



The Commodification of Da'wah on Social Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Monetized Da'wah Content on YouTube

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Abstract: Digital transformation has brought significant changes to “dakwah” (Islamic outreach) practices, shifting from conventional communication spaces to platform-based digital environments such as YouTube. This development has not only expanded the reach of Islamic messages but has also transformed the processes of producing, distributing, and consuming “dakwah” content. As an algorithm- and monetization-driven medium, YouTube has given rise to a new phenomenon in which religious messages, preachers, and audience attention are commodified within the digital economy. This study aims to analyze the forms of “dakwah” commodification in monetized YouTube content, the discursive strategies employed in constructing digital “dakwah”, and the interplay between religious values, the digital economy, and popular culture.

The study employs a qualitative approach utilizing Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, which examines discourse across three dimensions: text (text level), discursive practice, and social practice. Data were gathered through digital observation, documentation of YouTube “dakwah” content, analysis of monetization elements, and observation of audience interactions. The analysis draws upon Mosco's theory of media commodification, encompassing the commodification of content, audiences, and media labor.

The findings reveal that digital “dakwah” undergoes three primary forms of commodification. First, content commodification occurs through the packaging of religious messages using popular strategies such as persuasive titles, emotional narratives, and algorithmic optimization. Second, the commodification of preachers (“dai”) occurs through personal branding practices that turn them into media figures with economic value. Third, audience commodification occurs as user attention, interaction, and data become sources of value within the platform's monetization system. This study argues that digital “dakwah” serves as a site of negotiation among spiritual values, digital capitalism, and popular culture, in which religion functions not merely as a moral message but also as an integral part of the contemporary digital media industry.

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of digital technology has brought about significant changes in the practice of religious communication. “Dakwah” (Islamic outreach/preaching), which previously took place in conventional settings such as mosques, study circles (majelis taklim), television, and

radio, has now transformed through digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and other social media channels. This shift has not only expanded the reach of the Islamic message but also altered how “Dakwah” messages are produced, distributed, and consumed within digital society ((Campbell, 2017); (Bunt, 2018)). This transformation also indicates that digital religious practices are increasingly shaped by platform technologies and networked interactions, resulting in a reconfiguration of religious authority beyond traditional religious institutions ((Campbell & Evolvi, 2020); (Hjarvard, 2016)).

YouTube has emerged as a primary platform for the development of digital “Dakwah” due to its audiovisual nature, global reach, and an economic system driven by algorithms and monetization. Preachers (da’i) no longer act merely as conveyors of religious messages; they have evolved into digital public figures who build identities, popularity, and economic value through metrics such as views, subscribers, advertisements, donations, and commercial partnerships. This phenomenon illustrates a shift in the function of “Dakwah” from a purely religious activity conveying spiritual values to a communication practice oriented toward the media economy. Accordingly, digital media function not merely as communication channels but also as environments that construct social reality through the interaction of technology, institutions, and users (Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

Within the context of the digital media industry, this phenomenon can be understood through the concept of commodification: the process by which something originally possessing social, cultural, or spiritual value is transformed into something with economic value ((Mosco, 2009)). From a media political economy perspective, commodification occurs when messages, symbols, identities, and even specific figures are constructed to possess market appeal and generate profit ((Mosco, 2009); (Fuchs, 2021)).

Digital “Dakwah” undergoes commodification when religious messages are packaged according to media industry logic, such as sensational headlines (clickbait), eye-catching visuals, personal branding strategies for preachers, theme selection based on audience trends, and algorithmic optimization to drive high engagement. Recent studies indicate that “Dakwah” on YouTube serves not only as a medium for disseminating Islamic values but also as an arena for negotiating religious authority and constructing economic value through the interplay between preachers, audiences, and digital platforms.

This study employs (Mosco, 2009) theory of media commodification, which explains that within the media capitalist system, various forms of social, cultural, and even spiritual value can be transformed into commodities with economic worth. In the context of digital media, this commodification process unfolds through the logic of the attention economy, in which content is

produced and packaged based on its ability to capture audience attention, boost user engagement, and generate profit through platform monetization mechanisms (Fuchs, 2021). (Mosco, 2009) outlines three primary forms of media commodification: the commodification of content, where “Dakwah” (Islamic outreach) messages are constructed to align with digital market logic through the selection of popular themes, visual strategies, and engaging communication styles; the commodification of the audience, where user attention, interaction, and data serve as sources of economic value for platforms like YouTube; and the commodification of media workers, where preachers or “Dakwah” creators act not merely as conveyors of religious messages but also as content producers who build digital identities and manage their own popularity. In the context of YouTube-based “Dakwah”, this process reveals a negotiation between religious and economic values; while the religious message continues to serve as a vehicle for spiritual education, it simultaneously operates within a digital media industry structure shaped by algorithms, popularity, and market mechanisms ((Campbell, 2017); (Bunt, 2018)). Within this perspective, audience attention becomes the primary economic resource because engagement, viewing duration, and interaction directly influence the economic value of digital content (Davenport & Beck, 2001).

This phenomenon presents an academic dilemma. On one hand, the monetization of “Dakwah” can support the sustainability of content production and the professionalization of preachers, while also broadening public access to knowledge about Islam. On the other hand, the commercialization of “Dakwah” risks shifting its orientation from spiritual value toward market value, potentially reducing the religious message to a mere digital consumer product.

Current trends in monetization require deeper examination, one method being Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The CDA approach developed by (Fairclough, 1995) views language, texts, and communication practices as forms of social practice inextricably linked to power relations, ideology, and the surrounding social structures. From Fairclough’s perspective, discourse is understood not merely as a representation of reality but also as an instrument capable of shaping how society perceives a given phenomenon. The analysis is conducted across three primary dimensions: text level, discursive practice, and social practice. At the textual level, the analysis focuses on how “Dakwah” (religious outreach) messages are constructed through language choices, religious symbols, narratives, visuals, headlines, and persuasion strategies that generate specific meanings. At the level of discursive practice, the analysis centers on content production and distribution processes, audience management strategies, the relationship between “Dakwah” creators and media users, and the influence of digital platform algorithms on message dissemination. Meanwhile, the social practice dimension

is used to understand how “Dakwah” discourse interacts with broader contexts, such as digital capitalism, popular culture, and shifting religious authority in modern society. Through this approach, digital “Dakwah” is understood not simply as the delivery of religious messages, but as a social communication practice shaped by media economic logic, platform technology, and power dynamics within the digital space ((Fairclough, 1995); (Fairclough, 2013); (Fuchs, 2021)). Previous studies have discussed the commodification of digital da'wah through virtual preaching, celebrity preachers, and social media branding ((Nisa, 2024); (Mufadil et al., 2024);(Sa'diyah et al., 2024)). However, studies integrating Critical Discourse Analysis and the political economy of communication to examine YouTube monetization remain limited.

The study of digital “Dakwah” (Islamic outreach) has become increasingly important as social media has emerged as a primary space for shaping religious understanding among modern society. Younger generations often derive their religious references from digital platforms rather than traditional religious institutions. However, existing research on digital “Dakwah” largely focuses on media effectiveness, audience reception, or communication strategies, while critical studies regarding the commodification of “Dakwah” messages through YouTube’s monetization mechanisms remain relatively limited. Recent studies indicate a transformation of “Dakwah” into a media product driven by algorithmic logic, popularity, and the attention economy.

The novelty of this research lies in its integration of media commodification theory and critical discourse analysis to understand the transformation of “Dakwah” in the digital sphere. Unlike previous studies that primarily viewed social media as a vehicle for disseminating religious messages, this research analyzes how religious values are constructed, packaged, and negotiated as digital commodities within the YouTube ecosystem, an environment shaped by algorithmic logic, the attention economy, and monetization mechanisms ((Mosco, 2009); (Fuchs, 2021)). This study examines not only the substance of “Dakwah” messages but also explores how content production strategies, the personal branding of preachers, audience interactions, and monetization systems shape “Dakwah” practices as part of the digital media industry. Furthermore, it offers a critical perspective on the shifting nature of religious authority in the digital platform era, where authority is no longer established solely through institutional legitimacy but also through visibility, popularity, and digital connectivity among preachers, platforms, and audiences ((Campbell, 2017); (Bunt, 2018)). Thus, this research contributes to the field of digital Islamic communication by demonstrating that “Dakwah” in the social media age constitutes an arena of contestation between spiritual values, economic interests, and power structures within platform culture.

This study aims to: 1) Analyze the forms of commodification in monetized “Dakwah” (Islamic preaching) content on YouTube; 2) Identify the discursive strategies employed in the construction of digital “Dakwah”; 3) Analyze how the figure of the preacher (dai) is constructed as a media commodity; and 4) Understand the relationship between religious values, the digital economy, and popular culture.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative approach using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). A qualitative approach was selected because the research focuses on meaning-making, social construction, and the production of “Dakwah” (Islamic outreach) messages within a digital cultural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Object

The object of the study consists of “Dakwah” content on YouTube channels that meet the following criteria:

1. Possess a large number of subscribers.
2. Have monetization features enabled.
3. Feature regular “Dakwah” content.
4. Include elements of commercialization, such as advertisements, sponsorships, donations, or promotions (Mahbubi, 2025).

Data Collection Techniques

Data were obtained through:

1. Digital observation
2. Video documentation
3. Analysis of audience comments
4. Documentation of monetization elements

Data Analysis Technique

Analysis utilizes Fairclough’s model:

Level	Analysis
Text	Da'wah narrative, language, visuals, symbols
Discursive practice	Content production and distribution
Social practice	Relations between religion, digital capitalism, and popular culture

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Based on the analytical framework, this study identifies several forms of commodification:

Forms of Commodification in Monetized Da'wah Content on YouTube

An analysis of “Dakwah” (Islamic outreach) content published on YouTube reveals that digital “Dakwah” practices serve not merely as a medium for conveying religious messages but have also transformed into commodities within the digital economic ecosystem. Research findings indicate that the commodification of “Dakwah” occurs in three primary forms: the commodification of “Dakwah” content, the commodification of the preacher as a figure, and the commodification of the audience. These three forms demonstrate how religious values are negotiated against the logic of the digital media industry, a logic driven by the attention economy, popularity, and economic profit ((Mosco, 2009); (Fuchs, 2021)).

From the perspective of (Fairclough, 1995) critical discourse analysis, this commodification process is evident not only in the content of the messages conveyed but also in how religious messages are produced, packaged, distributed, and consumed by the digital public. As an algorithm-driven platform, YouTube compels “Dakwah” creators to align their content production with digital performance metrics such as view counts, watch time, comments, likes, and subscriber numbers. Consequently, the construction of “Dakwah” messages does not exist solely within the realm of spiritual values; it is also shaped by the economic mechanisms of digital platforms. This phenomenon aligns with research showing that digital “Dakwah” has evolved into a communication practice that intersects with market logic, personal branding, and monetization on social media.

1. The Commodification of “Dakwah” Content: Transforming Religious Messages into Digital Products

The first form of commodification is evident in the aspect of “Dakwah” (Islamic outreach) content. Religious messages, originally oriented toward conveying spiritual values, moral education, and community guidance, undergo repackaging to align with the characteristics of digital media consumption. “Dakwah” content is produced not merely to meet the public’s religious needs but also with an eye toward popularity, visual appeal, and the potential for high audience engagement.

Textual and visual analysis reveal that much “Dakwah” content employs popular communication strategies, such as provocative headlines, short lecture clips, and emotionally charged language. Themes often relate to everyday experiences such as sustenance (rezeki), finding a life partner, success, “hijrah” (spiritual migration/transformation), and life motivation. These strategies demonstrate that religious messages are constructed to fit the patterns of digital media consumption that demand immediate audience attention.

This phenomenon can be understood through the concept of the “commodification of content” proposed by (Mosco, 2009), a process wherein a message or social symbol shifts in value

from "use value" to "exchange value." In the context of digital "Dakwah", religious messages acquire economic value when they capture attention, drive traffic, and facilitate monetization through advertising or commercial partnerships.

Previous research has also found that religious content on YouTube is frequently tailored to digital market preferences. This finding supports (Aminarsih & Fauzi, 2024), who argue that religious content on YouTube is reconstructed through attractive visual packaging, audience-oriented narratives, and digital engagement strategies to increase its exchange value. Religious messages are packaged in more popular formats to ensure broader audience acceptance; however, this simultaneously risks shifting the orientation of "Dakwah" from a process of spiritual education toward media consumption driven by entertainment and popularity.

2. The Commodification of the Preacher Figure: The Preacher as a Brand and Media Commodity

The second finding reveals the commodification of the preacher figure (da'i). In the digital sphere, a preacher is not merely a conveyor of religious teachings but becomes a public figure with economic value through their digital identity.

Analysis indicates that the construction of the preacher figure is achieved through various strategies, such as the use of personal identity, a distinctive communication style, a specific visual presentation, and consistency in fostering emotional connections with the audience. Preachers become subjects of personal branding practices, enabling them to position themselves simultaneously as religious symbols and media assets.

From the perspective of media political economy, this phenomenon illustrates the commodification of labor, as described by (Mosco, 2009). Individuals who produce religious messages become part of the digital economic system when their popularity, image, and influence acquire commercial value.

These findings highlight a shift in the nature of religious authority. While a preacher's legitimacy was previously largely established through religious educational institutions, scholarly lineages (sanad), or religious communities, legitimacy in the digital sphere is also shaped by media-driven indicators such as follower counts, popularity, and audience engagement.

Recent studies on digital "Dakwah" (religious outreach) indicate that social media has created a new space for negotiating religious authority. Similarly, (Nawaf, 2025) explains that personal branding has become an essential strategy through which preachers negotiate religious authority and maintain their visibility within platform-based communication. Preachers must manage their digital identities to remain relevant amidst the competition for attention on social

media platforms. This phenomenon is also consistent with (Mufadil et al., 2024), who found that preachers increasingly function as digital content creators whose religious activities are intertwined with the economic logic of social media platforms.

3. Audience Commodification: The Congregation as Consumers in the Digital Attention Economy

A third form of commodification is found in the audience's position. In conventional "Dakwah" (religious outreach) communication models, the congregation is positioned as the recipient of religious messages. However, within the YouTube ecosystem, the audience also serves an economic function, as their attention becomes a source of value for both the platform and the creator.

Every audience activity, such as watching videos, commenting, sharing content, and subscribing to channels, increases the economic value of the content. In YouTube's monetization system, audience attention can be converted into revenue through advertising, brand partnerships, and other monetization methods.

This situation demonstrates that the audience undergoes a process of commodification, as described by (Mosco, 2009): a scenario in which media users are not merely consumers of messages but also become part of the product sold to the advertising industry.

In the context of digital "Dakwah", this phenomenon reveals a shift in the relationships between the preacher (dai), the religious message, and the congregation. The congregation does not simply receive spiritual messages; they also become part of the platform's economic mechanism. Research on YouTube monetization indicates that digital creators employ various revenue strategies, leveraging both the platform's internal features and external economic sources, such as promotions and commercial partnerships. These monetization strategies include advertising revenue, memberships, Super Chat, sponsorships, and other creator-support mechanisms that diversify income sources within YouTube's platform economy (Hua et al., 2022). Such practices are closely related to YouTube's monetization policies and advertiser-friendly content guidelines that determine content eligibility for monetization (YouTube, 2024).

4. Commodification through YouTube's Algorithmic Logic

Additional findings indicate that the YouTube algorithm plays a crucial role in shaping the direction of "Dakwah" (religious outreach) content production. The algorithm encourages creators to produce content with a high likelihood of generating audience engagement.

Consequently, the production of "Dakwah" content adapts to algorithmic logic, such as by considering video duration, using catchy titles, selecting specific thumbnails, and focusing on trending themes. From the perspective of critical discourse analysis, the algorithm functions not

merely as a distribution technology but also as a structure that shapes how religious discourse is produced and becomes visible (Dijck et al., 2018).

Thus, the commodification of “Dakwah” on YouTube occurs not only through direct economic aspects but also through technological mechanisms that determine which messages are more easily discovered, watched, and shared.

Discourse Strategies in the Construction of Digital Da'wah within YouTube Content Utilized for Monetization

A critical discourse analysis of monetized “Dakwah” (Islamic preaching) content on YouTube reveals that the construction of digital “Dakwah” is shaped not only by the delivery of religious messages but also by discourse strategies aligned with the economic logic of digital platforms. “Dakwah” in the YouTube space adapts to the characteristics of digital media, emphasizing reach, audience engagement, and economic sustainability through monetization. From (Fairclough, 1995) perspective, discourse is understood not merely as text but as a social practice involving processes of production, distribution, and consumption, as well as underlying power relations. The analysis is conducted across three dimensions: text, discursive practice, and socio-textual practice (Fairclough, 1995).

1. Strategies of Personalization and Humanization of Preachers as Digital Figures

The first finding indicates that the dominant discourse strategy in the construction of digital “Dakwah” (Islamic outreach) is the personalization of the preacher figure. In YouTube content, preachers are not merely communicators of religious messages; they are also constructed as public figures with distinct identities, communication styles, and characters, while fostering emotional closeness with their audiences.

This strategy is evident in the use of informal communication styles, references to personal experiences, storytelling, humor, and colloquial language. Such an approach cultivates a representation of the preacher as an accessible, relatable figure who understands the audience's lived experiences. Consequently, religious authority is established not solely on the basis of religious knowledge but also through the ability to forge emotional connections within the digital space.

This phenomenon reflects a shift in the nature of religious authority, moving from traditional forms toward “digital religious authority,” a form shaped by media visibility, follower counts, and digital interactions ((Campbell, 2017); (Bunt, 2018)). In the platform economy, personal identity becomes integral to value-creation strategies, as the creator figure serves as the primary draw for sustaining audience attention. YouTube itself employs a monetization system that links content performance, advertising, and creator activity through specific algorithms.

2. Strategy of Dramatizing “Dakwah” Messages through Emotion and Psychological Proximity

The second strategy identified is the use of emotional discourse in conveying “Dakwah” (Islamic outreach) messages. Digital “Dakwah” content tends to employ narratives that emphasize personal experiences, life changes (transformation narratives), the fear of sin, hope for divine forgiveness, motivation to achieve success, and inspirational stories.

From the perspective of (Fairclough, 1995) text analysis, this strategy is evident in the choice of affect-laden vocabulary such as “hijrah” (spiritual migration/turning point), “change,” “returning to Allah,” “life’s trials,” and “the path of blessings.” Such language serves not merely to convey religious information but also as a tool to foster emotional engagement among the audience.

The use of emotional elements in digital communication is linked to the nature of the “attention economy,” a condition in which user attention constitutes a primary economic resource. Content that elicits a strong emotional response is more likely to generate interaction, widespread sharing, and increased visibility (Fuchs, 2021). Consequently, the emotional strategy in digital “Dakwah” serves a dual function: first, as a pedagogical approach to touch the audience’s religious consciousness; and second, as a communication strategy to enhance content performance within platform systems.

3. Strategies for Simplifying and Popularizing Religious Knowledge

Research findings also reveal a strategy of simplifying religious discourse, transforming complex religious concepts into messages more easily understood by the digital public.

YouTube-based “Dakwah” (religious outreach) content often employs short formats, catchy titles, everyday illustrations, and accessible language to ensure the message resonates with a broader audience. This strategy demonstrates that digital “Dakwah” aligns with the nature of social media, which demands rapid, concise, and easily consumed communication.

However, from a critical perspective, this simplification also reflects a negotiation between religious values and media logic. Religious messages must be adapted to align with digital consumption patterns. (Mosco, 2009) refers to this process as a form of content commodification, in which communication content is transformed into something possessing exchange value within the media economic system. Consequently, “Dakwah” messages are evaluated not only based on the depth of their religious substance but also on their ability to capture audience attention.

4. Algorithmic Strategies: Optimizing Titles, Visuals, and Audience Engagement

Subsequent findings indicate that the construction of digital “Dakwah” (Islamic outreach) is also influenced by strategies adapted to YouTube’s algorithms. In content production, elements such as video titles, thumbnails, runtime, upload frequency, and comment interactions play a crucial role in expanding content reach.

For instance, titles that incorporate questions, conflict, or promises of transformation are often used to pique audience curiosity. This strategy demonstrates that digital “Dakwah” production is not driven solely by religious values but also considers the platform's distribution mechanisms.

Within the YouTube system, monetized content must meet specific standards and undergo a technology-based evaluation process that considers elements such as titles, descriptions, tags, and video content. This highlights the platform's role in shaping how “Dakwah” messages are produced and constructed.

5. Strategies for Commercializing Religious Symbols and Identity

The final strategy identified is the commercialization of religious symbols and identity. In some content, religious values are constructed through the use of religious attributes, Islamic terminology, an image of piety, and a sense of spiritual closeness, all of which become part of the media identity.

This phenomenon reveals that digital “Dakwah” occupies an ambivalent space. On one hand, monetization enables the sustainability of “Dakwah” activities, the production of high-quality content, and broader access to religious knowledge. On the other hand, when religious symbols are subjected to the logic of the digital market, there is a risk that spiritual values may shift into economic values.

(Mosco, 2009) explains that commodification occurs when something possessing social value transforms into something that can be produced, marketed, and traded within the system of media capitalism. In the context of YouTube, “Dakwah” becomes part of the digital creator industry, linking religious messages, audience attention, and economic profit.

The Construction of the Preacher Figure as a Media Commodity in YouTube Da'wah Content

Based on a critical discourse analysis of monetized “Dakwah” (Islamic preaching) content on YouTube, it was found that the “dai” (preacher) figure has undergone a transformation from an initial position of religious authority to that of a media figure possessing economic value within the digital ecosystem. In this context, the “dai” is not merely positioned as a communicator of religious messages but is also constructed as a “product” with marketability derived from popularity, personal appeal, and the ability to capture audience attention. These findings indicate

that the commodification of the “dai” occurs through a process in which religious symbolic value is transformed into economic value in the media (Mosco, 2009). Studies on the commodification of digital “Dakwah” also reveal that the rise of social media has prompted preachers to construct public identities through personal branding strategies and to negotiate religious authority in the digital space.

At the textual level, consistent with (Fairclough, 1995) concept of Critical Discourse Analysis, the “dai” is constructed as a commodity through the representational strategies employed in YouTube content. Preachers are portrayed not only through their religious scholarship but also through symbols of popularity, such as a casual communication style, colloquial language, emotional expression, humor, glimpses into their personal lives, and narratives that emphasize closeness to the audience. These strategies foster an image of the preacher as someone who is “approachable,” “relevant,” and “engaging to consume.” Consequently, the identity of the “dai” is no longer built solely upon the legitimacy of religious scholarship but also upon the performative ability to satisfy the logic of digital media.

An analysis of video titles, thumbnails, and visual packaging reveals that the “dai” (Islamic preacher) figure is constructed according to the logic of the attention economy. Provocative titles, emotionally charged language, and the selection of themes that address popular societal issues are strategies to boost click-through rates, watch time, and user engagement. Within the YouTube ecosystem, audience attention holds economic value because it is linked to monetization systems that include advertising and other forms of digital revenue (Fuchs, 2021). Consequently, the “dai” figure becomes part of an attention-production mechanism, in which popularity and audience engagement serve as benchmarks for content success.

Regarding the dimension of discursive practice, the study finds that the construction of the “dai” as a media commodity occurs through content production practices akin to those of the digital creator industry. “Dai” do not merely deliver sermons; they also manage production aspects, including theme selection, visual design, publication strategies, comment interaction, and digital community management. These practices demonstrate that “dai” on social media fulfill a dual role: acting as religious figures while simultaneously functioning as content creators who must understand platform algorithms. Research on the commodification of “dai” on social media indicates that these figures are packaged using symbolic strategies, entertainment skills, and personalization as integral parts of the design of digital “Dakwah” (preaching) content.

Furthermore, the findings show that personal branding serves as a primary instrument in the commodification process of the “dai” figure. A “dai”’s identity is built upon specific characteristics that distinguish them from others, such as linguistic style, attire, personal life

narratives, rapport with specific age groups, or an image as a modern “dai” who adapts to the times. From a media political economy perspective, an individual's personality can become a commodity when that identity is constructed, marketed, and exchanged to generate economic or social value (Mosco, 2009). This phenomenon is also linked to the emergence of the “celebrity preacher” concept, wherein a religious figure gains popularity through the mechanisms of the culture industry and mass media.

Regarding the dimension of social practice, the construction of the “dai” (Islamic preacher) as a media commodity reveals a shift in the structure of religious authority. While the legitimacy of a “dai” was previously derived largely from religious educational institutions, chains of scholarly transmission (sanad), or social standing, legitimacy in the digital sphere is also influenced by popularity metrics such as subscriber counts, views, comments, and audience engagement. Digital media thus fosters a new form of religious authority that is performative and rooted in visibility. (Bunt, 2018) explains that the digital Islamic sphere has altered the distribution of religious authority, as the public can access and select religious figures based on perceived relatability, communicative appeal, and social media popularity.

Research findings also indicate an ambivalence inherent in the commodification of “dai” figures. On one hand, commodification enables “Dakwah” (Islamic outreach) to reach a broader audience, fosters creativity in conveying Islamic messages, and ensures the economic sustainability of content production. Monetization can provide the resources necessary for preachers and production teams to consistently create high-quality content. On the other hand, when market logic becomes overly dominant, there is a risk that religious messages may be reduced to content driven by the pursuit of popularity, virality, and economic gain. Recent studies on digital “Dakwah” highlight the dual nature of the “dai's” transformation into a media figure: while it expands the dissemination of Islam, it also risks shifting the public perception of the “dai” from a bearer of religious messages to a figure with commercial marketability.

Consequently, these findings confirm that “dai” figures featured in monetized YouTube “Dakwah” content undergo a process of the “mediatization of religious authority,” a transformation of religious authority shaped by digital media logic. The “dai” is no longer viewed solely as a conveyor of transcendental messages but also as a media entity managed through production strategies, branding, algorithms, and the attention economy. This process demonstrates that digital “Dakwah” exists within a space of negotiation between spiritual values and the logic of media capitalism.

The Relationship between Religious Values, the Digital Economy, and Popular Culture in the Commodification of “Da'wah” on YouTube

Based on a critical discourse analysis of monetized “Dakwah” (Islamic outreach) content on YouTube, this study finds that the relationship between religious values, the digital economy, and popular culture is dynamic and subject to negotiation. Digital “Dakwah” no longer occupies a purely sacred space; instead, it has entered the realm of digital culture, which is governed by economic rules, algorithms, and the logic of popularity. This finding reflects the process of mediatization in which media increasingly influence religious institutions, authority, and practices within contemporary society (Hjarvard, 2016). In this context, religious values undergo a transformation when packaged as digital content, requiring alignment with the characteristics of social media platforms. This phenomenon demonstrates that “Dakwah” on YouTube serves not only as a medium for conveying Islamic teachings but also as part of a digital economic ecosystem that generates value through audience attention, the “attention economy” ((Mosco, 2009); (Fuchs, 2021)).

The analysis reveals that religious values form the primary foundation for the legitimacy of “Dakwah” content. Messages concerning Quranic studies, spiritual motivation, “hijrah” (spiritual migration/transformation), moral character, Islamic family life, and the strengthening of faith remain at the core of “Dakwah” communication. However, upon entering the YouTube system, religious messages undergo adaptation to the characteristics of digital culture. “Dakwah” is constructed using popular communication strategies, such as catchy titles, aesthetic visuals, emotional narratives, short-form video clips, and informal communication styles, to suit the preferences of social media users. This indicates a shift from a “religious message” to “digital religious content” that aligns with modern media consumption patterns ((Campbell, 2017); (Bunt, 2018)).

From the perspective of (Fairclough, 1995)critical discourse analysis, these changes demonstrate that religious language and symbols in YouTube content are not neutral; rather, they are produced within specific social and economic contexts. At the textual level, the construction of “Dakwah” messages frequently employs persuasive language that emphasizes emotional connection with the audience, such as narratives of personal transformation, life’s blessings, solutions to family issues, and motivation to navigate life’s challenges. These strategies render religious messages more palatable to the digital public, particularly the younger generation, who are accustomed to consuming information via social media. Thus, popular culture serves as a medium that enables religious values to enter the digital public sphere more widely.

However, this study also finds that integrating “Dakwah” (Islamic preaching) into popular culture has led to a shift in value orientation. Within the logic of popular culture, content is evaluated not merely on the depth of its substance but also on its capacity to capture attention,

spark interaction, and drive audience engagement. Metrics such as views, comments, likes, shares, and subscriber counts thus become indicators of the success of digital “Dakwah”. This situation reflects a process of audience commodification, wherein public attention toward religious messages acquires economic value for both creators and digital platforms (Mosco, 2009). Research on the commodification of religious content on YouTube further demonstrates that religious content can be transformed into economically valuable audiovisual products through monetization, advertising, and audience development strategies. This interpretation is supported by (Syafuddin & Wibowo, 2023), who found that religion-based audiovisual content on YouTube increasingly follows digital market logic through packaging strategies designed to maximize audience engagement.

The relationship between the digital economy and “Dakwah” is evident in YouTube’s monetization mechanisms. Digital platforms enable preachers or channel managers to generate revenue through advertising, donations, brand partnerships, channel memberships, and product promotions. In this context, “Dakwah” is no longer produced solely to convey religious messages; economic sustainability also becomes a factor in content production. Previous studies indicate that monetizing digital “Dakwah” can create new opportunities for preachers to expand their social influence, but it also introduces risks when religious values are excessively aligned with the interests of the digital market.

Beyond the commodification of messages and audiences, this study also identifies the commodification of the preacher’s identity. In digital culture, a preacher is positioned not merely as a conveyor of religious knowledge but also as a public figure possessing a distinct identity, image, and economic value. Personal branding plays a crucial role in establishing relationships with the audience. The emergence of celebrity preachers also illustrates how media popularity has become an important symbolic and economic asset in the contemporary da’wah industry (Maulida et al., 2026). Elements such as speech patterns, attire, religious symbols, personal background, and interactions with followers all contribute to the construction of a preacher’s digital identity. This phenomenon illustrates a shift in religious authority within the digital space, moving from institution-based authority toward an authority shaped by popularity and audience engagement ((Bunt, 2018); (Campbell, 2017)). Recent research on digital “Dakwah” also indicates that the personal branding of preachers and their interactions with audiences are part of the process of negotiating religious authority on social media.

Furthermore, this study finds that popular culture serves as a bridge between religious values and the digital economy. (Hakim & Dahri, 2024) similarly argue that the commodification of Islam on social media has significant implications for the transformation of Islamic education

and contemporary religious communication. Popular culture allows religious messages to be packaged in forms closer to people's daily lives, such as through humor, inspirational stories, casual communication styles, and digital trends. While this strategy makes "Dakwah" (Islamic outreach) more palatable to younger audiences, it also poses challenges in simplifying religious messages to align with the logic of rapid consumption on social media. From the perspective of the culture industry, this phenomenon demonstrates that cultural products, including religious messages, can be standardized and reproduced to suit market mechanisms ((Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002); (Ramdani et al., 2025)).

Thus, the relationship between religious values, the digital economy, and popular culture in YouTube-based "Dakwah" can be understood as dialectical. Religious values lend moral and spiritual legitimacy to the content; the digital economy provides mechanisms for distribution and profit; and popular culture offers a mode of communication that enables religious messages to reach a broad audience. However, this relationship also creates tension, as spiritual values risk shifting toward market values when the success of "Dakwah" is measured primarily by popularity, viewership numbers, and economic gain.

Overall, this study indicates that the commodification of "Dakwah" on social media does not signify the loss of its religious function; rather, it reflects a transformation in the form of "Dakwah" practices within digital society. "Dakwah" involves adapting to new technological and economic structures, in which religion, the market, and popular culture interact to shape the new face of contemporary Islamic communication.

CONCLUSION

Based on a critical discourse analysis of monetized "Dakwah" (Islamic preaching) content on YouTube, this study demonstrates that digital "Dakwah" has become part of the digital economic ecosystem through three primary forms of commodification: content, the preacher figure, and the audience. "Dakwah" messages serve not only to convey spiritual values but are also constructed as digital products that adhere to platform logic, utilizing visual strategies, emotional narratives, personal branding, and algorithmic optimization to boost audience engagement. Preachers have shifted from being purely religious authorities to media figures possessing both economic and symbolic value, while audiences have become integral to the "attention economy" through their digital activities. These findings reveal a dialectical relationship among religion, the digital economy, and popular culture: religious values provide spiritual legitimacy, the digital economy offers mechanisms for distribution and monetization, and popular culture serves as an adaptation strategy to keep "Dakwah" relevant in digital society.

However, this development also presents challenges, specifically the potential for “Dakwah” to shift its orientation from educational and spiritual values toward the logic of popularity and market forces. Therefore, a balance must be struck between digital communication innovation and a commitment to the substance of religious values to ensure that the transformation of digital “Dakwah” retains its social and spiritual integrity.

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