



The Medium is Viral: Reinterpreting McLuhan's Theory in Digital Da'wah Practice

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A B S T R A C T

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This study examines the practice of digital da'wah through the lens of classical communication theory, particularly the medium is the message (Marshall McLuhan) and simulacra (Jean Baudrillard). The phenomenon of da'wah on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram reveals that virality is no longer merely a channel of distribution but has become the dominant medium that shapes message structures, aesthetics, and digital religious practices. A qualitative approach employing content analysis and interviews was used to explore how repetitive, short-form da'wah content creates a religious hyperreality detached from transcendental references. The findings indicate that: (1) the digital da'wah landscape has shifted from educative-transformative communication toward performative expression governed by algorithmic logic; (2) religious symbols are massively reproduced in uniform and emotional formats, generating sign repetition; and (3) virality itself has emerged as the medium reshaping da'wah into a phenomenon of aesthetic religiosity, where audience reception is formed as instant collective emotion based on visual impressions and digital

popularity. This study underscores the need for a critical reading of digital da'wah content to avoid entrapment in superficial and illusory forms of religious consumption.

Introduction

Da'wah (Islamic preaching) in Indonesia's digital society has undergone a marked shift in meaning and style. It's not difficult to find da'wah content on social media these days. Several digital platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts, present religious messages in a light, fast, and visual format. This demonstrates that the production of da'wah messages can be done by anyone, in line with the principle of new media's democratization of messages.

On Instagram, religious hashtags such as #Islam #nasihatdakwah have recorded more than 43 billion views worldwide (*100 Islamic Best Hashtag, 2025*). While the total number of TikTok videos using the hashtag #dakwah doesn't provide an open metric for the number of videos per hashtag, TikTok's unique algorithm allows content creators and influencers to implicitly incorporate da'wah into their content. To illustrate local trends in Indonesia, a study of 150 viral videos using the hashtags #dakwah or #islam between 2022 and 2024 indicates that da'wah content on TikTok is highly productive and widespread. (Daragana, 2025).

The democratization of da'wah is both exciting and depressing. There are no longer any boundaries between the stage and the pulpit. Every account is a channel, and every post is a sermon. However, it's worth examining the viral phenomenon of digital da'wah productions: are they truly da'wah, merely appear to be da'wah, or are they combining the two, as in other phenomena such as the mediatization of da'wah and the commodification of da'wah.

Some viral Islamic preaching content appears without textual evidence or contextual explanation, which can be open to multiple interpretations and even have a fleeting cognitive effect. Examples from TikTok and Instagram include short narratives, trending soundtracks, or motivational quotes, all wrapped up in 30-second clips that can attract audiences. At first glance, this new trend raises the question of whether it is the success of Islamic preaching or of algorithms. The algorithm's

takeover marks a major shift in how society consumes religious values. Speed, conciseness, and visual aesthetics are becoming more important than interpretation, discussion, or depth of content. Social media is creating a world where meaning is no longer sought in lengthy texts, but rather in the next "swipe up."

The rapidity with which digital communities consume real-time, live digital content will influence how they perceive and interpret messages. Messages packaged attractively will be perceived as meaningful, even if they are meaningless. When content containing Islamic preaching or religious content is mixed, the nagging question arises: is this Islamic preaching or merely a simulation of Islamic preaching? The author will examine Marshall McLuhan's work to shed light on this. He stated that the medium is the message; media is not merely a means but also a constructor of the message's structure. This marks a shift from a paradigm of meaning-centered communication to attention-centered communication. In this landscape, the performance of the message becomes more important than its substance. Da'wah is no longer judged by the depth of its theological content or argumentation, but by its ability to penetrate social media algorithmic feeds and become part of the massive digital conversation.

Marshall McLuhan, in his work **Understanding Media**, put forward his legendary thesis: the medium is the message. (McLuhan, 2019). This premise fundamentally rejects the old assumption that the content of a message is more important than the medium through which it is delivered. For McLuhan, every medium is not simply a "neutral vessel" but rather shapes the way humans communicate, feel, and even think. Television, for example, not only conveys visual information but also shapes how people perceive reality simultaneously and instantly. In other words, the medium produces social and cultural effects that are more profound than the message's content.

However, in the context of social media, McLuhan's thesis requires reinterpretation. While in the television era, the medium shaped perceptions through broadcast formats, in the digital era, the medium is no longer the form of mass media and its derivatives, but rather the way mass media, in this case, digital media, operates: through the logic of virality. Instagram and TikTok, for example, digital media not only "transmit messages" but also determine what is considered valuable based on certain criteria, namely visibility and shareability. Thus, the reinterpretation of "the medium is the message" as "the medium is viral"

finds momentum here, namely, that the depth of its substance no longer measures the success of a message, but rather by the extent to which it submits to the viral mechanisms produced by social media algorithms.

This view can be approached more critically by drawing on Jean Baudrillard's analysis of simulacra. Baudrillard asserts that in contemporary society, signs and images are often more decisive than reality itself. The logic of virality on TikTok and Instagram illustrates this: a preaching message that is merely aesthetic, brief, or follows a music trend can be more "meaningful" to the audience than a lengthy sermon based on a classical text.

Besides Baudrillard, Pierre Bourdieu provides a critical lens through the concepts of field and capital. In the realm of digital preaching, cultural capital such as religious knowledge does not automatically translate into legitimacy. (Bourdieu, 1986). What's more decisive is symbolic capital in the form of followers, likes, and engagement. Instagram accounts like @dibalik.akun, and TikTok accounts like @irfanrizkihaas, @nurulamalia19.k, and @kohdennislim, whose content goes viral by packaging moral narratives in aesthetic visuals and concise storytelling, demonstrate how the capital of visibility is replacing conventional scholarly authority. Thus, it can be argued that virality functions as a new form of legitimacy in the digital da'wah space.

A critical question arises: does this viral logic simply expand access to da'wah, or does it actually establish a new term, where algorithms are key? Here, McLuhan is relevant again. If the "message" of television is visual simultaneity, then the "message" of social media is virality itself. Content that fails to make it to TikTok's For Your Page (FYP) is often deemed "worthless," even if it's profound. Conversely, aesthetic content can be considered successful even if it lasts only 30 seconds. This phenomenon marks an epistemological shift: truth and relevance are no longer determined by the authority of texts or religious scholars, but rather by the logic of algorithms that select what is worthy of appearing on our screens.

The concept of the medium is viral has become the dominant structure framing the message of da'wah. Virality reconstructs the meaning of da'wah, from educational and transformative communication to performative expression emphasizing popularity, visual impressions, and instant emotional engagement. This reinterpretation is crucial not only for understanding the changing practices of digital da'wah but also as a theoretical contribution in updating McLuhan's

framework amidst the dynamics of social media and digital da'wah. Meanwhile, Jean Baudrillard, in his work on simulacra, emphasized the position of representation as imitating reality without referring to reality itself. In the context of digital da'wah, presentations can appear to be da'wah but no longer convey the reality of authentic values.

The combination of these two perspectives raises a new concern: the virality of da'wah can mirror a religious simulation. Where sermons are consumed like spiritual snacks, and spirituality is presented in a fast, light, and easily shared form. Technology, meanwhile, exists to provide convenience and is ongoing due to its rapid pace of change. However, understanding that when da'wah is absorbed in viral logic, it is vulnerable to slipping into soulless content.

This research does not necessarily seek to negate all forms of digital da'wah. Instead, it can open up a critical space: what are the challenges and alternatives to da'wah in the digital space, without losing its meaning. The main question is not simply how to make da'wah viral, but how to ensure that what goes viral is indeed da'wah-oriented and substantive. By positioning virality as a new medium, this research seeks to demonstrate that classical communication theory needs to be transformed to remain relevant to contemporary digital society.

Using the theoretical framework of McLuhan and Baudrillard, along with a digital content analysis approach, this research attempts to explore the possibility that some Indonesian digital da'wah today is navigating two boundaries: between substance and aesthetics, between meaning and simulation.

Research Methods and Theoretical Approach

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with an interpretative-critical study design. (Miles et al., 2014), This study aims to explore in depth how virality as a medium shapes and transforms the meaning of Islamic preaching in the digital media ecosystem. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the phenomenon's contextual, complex, and symbolic nature. The primary focus of this research is to interpret the production, circulation, and reception processes of viral Islamic preaching content, and to understand how aesthetic patterns, algorithms, and social media interactions shape the construction of religious meaning.

Data collection was conducted using digital content analysis, literature

review, and interviews. Content analysis focused on Islamic preaching videos with high distribution intensity on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, using virality criteria: number of views, interactions (likes, comments, shares), on the Instagram account @dibalik.akun, and the TikTok accounts @irfanrizkihaas, @nurulamalia19.k, and @kohdennislim. The researcher purposively selected at least 10 viral Islamic preaching content pieces from the past month.

The data obtained were analyzed using Baudrillard's and McLuhan's critical theories. The simulacra and "the medium is the message" frameworks are used as theoretical tools to interpret the shift in the meaning of da'wah from the spiritual-transcendental realm to a form of viral hyperreality. Thus, this study not only explains how da'wah is conveyed through digital media, but also how the viral medium itself has reconstructed the essence of religious communication in contemporary digital society.

1.1 Theoretical Approach: The Medium is Viral

Marshall McLuhan introduced a fundamental idea in communication studies through his famous statement, "the medium is the message." According to McLuhan, the essence of communication lies not in the content or message sent, but in the medium used to convey that message. The medium is not simply a neutral channel but actively shapes how humans feel, think, and interact with the world. In other words, the characteristics of a medium determine its social and cultural impact more than the content of the message it carries. As McLuhan asserted, "the 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale, pace, or pattern that it introduces into human affairs." (McLuhan, 2019).

Furthermore, McLuhan demonstrated that each medium carries a particular bias toward human experience. Print media, for example, prioritizes linearity, rationality, and individuality, while electronic media like television create simultaneous, collective, and multisensory experiences. From this perspective, television does not simply convey entertainment or news programs, but has more fundamentally changed the structure of consciousness and social habits of modern society. McLuhan called this phenomenon "extensions of man," namely, how technology and media expand the capacity of human senses and organs, thus forming new ways of understanding reality. (McLuhan, 2019).

In the contemporary digital context, McLuhan's concept finds increasing relevance. Digital media like Instagram and TikTok are not merely passive platforms, but ecosystems that continually discover their own ways of working through algorithms, the logic of virality, and dynamic feed mechanisms. With this logic, digital media shapes not only how messages are distributed but also how they must be designed to fit the algorithmic rhythm. Virality, brevity, and visual aesthetics are prerequisites for a message to be present and attract audience attention. Thus, digital media today function simultaneously as an active environment that shapes new communication patterns, thus expanding McLuhan's understanding that the "true message" lies within the logic of the medium itself. (McLuhan, 2019).

Virality, in the context of Indonesian audiences, can foster solidarity, public pressure, and even influence religious, social, and political opinion. In the context of government, for example, virality involving inappropriate public policy directions in certain agencies will garner significant audience attention due to the massive reach and pressure that occurs digitally, by the digital community.

Meanwhile, da'wah (Islamic preaching) in the digital era is not only determined by the content of religious sermons, but also by the characteristics of media like TikTok and Reels. Short, catchy, and visual da'wah content is more acceptable. The virality of da'wah is determined by the technical success of the media. Recent research highlights that viral content in Indonesia is not always meaningful. Often, it simply displays style, humor, or short-lived emotions. This also applies to da'wah, which is now shifting from interpretive narratives to emotional and instant narratives. (Hasnah et al., 2025).

1.2 Simulacra as a Framework for Reading Digital Da'wah

From a postmodern perspective, Baudrillard argues that society no longer refers to reality, but to representations that imitate reality. The concept of simulacra explains how signs and images in postmodern society no longer simply represent reality but create a new reality, which he calls hyperreality. In his work, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard asserts that "simulacra is not that which hides the truth; it is the truth that hides the fact that there is none. Simulacra is true." (Baudrillard, 1995). With this statement, he shows that signs ultimately no longer refer to transcendental reality, but instead stand alone as a new "reality."

Baudrillard also outlines three stages of sign development: first, signs reflect reality; second, signs distort or mask reality; and third, signs become simulacra that are completely detached from their original reality. (Baudrillard, 1995).

In the context of digital communication, simulacra appear through the practice of massive and uniform repetition of symbols. The poster emphasizes that for Baudrillard, modern media "does not merely represent reality, but it produces reality, it creates the social itself." (Poster, 2002). This statement is highly relevant to the phenomenon of digital da'wah, where religious symbols such as calligraphy, verses, prayer gestures, and Islamic music are reproduced in concise and aesthetic formats. These symbols no longer refer to deep theological meaning, but rather to visual appeal and the potential for virality that can generate engagement.

Kellner further explains that in consumer society, "signs and images are circulated endlessly, detached from their origins, generating a universe of spectacle and simulation." (Kellner, 2007). This explains how digital da'wah creates a religious hyperreality: audiences perceive a religious experience by consuming short, viral content, even though the connection to transcendental references is weakening. The authority of da'wah has shifted: it's no longer based on the depth of the text or scholarship, but rather on digital visibility—the number of times the content appears on the For You Page and the number of views, likes, and comments. Thus, digital da'wah can be read as "religion in image form," completely subject to algorithmic logic and visual consumption.

In contemporary media and communication theory, particularly through the lens of simulacra developed by Jean Baudrillard, digital da'wah content has transformed from a representation of spiritual values into a hyperreality, a reality constructed from the repetition of signs that no longer refer to their original substance. Da'wah, in the form of quotations from hadiths, verses, or moral rhetoric, is continually reproduced in identical formats on social media, rendering the message banal. This repetitive action produces an effect of symbolic redundancy, where users no longer absorb the essential meaning of the da'wah, but instead consume its form as a viral algorithmic aesthetic. (Wijaya & Mashud, 2020).

This phenomenon of repetitive da'wah content not only shows a shift in the function of da'wah communication from educational praxis to performative aesthetics, but also creates what Baudrillard calls the third stage of the order of simulacra where religious signs no longer represent transcendental values, but

only refer to themselves. (Saumantri & Zikrillah, 2020). In this context, short sermons, beautifully texted Quranic excerpts, and religious visualizations become commodities of meaning capitalized by platform algorithms. Furthermore, audiences no longer engage with spiritual meaning, but with digital impressions that are liked and shared for visibility, not understanding.

By involving visibility and the dislocation of meaning in digital da'wah communication, religious messages are fragmented into content units that are easy to consume but difficult to internalize. Da'wah that goes viral on social media, in many cases, falls into the category of simulacra: imitations of da'wah without conveying substantial value. (Baudrillard, 1995). Da'wah has shifted from a transcendental act to a representational simulation, from the transmission of wisdom to the repetition of narratives that satisfy the audience's visual and emotional expectations. Within this framework, simulacra not only blur the boundaries between reality and imitation, but also reconstruct how society understands religiosity through the lens of digital media, which goes viral not because of its content but because of its familiar and predictable form.

Literature Review

Studies on digital da'wah in Indonesia have developed through various theoretical approaches, particularly media ecology and the mediatization of religion, which explain the relationship between digital media and contemporary religious practices. These studies have made important contributions to understanding the changing space, authority, and communication patterns of da'wah in the social media era. However, these studies still leave room for analysis that has not fully explored the logic of the digital medium as a primary determinant of the production of da'wah meaning.

Research on da'wah from a media ecology perspective positions digital media as a media environment that influences how humans interact, understand messages, and carry out da'wah activities. Drawing on the thinking of Marshall McLuhan, this approach emphasizes the mutual symbiosis between humans and technology, where media functions as a new space that enables da'wah to adapt to social and technological changes. (Uswatun Hasanah, 2019) However, in this study, media is still understood primarily as an external context that facilitates

the delivery of da'wah messages, rather than as a structure capable of adapting to evolving digital media.

Meanwhile, studies on the mediatization of religion in digital religious practices highlight how media logics such as speed, visualization, interactivity, and social media formats influence religious authority, congregational participation patterns, and the transformation of religious expression in digital spaces. This approach successfully demonstrates that religion no longer exists autonomously, but is increasingly integrated with and dependent on media mechanisms. (Hanung Sito, 2024) However, within the framework of mediatization, virality is generally positioned as a social impact of media logic, rather than as an inherent characteristic of the digital medium itself.

Building on this gap, this study offers a distinct theoretical contribution through a reinterpretation of McLuhan's thesis "the medium is the message" in the context of digital da'wah. This article argues that in digital media, the medium operates as a viral mechanism, so that virality is not merely a communication strategy or a consequence of social media use, but rather the underlying logic of the medium that shapes how da'wah messages are produced, circulated, and received by audiences.

With this perspective, this article not only discusses how da'wah is mediated by digital media but also how virality, as a characteristic of digital media, plays a role in determining the legitimacy, visibility, and, subsequently, the realm of da'wah authority. Algorithms, popularity metrics, and the attention economy of social media are understood as medium structures that contribute to constructing the meaning of da'wah, while simultaneously shifting the orientation of da'wah from the transmission of normative values to competition for visibility and audience reach.

Thus, the main distinction of this article lies in the shift in analytical focus from the adaptation of da'wah to media or the process of religious mediatization to a McLuhanian critical reading of digital media as a viral actor. This approach complements and critiques previous research and enriches the study of digital da'wah communication in Indonesia by positioning virality as a structural dimension of the medium, not simply a communication effect.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate a shift in the logical mechanism of da'wah text production in a digital context, transforming the current da'wah style.

The reinterpretation of the theoretical concept of “the medium is the message” as “the medium is viral” places it within a new medium used to explain digital da'wah practices, which are rife with repetition of signs, aesthetic-religious elements involving visual impressions and popularity.

1.1 Virality in Digital Da'wah

Results from an analysis of viral da'wah content on the Instagram account @dibalik.akun, TikTok accounts @irfanrizkihaas, @nurulamalia19.k, and @kohdennislim show that the formats used tend to prioritize visual aspects in feed organization, engage audience emotions, and include excerpts taken from the full sermon. Videos lasting 15–60 seconds, with popular background audio, superimposed text such as “ingat mati” or “jangan libur salah,” and emotional framing with illustrations of happiness, sadness, or hope, make da'wah content more of an emotional product than an educational instrument. This pattern demonstrates that virality has become the dominant medium dictating the form of religious communication.

In this context, contemporary digital da'wah practices also demonstrate a tendency to consciously follow established patterns and mechanisms on social media platforms to maintain sustainable audience reach and engagement. Adjustments to platform algorithm, upload rhythms, short content formats, and the use of audio and visual trends are inseparable strategies for producing Islamic preaching content.



Figure 1: Content with a quote (left: @dibalik.akun) and an interesting thumbnail text (right: @nurulamalia19.k)

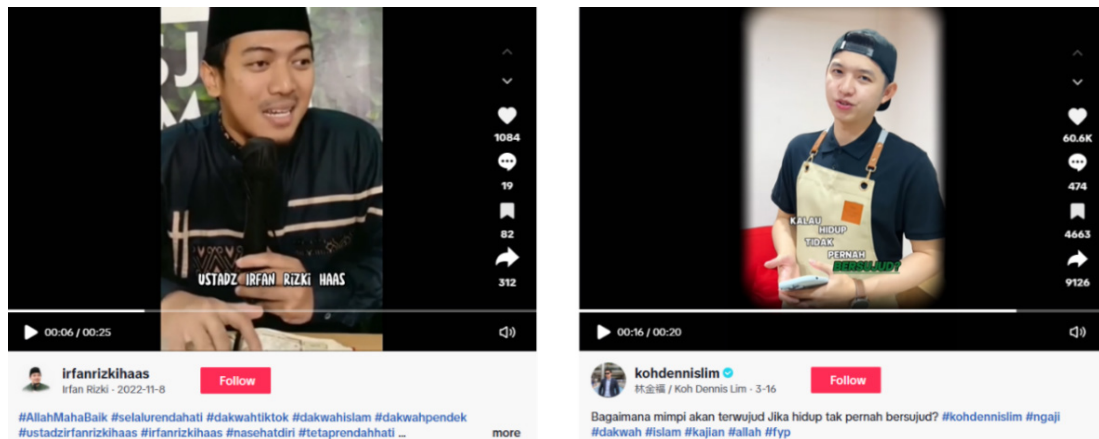


Figure 2: Content of a lecture excerpt with subtitles (left: @irfanrizkihas) and a contemporary look without the preacher’s attributes (right: @kohdennislim)

The content above cites images and videos from preachers who already have a reputation for capturing audience attention. Virality is not simply a distribution channel, but rather a production logic that shapes the structure of the preaching message itself. The religious message presented seems to lose its complexity of meaning, reduced to a slogan or short quote that is easy to consume and share. The content is massively available but loses its epistemic depth due to its rapid spread and is replaced by new content. An analysis of the new meaning of preaching through the lens of virality can be explained in the following table:

Matter	Explanation	Interpretation
Economy Algorithm	Viral content benefits social media platforms (Tiktok/IG)	Increasing engagement between account owners and platforms. Religious messages are becoming increasingly commodified.
Medium-Message Relationship	Messages that don’t fit viral logic (long, wordy, too theoretical) don’t appear in feeds and FYP.	Affirming McLuhan’s thesis: the medium itself is the primary message. So the logic of TikTok/IG Reels forces religious messages to be brief, repetitive, and emotional.

Scale & Tempo	Digital Islamic preaching content on each account on Instagram Reels and TikTok moves on a scale of hundreds, thousands, or millions of views per video.	Spread quickly and disappear quickly from the algorithm if it is not sustainable.
Aesthetics and Format	30–60 second vertical format with dominant audio visuals, subtitles to maintain audience focus, clips of the preacher and the preacher's appearance	Forming the perception that religious messages are delivered in an emotional form (creating emotion, anger, like, hate) and argumentative audience reception (interactive audience discussion in the comments column)
Social Dynamics	Virality creates a new cultural environment for preaching	The interactivity of comments, likes and shares, and the culture of "checking the source" has dropped due to the rapid consumption.
Religious Message	Become a slogan or short quote Follow a niche that the account has already understood and chosen	Substantial reduction The diversity of preaching is lost, referring to niches
Perception and attention	Fast scrolling logic	Creating a shallow attention pattern, religious messages are understood at a glance depending on visual/auditory impressions.

Figure 3: The table of Da'wah in a new perspective, the medium is viral

The table above clearly demonstrates that McLuhan's relationship between virality and the medium involves the algorithmic economy, the relationship between the medium and the message itself, the scale factor of speed, the aesthetics and format of preaching, social dynamics, religious messages, and audience perception.

Adapting viral media shifts the focus to rapid production, limited duration, and compatibility with algorithms. Audience reception of viral religious content can diminish the depth of the original content and meaning in the text and lead to shallow attention.(McLuhan, 2019). This demonstrates that viral media is no longer neutral, but rather shapes the message itself. It also demonstrates that authentic preaching methods according to the Quran also face challenges that should be guided by the principle of wisdom.(Nurdin et al., 2024). However, in practice, this must also refer to the use of the medium.

Viral is not only about rapid spread, but also a symbol of digital cultural authority that sometimes transcends formal authority. What goes viral is often considered “valuable.” McLuhan called media expanding the nervous system, meaning that virality today expands instant collective emotions and digital collective emotions. It demonstrates irrational yet highly effective mass emotions. Meanwhile, the medium can dominate the content of the da’wah message. Through McLuhan’s lens, social media (TikTok, Instagram Reels) takes center stage. Viral da’wah videos are judged not by their text or interpretation, but by their aesthetics, algorithmic speed, and engagement. The medium not only conveys the message, but also the message itself. (Ika et al., 2025).

In McLuhan’s terminology, viral media accelerates and changes patterns of social relationships (viewing, sharing, and reacting). This demonstrates that once viral media is used, dissemination becomes rapid, without in-depth processing of messages and meanings. The dominance of digital communication studies will primarily explore technical aspects, namely, that certain platforms can optimize their functioning through specific techniques.

The “the medium is viral” perspective of digital da’wah also carries epistemological implications for how religious knowledge is produced and understood by audiences. When da’wah messages are constructed in a fast-paced format (see figure 03), the process of religious interpretation has the potential to shift from a reflective approach to an impressionistic one, namely, religious understanding formed through visual impressions and emotional narratives (anger, joy, happiness, hate, and like). In this situation, the authority of religious knowledge no longer rests solely on scientific legitimacy, but is also determined by the content’s ability to capture attention and mobilize instant audience responses. Consequently, digital da’wah, in “the medium is viral,” has the potential to create

a more performative form of religiosity, where religious expressions are often produced to fulfill the logic of social media visibility.

Furthermore, the dominance of viral media also influences the orientation of da'wah practices. Da'wah strategies are no longer solely designed to transmit religious values and teachings, but also to ensure the message's continued existence in a competitive social media ecosystem. This encourages da'wah creators to adapt their communication style, choose emotionally resonant themes, and package religious messages in formats that are easy to share and consume quickly. In certain contexts, these adjustments can increase the reach of da'wah and open new access to religious literacy. However, on the other hand, this situation also has the potential to lead to a simplification of religious messages, a reduction in the complexity of teachings, and a shift in the orientation of da'wah from long-term spiritual guidance to the production of content oriented towards short-term audience engagement.

1.2 Simulacra in Islamic Propagation Content: The Production of Repetition of Signs

Viral digital Islamic propagation content exhibits the characteristics of Baudrillard's third stage of simulacra, where religious representations no longer refer to spiritual reality but rather to religious images that are continually replicated for aesthetic and algorithmic purposes. In viral Islamic propagation videos, narratives about marital relations, heaven, hell, migration, and repentance are often packaged in an identical format: dramatic lecture clips, cinematic visuals, and uniform background music. This creates a hyperreality effect, where the public becomes more familiar with religion through representations mediated by the logic of social media, rather than through authentic, naturally occurring religious sources and processes.

Simulation creates Islamic propagation as a visual commodity that can be produced and reproduced infinitely, regardless of context or scientific authority. As Baudrillard put it, "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, but of substituting signs of the real for the real itself." (Baudrillard, 1995). Digital da'wah has become a self-contained simulation, where audiences no longer associate content with sacred texts or scholarly authority, but rather with the content's appeal.

In interviews, some creators admitted to choosing topics and formats not based on urgent religious values, but rather because "previous content was on FYP" or "more interaction when using mellow and trending music." This means that

simulacra in da'wah content don't simply present Islamic messages, but rather reshape the image of religiosity as something that is liked and viral, rather than understood critically. Audiences find it easier to remember popular slogans (“selfreminder,” “masyaallahtabarakallah,” “dakwahtiktok,” “hijrahistiqaomah”) than to understand the complex teachings behind them. From this perspective, this study concludes that in the context of Indonesia's media society, particularly digital media, the virality of da'wah is not merely about conveying a message but has replaced the meaning of da'wah itself with the logic of entertainment and algorithms.

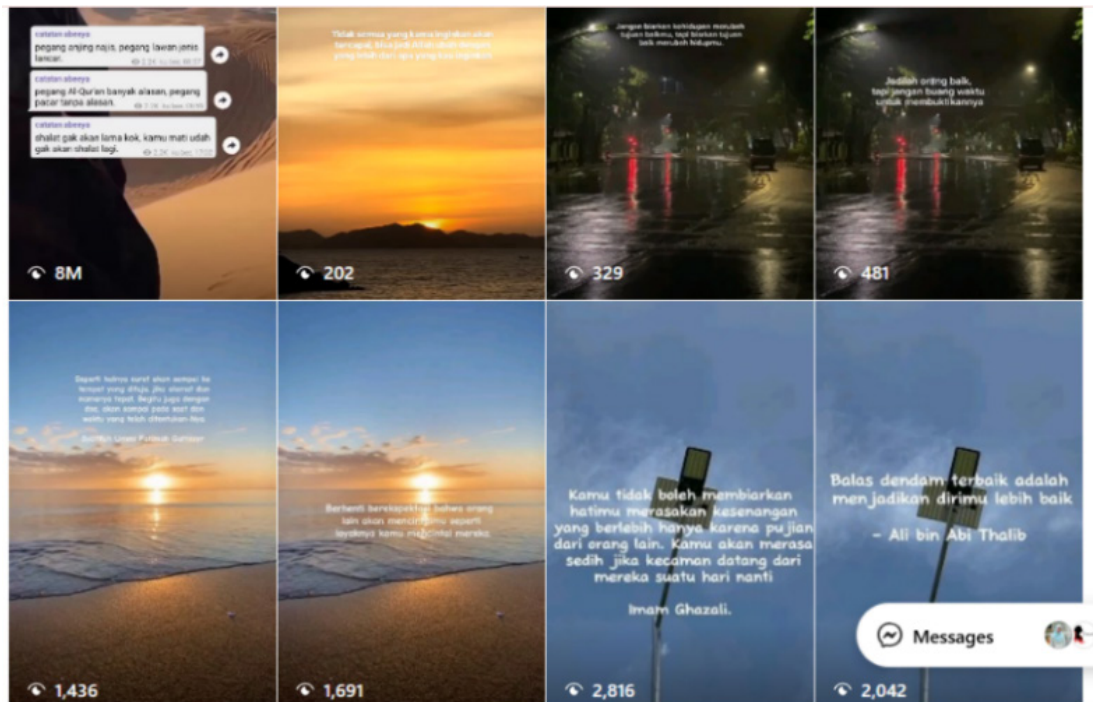


Figure 4: Content with quotes and aesthetic images (@dibalik.akun)

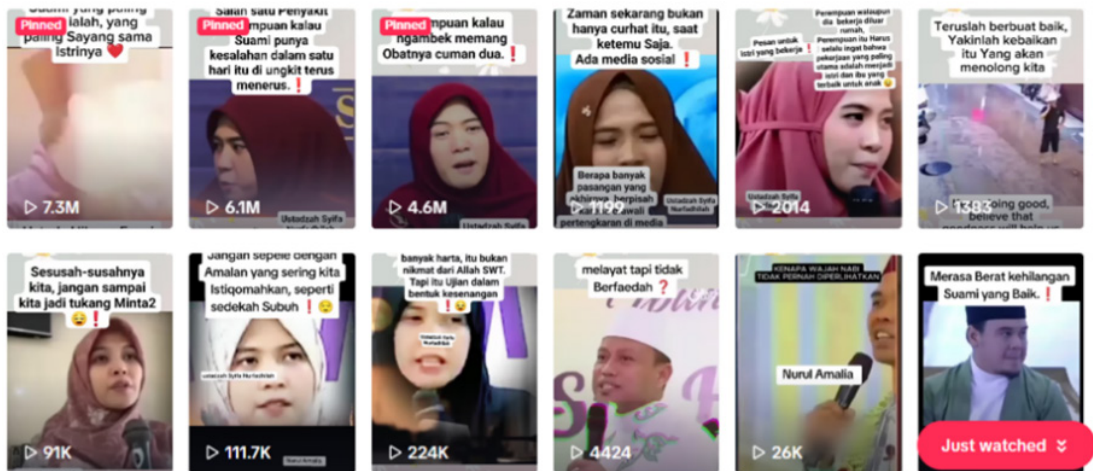


Figure 5: Content with repeated image/video tags (@nurulamalia19.k)



Figure 6: Content with the appearance of a preacher as a hook (@irfanrizkihas)

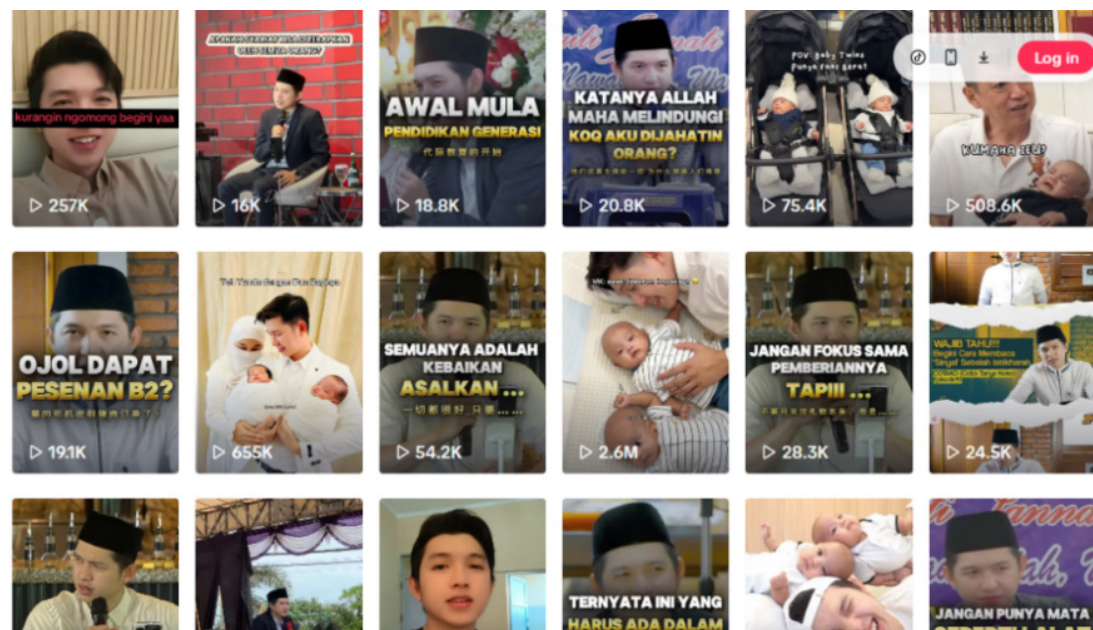


Figure 7: Content featuring the preacher and some of his personal life (@kohdennislilm)

The screen displays in the images above demonstrate Baudrillard's thesis that the repetition of signs makes religious messages seem to exist in an autonomous space, independent of their transcendental source. Within the framework of da'wah communication, transcendental values should be present through the vertical dimension between humans as communicators and God as communicants, namely a spiritual relationship that consciously and reflectively unites aspects of faith and ritual activities such as prayer.

Effective da'wah is not simply the reproduction of social or symbolic norms without a spiritual approach, but rather must internalize and embody divine moral values that permeate worldly reality. This aligns with the analysis that transcendental communication in Islam can be conducted through various media known as worship rituals, so that the effect is not only behavioral change, but also the achievement of inner peace and authentic spiritual resonance. (Marwah, 2021).

Conclusion

The phenomenon of digital da'wah in the contemporary social media landscape is currently experiencing a shift in the structure of religious communication from a model of transmitting transcendental meaning to a logical mechanism for producing da'wah texts themselves. Findings from two analytical focuses indicate that virality is no longer a side effect of content but has transformed into the medium itself, as McLuhan proposed, structuring how da'wah is constructed, circulated, and consumed by digital communities.

Repetitive, concise, and emotional da'wah content presents a form of communication with high redundancy and low elaboration, where the message's significance is reduced to popular, easily recognizable symbols but lacking interpretive depth. This results in religious messages no longer shaping spiritual awareness but merely functioning as social markers in a culture of clicking and sharing. Da'wah becomes a product of aesthetic religiosity, namely religiosity packaged visually, enjoyed as impressions, and attached to digital identities.

The implications of these findings emphasize that digital da'wah can no longer be understood merely as a process of conveying religious messages that shifts media, but rather as a communication practice entirely shaped by the logic of the viral medium itself. When virality serves as the primary selection mechanism in the circulation of religious messages, the sustainability of da'wah (Islamic preaching) is in tension between the demands for visibility and the responsibility for interpreting meaning. This situation demands the development of critical awareness in digital da'wah practices, where the use of social media is treated not merely as a technical tool but as an ideological space that produces the values, emotions, and religious orientations of the audience. Thus, the main conclusion of this study confirms that the future success of digital da'wah is measured not solely by virality but by its ability to maintain a balance between adapting to the logic

of the medium and a commitment to the depth of meaning and transformative purpose of da'wah itself. Therefore, reinterpreting the theoretical concept of "the medium is the message" as "the medium is viral" places it within a new medium used to explain digital da'wah practices, which are rife with repetition of signs, religious aesthetics, and visual impressions, involving visual impressions and popularity.

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