

THE RHETORIC OF DA'WAH IN THE TIKTOK ERA: AN ANALYSIS OF DIGITAL PREACHERS' COMMUNICATION STYLES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON GENERATION Z IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

The proliferation of short-form video content on platforms like TikTok has created a new frontier for Islamic preaching (da'wah), fundamentally altering how religious messages are communicated to younger audiences. This digital shift poses new challenges and opportunities, particularly in engaging Generation Z in Indonesia, a demographic highly active on the platform. This research aims to analyze the rhetorical communication styles of prominent Indonesian digital preachers on TikTok and to assess their influence on the religious perceptions and engagement of Generation Z. Employing a qualitative methodology combining virtual ethnography and critical discourse analysis of popular da'wah videos, complemented by online interviews with Gen Z users, this study delves into contemporary Islamic communication. The results identify a predominant use of relatable storytelling, humor, and trend-integration as key rhetorical strategies. These styles foster high engagement and a personalized religious connection among youth but also risk oversimplifying complex theological issues. In conclusion, the rhetoric of da'wah on TikTok marks a significant evolution in religious discourse, effectively capturing the attention of Generation Z but also highlighting a critical need for digital religious literacy to ensure deeper understanding.

Keywords: Digital Da'wah, Islamic Communication, TikTok



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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary communication landscape has been irrevocably reshaped by the ascendancy of digital platforms. Social media networks, once peripheral channels of interaction, now function as central arenas for public discourse, cultural production, and identity formation. Among these, short-form video platforms have emerged as a particularly potent force, with TikTok standing at the forefront of this transformation (Miguel dkk., 2025). Its algorithmically curated content stream, emphasis on brevity, and highly participatory culture have captivated a global audience, most notably Generation Z, who navigate its digital corridors as native inhabitants (Mathe, 2023). This platform is not merely a venue for entertainment; it has become a significant ecosystem where social norms are negotiated, political opinions are shaped, and information, both factual and otherwise, is disseminated at unprecedented speed.

This digital migration has profoundly impacted all spheres of life, including the domain of religious expression and communication. Religious institutions and figures, historically reliant on traditional mediums such as sermons, books, and broadcast media, are increasingly compelled to engage with these new digital frontiers to maintain relevance and reach younger constituencies. This has given rise to the phenomenon of “digital da’wah,” the practice of Islamic preaching and propagation within online spaces (Witteborn, 2025). The transition of da’wah from the physical mosque and the scheduled television program to the on-demand, personalized feeds of social media represents a fundamental paradigm shift in the dissemination of religious knowledge and the cultivation of religious identity.

The intersection of digital media and Islamic practice is particularly dynamic in the context of Indonesia. As the country with the world’s largest Muslim population and one of its most engaged and extensive TikTok user bases, Indonesia presents a unique and critical case study (Muselli dkk., 2025). The platform has become a vibrant stage for a new generation of digital preachers (da’i) who leverage its features to communicate Islamic teachings to millions of young Indonesians (Nguyen, 2023). This convergence of a dominant digital culture with deeply embedded religious traditions creates a fertile ground for new forms of religious expression and authority to emerge, making the study of da’wah on TikTok an urgent scholarly imperative.

The primary challenge arising from this digital transition is the profound rhetorical shift required to make religious messaging effective on a platform like TikTok. Traditional da’wah rhetoric, often characterized by its formal structure, lengthy exegesis, and reliance on the established authority of the preacher, is fundamentally incompatible with TikTok’s ecosystem. The platform’s architecture prioritizes content that is immediately engaging, emotionally resonant, and easily shareable within seconds (Jhoti & Allen, 2025). This inherent tension forces a renegotiation between theological depth and the demands of virality, creating a complex problem for both the producers and consumers of religious content.

This situation presents a series of specific, multifaceted problems. Digital preachers must craft their messages to be not only religiously coherent but also algorithmically optimized, a process that can inadvertently lead to the decontextualization of sacred texts and the oversimplification of complex theological and ethical issues (Buehling dkk., 2025). The platform’s metrics of success—likes, shares, and follower counts—can foster a new form of religious authority, where charisma and content creation skills rival or even supplant traditional scholarly credentials. For Generation Z audiences, this environment presents the challenge of navigating a deluge of fragmented religious content, making it difficult to discern credible sources and to construct a holistic and nuanced understanding of their faith.

The core problem this research addresses is the significant gap in the scholarly understanding of the specific communication strategies employed in this new da’wah landscape and their tangible influence. While the phenomenon of “TikTok da’wah” is widely acknowledged in popular discourse, it remains academically under-examined (Reynolds &

Hallinan, 2024). There is a pressing lack of systematic analysis focusing on the specific rhetorical techniques—the persuasive appeals, narrative structures, and aesthetic choices—that define this new genre of religious communication (Cao dkk., 2025). Furthermore, how Indonesian Generation Z users interpret, engage with, and are ultimately influenced by these novel forms of religious messaging remains a critical and unanswered question.

The overarching objective of this research is to conduct a comprehensive and critical analysis of the rhetoric of Islamic da'wah as it is practiced on the TikTok platform in Indonesia. This study seeks to move beyond a superficial description of the phenomenon by systematically deconstructing the communication styles and persuasive strategies employed by prominent Indonesian digital preachers (Tolsma & Spierings, 2024). The ultimate goal is to illuminate the intricate dynamics of religious communication and influence in the contemporary digital age.

To achieve this broad aim, the research sets forth several specific objectives. The first is to identify and categorize the dominant rhetorical techniques utilized by Indonesian digital preachers on TikTok (Waldherr dkk., 2024). This involves a granular analysis of their use of classical rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos), narrative storytelling, humor, and the integration of popular trends and platform-specific features. A second objective is to analyze how these rhetorical strategies are strategically adapted to the unique technological affordances and algorithmic constraints of the TikTok ecosystem, examining the interplay between message and medium.

Further objectives are centered on understanding the impact of these rhetorical styles on their intended audience. A third objective is to investigate the influence of these digital da'wah communication styles on the religious perceptions, attitudes, and engagement of Indonesian Generation Z users (Kang dkk., 2025). This exploration will delve into how TikTok da'wah shapes their understanding of Islamic concepts and their sense of religious identity. The final objective is to explore how these young audiences actively interpret, negotiate, and co-construct religious meaning from the short-form, often decontextualized, da'wah content they encounter in their daily media consumption.

An examination of the existing body of scholarly work reveals a growing interest in the intersection of Islam and digital media. Numerous studies have explored the phenomenon of Islam online, covering topics from the formation of virtual religious communities to the use of platforms like Facebook and YouTube for da'wah and religious education. Research in the Indonesian context has similarly traced the evolution of Islamic media, from print to television and onto the internet (Li dkk., 2025). However, this existing literature, while valuable, has yet to fully address the specifics of the current media environment.

The primary gap identified in the literature is the lack of specific focus on the rhetorical dimension of da'wah within the unique socio-technical ecosystem of TikTok. While previous research has often employed content analysis to categorize the topics discussed by digital preachers, it has rarely delved into a micro-level analysis of the persuasive language, visual grammar, and narrative structures that make the content compelling and influential (Barnard, 2024). The distinct nature of TikTok—its algorithm, its short-form format, and its trend-driven culture—creates a rhetorical situation that is fundamentally different from that of older platforms like YouTube or Instagram, a difference that has not yet been adequately theorized or empirically investigated.

This study is designed to fill this critical gap by providing a fine-grained rhetorical critique of TikTok da'wah. It moves beyond simply asking what is being said to asking how it is being said and why it is effective (Bigman dkk., 2023). By connecting a detailed analysis of preachers' communication styles directly to an investigation of audience reception and influence among Generation Z, this research bridges a divide between media studies, rhetorical criticism, and Islamic studies (Shifman dkk., 2025). It offers a timely and necessary update to

the scholarship on digital religion, accounting for the latest platform dynamics and their impact on the youngest generation of media consumers.

The novelty of this research is grounded in its focused, interdisciplinary approach to a highly contemporary and influential phenomenon. It is one of the first in-depth academic studies to specifically analyze the rhetoric of TikTok da'wah within the Indonesian context, offering a pioneering investigation into an emerging and rapidly evolving field of communication (Karatas, 2023). The synthesis of rhetorical analysis, which provides the tools for textual deconstruction, with virtual ethnography, which offers deep insights into audience reception and practice, constitutes an innovative methodological framework for studying digital religious phenomena.

This study aims to make significant theoretical and methodological contributions. Theoretically, it will contribute to scholarship on digital rhetoric by examining how classical persuasive theories are being radically adapted, remixed, and reconfigured within the context of algorithm-driven, short-form video platforms (Dong dkk., 2025). Methodologically, it pioneers a framework for analyzing ephemeral digital content and its real-world impact, providing a model that can be adapted for studying other forms of social and cultural expression on TikTok and similar platforms.

The justification for this research lies in its profound social and academic significance. For religious scholars and leaders, understanding this new landscape is essential for fostering digital religious literacy and ensuring the communication of a nuanced and responsible understanding of Islam (Xu, 2025). For educators, sociologists, and parents, this study provides critical insights into the digital forces shaping the values and identities of young people. For communication and media scholars, it illuminates the powerful intersection of technology, culture, religion, and rhetoric in one of the world's most dynamic digital societies (Zou dkk., 2025). Ultimately, comprehending this phenomenon is vital for understanding the present and future of religious authority, community, and identity in the digital age.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research methodology by integrating virtual ethnography with a critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework (Wang, 2025). This dual approach was selected for its comprehensive capacity to capture the complexity of a socio-digital phenomenon, enabling both a deep, critical analysis of the communicative texts themselves (CDA) and a rich contextual understanding of their reception, interactions, and cultural practices within the TikTok environment (virtual ethnography). This combination ensures a nuanced exploration of how religious messages are constructed and received by a young digital audience.

Research Design

The fundamental design of this research is a qualitative, integrated approach that combines textual analysis with audience reception study. Virtual ethnography provides the methodological lens to observe and describe the social, cultural, and communicative norms surrounding da'wah content on TikTok (Zhou & Pun, 2024). Concurrently, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) serves as the rigorous analytical framework used to deconstruct the rhetorical strategies, ideological underpinnings, and embedded power dynamics within the digital preachers' videos. This integrated design aims to connect the preachers' persuasive strategies with the actual influence and interpretation among their target audience, thereby strengthening the validity of the study's conclusions through triangulation.

Research Target/Subject

The research involves two distinct populations. The first population comprises Indonesian digital preachers (da'i) active on TikTok, from whom a purposive sample of five

prominent preachers was selected based on criteria such as follower count, content consistency, and high engagement. This selection yielded a total corpus of 100 videos (20 most-viewed per preacher posted between January 2023 and January 2024) for the discourse analysis. The second population consists of Indonesian Muslim Generation Z TikTok users, from whom 25 participants (aged 16 to 24) were recruited using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. These participants self-identified as active consumers of TikTok da'wah content, forming the sample for the audience reception interviews.

Research Procedure

The research was systematically conducted in three distinct phases. The initial phase focused on data collection, which involved the systematic downloading and archiving of the 100 selected TikTok videos, alongside the recruitment and securing of informed consent from the 25 interview participants. The second phase consisted of parallel data analysis: the video corpus was subjected to a rigorous critical discourse analysis using the established coding framework, while concurrently, the 25 online interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then analyzed (Kuai dkk., 2025). The third and final phase involved data triangulation, where the rhetorical findings from the video analysis were systematically compared and contrasted with the themes emerging from the audience interviews, allowing for a comprehensive interpretation that linked the preachers' strategies with their audience reception.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

The study utilized three main instruments. For the textual analysis, the primary instrument was a researcher-developed coding framework built on rhetorical theory and principles of multimodal discourse analysis, which included categories for identifying rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos), narrative structures, humor, and platform-specific engagement techniques (Markham, 2024). For the audience reception component, the main instrument was a semi-structured interview protocol, designed to elicit detailed responses regarding participants' media consumption habits, content interpretations, perceived authenticity of the preachers, and the content's influence on their religious practices (Kidd dkk., 2023). Additionally, observational notes taken from the virtual ethnography, focusing on comment sections and user-generated content, served as a supplementary instrument.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted using two specific techniques corresponding to the dual methodological approach. For the video corpus, the technique utilized was Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), guided by the established coding framework to deconstruct the rhetorical strategies, ideological underpinnings, and power dynamics embedded within the da'wah messages. Concurrently, the qualitative data obtained from the 25 semi-structured interviews were analyzed using an inductive Thematic Analysis approach (Bhandari & Sun, 2023). This technique involved breaking down the interview transcripts, applying open and axial coding, and subsequently identifying and organizing emergent patterns and key themes related to audience interpretation, affective responses, and perceived influence of the da'wah content.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the 100-video corpus from five prominent Indonesian digital preachers revealed a distinct pattern of rhetorical strategies tailored to the TikTok environment. A quantitative summary of the qualitative coding shows a significant prevalence of certain appeals over others. Pathos-driven content, particularly in the form of emotional storytelling, was the most frequently observed strategy, appearing in a significant majority of the analyzed videos. This was closely followed by the integration of humor and the leveraging of platform-

specific trends, such as popular audio clips and video formats. In contrast, appeals to logos, characterized by complex theological explanations or detailed scriptural exegesis, were markedly less common.

Table 1. Frequency of Primary Rhetorical Strategies in the Video Corpus (N=100)

Rhetorical Strategy	Frequency of Occurrence	Description
Pathos: Emotional Storytelling	78%	Narratives of repentance, hardship, or inspiration designed to evoke empathy.
Ethos: Relatability/Authenticity	71%	Use of casual language, sharing personal anecdotes, “day-in-the-life” content.
Humor and Meme Integration	65%	Incorporating witty remarks, skits, and meme formats into religious messages.
Trend Leveraging	62%	Utilizing trending audio, hashtags, or video challenges for da’wah content.
Logos: Direct Exegesis	15%	Direct, detailed explanation of Qur’anic verses or Hadith.

The distribution of these strategies indicates a deliberate communicative choice. The data presented in Table 1 highlights a clear prioritization of content that fosters immediate emotional and personal connection. Preachers consistently favored techniques that made their messages feel authentic, accessible, and entertaining to a young audience. The infrequent use of traditional, logos-centric appeals suggests a strategic pivot away from didactic lecturing towards a more affective and culturally embedded form of religious communication that aligns with the fast-paced, entertainment-driven nature of the platform.

The dominance of pathos and a constructed ethos of relatability is directly explained by the affordances of the TikTok platform. The algorithm favors content that generates high engagement in a short period, and emotional resonance is a powerful driver of such engagement (likes, comments, shares). Digital preachers appear to have intuitively or explicitly understood that a poignant 60-second story about overcoming a personal struggle is more likely to be algorithmically amplified and emotionally impactful than a detailed explanation of Islamic jurisprudence. This strategy ensures their messages penetrate the competitive attention economy of a user’s “For You Page.”

The strategic incorporation of humor and trending content serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it acts as a “Trojan horse,” embedding religious reminders within familiar and entertaining formats, thereby lowering the audience’s potential resistance to overtly religious messaging. Secondly, it signals cultural fluency and relevance, constructing the preacher’s ethos not as a distant authority figure, but as an in-group member who understands and participates in youth culture. This approach effectively collapses the perceived distance between the sacred and the profane, making religious engagement seem like a natural and integrated part of everyday digital life.

Thematic analysis of the 25 interviews with Generation Z participants revealed three superordinate themes concerning their reception of TikTok da’wah. The first theme was “The Primacy of Relatability,” where participants consistently expressed a preference for preachers who felt “authentic,” “real,” and “not preachy.” Authenticity was often defined by the preacher’s use of casual language, willingness to show vulnerability, and engagement with contemporary youth culture. This indicates that the perceived character and personality of the messenger are as important as the message itself.

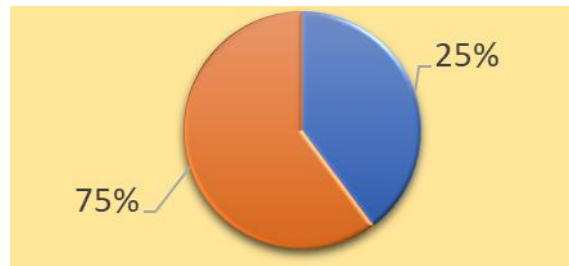


Figure 1. Binary Distribution of Gen Z's Da'wah Reception: messenger VS. Message

A second major theme was "Affective Connection over Theological Depth." Participants frequently described their engagement in emotional terms, using phrases like "it hit me right in the heart" or "it felt so calming." They valued content that provided immediate spiritual comfort, motivation, or a sense of emotional validation. Conversely, many expressed disinterest in content they perceived as overly academic or judgmental, indicating a consumption pattern driven more by the search for affective experience than for deep doctrinal knowledge. A final theme, "Navigating Fragmented Authority," highlighted participants' awareness of the platform's diverse and often contradictory religious content, leading to a personalized approach where they "pick and choose" messages that resonate with them.

From the interview data, one can infer that the construction of religious authority in the TikTok era is undergoing a significant transformation for Generation Z. Traditional markers of authority, such as institutional affiliation or formal education, are becoming secondary to digitally mediated markers of authenticity and relatability. The authority of a digital preacher is not granted by a formal institution but is continuously earned and negotiated through their ability to perform a relatable and engaging online persona. This suggests a shift from a top-down model of religious instruction to a more horizontal, networked model of influence.

It can also be inferred that the nature of religious engagement fostered by the platform is highly affective and therapeutic. The preference for emotionally resonant content suggests that many young users approach TikTok da'wah as a resource for emotional and spiritual well-being rather than a tool for systematic religious learning. This pattern of consumption, centered on short, decontextualized messages, likely cultivates an episodic and personalized form of religiosity. The religious "snacking" behavior, where users consume small, digestible pieces of content, may lead to a broad but shallow understanding of complex religious concepts.

A clear and direct relationship exists between the preachers' dominant rhetorical strategies and the expressed preferences of the audience. The high prevalence of pathos-driven storytelling and the construction of a relatable ethos in the video content directly correlate with the audience's stated demand for "Affective Connection" and "The Primacy of Relatability." This indicates a highly symbiotic relationship: preachers produce the content that the audience craves and that the algorithm rewards, creating a feedback loop that reinforces these specific communication styles. The success of the analyzed preachers is contingent upon their mastery of this rhetorical alignment.

The preachers' use of humor and trend integration is a direct response to the audience's media consumption habits. Participants described scrolling through an endless stream of entertainment, and for da'wah content to capture their attention, it must compete on the same terms. The data demonstrates that by embedding Islamic messages within meme formats or popular challenges, preachers successfully interrupt these consumption patterns. This strategy validates the audience's cultural tastes while simultaneously delivering a religious reminder, proving to be a highly effective method of engagement that bridges the gap between entertainment and edification.

A specific case study of "Preacher B" exemplifies the strategy of humor and trend integration. In a typical 30-second video, he utilizes a trending audio clip where a person is comically complaining about a minor inconvenience. Preacher B appears on screen, lip-syncing to the audio, but the on-screen text reframes the complaint in a religious context, such as "Me

when I miss Fajr prayer and my whole day feels off.” The video ends with a quick, cheerful reminder: “It’s not too late to pray Dhuha! Let’s go!” This format is repeated across dozens of his videos, consistently generating hundreds of thousands of likes and shares.

In contrast, a case study of “Preacher D” showcases the “Aesthetic Storytelling” approach. Her videos are characterized by a highly cinematic quality, featuring slow-motion shots, soft lighting, and emotive instrumental music. In a representative video, she narrates a story of a young woman struggling with insecurity, using visual metaphors to depict her emotional state. The voiceover connects this personal struggle to the Islamic concept of trusting in God’s plan (tawakkul). The video concludes not with a direct call to action, but with a beautifully calligraphed Qur’anic verse appearing on screen, leaving the viewer with a feeling of peace and contemplation.

The effectiveness of Preacher B’s method lies in its profound cultural resonance and low cognitive load. By adopting the native language and formats of the platform, he removes any friction that might make a user scroll past. The humor makes the religious message highly palatable and shareable, turning his followers into active participants in his da’wah through their shares and duets. This approach transforms a religious reminder from a solemn obligation into a piece of relatable, entertaining content that fits seamlessly into the user’s daily media diet.

Preacher D’s success illustrates a different dimension of affective engagement. Her strategy appeals to the audience’s desire for beauty, tranquility, and emotional depth. In a digital environment often characterized by chaos and noise, her content offers a brief moment of aesthetic and spiritual respite. This approach builds her ethos as a source of wisdom and calm. It demonstrates that TikTok da’wah is not monolithic; while some users seek humor and relatability, others are drawn to content that provides a more contemplative and emotionally immersive religious experience.

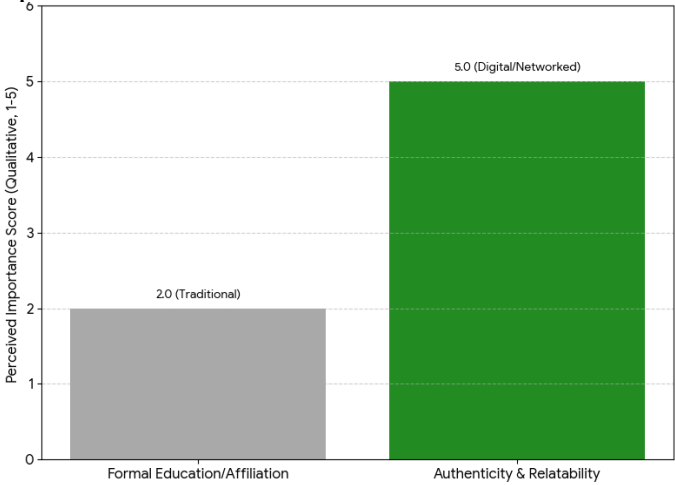


Figure 2. Shift in Religious Authority Markers in the TikTok Era (Gen Z)

The findings collectively indicate that the rhetoric of da’wah on TikTok is defined by a strategic adaptation to the platform’s socio-technical logic. This involves a deliberate move away from traditional, logos-heavy discourse towards a communication style that prioritizes affective resonance, perceived authenticity, and cultural relevance (Dowling, 2024). Digital preachers are not merely transplanting old methods onto a new medium; they are actively crafting a new rhetorical genre of da’wah that is native to the short-form video ecosystem.

This emergent rhetorical style is highly influential in shaping the religious experiences of Indonesian Generation Z. It successfully captures their attention and fosters a sense of personal connection to Islamic teachings (Törnberg & Nissen, 2023). However, this influence is characterized by the cultivation of an affective, personalized, and fragmented form of religiosity. While effective for engagement, this communication style raises critical questions

about its long-term impact on the depth of theological understanding and the development of a holistic Islamic worldview among young digital natives.

This study's primary findings reveal that the rhetoric of Islamic da'wah on TikTok is overwhelmingly characterized by a strategic prioritization of pathos and ethos. The analysis of the video corpus demonstrated a clear preference for emotional storytelling and the construction of a relatable, authentic persona, with these strategies appearing in 78% and 71% of the content respectively. Concurrently, the integration of humor and the leveraging of platform-specific trends were identified as dominant techniques. A stark contrast was observed in the minimal use of logos-centric appeals, with direct theological exegesis constituting only a small fraction of the analyzed messages. This rhetorical composition points to a deliberate adaptation to the platform's communicative demands.

The reception of this content by Indonesian Generation Z audiences directly mirrors the preachers' rhetorical choices. Thematic analysis of interviews uncovered a strong audience preference for authenticity and relatability, encapsulated in the theme "The Primacy of Relatability." Participants consistently favored preachers who felt approachable and non-judgmental (Jia & Zhang, 2025). Furthermore, the findings highlight a consumption pattern driven by a search for emotional connection rather than deep intellectual engagement, as captured by the theme "Affective Connection over Theological Depth." This indicates that young audiences primarily use TikTok da'wah as a source of spiritual comfort and motivation.

A symbiotic relationship between content production and audience consumption was clearly established. The rhetorical strategies employed by the preachers align perfectly with the expressed desires of the Generation Z audience and the algorithmic priorities of the TikTok platform (Sandri dkk., 2025). This creates a powerful feedback loop where engaging, emotionally resonant content is rewarded with visibility, further incentivizing its production. The success and influence of the studied digital preachers are fundamentally contingent on their ability to master and operate within this dynamic ecosystem of affect, authenticity, and algorithms.

The research's interpretive analysis concludes that a new, platform-native genre of da'wah is emerging. This genre is highly effective at capturing the attention of young audiences and fostering a sense of personal connection to Islamic teachings. The case studies of preachers utilizing humor and aesthetic storytelling illustrate the stylistic diversity within this broader affective turn (Snoussi dkk., 2023). The overall influence of this rhetorical style, however, is characterized by the cultivation of a personalized, fragmented, and emotionally driven form of religiosity, raising significant questions about its long-term impact on theological literacy among digital natives.

The findings of this research affirm and extend existing scholarship on the digitalization of religion. Scholars have long noted the migration of religious authority from traditional institutions to online platforms (Hietajärvi dkk., 2024). This study contributes to that conversation by specifying the precise rhetorical mechanisms through which this authority is constructed and performed within the unique socio-technical context of a short-form video application. It demonstrates that TikTok is not merely a new venue for old practices but a transformative environment that cultivates a distinct and novel style of religious communication, different from the longer-form content found on platforms like YouTube.

The pronounced preference for "Affective Connection over Theological Depth" provides strong empirical support for the "therapeutic turn" in modern religious practice discussed within the sociology of religion. This research situates this broader trend within the specific context of Indonesian Muslim youth, illustrating how platform architecture acts as a powerful catalyst for this shift. The algorithm's prioritization of engaging content effectively favors therapeutic and motivational messages over complex doctrinal teachings, accelerating the reorientation of religious consumption towards personal well-being and emotional regulation.

The rhetorical strategies observed stand in stark contrast to classical Islamic pedagogical and rhetorical traditions (*balaghah*), which often place a high value on knowledge transmission (*ta'lim*) and logical argumentation. This study reveals a significant inversion of this traditional hierarchy, where the preacher's persona and the emotional impact of the message often supersede the transmission of detailed religious knowledge (Haßler dkk., 2023). This divergence challenges conventional understandings of effective *da'wah* and suggests a profound renegotiation of communicative norms in the digital age.

The audience's approach of "Navigating Fragmented Authority" resonates deeply with sociological theories on late modernity and the individualization of belief. The "pick and choose" mentality described by participants reflects a broader societal trend away from singular, institutional sources of authority towards a more eclectic and personalized construction of one's worldview (Butkowski, 2023). This study grounds these abstract social theories in the concrete, everyday digital media practices of young Indonesian Muslims, showing how platform dynamics both enable and reinforce this individualized approach to faith.

The results of this study signify a fundamental re-mediation of religious authority. Authority in the TikTok era is less about formal credentials or institutional backing and more about a continuously performed digital charisma. It is an authority of presence, cultural fluency, and perceived authenticity, earned through skillful engagement with the platform's vernacular and norms (Grates & Brandt, 2025). This represents a significant shift from an authority based on scholarly knowledge to one based on networked influence and personal connection, a transformation with profound implications for the future of religious leadership.

These findings also point towards an increasing commodification of religious discourse. In the hyper-competitive attention economy of TikTok, *da'wah* content must be packaged as an engaging, easily consumable product to survive. The platform's metrics of likes, shares, and views function as direct market feedback, shaping the production of religious content to meet audience demand for entertainment and emotional uplift. This dynamic risks turning sacred teachings into another form of popular content, subject to the same market pressures as fashion trends or comedy skits.

The research simultaneously reveals the emergence of what could be termed a "digital Islamic aesthetic." As exemplified by preachers who focus on cinematic storytelling and visual beauty, a form of *da'wah* is developing that prioritizes a spiritual "vibe" or mood. This aesthetic approach offers a moment of tranquility and contemplation amidst the platform's often chaotic and fast-paced nature. This aesthetic itself becomes a powerful rhetorical tool, persuading not through argument but through the creation of an immersive and emotionally resonant experience.

The findings are ultimately a testament to the "platform vernacularization" of religious practice. Islamic concepts, narratives, and reminders are being systematically translated into the native language, grammar, and formats of TikTok (Weigel & Gitomer, 2025). This process goes beyond simple linguistic translation to involve a deep adaptation of form, style, and even substance to align with the platform's logic. This vernacularization makes religious engagement feel seamless and indigenous to the digital spaces where young people spend their time, effectively embedding faith within the fabric of their daily media consumption.

A primary implication of these findings is directed at traditional Islamic educational institutions. These institutions face a significant challenge to their continued relevance in the lives of young Muslims. When a generation increasingly sources its religious knowledge and spiritual guidance from charismatic online personalities, traditional bodies must critically reassess their pedagogical approaches and digital engagement strategies. A failure to adapt to this new media reality risks creating a profound disconnect between institutional Islam and the lived religious experiences of young people.

The study carries profound implications for the promotion of digital and religious literacy. The current ecosystem, characterized by fragmented and emotionally charged content, necessitates that young audiences be equipped with critical thinking skills. There is a tangible risk that, without such skills, audiences may uncritically accept oversimplified or decontextualized religious claims simply because they are delivered in a persuasive and entertaining package. Fostering the ability to discern credible sources and appreciate nuanced understanding is therefore a critical educational imperative.

There are also significant implications for the digital preachers themselves and the broader practice of da'wah. The relentless pressure for virality and engagement creates the potential for a gradual erosion of substantive theological content in favor of pure entertainment. This raises crucial ethical questions about the responsibilities of these new religious influencers and the long-term spiritual and intellectual health of their millions of followers. The balance between accessibility and accuracy, engagement and edification, becomes a central ethical challenge in this new landscape.

The research offers broader implications for understanding contemporary youth culture. The manner in which Indonesian Generation Z engages with religious content on TikTok is a microcosm of their engagement with information more broadly—be it political, social, or educational. Their preference for personalized, affective, and networked sources of information over institutional ones is a generational characteristic. Understanding the dynamics of TikTok da'wah therefore provides a valuable lens through which to comprehend the fundamental ways in which digital media is reshaping identity, community, and worldview formation for an entire generation.

The research outcomes are, first and foremost, a direct consequence of the technological architecture and algorithmic logic of TikTok. The platform is not a neutral conduit for information; its design actively shapes the nature of the communication that thrives within it. The short-form video format and the powerful recommendation algorithm, optimized to maximize user watch time, create a structural environment where emotionally resonant, visually stimulating, and trend-aligned content is systematically advantaged. The rhetorical strategies of the preachers are a logical and effective adaptation to this powerful technological reality.

The socio-cultural positioning of Generation Z provides a second critical explanatory layer. As digital natives immersed in a media-saturated world, their expectations for communication are shaped by principles of authenticity, immediacy, and peer-to-peer interaction. They value horizontal networks of influence over top-down hierarchical structures of authority. Their preference for relatable and affective content is not a phenomenon exclusive to religion but is a defining characteristic of their generation's broader media consumption habits, making the observed rhetorical shifts in da'wah an unsurprising development.

The specific cultural and religious context of Indonesia offers further explanation. Indonesian Islam has historically demonstrated a significant capacity for cultural adaptation and popular expression. The phenomenon of the celebrity preacher (da'i kondang) who blends religious teaching with entertainment is not new, having been a staple of Indonesian television for decades. The rise of TikTok da'wah can thus be understood as the latest evolution of this "pop Islam" tradition, updated and optimized for the specific affordances of the contemporary platform age.

Economic incentives also contribute to shaping these outcomes. For a growing number of digital preachers, content creation is a viable profession, supported by TikTok's monetization features, brand sponsorships, and other forms of digital enterprise. This economic dimension creates a strong incentive to produce content that performs well according to platform metrics. The financial imperative to generate views and engagement inevitably reinforces the strategic decision to prioritize entertaining, shareable, and emotionally appealing content over more complex or challenging theological discourse.

Future research must endeavor to understand the long-term effects of this mode of religious engagement. Longitudinal studies are urgently needed to track how the consumption of short-form, affective da'wah content influences the faith development, social attitudes, and offline religious behaviors of Generation Z over time. It is crucial to investigate whether this digital engagement fosters a deeper, more committed faith or if it remains a largely therapeutic and ephemeral experience confined to the screen.

A clear and actionable recommendation for Islamic educators, community leaders, and parents is the development of comprehensive digital literacy programs. Such programs should move beyond simple proscriptions against social media and instead empower young Muslims with the critical tools to navigate the digital religious landscape responsibly. The curriculum should focus on teaching how to evaluate the credibility of online sources, understand the difference between affective appeal and theological soundness, and appreciate the importance of deep, contextualized knowledge.

Scholarship in this area would benefit immensely from a deeper investigation of the content creators themselves. In-depth qualitative interviews with the digital preachers could provide invaluable insights into their motivations, their theological backgrounds, their understanding of their own influence, and the ethical considerations they grapple with. Understanding the “supply side” of this ecosystem is essential for a holistic and nuanced analysis of the phenomenon of TikTok da'wah.

There is a pressing need for proactive and constructive interventions in this space. Instead of simply ceding the digital stage to algorithmically favored content, established religious institutions and scholars should consider collaborating with digitally savvy creators to produce content that is both theologically robust and compelling. The challenge is not to reject the platform's vernacular but to skillfully utilize it to communicate a deeper and more nuanced vision of Islam, creating an alternative model of digital da'wah that is both authentic and substantive.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this research is the identification of a new, platform-native genre of da'wah that has emerged within the TikTok ecosystem. This genre represents more than a mere migration of traditional religious discourse to a new medium; it constitutes a fundamental rhetorical inversion where pathos and a constructed ethos of authenticity supersede logos. The communication style is characterized by emotional storytelling, humor, and trend integration, a formula driven by a symbiotic alignment of preacher strategies, audience desires for affective connection, and the platform's algorithmic logic. This dynamic effectively cultivates a form of religious engagement that is highly accessible and personally resonant for Generation Z, yet simultaneously fosters a fragmented and emotionally-driven understanding of faith that prioritizes immediate spiritual comfort over deep theological inquiry.

This study's primary contribution to the field is the conceptualization of the “platform vernacularization” of religious discourse. It demonstrates how sacred teachings are systematically translated not just into a new language but into the native grammar, formats, and cultural logic of a specific digital environment. By integrating virtual ethnography with critical discourse analysis, the research provides a robust methodological framework for examining the interplay between content production, platform architecture, and audience reception in digital religious phenomena. This approach moves beyond simple content analysis to offer a nuanced understanding of how religious authority, identity, and practice are being reshaped in the contemporary media landscape, offering a valuable model for future studies at the intersection of religion, media, and technology.

The study's qualitative approach and specific focus on the Indonesian context naturally present limitations regarding generalizability. The findings reflect a particular cultural and digital moment that is subject to change as platform dynamics evolve. Future research should therefore endeavor to conduct comparative analyses across different cultural and religious contexts to test the broader applicability of the identified rhetorical trends. Longitudinal studies are also critically needed to assess the long-term impact of this affective and fragmented mode of religious consumption on the faith development, social attitudes, and offline behaviors of young digital natives, thereby moving from an analysis of perceived influence to a measurement of tangible, lasting effects.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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