



## **Digital Da'wah Communication Model on Instagram Social Media: A Qualitative Study of Islamic Propagation Strategies in the Digital Age**

**Maman Abdurahman<sup>1✉</sup>, Muthia Oktavanie Bachrie<sup>2</sup>**

Universitas Islam Bunga Bangsa Cirebon, Indonesia

Email : [mamanabdurahman11@gmail.com](mailto:mamanabdurahman11@gmail.com)<sup>1</sup>, [thiabakrie@gmail.com](mailto:thiabakrie@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup>

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** The rapid evolution of digital platforms has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of Islamic propagation, compelling contemporary da'i (Islamic preachers) to reconfigure their communicative strategies within algorithmically governed environments. Instagram, as a visually dominant social media platform, has emerged as a pivotal medium through which da'wah messages are disseminated, negotiated, and consumed across diverse demographic segments. **Objective:** This study investigates the communication models employed by da'wah content creators on Instagram and examines the strategic, aesthetic, and theological dimensions that shape their digital propagation practices. **Methodology:** Adopting a qualitative approach grounded in ethnographic content analysis and in-depth interviews, this research engaged with six purposively selected da'wah accounts on Instagram, each with a following exceeding 100,000. Data were gathered through systematic observation of content from January to September 2024, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with content creators and audience representatives. Thematic analysis was employed to distill emergent patterns and construct theoretical propositions. **Results:** Findings reveal that digital da'wah on Instagram operates through three interrelated communicative layers: visual-textual encoding, platform-adaptive narrative framing, and audience engagement mechanics. Da'wah practitioners demonstrated sophisticated awareness of platform affordances, deploying carousel posts, short-form Reels, and interactive Stories to maximize reach and doctrinal accessibility. The study culminates in the formulation of an integrative Digital Da'wah Communication Model that synthesizes traditional Islamic communicative principles with contemporary digital media logic.

**Keywords:** *digital da'wah; Instagram; communication model; Islamic propagation; social media*

## INTRODUCTION

The intersection of digital technology and religious communication has generated a transformative space in which faith traditions are simultaneously preserved, reinterpreted, and transmitted to audiences who may never encounter a mosque or a madrasa. Within the Indonesian context, where Islam is practiced by the world's largest Muslim population, the migration of da'wah understood as the active invitation to embrace Islamic teachings and values from conventional pulpits to digital platforms represents one of the most consequential communicative shifts in contemporary religious life (Nasrullah, 2022). This shift is not merely technical but profoundly epistemological, demanding that Islamic communication scholars revisit foundational assumptions about who speaks, to whom, through what channels, and with what effects.

Instagram, launched in 2010 and subsequently acquired by Meta, has evolved well beyond its origins as a photo-sharing application. With over two billion monthly active users globally and approximately 100 million users in Indonesia as of 2024, the platform constitutes a massive arena of cultural production and consumption in which religious content competes vigorously with entertainment, commerce, and lifestyle material (Wulandari & Aziz, 2023). The platform's architecture privileging high-resolution imagery, short-form video, interactive stories, and algorithmic content curation creates a specific set of affordances and constraints that da'wah practitioners must navigate strategically if their messages are to achieve meaningful reach and resonance.

The theoretical framing of communication in Islamic scholarship has historically drawn upon the concept of *tabligh* (conveying the message), *hikmah* (wisdom), *mauizah hasanah* (good counsel), and *mujadalah* (reasoned debate), as articulated in various Quranic verses and prophetic traditions (Al-Qaradawi, 2021). These concepts define not only the content but also the ethical orientation of da'wah communication. However, translating these principles into the visual grammar of Instagram where engagement is measured in likes, shares, saves, and follower counts requires a sophisticated bridging of theological tradition and platform logic that has not been adequately theorized in the extant literature.

Prior scholarship on digital religion has examined phenomena such as online fatwa issuance, virtual Islamic communities, and the commodification of religious identity on social media (Campbell, 2021; Slama, 2022). However, relatively few studies have focused explicitly on the communicative models and

strategic architectures that da'wah practitioners consciously or intuitively employ on visually oriented platforms such as Instagram. This gap is particularly notable given that content strategy, aesthetic choices, and audience engagement mechanics are not peripheral but central to whether a da'wah message achieves its intended propagation goals in algorithmic media environments.

The study of communication models provides a valuable conceptual scaffold for this inquiry. Since Lasswell's (1948) foundational articulation of the 'who says what in which channel to whom with what effect' framework, communication scholars have progressively refined and complicated the linear transmission model to account for feedback loops, contextual variables, semantic noise, and the active role of audiences in meaning-making. In digital media environments, these complexities multiply further: the communicator must simultaneously manage content quality, platform algorithms, audience analytics, and competitive attention dynamics (McQuail, 2021). For da'wah communicators, an additional layer of obligation exists the content must be doctrinally sound, accessible, and motivationally compelling, all at once.

Research conducted in recent years has documented the rise of what scholars term 'digital Islamic populism,' a phenomenon in which charismatic online preachers cultivate massive digital followings by combining religious authority with entertainment sensibilities and social media savvy (Fakhruroji, 2021). Figures such as Ustadz Abdul Somad, Hanan Attaki, and Felix Siauw in Indonesia have demonstrated that Instagram can serve as a primary medium for sustained religious influence, accumulating millions of followers and generating significant social impact. Yet the communicative architectures underlying their success remain undertheorized, as most existing studies focus on content themes or socioreligious effects rather than on the structural models of communication that make such influence possible.

This study addresses that gap by undertaking a systematic qualitative examination of how da'wah communicators on Instagram conceptualize, design, and execute their communication strategies. The research is guided by three central questions: first, what communication models do da'wah practitioners on Instagram consciously or implicitly employ; second, how do platform-specific affordances shape the encoding and framing of Islamic messages; and third, what integrative theoretical model can be proposed to account for the distinctive dynamics of digital da'wah communication on Instagram?

The significance of this inquiry extends beyond the academic domain. As Indonesian religious authorities, educational institutions, and community organizations increasingly invest in Instagram-based da'wah initiatives, a theoretically grounded understanding of communication models can inform

more effective, ethically coherent, and doctrinally responsible digital propagation practices. Furthermore, at a moment when algorithmic misinformation and religious radicalization pose genuine threats to social cohesion, understanding how legitimate da'wah operates in digital spaces can contribute to broader efforts to promote religious moderation and digital literacy (Affandi & Mansyur, 2023).

The remainder of this article is organized as follows: Section B describes the methodological approach adopted in this study, including participant selection, data collection procedures, and analytical framework. Section C presents the empirical findings and theoretical discussion, organized around the three communicative layers identified in the analysis. Section D offers conclusions and implications for future research and practice, followed by a comprehensive reference list.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative research design informed by interpretive epistemology, which recognizes that social phenomena including communicative practices are constructed through meaning-making processes that must be understood from the perspectives of the actors involved (Creswell & Poth, 2022). Specifically, the research combined ethnographic content analysis with in-depth semi-structured interviews, a methodological triangulation that permitted both the systematic examination of observable communicative outputs and the interpretive exploration of the intentions, strategies, and reflections of da'wah content creators.

Purposive sampling was used to select six Instagram da'wah accounts that collectively embodied diverse stylistic approaches, demographic targeting strategies, and organizational affiliations, while sharing the common criterion of having amassed a minimum of 100,000 followers by January 2024. Selected accounts included both individual preachers and institutionally managed pages. Observation of each account spanned January to September 2024, yielding a corpus of approximately 1,200 posts, 340 Stories, and 280 Reels subjected to systematic content analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with four content creators and six audience representatives, with each session lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. Interviews were recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase protocol recommended by Braun and Clarke (2023). Member checking and peer debriefing were employed to strengthen the trustworthiness of the analytical outcomes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Visual-Textual Encoding as Da'wah Architecture

The first major finding of this study concerns the sophisticated visual-textual encoding practices through which da'wah messages are constructed and packaged for Instagram audiences. Contrary to perspectives that might regard visual aesthetics as superficial to the doctrinal substance of da'wah, the present data reveal that aesthetic choices are deeply integrated with communicative intent, audience psychology, and theological framing. Da'wah content creators demonstrated a consistent and deliberate approach to what might be termed 'Islamic visual grammar' a set of visual conventions that simultaneously signal religious authenticity, aesthetic appeal, and doctrinal accessibility (Nasrullah, 2022).

Analysis of carousel posts across selected accounts revealed a recurring structural pattern in which the opening slide functions as an affective hook, typically deploying a compelling Quranic verse, hadith fragment, or rhetorical question rendered in calligraphic typography against a warm-toned background. Subsequent slides progressively unpack the doctrinal content, employing digestible narrative segments that guide the audience through a complete argument or devotional reflection. This structure aligns with Aristotelian rhetorical principles of *exordium*, *narratio*, and *conclusio*, but is adapted to the scrolling affordances of Instagram's interface. As one content creator explained during interview: 'We think of each carousel like a mini-book. The cover must make them stop scrolling. The pages must make them want to keep reading. And the last page must make them want to save or share it.'

This finding resonates with Fakhruroji's (2021) theorization of digital da'wah as a practice of 'communicative translation,' in which sacred texts are not simply reproduced but actively recontextualized within platform-specific visual economies. The creators in this study demonstrated acute awareness that Instagram's algorithm rewards high save and share rates, which in turn incentivizes the production of content perceived as practically valuable or emotionally resonant by audiences. This creates a productive tension between doctrinal rigor and communicative accessibility that skilled da'wah practitioners navigate through iterative experimentation and audience feedback analysis.

The role of Arabic typography and Islamic iconographic elements such as mosque silhouettes, geometric patterns, and nature imagery associated with divine creation was found to serve a dual function: establishing religious legitimacy and differentiating da'wah content within a crowded visual landscape. Wulandari and Aziz (2023) similarly observed that visual markers of Islamic authenticity function as 'credibility signals' that enable audiences to

rapidly categorize and evaluate content within high-speed scrolling environments. This study extends that observation by demonstrating that such signals are not merely intuitive but are consciously strategized by content creators who possess sophisticated understandings of audience perception and platform dynamics.

## **2. Platform-Adaptive Narrative Framing**

The second communicative layer identified in this research concerns the narrative framing strategies through which da'wah messages are adapted to different Instagram content formats specifically the differential deployment of feed posts, Reels, and Stories to target distinct audience segments and serve distinct communicative functions. This finding challenges monolithic conceptions of da'wah communication as a uniform practice and instead reveals a highly differentiated, format-sensitive approach to Islamic propagation that reflects sophisticated media literacy (Slama, 2022).

Feed posts were predominantly used for doctrinal instruction and devotional reflection, where the permanence and searchability of the format suited the goal of creating an accessible archive of Islamic knowledge. Reels, characterized by short-form video between 15 and 90 seconds, were employed primarily for emotional engagement and viral diffusion, with content creators deploying carefully calibrated combinations of spoken word, background nasheed (Islamic chant), text overlay, and expressive facial delivery to generate empathic resonance. Stories, given their ephemeral 24-hour lifespan, were used for relational maintenance audience polls, Q&A sessions, behind-the-scenes glimpses, and timely responses to contemporary events creating a sense of intimacy and accessibility that sustained audience loyalty between formal content releases.

This format-differentiated strategy maps onto what McQuail (2021) describes as the 'media logic' of contemporary digital platforms, wherein communicators must internalize and work within the temporal, aesthetic, and interactive conventions that each format imposes. However, the present study contributes a distinctively Islamic dimension to this analysis by demonstrating that narrative framing choices are also theologically motivated. Several content creators explicitly framed their Reels strategy in terms of the Quranic injunction to deliver da'wah with hikmah wisdom appropriate to the audience's capacity arguing that the short-form video format, while superficially constraining, could effectively convey the essence of Islamic devotional life if the communicator exercised sufficient narrative discipline and visual artistry.

A particularly notable finding concerns the strategic timing of content releases in relation to the Islamic calendar and daily prayer schedule. Creators

consistently released devotional Reels in the early morning hours preceding Fajr prayer and reflective carousel posts on Thursday evenings a time traditionally associated in Indonesian Islamic practice with reading Yasin and engaging in collective remembrance (dzikir). This temporal attunement to the rhythms of Islamic practice represents a sophisticated integration of platform analytics with liturgical sensibility, enabling da'wah communicators to intercept their audiences at moments of heightened religious receptivity (Affandi & Mansyur, 2023).

### **3. Audience Engagement Mechanics and Feedback Dynamics**

The third communicative layer centers on the interactive and participatory dimensions of digital da'wah, specifically the mechanisms through which da'wah practitioners cultivate, sustain, and leverage audience engagement to amplify the reach and depth of their propagation activities. This layer is where the distinction between traditional and digital da'wah communication is perhaps most pronounced, as the interactive affordances of Instagram create possibilities for what might be termed 'collaborative da'wah' a mode of propagation in which audiences are not passive recipients but active co-producers of the communicative event (Campbell, 2021).

All six accounts in the study demonstrated active comment section management as a core component of their da'wah strategy. Content creators or designated team members responded to audience questions, addressed theological queries, corrected misunderstandings, and directed followers toward additional resources with a consistency and quality that reflected genuine communicative commitment. Analysis of comment sections across 300 sampled posts revealed that accounts with higher rates of creator-audience interaction measured by reply frequency and response quality demonstrated significantly higher save and share rates, suggesting that perceived relational authenticity enhances the propagation efficacy of da'wah content.

Interviews with audience representatives further illuminated the psychological mechanisms underlying these engagement dynamics. Multiple participants described the comment section and Stories Q&A as spaces of 'accessible scholarship,' where they could receive guidance on personal religious questions without the social barriers associated with formal consultations with traditional religious authorities. This finding aligns with Hidayatullah and Karim (2023), who argue that digital platforms have democratized access to Islamic knowledge in ways that simultaneously empower lay Muslims and create new challenges for the maintenance of scholarly authority and doctrinal quality control.

Based on the integration of these three communicative layers visual-textual encoding, platform-adaptive narrative framing, and audience engagement mechanics this study proposes an integrative Digital Da'wah Communication Model. This model conceptualizes digital da'wah on Instagram as a cyclical, multi-layered communicative process in which doctrinal content, aesthetic production, platform strategy, and audience participation are mutually constitutive rather than hierarchically arranged. The model is anchored by the concept of 'purposive visual-digital tabligh,' emphasizing that the effective conveyance of Islamic messages in digital environments requires not only theological soundness but also aesthetic intelligence, platform fluency, and relational responsiveness. This model contributes to both Islamic communication theory and digital media studies by providing a culturally grounded, empirically derived framework for understanding religious propagation in algorithmically governed media environments (Creswell & Poth, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the communication models employed by da'wah content creators on Instagram and to develop a theoretically grounded framework for understanding digital Islamic propagation in algorithmically governed social media environments. Through a rigorous qualitative methodology combining ethnographic content analysis and in-depth interviews, three interrelated communicative layers were identified: visual-textual encoding as da'wah architecture, platform-adaptive narrative framing, and audience engagement mechanics. Together, these layers constitute a sophisticated and multidimensional communicative practice that cannot be adequately captured by linear transmission models or simplistic notions of da'wah as unidirectional religious instruction.

The proposed Digital Da'wah Communication Model synthesizes these findings into an integrative theoretical framework that acknowledges the mutual interdependence of doctrinal content, aesthetic production, platform strategy, and audience participation. This model has several important implications. For da'wah practitioners, it offers a structured conceptual vocabulary for reflecting on and improving their digital communication practices, enabling more intentional and effective Islamic propagation in digital spaces. For Islamic communication scholars, it provides an empirically grounded contribution to the emerging field of digital Islamic studies, advancing theoretical understanding of how sacred traditions are adapted, negotiated, and sustained within secular digital infrastructures.

For policymakers and Islamic educational institutions, the findings underscore the importance of integrating digital media literacy and communication strategy into the curricula of da'wah training programs, equipping the next generation of Islamic communicators with the practical competencies and critical awareness needed to navigate the complex affordances and risks of social media propagation. Future research should extend this model through comparative studies across different national contexts, longitudinal analyses of audience impact, and quantitative validation of the communicative layers identified here. The relationship between digital da'wah and broader dynamics of religious moderation, radicalization prevention, and interfaith dialogue in digital spaces also constitutes a fertile and pressing area for subsequent scholarly inquiry.

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