

# THE ENCOUNTER OF DA'WAH DIGITALIZATION WITH URBAN MUSLIM CULTURE

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## Abstract

This research aimed to explore the encounter of da'wah digitalization with urban Muslim culture. The attention on this topic was due to the concern about the dislocation of traditional da'wah activities because of the demands of a fluctuating, fast-paced, and dynamic urban culture associated with the transformation from conventional to digital media. A virtual ethnography approach was applied with the data collected through Google Trends and analyzed manually. The results showed that da'wah media, such as images, videos, memes, animations, and podcasts, was becoming a significant trend among netizens. The media was associated with speed, effectiveness, as well as time and cost efficiency in delivering da'wah messages, which was particularly relevant for urban Muslim with fast-paced and hectic lifestyles. Da'wah digitalization also reinforced the urban Muslim culture of instant religious fulfillment. However, the tendency to consume da'wah materials instantly was associated with the risk of disseminating inaccurate religious information and disrupting the fragmentation of religious authority. This showed the need for careful monitoring and management of digital da'wah content to ensure the quality and sustainability of balanced religious education in a dynamic urban context.

**Keywords:** Da'wah Digitalization; Media; Urban Culture; Virtual Ethnography.

## A. Introduction

The phenomenon of digitalization is continuously causing arguments in the field of religious studies as observed in the debate on da'wah media. Several challenges and threats are being experienced by da'wah practitioners (*da'i*) in actualizing the role in the community (Briandana et al., 2020; Ermayani et al., 2021). This is observed from the need for practitioners to adjust to technological developments associated with the transformation of da'wah approaches from conventional to digitalized media. The transformation process facilitates the access to spread Islamic values to the community

and individuals. However, the process is observed to have dislodged some traditional offline religious cultures such as *pengajian*, *sorogan*, and *sima'an*. It is also showed that present religious rituals (da'wah) tend to be conducted using digital media in line with urban society culture (Briandana et al., 2020). This simply shows that the culture is influencing the implementation of da'wah activities in digital media.

Research are observed to have been previously conducted on the integration of da'wah digitalization and urban Muslim culture. For example, Risris Hari Nugraha et al. showed that da'wah digitalization motivated urban millennials to *hijrah* as shown by the response of 72% implying its ability to promote Islamic values (Nugraha et al., 2020). Thiyas et al. also emphasized the influence of da'wah digitalization on urban Muslim adolescents as shown in the transformation of the trends and religious lifestyles (Taufiq et al., 2022). The access provided by the internet allowed the urban Muslim youths to express the religious beliefs. Furthermore, Rini Setiawati et al. described the preaching strategies to be used for urban Muslim considered pluralistic, hedonistic, and individualistic, and categorized as challenging for *da'i* (Setiawati et al., 2022).

Nusrat Jahan Mim studied Bhaka in Bangladesh and reported that Islam digitalization in urban areas fostered secularism. This disrupted the relationship between rural and urban community and also threatened the tolerance of interfaith celebrations (Mim, 2021). Digitalization and Islamization were also observed to have stimulated the emergence of geopolitical and socio-culture problems between countries vulnerable to conflicts (Kudryavtseva et al., 2020). Furthermore, the concept promoted teenagers to negotiate the personal identity for the content consumed on digital platforms. This allowed young people in the villages to easily transform to the lifestyle and fashion trends in urban community as well as to proselytize the religion and da'wah (Mulyani, 2023).

These research were observed not to have specifically explored the correlation between da'wah digitalization and urban Muslim culture even though the concept has been implemented by *da'i* (Mutmainah et al., 2022) as well as Islamic community and organization in the present era (Hamayotsu, 2013; Lengauer, 2018). The integration of digitalization was connected to its ability to ensure the effortless dissemination of religious culture by promoting urban culture values. Moreover, internet-based digital media is a primary requirement to mediate several religious matters among urban Muslim (Humeira & Sarwono, 2019). This shows urban Muslims are acutely conscious that the technology is particularly beneficial to the rapid and convenient consumption of several religious teachings through da'wah (Aditoni & Rohmah, 2022). Therefore, this research was conducted to complement the aspects not explored in previous research by focusing on the relationship between da'wah digitalization and urban Muslim culture.

The fundamental assumption for the conduct of this research was the tendency of da'wah digitalization to implement urban culture values. This was based on the explanation of Ansusa Putra et al. that urban Muslim has a distinctive culture reflected in Islamic symbols and considered different from traditional Muslim (Putra & Wahyuni, 2021). Urban Muslims exhibit dialectics or communication patterns with complex symbols such as those in movies, short videos, and music. Moreover, several contents on social media associated with religious values and teachings have become a medium of da'wah for *da'i* (Tariq, 2023). It was observed that the infiltration of digital media by urban culture could lead to the dislocation of traditional da'wah values. Therefore, this research was considered important to explore the massive infiltration of the digital media being used for da'wah activities by urban Muslim culture. The specific purpose was to analyze the functions of digital media platforms in spreading da'wah by *da'i*. Furthermore, the contributions of the digital media were evaluated based on the urban

culture concept to identify the contents associated with urban Muslim culture activities. The encounter between da'wah digitalization and urban Muslim culture was observed to have led to different trends and forms of innovative content demanded by society. This led to the formulation of two research questions including a) What is the contribution of digital media to the spread of da'wah? and b) What is the relationship between da'wah digitalization and urban Muslim culture?

## B. Methods

This research was conducted qualitatively by adopting a virtual ethnography approach to deeply explore the relationship between da'wah expression and urban Muslim culture. The method was applied to comprehensively understand and analyze different behaviors and interactions that represent the online culture constructed by netizens (Paoli & D'Auria, 2021). The focus was mainly on the virtual forms of computer-mediated culture expression or computer-mediated communications (CMC) (Lenihan & Kelly-Holmes, 2015). A total of 2827 data covering a period of one year from September 11, 2022 to August 27, 2023, were collected and classified into five including image, video, meme, animation, and podcast media from YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. The collection process was in two stages with the first focused on the use of a digital machine known as Google Trend while the second was the manual observation and active participation in the content obtained. The data were analyzed thematically by identifying the narratives or text, symbols, and interactions repeatedly to provide interpretations and answers to the research questions.

## C. Results and Discussion

The preliminary findings were focused on describing the da'wah media activities trending in the virtual world and this was followed by the analysis of their relationship with the urban culture. These trends referred to da'wah activities, patterns, or practices considered popular on social media platforms.

### 1. Results

#### Da'wah Trend in Indonesian Digital Media Space

The first stage was used to select some keywords such as *video da'wah*, *podcast da'wah*, *gambar da'wah*, *animasi da'wah*, and *meme da'wah* to compare the activities in the popular da'wah media. Data were collected using Google Trend which was explained as a service tool provided by Google to identify the interest and volume of searches on certain topics. The search results showed that da'wah was trending for a period of one year from September 11, 2022 to August 27, 2023 through images, videos, podcasts, animations, and memes.

The results showed that da'wah media often used and searched through the Google search engine for the period were five and the highest was found to be image. Furthermore, the most popular media used was video which combined several elements including images, sound, and text simultaneously. The traffic for this media was observed to be consistent in the period and was in different forms such as lectures and religious research, religious documentary videos, worship tutorials, interviews with religious leaders, and others.

Podcasts were also extremely popular for da'wah activities and discovered from to be constantly used for one year without the identification of any vacuum in the search activity. Meanwhile, animations were considered to be new as shown by its minimal usage compared to images, videos, and podcasts. Memes were found to be the least used media including ideas, notions, and behaviors spread from one individual to another

through imitation in a certain culture context. The memes contain several forms of satire and humor or entertaining messages, including those related to religion.

Table 1. Number and Percentage of Media Used for Da'wah

<b>Da'wah Media</b>	Videos	Podcasts	Images	Memes	Animations
Number	595	0	1747	327	158
Percentage	21,05%	0,00%	61,80%	11,57%	5,59%

The results presented in Table 1 showed the different types of media used for da'wah based on the netizen searches and popularity on Google sites. Video was found to be a potentially effective and popular tool for disseminating different da'wah messages due to its ability to combine audio, visual, and text elements simultaneously. However, images were discovered to be more popular with 1747 or 61.80% compared to the 21.05% reported for videos while memes, animations, and podcasts had lower numbers. The adoption of memes at 11.57% showed that humor and satire could also be an effective way to deliver attention-grabbing da'wah messages and animation at 5.59% provided an interesting visual aspect while podcasts at 0% were not a common choice in this context.

The common analysis of the data showed variations in the usage of different media formats for proselytization. Videos and images were used the most while memes, animations, and podcasts provided additional value in spreading religious and moral messages to audiences. This showed that the good strategy in da'wah was the ability to use different types of media according to the intended audience and the purpose of the message to be passed across.

### Media Platform for Da'wah

The results showed that the media previously identified were consumed through social media platforms defined as websites or applications enabling people to interact, share content, and communicate online with others. These platforms allowed people to create profiles, and post text, images, videos, and other types of content. They also make it possible for people to interact with content posted by others. Some of those considered popular among netizens in Indonesia were Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and others.

Table 2. Da'wah Media Platforms and Number of Followers

<b>No</b>	<b>Platform Types</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Followers</b>
1.	Instagram	traats_gram	79,1k
2.	Instagram	kartun.muslimah._	278k
3.	TikTok	ilovenyolnyol	127k
4.	Instagram	yakuuya	17k
5.	Instagram	iqomic	484k
6.	Instagram	dina_syaheer	6174
7.	Instagram	sahabatmuslimahsholehah	64,9k
8.	Instagram	dakwahvisual.id	117k
9.	TikTok	@muezzaverse	434.0k

The two prominent accounts on TikTok were "ilovenyolnyol" and "@muezzaverse" with both observed to have an impressive number of followers, surpassing 561,000. Interestingly, an average of 50.00% of the total followers were actively engaged in the content posted by these accounts and this was 14.29% above the average value. This reflected a very significant amount of traffic, showing the content generated successfully attracted the interest of several TikTok users. Therefore, it was concluded that these accounts were highly favored by netizens based on the sizable number and high level of interaction associated with the followers.

The contents were discovered to be extremely varied and three popular social media accounts with varied contents from a total of 9 platforms were selected for analysis. First, "taarts\_gram," had 79.2K followers and focused on Islamic da'wah using animated videos with lip sync featuring famous Indonesian ustadzs to deliver religious messages and explain concepts in an engaging way, particularly targeting young audiences and those that prefer short visual content consumption. Second, among the accounts considered, "ilovenyolnyol" was special with 125,000 followers and 532 posts focusing on Muslim women with an emphasis on relevant Islamic values related to romance, obligations, rights, prohibitions, and ethics. This account was considered a significant resource for delivering religious messages on TikTok, specifically for those looking for information related to religious beliefs. Third, "kartun.muslimah.\_" had 277,000 followers and 2,794 posts on Instagram and combined animated images with videos to address issues relevant to Muslim teenagers, showcasing the continued appeal of this approach in da'wah activities on social media. The major focus was Muslim adolescent issues such as Islamic identity, religious education, interpersonal relationships, gender roles, culture identity, moral and ethical challenges, technology use, mental health, civic engagement, and activism. In the content, Muslim teenagers were confronted with questions on how the integration of Islamic values into their daily lives, live balanced social relationships, and face moral and ethical challenges related to peer relationships. This showed that the account seemed to be targeting a young audience with da'wah messages delivered through the use of engaging animated images and videos. With a significant number of followers and a large amount of content being produced, the account has the potential to be a source of inspiration and religious understanding for Muslim teenagers on Instagram.

## 2. Discussion

### **Interpretation of Da'wah Media Usage and Content Trends on the Users**

The results showed several points indicating the mediation process of online religious activities in the form of da'wah in digital media. It was discovered that there was a form of convergence from conventional to online religious rituals, thereby becoming an attraction for the people. Global accessibility was observed to have allowed the people or netizens to connect with other religious communities to spread Islamic values. Another form of convergence identified was that digital media served as a place to practice and search religious teachings.

The media convergence associated with online religious rituals was perceived through three forms including the technological, economic, and culture aspects. The technological convergence showed that da'wah which was a religious ritual was mostly actualized through digital media. This was observed from the high number of traffic trends in the one-year period that facilitated faster and more efficient spread of quality information. The economic convergence showed the provision of more financial convenience through the media where netizens did not need to spend more

accommodation costs to access religious information. This showed that the conduct of religious rituals or da'wah by optimizing digital media was more effective for the current generation focused on fast and instant life activities. Moreover, culture transformation was also related to digital media convergence in da'wah activities. The traffic associated with da'wah on Google Trends and social media showed that digital media has become an important interactive tool to produce and distribute da'wah experiences and activities. This was observed to be different from the application of conventional media based on the culture of the local community through forums in Islamic boarding schools by *kyai/ustadz*, public recitation, as well as arts such as puppets and music containing Islamic teaching values. Some people have started shifting from this conventional da'wah culture to digital media.

Stig Hjarvard explained in "The Mediatization of Culture and Society" that religious media has great power in implementing and changing the culture of religious rituals. These concepts were both observed to have forced the media to fulfill the role of a religious institution in charge of providing religious teachings (Hjarvard, 2013). The media was required to be creative and innovative in packaging religious content by adjusting to the needs and demands of the community. This was a shift in the fragmentation of religious authority originally held by the *kyai/ustadz*, boarding schools, and formal religious institutions in the community.

In accordance with Stig Hjarvard, da'wah content presented through different multimedia formats such as images, videos, animations, memes, and podcasts represented a transformative shift from the traditional system. These multimedia forms showed characteristics that extend beyond conventional religious services, preaching, confessions, and discussions (Hjarvard, 2013). The limitations associated with conventional religious institutions in disseminating da'wah provided a great opportunity for digital media to reach the community. The convergence of da'wah through digital media served as a mediatization that significantly transformed the culture and local wisdom of each individual, affecting the broader culture and local community context.

### **Da'wah Digitization and Urban Muslim Culture**

The growing number of digital media users and the diverse range of da'wah content available exemplified the convergence process. Da'wah activities in the digital media represented a form of religious mediatization facilitated through different channels. This mediatization was observed to have enhanced personal religious literacy with fewer hindrances due to the opportunities provided for easy access to religious teachings which eliminated the need to physically attend gatherings and places of worship. The phenomenon led to a positive outcome and different forms of the media including memes, animations, and podcasts signified a new expression of contemporary culture da'wah which reflected urban Muslim culture.

Eva F. Nisa also explained in "Creative and Lucrative Da'wah; the Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia" that social media, specifically Instagram and WhatsApp, had become a means to transform the piety of a Muslim (Nisa, 2018). The millennial generation was also observed to be competing to learn the teachings of Islam and this strengthened the trend of hijabers culture in the virtual world. Eva F. Nisa further confirmed that urban Muslim popular culture was constructed in the virtual world through images, videos, memes, animations, podcasts, and other religious symbols.

Digital media was observed to be preferred by the current generation because of its accessibility and the ease of retrieving religious-themed content. The short video

features often found on platforms like TikTok have appeal in the fast-paced urban culture. Videos fit into the fast and efficient lifestyle of the people in urban areas that often have tight and busy work schedules. Moreover, the conduct of da'wah in digital media is popular with millennials and Z generations from urban areas that are led to be fast-paced and efficient because of the urban background. This showed that da'wah digitalization bridged the needs of urban Muslim to gain religious experience due to the provision of more efficient and easily accessible content in digital media.

Images, videos, memes, animations, podcasts, and messages played by ustadz or kyai provided a certain moment for *da'i* to trend in the virtual society. This was observed for Ustadz Syam on TikTok (Achfandhy & Chairunnisa, 2022), Ustadz Hanan Attaki on YouTube (Mabela et al., 2022), Felix Siau (Hew, 2018), and other *da'i*. These individuals were often referred to as the "micro-celebrities". The term was developed for individuals that became popular and known to the public through social media and earning income through the process (Tolani & Sao, 2020). Ustadz or *da'i* have similar characteristics to celebrities due to their loyal following on a particular social media or digital platform and wide recognition by the online community in a particular religious sphere or understanding. However, the term celebrity is certainly related to urban culture with sensational activities and popularity. The designation of *da'i* as micro-celebrities has reduced their charisma compared to past preachers that were often acknowledged for wisdom, deep religious knowledge, level of piety, and spiritual leadership. Meanwhile, *da'i* in the present digital era normally uses factors such as physical appearance, speaking style, and visual appeal through published content to become quickly popular. This shift represents a transformation in the way the devotion of Muslim is perceived, where the measure of piety is influenced by visual representation in the digital media landscape.

The encounter of da'wah digitalization with urban Muslim culture was also identified from the instant culture. The concept of instant culture was defined as a phenomenon where individuals and societies prioritize satisfaction and quick results without waiting much or investing in the longer processes. According to Anindita Datta, this concept was present in urban society through MacDonalidization in India (Datta, 2017). It was stated that access to technology and services enabling instant gratification such as fast food, delivery services, and social media could affect the way individuals interact, work, and spend leisure time. This instant culture can also influence expectations for quick results in different aspects of life. The conduct of da'wah through short videos, images, animations, memes, and some other content represented the habit and culture of instant religion. This was further defined as the preference of modern society to obtain religious information in a short time and with minimal effort. Moreover, "instant culture of religion" refers to the preference to consume religious content being passed across to a wide audience, specifically through social media, in a fast, short, and attractive format. It shows the desire of people to gain an understanding of religion without having to invest a long time in deep study or reflection.

The emergence of instant habits in consuming da'wah teachings among urban Muslim was observed to have certain consequences. The consumption of instant da'wah material allowed individuals to access false religious teachings. Imam Rosyidi et al. explained that hoaxes and false information were part of the religious teachings being spread through digital media (Rosyidi & Mukarom, 2021). These information were deliberately spread on the Internet for the benefit of certain groups, thereby making Indonesian society prone to conflict between one Muslim organization and another. This means there is a need for comprehensive religious learning as a preventive measure against bias and conflict.

#### D. Conclusion

In conclusion, the convergence of da'wah through images, videos, memes, animations, and podcasts was currently the popular medium of consuming Islamic materials by netizens. This was observed from da'wah digitalization mostly directed toward the teenage generation known as the digital natives. Moreover, there was a very close relationship between da'wah digitalization and urban Muslim culture. This was associated with the emphasis of digital media on speed, effectiveness, efficiency of time, and cost which were urgently required by urban Muslim having hectic and crowded lifestyles. However, the concept was observed to have provided a new identity for *da'i* as micro-celebrities and enhanced the consumption of instant religion culture among urban Muslim. The results were expected to contribute to the interdisciplinary study of da'wah digitalization and the discourse on the communication perspective in order to provide new insights and serve as a recommendation for future research.

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#### F. Author Contributions Statement

This research was conducted by four authors with different contributions. These include Dawam Multazamy Rohmatulloh from the Netherlands and Irfan Achfandhy that initiated the research, designed the analysis, and sent the proposal to the other partners. Astuti Patminingsih collaborated in the development of the research instruments, data collection, reference management, as well as the contribution of data and analysis tools. All authors participated in the data collection and analysis process, as well as approved the final manuscript.

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