tension that could produce new approaches to reading digital texts:

- Derrida brings awareness that digital meaning is fluid, fragmented and unstable.
- Gadamer provides a dialogical framework to keep the interpretation process responsible and not fall into extreme relativism.

By combining the two, a new paradigm is created:

Digital Deconstructive Hermeneutics namely an approach that recognizes the instability of meaning (Derrida), but still maintains dialogue, openness and interpretive responsibility (Gadamer).

This approach is especially relevant in reading digital texts that:

- changes very quickly,
- produced by many actors,
- algorithm bound,
- and operate in a multimodal culture.

Derrida–Gadamer’s Epistemological Intersection

Although Derrida and Gadamer are often placed in opposing positions in the philosophy of language and hermeneutics, in-depth study shows that both share a number of epistemological assumptions that place them in the same intellectual orbit. The differences between the two are methodological and orientational, not ontological. Therefore, epistemological synthesis can be carried out by identifying common ground that connects the two.

Meaning is Never Final

Derrida: Meaning of Always Postponed (Différance)

Derrida argues that meaning is never completely present because language works through mechanisms of delay and difference which make meaning always move from one signifier to another without end. Thus, the non-finality of meaning is a structural consequence of language itself.

Gadamer: Meaning Develops through Dialogue

Gadamer agrees that meaning is not final, but he places it in a dialogic framework. Understanding is always open because it is a fusion horizon that continues to develop following changes in the history of influence (*wirkungsgeschichte*). Meaning is never finished because the dialogue between text and reader never stops.

Language as an Arena of Interpretation

Derrida: Language is a Game of Signs

For Derrida, language is a differential network without a center, where each sign obtains its meaning only through difference with other signs. Language is never a transparent medium, but rather an unstable playing field that moves meaning.

Gadamer: Language is a Medium of Existence (Linguisticality)

In contrast to Derrida, Gadamer emphasizes that language is not just a sign system, but an ontological condition of understanding: Being that can be understood is language. Language is the home of existence where meaning is realized

Interpreter Actively Forms Meaning

Derrida: Readers as Agents of Deconstruction

Derrida rejects the authority of the author and places the reader as a subject who dismantles the text, reveals internal contradictions, and produces meaning through

deconstruction). Readers are not passive recipients, but co-producers of meaning.

Gadamer: Readers Bring Productive Prejudice

For Gadamer, readers always *carry Vorurteile* (prejudices) which form the basis of possible understanding. Prejudice is not negative; it is the “initial structure of understanding” that allows readers to interact creatively with the text.

Text is Always in Context

Derrida: Context is Never Closed

Derrida emphasizes that every text is in a network of contexts that can never be determined completely (iterability).²⁹ Texts always carry traces of other texts, and their meaning can only be understood through differential relationships with these contexts.

Gadamer: Texts in the History of Influence (Wirkungsgeschichte)

Gadamer views texts as always standing in the historical flow of tradition, and understanding must take into account that historical influence. Without historical context, hermeneutical dialogue is impossible.

Deconstructive Implications for Islamic Studies (Jacques Derrida)

The deconstruction approach developed by Jacques Derrida has very significant implications for Islamic Studies, especially in understanding the dynamics of meaning, the structure of religious discourse, and the authority of interpretation. Derrida emphasizes that texts do not have final and stable meaning; on the contrary, meaning is always postponed and moves through a process of differentiation, namely shifting and postponing meaning that never reaches absolute certainty. In the context of Islamic Studies, this idea invites scholars to realize that every reading of the Al-Qur'an, Hadith and other religious texts cannot be completely final, but is always open to the possibility of new interpretations according to the developing social, historical and epistemological context.

Deconstruction is not intended to totally relativize meaning or dismantle the authority of sacred texts, but to open the awareness that meaning cannot be imposed through a single authority. In the Islamic tradition itself, plurality of interpretations has actually become part of intellectual history, for example through differences in schools of *fiqh*, various methods of interpretation, and the dynamics of *ijtihad*. Deconstruction actually provides a philosophical basis for why plurality is a natural consequence of the nature of language and text. Through the concept of trace, Derrida explains that the presence of a meaning always contains the shadow of another absence that forms it.³⁰ This helps explain the phenomenon of differences in interpretation in Islam that every meaning is born from the dialectic between what is shown and what is hidden by the text.

In interpretive studies, deconstruction can be used to analyze the relationship between texts, readers, and power structures in interpretive traditions. Many modern scholars such as Mohammed Arkoun, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Abdul Karim Soroush have utilized a deconstructive approach to criticize the dominance of certain discourses that limit interpretive creativity. Abu Zayd, for example, views texts as language phenomena that are subject to linguistic laws and must be analyzed through modern linguistic and semiotic approaches.³¹ This perspective is in line with Derrida's way of viewing texts as networks of signifiers that refer to each other and never reach a final point of meaning.

Deconstruction also reveals how binary constructions in Islamic disciplines such as textual vs. contextual, literal vs. metaphorical, revelation vs. reason, orthodoxy vs. heterodoxy often produces hierarchies that determine what is considered "correct" or "authoritative." Through the deconstruction method, these binary pairs can be reversed, explored and criticized, thereby opening up a space for more inclusive and dialogical understanding. This approach makes an important contribution to contemporary Islamic Studies which is grappling with issues of authority, pluralism, gender, Islamic law, and the rereading of classical texts.

Furthermore, deconstruction is relevant for reading Islamic texts in the digital era. Phenomena such as truncated quotes, virality, religious memes, and online discourse show how religious meaning experiences the play of signifiers, a game of signifiers that moves quickly, is reproduced, and reinterpreted without central control. Deconstruction helps explain that digital spaces reinforce the fluid and unstable nature of language, so the main challenge for Islamic Studies is how to maintain the integrity of meaning without closing the possibility of creative interpretation that emerges from the participation of the faithful.

Thus, deconstructive implications for Islamic Studies include freeing meaning from claims of finality, opening up a space for more critical and reflective interpretation, and realizing that every meaning is the result of negotiations between the text, tradition, reader and social context. This approach does not replace classical methodology, but provides a philosophical foundation for rereading Islamic traditions in a more open, dialogical and adaptive way to the challenges of modernity, including in digital and post-digital contexts.

Hermeneutical Implications for Islamic Studies

The hermeneutic approach has become an important theoretical framework in studying religious texts, including in the realm of Islamic Studies. The term Hermeneutical Implications for Islamic Studies refers to how concepts, methods, and principles of hermeneutics especially those developed in the Western philosophical tradition such as those developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer can

influence, enrich, or change the way Muslims understand the *Quran*, *Hadith*, *tafsir*, *fiqh*, and the Islamic intellectual tradition more broadly. In Gadamer's view, every understanding is always influenced by productive prejudices (*Vorurteil*) and the reader's historical horizon, something that cannot be avoided in the human interpretation process.

In the context of Islamic Studies, this idea opens up the awareness that the meaning of sacred texts never takes place in a vacuum, but is always tied to the experience, knowledge structure and social background of the reader. For example, a classical commentator and a modern interpreter will produce different interpretations because they live in different historical horizons, intellectual traditions and social realities. This difference in horizons illustrates what Gadamer calls a fusion of horizons a meeting between the text's horizon and the reader's horizon. In Islamic studies, this concept can explain why interpretation of the Koran continues to develop from time to time and how the historical context opens up space for new readings that still respect tradition but are responsive to the challenges of the times.

In addition, hermeneutics emphasizes the hermeneutical circle, namely the process of understanding that moves between part and whole repeatedly. In the science of *tafsir*, this concept is actually known through the principle of *tafsir al-Qur'an bi al-Qur'an*, namely that the understanding of a verse cannot be separated from the entire structure of the discourse of the Qur'an. However, hermeneutics develops a broader understanding that the circle also includes the relationship between texts, interpretive traditions, and the subjective position of the interpreter. Thus, the concept of hermeneutics does not conflict with classical methods, but enriches the perspective that understanding is always historical and dialogical.

The concept of *wirkungsgeschichte* or history of influence also has important implications for Islamic Studies. This idea emphasizes that every text carries a legacy of reception history which shapes the way people read it. In the Islamic context, historical influence can be seen in the development of the sciences of *tafsir*, *hadith*, *fiqh*, and theology, each of which has a long tradition of interpretation. It is impossible for a contemporary interpreter to read the Al-Qur'an directly without being influenced by the methodological legacy of previous scholars, either through the Islamic books or religious educational institutions. Thus, "understanding Islamic texts" also means understanding the history of their interpretation.

Hermeneutics also opens up opportunities for contextual reading of religious texts. This thinking is close to the approach of scholars such as Fazlur Rahman with his double movement theory, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd with his text hermeneutics, and Mohammed Arkoun with his applied Islamology approach, all of whom emphasize that texts must be understood in their historical-sociological context.

Thus, hermeneutics provides a strong philosophical framework for efforts to *tajdīd* (renew) religious understanding without ignoring its traditional roots.

However, the application of hermeneutics in Islamic Studies is not free from epistemological challenges. Some traditional Muslim scholars criticize hermeneutics because they think it can reduce the authority of the text and open up opportunities for interpretive relativism. This concern primarily arises from the understanding that hermeneutics rejects the objectivity of meaning and emphasizes the role of the interpreter's subjectivity. However, according to Gadamer, subject involvement is not a threat, but rather a condition for the possibility of understanding the text authentically. This criticism actually encourages the need for a more productive dialogue between hermeneutics and classical methodology so that both can enrich each other.

Thus, the hermeneutical implications for Islamic Studies cover two sides: 1) opening up opportunities for methodological renewal through historical, dialogical, contextual and horizon-aware understanding; and, 2) challenging the Islamic scientific tradition to respond to modern social dynamics without losing its epistemological continuity. In an academic context, hermeneutics provides a coherent framework for interpreting Islamic texts as living texts-texts that continue to speak to each generation through a dialogue between tradition and the new horizons of the modern era.

Synthesis of Gadamer's Hermeneutics and Derrida's Deconstruction in Islamic Studies

Efforts to combine Gadamer's hermeneutics and Derrida's deconstruction in Islamic Studies are an important step in building a more comprehensive, critical and adaptive interpretive approach to the dynamics of contemporary religious discourse. Even though they come from two philosophical traditions that are often seen as opposites, they both contribute fundamental aspects that complement each other. Gadamer's hermeneutics emphasizes that meaning is dialogical, historical, and continues to move within the horizon of the reader's tradition. Meanwhile, Derrida's deconstruction emphasizes the instability of meaning, the openness of texts to the suspension of meaning (*differance*), and the need to dismantle binary constructions that form claims to authority in discourse. Both open up the possibility of formulating a new epistemological model for Islamic Studies that combines respect for tradition with criticism of established structures of meaning.

In Gadamer's hermeneutical perspective, Islamic texts ranging from the Koran, Hadith, tafsir books, to works of *ushul* and *fiqh* are understood through a fusion of horizons, namely the meeting between the horizon of the text and the horizon of the reader, each of which has a certain historical context. Understanding is never neutral,

because it is shaped by productive prejudices (*Vorurteil*) that enable the reader to enter a dialogue with the text. This framework is very relevant for Islamic Studies which is inherited from a long tradition of textual interpretation and debate in the history of the ulama. However, Gadamer's hermeneutics is often assumed to give too much stability to meaning, thereby ignoring the internal tensions of the text and the existence of power structures that help shape interpretive authority. It is at this point that Derrida's deconstruction becomes a critical complement.

Derrida's deconstruction shows that every text contains traces, namely traces of meaning that are not present but form the structure of meaning that emerges. Thus, no interpretation is truly final. In Islamic Studies, this approach provides theoretical tools to criticize the dominance of certain discourses, opens up opportunities for alternative readings, and reveals how pairs of binary oppositions such as literal vs. metaphorical, orthodox vs. heterodox, and text vs. context creating certain hierarchies that are often unconscious. This is in line with the criticism of modern Muslim thinkers such as Abu Zayd who views religious texts as linguistic phenomena that are subject to historical dynamics and social,³² or Arkoun who emphasizes the need for applied Islamology to dismantle the boundaries of religious discourse.³³

When these two approaches are synthesized, a model of interpretation emerges which can be called deconstructive hermeneutics: an approach that respects the continuity of tradition as advocated by Gadamer, but remains critical of the discourse structures that form meaning as demanded by Derrida. In this framework, understanding Islamic texts not only moves in a hermeneutical circle between part and whole, but also involves tracing hidden traces of meaning, internal tensions of the text, and structural biases that are often perpetuated by interpretive traditions. This approach is very useful in contemporary issues such as gender hermeneutics, pluralism, minority rights, and Islamic legal reform, where traditional dialogue and structural criticism must be balanced.

Furthermore, this synthesis becomes very relevant in the digital era. Religious texts are no longer understood exclusively through static books, but through digital circulation that is rapid, fragmented, and determined by algorithms. Digital space accelerates the play of signifiers as explained by Derrida, so that the meaning of religious texts often changes according to virality, platform context and community participation. On the other hand, Gadamer's hermeneutics helps place this digital reading in a dialogical relationship with the tradition and history of the influence of Islamic discourse. Thus, the combination of hermeneutics and deconstruction provides a solid theoretical framework for Islamic Studies to respond to the challenges of postmodernity and digitalization without abandoning its intellectual roots.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that Derrida's deconstruction and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, often treated as opposing theoretical positions, can be brought into a dialogical engagement that enriches the interpretation of contemporary digital texts. Rather than producing a total synthesis, this dialogical approach reveals shared epistemological concerns, including the non-finality of meaning, the centrality of language, the active role of the interpreter, and the relational positioning of texts within broader discursive and historical contexts.

In the digital environment, meaning is shaped not only by textual structures and interpretive traditions, but also by algorithmic mediation, user interaction, and multimodal forms of expression. By engaging Gadamer's emphasis on historical dialogue and the fusion of horizons with Derrida's critical attention to *différance* and the instability of meaning, this study proposes an interpretive framework referred to as Digital Deconstructive Hermeneutics. This framework enables readers to approach digital texts with both hermeneutical openness and critical reflexivity, acknowledging the dynamic interplay between text, context, and technological mediation.

Ultimately, this dialogical perspective underscores that interpretation in the digital age is an ongoing process rather than a definitive outcome. Meaning emerges through continuous negotiation among textual traditions, interpretive horizons, and evolving digital realities. As such, this study contributes to contemporary debates on interpretive epistemology and offers conceptual insights for digital literacy and cultural analysis in increasingly complex textual environments.

Endnotes

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