



DIGITAL DA'WAH COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL NETWORKS IN THE INDONESIAN CONTEXT: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF SHIFT MEDIA, UAH OFFICIAL, AND YUK NGAJI

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the transformation of digital-based da'wah communities in Indonesia specifically Shift Media, UAH Official, and Yuk Ngaji as new actors in contemporary Islamic communication. Adopting a qualitative case study approach and employing critical discourse analysis, the research investigates how these communities navigate religious discourse, digital culture, and social engagement. Findings show that these communities transcend the conventional role of da'wah transmitters by fostering participatory religious spaces that resonate with urban Muslim youth. They reframe Islamic messages using contextual, dialogical, and accessible formats, while maintaining an inclusive posture in the face of rising ideological polarization. This shift signifies the emergence of a networked model of da'wah fluid, decentralized, and socially embedded marking a departure from traditional institutional frameworks. The study contributes to da'wah theory by validating this paradigm shift and underscores the importance of supporting digital da'wah communities through ethical guidance, capacity-building, and media literacy. Future research may examine their long-term social impact or draw comparative insights from similar movements in other socio-religious contexts.

Keywords: Digital da'wah communities; social networks

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology, particularly with the emergence of social media and various digital platforms, has fundamentally transformed the way people interact, form communities, and distribute information including within the context of Islamic preaching (da'wah). Traditionally conducted face-to-face and characterized by hierarchical structures, da'wah has now undergone a transformation into a more horizontal and participatory practice through the presence of online communities. This shift opens new opportunities for the dissemination of inclusive Islamic values, while also presenting new challenges in the form of message distortion, polarization, and contestation of religious authority (Castells, 2009).

In recent years, Islamic preaching (da'wah) has undergone a significant transformation, shifting from traditional formats such as sermons in mosques and religious study circles to digital

platforms that reach broader and more diverse audiences. This transition is largely driven by the proliferation of social media and mobile internet access, which allow individuals and organizations to produce, share, and engage with religious content in real time. As a result, da'wah has become increasingly decentralized, participatory, and visual, reshaping both the structure and substance of religious discourse in contemporary Muslim societies.

This transformation is evident in the rise of new digital da'wah actors such as Shift Media, UAH Official, and Yuk Ngaji. These platforms represent a new wave of religious communicators who are not only technologically savvy but also strategically positioned to appeal to younger, digitally native audiences. They utilize short videos, memes, Instagram reels, YouTube lectures, and TikTok clips to spread Islamic teachings while maintaining stylistic relevance. Their ability to merge religious content with contemporary digital aesthetics challenges the dominance of traditional religious authorities and institutions.

Online communities serve not only as spaces for communication, but also as arenas for representation and the formation of religious identity. Within these digital spaces, preachers, Islamic scholars, and Muslim digital-native communities build social networks that allow da'wah to reach a broader spectrum of society. The presence of these social networks amplifies the dissemination of religious messages, but also opens the possibility for the emergence of ideologically fragmented understandings. Therefore, it is essential to examine how online communities and social networks operate in shaping contemporary da'wah practices (Andrian, 2020; Azwar & Mulion, 2020; MS, 2018; Nuwairah, 2020; Qodir, 2019; Safei, 2016; Syam, 2022).

An adaptive approach to da'wah that responds to digital realities has become a necessity in this era of high connectivity (Budiantoro, 2017; Kasir & Awali, 2024; Marwantika, 2021; Talalu, Adam, et al., 2024; Ummah, 2020). In this context, the sociology of da'wah offers a sharp analytical lens to examine the mediation of religion through online communities and interactions within social networks. This journal article aims to explore the dynamics of digital da'wah communities, the characteristics of their networks, and how they shape patterns of communication, participation, and the transformation of da'wah messages in the virtual world.

Amid the disruption of information and the rapid flow of digital communication, da'wah is no longer solely reliant on conventional sermons delivered in mosques or religious gatherings. Instead, it has transformed into curated content that is produced and disseminated by individuals and communities through social media networks (M & Tasruddin, 2025; Mutmainna & Tasruddin, 2025; Ridwan & Tasruddin, 2025; Talalu, 2020; Talalu, Tike, et al., 2024). This reflects a paradigm shift from institutional da'wah to community-based da'wah one that is more fluid, dynamic, and responsive to the needs of netizens. This phenomenon positions online communities as key actors in the digital da'wah ecosystem, shaping their own norms, language, and styles of religious communication (Rheingold, 2000). In other words, digital da'wah communities are not merely platforms for disseminating Islamic messages, but also arenas for contesting religious meaning and authority within the virtual social space.

Despite the growing literature on digital da'wah, few studies have critically examined how these communities construct and sustain social networks and how such networks influence religious narratives, identity, and moderation particularly in the Indonesian context. Existing research tends to focus on content or media strategies, often overlooking the structural and relational dimensions of digital da'wah communities. This research seeks to fill this gap by applying the theoretical lens of da'wah sociology and social network theory to examine selected Indonesian digital da'wah groups.

Accordingly, this study sets out the following objectives: (1) To analyze how digital da'wah communities construct and sustain social networks in the Indonesian digital landscape; (2) To examine the role of these networks in shaping the religious identity of their audiences; and (3) To evaluate their contribution to promoting religious moderation in an era marked by the spread of digital extremism.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to offer insights into the ways digital da'wah can foster inclusive religious discourse, counterbalance online radicalism, and reshape Islamic communication in a plural and democratic society. At a time when digital platforms are often exploited by polarizing actors, understanding the mechanisms through which moderation and engagement are sustained in da'wah communities is both timely and socially imperative.

2. METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at providing an in-depth depiction of the dynamics of da'wah within online communities and how social networks are formed and function in the dissemination of religious messages. This approach is chosen because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of social relations, symbolic interactions, and meaning construction that take place within the digital da'wah space without reducing them to mere numbers or statistical data.

The study is exploratory and interpretive, focusing on understanding new forms of religious communities emerging on digital platforms, as well as the patterns of social relations that underlie interactions among members of da'wah communities. It also seeks to explore how religious messages are interpreted, distributed, and received within social networks based on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp.

The three selected communities Shift Media, UAH Official, and Yuk Ngaji were chosen through purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) the extent of their digital reach and consistent audience engagement, (2) distinctive communicative styles and approaches to religious discourse, and (3) their representativeness of different ideological and generational segments within Indonesian Islam. These communities are considered significant digital actors that reflect both the diversity and convergence of Islamic communication practices in the country.

Data collection was conducted through a literature review and digital ethnographic observation. Secondary data were obtained from scholarly journals, books, media reports, and the official digital platforms of the selected communities. Meanwhile, primary data were gathered by observing 30 selected da'wah videos (10 per community) and 150 user comments across YouTube and Instagram, collected within a four-month observation period (January–April 2025). Selection of video content and comments was based on popularity metrics, relevance to research objectives, and thematic richness.

Data analysis followed the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as formulated by Norman Fairclough, operationalized through three levels: (1) Textual analysis: examining vocabulary, syntax, narrative framing, and multimodal elements within da'wah videos; (2) Discursive practice: analyzing patterns of content production, circulation, and audience engagement (e.g., likes, shares, comment threads); (3) Sociocultural practice: exploring the broader ideological and power structures that shape and are shaped by these discursive activities.

The analysis was further guided by the theoretical frameworks of Castells' network society, which informed the understanding of digital connectivity and informational flows in religious communication, and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, which was used to examine the

dynamics of authority, legitimacy, and influence within online da'wah communities. These frameworks provided coherence between the research focus, data interpretation, and conceptual framing.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The development of information technology has transformed the face of da'wah from physical spaces to digital platforms. Da'wah communities are no longer confined to formal institutional structures but have evolved into internet-based social networks that are flexible, participatory, and highly responsive to the cultural dynamics of society—particularly among the younger generation. This phenomenon has given rise to new forms of da'wah activities that not only convey religious messages but also shape identities, lifestyles, and even social affiliations within the virtual realm.

This paper analyzes three leading digital da'wah communities in Indonesia that utilize social media as their primary channel for conveying Islamic messages: Shift Media, Ustadz Adi Hidayat (UAH) Official, and Yuk Ngaji. Each of these communities has distinct characteristics, approaches, and communication strategies, yet all represent the emerging face of digital da'wah in Indonesia.

Shift Media is a digital da'wah community born out of a spirit to renew da'wah methods targeted at urban youth. The community was initiated by Ustadz Hanan Attaki, a preacher and graduate of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, who has gained significant appeal among millennial and Gen Z audiences. Shift is widely known for its light, narrative-driven da'wah style, presented with visually engaging content. Their da'wah materials are packaged in the form of short videos, motivational quotes, podcasts, and thematic studies that resonate with the emotional and existential dimensions of young people (A'thoina & Al-Aboosi, 2024; Arifin, 2022; Faturokhmah, 2021; Luthfia & Yanuri, 2024).

Ustadz Adi Hidayat (UAH) is one of the most prominent figures in digital da'wah today. His official channels on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Telegram serve as the primary media for disseminating da'wah content based on scholarly studies, Q&A sessions, and thematic lectures. UAH's digital presence is not merely an extension of conventional da'wah activities, but also the construction of a religious social network that relies on scholarly authority and spiritual closeness with his online followers (Anwar, 2021; Nasichah et al., 2024; Nasution & Rambe, 2024; Pramesti, 2023; Sayyidah et al., 2023).

Yuk Ngaji is one of the digital da'wah movements that emerged in response to the urban youth's need for more contextual, fresh, and relevant access to Islamic understanding. Unlike conventional da'wah models that tend to be formal and top-down, Yuk Ngaji presents itself as an informal community space that combines lifestyle-based da'wah approaches with the intimacy of social networking. This community operates as a decentralized da'wah ecosystem, supported by volunteers and local activity hubs across major cities in Indonesia (Rohman et al., 2023; Rohman, Arif, et al., 2024; Rohman, Syam, et al., 2024; Waskito & Fauzan, 2021).

This study reveals how digital da'wah collectives Shift Media, UAH Official, and Yuk Ngaji construct and disseminate Islamic narratives within Indonesia's dynamic religious and media landscapes. Although each collective exhibits distinct characteristics, they collectively reflect new modalities of religious communication shaped by digital infrastructures, market logic, and ideological contestations.

3.1. The Hybrid Structure of Digital Da'wah Collectives

All three collectives operate within hybridized ecosystems that blur boundaries between online and offline da'wah, institutional authority and personal branding, as well as religious and commercial goals. In terms of structure, UAH Official is highly centralized around the persona of Abdul Somad, functioning as a tightly controlled vertical network. Yuk Ngaji, while rooted in celebrity preacher culture, shows a more decentralized pattern, emphasizing peer-driven networks and user-generated content. Shift Media represents a hybrid node between institutional da'wah and digital marketing, employing a corporate-style management structure.

This structural hybridity affirms Castells' view of networked individualism, where influence flows through both technological and symbolic nodes. In Bourdieu's terms, these collectives convert symbolic capital (religious knowledge, charisma) into economic and cultural capital via media visibility and monetization strategies.

3.2. Communicative Strategies and Audience Engagement

The da'wah content across all three platforms shows a spectrum of communicative approaches. UAH Official employs a formal, didactic style, reinforcing authoritative interpretations with Quranic and Hadith citations. Shift Media uses an emotionally resonant style short videos, visuals, and motivational tone appealing to spiritual longing and anxiety. Yuk Ngaji adopts a performative and playful tone, integrating pop culture and humor to foster affective bonds with young audiences.

This divergence illustrates how communication strategies are shaped by target audience segmentation, platform affordances, and ideological orientation. While UAH seeks to maintain epistemological control, Yuk Ngaji invites audience participation, reflecting Fairclough's idea of discursive recontextualization where traditional meanings are renegotiated in new formats.

3.3. Ideological Orientations and Discursive Tensions

Despite shared Islamic references, the collectives convey divergent ideological undercurrents. UAH Official leans toward conservative orthodoxy and often employs oppositional narratives against pluralism or liberal Islam. Shift Media projects an inclusive "soft Salafi" narrative, blending textual orthodoxy with emotional appeal, while Yuk Ngaji promotes a populist-moderate image, emphasizing hijrah, self-development, and community belonging.

However, these ideological stances are not monolithic. Ambivalence and contradictions emerge: for example, Shift Media's "inclusive tone" coexists with a simplified black-and-white view of morality; Yuk Ngaji's "moderation" sometimes morphs into exclusivist group identity; UAH's "textual authority" risks alienating divergent perspectives.

These tensions align with Bourdieu's insight into symbolic struggles, where actors compete for legitimacy within the religious field, negotiating between orthodoxy, authenticity, and market demand.

3.4. Digital Infrastructure and Religious Market Dynamics

Platformization plays a critical role in shaping visibility and audience interaction. All three collectives rely heavily on YouTube, Instagram, and Telegram, leveraging algorithmic logic to optimize reach. Yet, their platform strategies differ: UAH prioritizes high production-value lectures; Shift Media curates "relatable" short videos with clickbait titles; Yuk Ngaji focuses on real-time audience engagement via live chats and event promotions.

The reliance on platform metrics (views, likes, followers) signals the commodification of piety, where da'wah is simultaneously a spiritual mission and a content industry. This aligns with

Castells' notion of the network society, in which religious authority becomes increasingly mediated, visual, and transactional.

3.5. The Online–Offline Nexus

While digitally rooted, these collectives maintain robust offline presence. Shift Media hosts training sessions and charity events; Yuk Ngaji organizes hijrah festivals and live da'wah tours; UAH conducts conventional pengajian and institutional sermons. The online offline synergy serves to strengthen community identity, extend symbolic authority, and anchor ephemeral digital engagement in tangible social spaces.

This convergence confirms that digital da'wah is not a rupture from tradition, but a reconfiguration that incorporates, adapts, and transforms existing religious practices.

3.6. Critical Reflections and Theoretical Contributions

While these collectives exemplify innovation, several critical issues arise: (1) Simplification of theology for digital virality may dilute doctrinal nuance; (2) Echo chambers risk reinforcing rigid identity politics; (3) The balance between moderation and branding can be blurred, raising questions about authenticity.

Theoretically, this study contributes to: (1) Castells' theory by showing how digital infrastructures reshape religious authority and community; (2) Bourdieu's sociology by illuminating the conversion of symbolic capital into digital-cultural capital; (3) Fairclough's discourse analysis by exposing how religious meanings are recontextualized and contested in new media formats.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that digital-based da'wah communities such as Shift Media, UAH Official, and Yuk Ngaji have emerged as influential actors in the contemporary Islamic preaching landscape. These communities no longer rely on one-way communication models, but instead transform social media into interactive spaces for negotiating religious identity, sharing Islamic values, and engaging urban youth in contextualized religious discourse.

Viewed through the lens of da'wah sociology, these communities function not merely as content creators but as builders of new social spaces where religiosity, digital culture, and generational aspirations converge. Critical discourse analysis reveals that the religious narratives they construct are dynamic and responsive addressing moral questions, identity politics, and ideological tensions in the digital public sphere. Their inclusive rhetorical strategies and avoidance of polarizing themes further illustrate a commitment to promoting religious moderation in fragmented digital environments.

The findings confirm a broader theoretical shift in da'wah practices from institutional and hierarchical modes to decentralized, networked, and participatory models. In doing so, this study contributes to the theorization of da'wah in the digital age by validating the significance of sociotechnical networks in shaping religious discourse and engagement.

To ensure that these communities continue to support religious moderation and cohesion, practical support mechanisms are needed. These may include digital literacy training, strategic partnerships with religious institutions, and community-based frameworks for ethical content governance. Such interventions can help sustain their inclusivity and resilience in the face of increasing digital polarization.

Future research could explore longitudinal impacts of digital da'wah communities on religious understanding and behavior, or conduct comparative studies across regions and cultural contexts to assess the diversity and adaptability of networked da'wah models. In sum, digital da'wah communities are not merely alternatives to conventional preaching they are now central to the da'wah ecosystem. Recognizing, supporting, and critically engaging with their role is vital to fostering inclusive and constructive religious life in an evolving digital society.

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