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Utilisation of animated video as a media for da'wah communication in the era of disruption

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Abstract: This study examines the transformation of Islamic da'wah communication through animated media on Instagram, focusing on how visual aesthetics and narrative strategies influence the construction of religious meaning and audience engagement. Unlike previous research that mainly examined audience responses, this study integrates visual communication theory, symbolic interactionism, and the sociology of religion to analyze how animation redefines religious authority and identity in digital spaces. Using a qualitative case study, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and content documentation from four purposively selected Instagram accounts. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns in narrative construction, symbolic representation, and audience interpretation. Findings reveal that animation functions not only as a tool for message delivery but also as an active medium of theological construction and identity formation for Gen Z Muslims. The study makes a theoretical contribution to the mediatization of religion and offers practical insights for digital da'wah strategies in contemporary contexts.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji transformasi komunikasi dakwah Islam melalui pemanfaatan media animasi di Instagram, dengan fokus pada bagaimana estetika visual dan strategi naratif membentuk makna keagamaan serta keterlibatan audiens. Berbeda dengan penelitian terdahulu yang umumnya menitikberatkan pada respons audiens, studi ini mengintegrasikan teori komunikasi visual, interaksionisme simbolik, dan sosiologi agama untuk menelaah bagaimana animasi mendefinisikan ulang otoritas dan identitas keagamaan dalam ruang digital. Pendekatan kualitatif studi kasus digunakan dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi konten dari empat akun Instagram yang dipilih secara purposif. Analisis tematik diterapkan untuk mengidentifikasi pola konstruksi naratif, representasi simbolik, dan interpretasi audiens. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa animasi tidak sekadar menjadi sarana penyampaian pesan, melainkan berperan aktif dalam konstruksi teologis dan pembentukan identitas Muslim Generasi Z. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada kajian mediatisasi agama sekaligus memberikan implikasi praktis bagi strategi dakwah digital kontemporer.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly impacted various aspects of human life, particularly in terms of communication and information dissemination (Suliswaningsih et al., 2023). The era of disruption, marked by technological innovations replacing traditional systems, has cultivated a new media ecosystem and altered the creation, delivery, and understanding of religious messages (Ibnu Kasir & Awali, 2024). In an Islamic context, these changes have prompted religious educators to adapt their communication strategies to remain relevant and effective, particularly in engaging with a younger generation that is adept in digital culture, as the primary users of social media, Millennials, and Generation Z, prefer concise, interactive, and emotionally engaging visual content. Therefore, the approach to da'wah must be communicative, creative, and straightforward (Briandana et al., 2020; Hilmi, 2021).

Religious values are expressed, debated, and reinterpreted on social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, which have emerged as alternative public spaces (Pabbajah et al., 2021). In these spaces, Islamic teachings are increasingly delivered in visual and audiovisual forms that depend on user engagement, platform algorithms, and aesthetic appeal, rather than on verbal or textual models. A notable response to this shift is the use of animated videos in *da'wah* communication. Animation enables da'is to present dynamic visual stories that are emotionally engaging and pedagogically accessible — characteristics that align well with fast-paced, information-rich digital communication (Ul Haq & Kurniawan, 2021).

The growing popularity of animated religious videos reflects aesthetic innovation and a deeper phenomenon known as the 'mediatization of religion' (Hjarvard, 2008). This concept suggests that religious authority, message framing, and audience interaction are increasingly shaped by media logic. While traditional scholars relied on oral delivery and textual authority, modern preachers now must use digital platforms, visual symbols, and algorithmic visibility to connect with their audience. This shift impacts the effectiveness of communication, the simplification of theological content, the emergence of non-traditional religious influencers, and the redefinition of religious authority in the online realm (Campbell, 2005; Hefner, 2011; S. P. Saleh et al., 2022).

The popularity of social media platforms, such as Instagram and YouTube, has grown significantly among various demographics, particularly millennials and Generation Z, who exhibit a pronounced preference for visually appealing and interactive content (Qodriyah, 2021). These platforms have the potential to be optimised as a medium for religious outreach in the era of disruption through the use of animated visuals. Innovations such as animation effects, moving text, and relevant music have enabled religious outreach videos to successfully capture the interest of young people who frequently use social media as a means of religious education (Hilmi, 2021).

Islamic animations shared on social media have effectively reached Muslim audiences searching for a religious understanding that resonates with their modern lives. Animations featuring Islamic themes, such as stories about the lives of the prophets or life advice, have gained attention and received positive feedback from social media users. This makes them one of the most effective

methods of da'wah in the digital age (Hamzah et al., 2023). Social media facilitates the dissemination of religious values concisely and compactly, making them accessible at any time for busy audiences. In this context, animated videos stand out as a highly suitable medium for conveying values of moderation visually and effectively on digital platforms like Instagram. This aligns with the characteristics of the disruptive era, which requires the delivery of messages that are both quick and profound. The strength of animated videos lies in their ability to combine visual elements, text, and audio to create engaging and easy-to-understand narratives, even within short durations, making them ideal for digital platforms.

The transformation of digital *da'wah* presents both opportunities and challenges for preachers to ensure that the content conveyed remains consistent with Islamic teachings (Uyuni, 2023). With visual approaches such as animation, da'wah can be conveyed more enjoyably without losing its religious substance (Rani, 2023). Animated videos as a medium for da'wah offer a combination of digital cultural relevance and adherence to Islamic values, making them a powerful tool for achieving da'wah objectives in the modern era (S. Saleh et al., 2022). The use of animation in da'wah can also reach younger age groups, especially children, who require a more visual approach to learning. This is evidenced in a study by Rubino and Ridha (2023), which examines the effectiveness of animations like Animasi Nussa in conveying Islamic values to children, showing that da'wah videos are not only suitable for adult audiences but also effective for younger age segments. Beyond the Islamic context, Bautista (2021) demonstrates how sacred objects in Catholic devotion in the Philippines are "animated" not only through ritual but also through visual storytelling, which grants them agency. This finding resonates with the idea that animation in da'wah does not merely illustrate religious messages but also confers symbolic power and agency upon visual representations, thereby influencing audience perception and spiritual engagement.

Da'wah through animated media has become an increasingly relevant strategy in modern religious communication. The use of animation enables the delivery of *da'wah* messages in a more engaging and accessible manner, particularly for the younger generation, who have grown up in a digital culture (Aziz et al., 2022). Information technology, particularly social media, presents new opportunities for preachers to disseminate religious messages more widely and interactively.

Animated *da'wah* can also be viewed as an adaptation of *da'wah* communication to the evolving media landscape and audience preferences. *Da'i* utilizes animation to connect with a broader audience and convey religious messages in a more relatable and engaging manner (Millah, 2021). As shown by Langga et al. (2020a), animated content has emerged as an effective medium for conveying Islamic messages and facilitating spiritual reflection. The animated series "Nussa" exemplifies how Islamic representation can be integrated into children's educational content through visual elements, character design, and narrative (Langga et al., 2020b).

Digital *da'wah* has opened new opportunities for spreading Islamic teachings, with social media platforms enabling a broader audience reach (Ibnu Kasir & Awali, 2024). However, a combination of digital and conventional

approaches is recommended for a more comprehensive dissemination of Islamic messages. Additionally, digital animated learning media have demonstrated a positive impact on Islamic education outcomes when combined with student self-confidence (Panjaitan et al., 2020). The pedagogical implications of digital media are also relevant to this discussion. Papakostas (2025) demonstrates that the use of artificial intelligence in religious education can enhance engagement while raising critical questions about theological authenticity and ethical boundaries. In a broader educational context, Bitar and Davidovich (2024) argue that digital transformation is not only technological but also pedagogical, requiring a rethinking of teaching strategies and audience engagement. These perspectives offer a comparative lens for understanding how animated *da'wah* on Instagram serves as a digital pedagogy that simplifies complex teachings and reshapes the way young audiences learn and embody religious values. These studies highlight the potential of digital animation in enhancing Islamic communication and education in the modern era.

From a visual communication perspective, symbols and visual styles play a crucial role in shaping social and spiritual meaning (Wibowo, 2021). Furthermore, through a symbolic interactionism approach, animated da'wah narratives can be understood as an ongoing process of meaning exchange between content creators and digital audiences (Virginia, 2022). The visual communication approach emphasizes how visual elements such as color, shape, and image composition contribute to meaning formation. This theory is pertinent in analyzing how religious animation utilizes visual elements to convey religious messages (Toybah, 2017). Meanwhile, symbolic interactionism aids in understanding how audiences interpret the symbols presented in religious animation, such as characters wearing hijabs without faces, and how these interpretations influence their comprehension of the messages being conveyed. Nugrahani et al (2021). Explain that the illustrations in the Muslimah visual religious movement on Instagram contain implicit iconic meanings by emphasizing aesthetic principles. Visual content and communication can streamline the delivery of moral concepts and religious teachings that are often seen as complex, especially for younger audiences. This medium can simplify messages, maintain user attention, and reach diverse audiences, making it highly relevant to technological needs in the digital age (Darmawan et al., 2022).

In the broader context of digital religion, recent scholarship emphasizes that media logic has become a central force in shaping religious practices and meanings. Ding et al. (2025) highlight how digital-age audiovisual media reshape interfaith experiences by embedding religious narratives within popular culture frameworks, indicating a shift from traditional authority to symbolic mediation through media. Similarly, Stepniak (2023) shows that religious advertising today is not merely informative but performative, constructing sacred meaning through media logic. These insights reinforce the argument that Islamic animated da'wah should also be understood as part of a broader process of mediatization of religion, where digital aesthetics serve as symbolic carriers of theological meaning. In this era of disruption marked by rapid technological advances and digital transformation, *da'wah* communication has undergone significant changes. This era of disruption can change the way we live, work, and communicate. One example is *da'wah* communication, which has

undergone a transformation in the way *da'wah* is conducted, shifting from conventional methods such as lectures at mosques, majelis taklim, and tabligh akbar (Saleh et al., 2022). Digitalization in the era of disruption presents challenges for moslem societal values, particularly in distinguishing between right and wrong amid the global flow of information (Ragheb, 2022). The digital disruption era has brought about significant changes in communication methods, including the dissemination of religious messages (Verolyna & Syaputri, 2021). This study offers new insights into the field of religious communication by thoroughly examining how religious preachers employ visual and narrative animation strategies as an effective adaptation of religious communication in the digital era.

Although several previous studies have examined the role of social media in Islamic communication (Rozi, 2019), most of them still focus on general usage patterns or audience responses. Few have discussed in depth the creative production process, visual communication strategies, and the adaptive role of da'i as religious narrators in animated content. Additionally, the application of theory in these studies remains limited, with little engagement with frameworks such as visual communication theory, symbolic interactionism, or the sociology of religion in digital media.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining how Instagram accounts such as @mau.benerbareng, @amberlyn.id, @sholehahstory, and @taarts_gram utilize animated videos to convey religious messages. Given their uniqueness, diversity of approaches, popularity, and the relevance of the animated religious content they promote, these four accounts are considered representative for exploring the

phenomenon of visual religious transformation in the era of digital disruption and for providing strong empirical contributions to the development of religious communication studies based on new media.

This study explores how *da'i* act as adaptive communicators who strategically use digital aesthetics and narrative design to engage with their audience. It is based on a constructivist paradigm and focuses not only on the content produced but also on the purpose of production, audience interpretation, and the impact of media on the reception of da'wah messages. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach that combines visual communication theory, symbolic interactionism, and the sociology of religion to analyze animated da'wah on social media. While previous research has largely emphasized audience responses or general patterns of media usage, this study demonstrates how aesthetic strategies in animation actively construct theological meaning, reshape religious authority, and influence the digital religious identity of young moslems. By applying these rarely combined theoretical perspectives, the study not only maps the use of animation in Islamic communication but also extends the discussion on the mediatization of religion. In doing so, it offers both academic contributions to understanding religious transformation in digital culture and practical guidance for da'wah practitioners seeking to engage with digitally native audiences.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of da'wah communication through animated media

on digital platforms (Yin, 2018). This approach was selected because it effectively captures the complexity of meaning generated in the interaction between content creators, visual da'wah messages, and audiences on social media. This study is grounded in the constructivist paradigm, which emphasizes that social reality is constructed through the experiences, perceptions, and subjective interpretations of communication actors, specifically social media creators and users (Ibnu Kasir & Awali, 2024). The research flow chart is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Illustrates the sequential stages of the research process, from data collection to analysis and validation
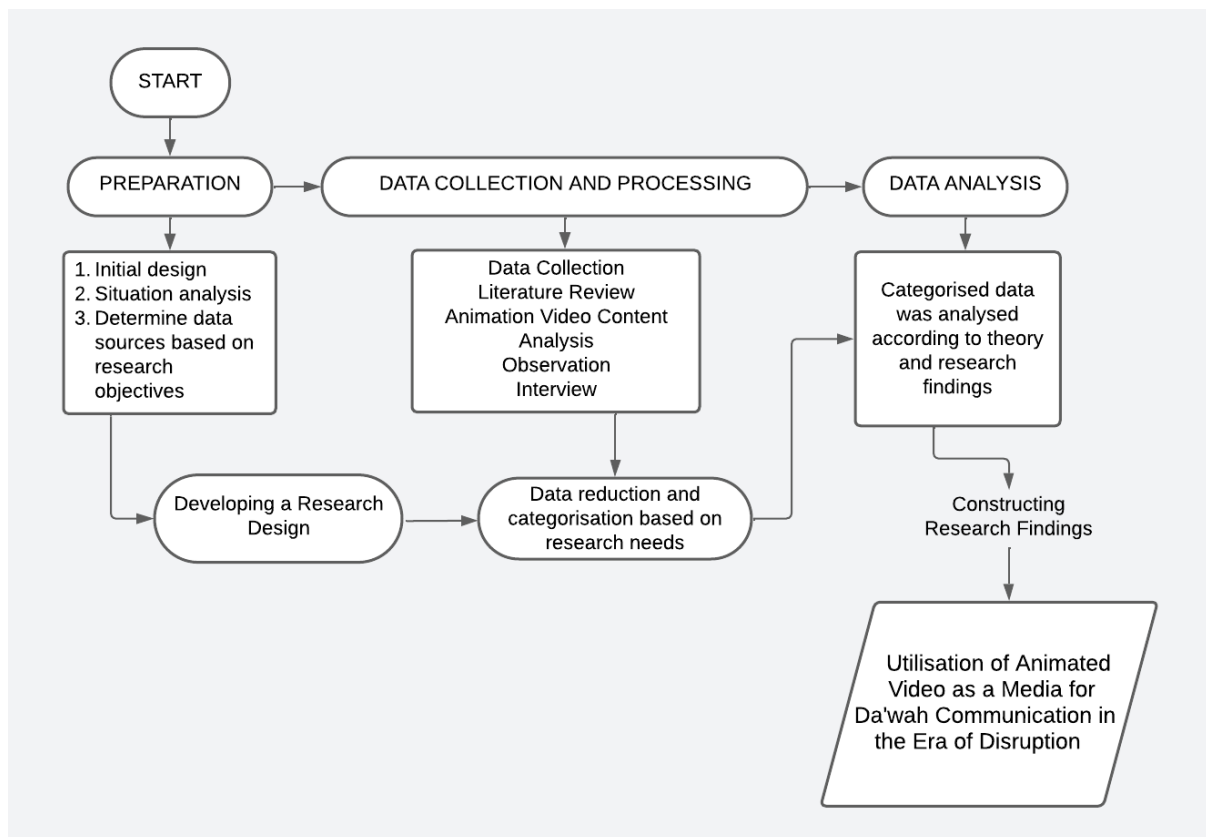
Source: Researcher's Work

The research focused on four Instagram accounts that actively create and share animation-based religious content: @mau.benerbareng, @amberlyn.id, @sholehahstory, and @taarts_gram. These accounts were purposefully selected for their consistent use of animated media, diverse visual styles and narrative approaches, and high audience engagement, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Characteristics of selected instagram accounts as objects of research on animation da'wah (estimated data as of May 2025 based on account profile observations)

No.	Instagram Account Name	Number of Followers*	Number of Posts*	Content Characteristics	Visual Style	Communication Hallmarks
1	@mau.benerbareng	±12.900	>600	Dawah animation video with narration text and voice	Simple animation, bright colors	Without showing faces, focus on daily moral issues
2	@amberlyn.id	±121.000	>500	Animation of a long hijab-wearing female character without a face	Minimalist, monochrome, symbolic	No sound; narration in text; strong in symbolic visuals
3	@sholehahstory	±855.000	>4000	Animated Muslimah hijab with story and advice	Feminine, colorful visuals	Uses dubbing and text; focuses on the lives of young Muslim women
4	@taarts_gram	±155.000	>600	Animation of a famous cleric with original voice	(Ustadz) Cleric-like cartoon character	Inserting the original voice (voice-over) of ustadz such as Buya Yahya and Ustadz Abdul Somad

Source: researcher's processing

The research subjects include content creators from each account who were interviewed to explore their perspectives on the creative process, communication strategies, and challenges in conveying dakwah messages through digital animation. Data collection techniques were employed using three primary methods: in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation of account activities and content, and documentation of published religious animation videos for

analysis.

In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the motivations, values, and communication strategies of content creators. First, the founders of the Instagram accounts @mau.benerbareng, @amberlyn.id, @sholehahstory, and @taarts_gram were interviewed to gain insights into their account profiles, vision and mission, content creation objectives, production processes, as well as challenges and successes in utilizing animation for da'wah. Second, communication experts were consulted to provide professional perspectives on the effectiveness of animation in da'wah communication. Third, da'i (preachers) were involved in reviewing the opportunities and challenges of conducting da'wah through animated videos. Fourth, social media analysts were engaged to analyze prevailing trends and algorithms that affect the reach and effectiveness of da'wah content on digital platforms.

Although this study examined only four Instagram accounts, they were purposively selected because of their consistent use of animation, popularity, diverse visual aesthetics, narrative strategies, and audience engagement. The sample does not aim to be statistically representative; rather, it captures key variations of digital da'wah animation, making these cases sufficiently representative to provide a meaningful case-based understanding of the phenomenon.

Observations were conducted to examine the visual, symbolic, and interaction patterns in each piece of religious content. Content analysis was performed on several videos selected purposefully from each account, focusing on narrative structure, visual symbols, delivery style, and the use of audio and text. Additional documentation, such as the number of views, audience comments, and upload descriptions, was also collected as supporting data.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (Husain et al., 2024) thematic approach, including transcription, coding, theme identification, review, and analytic writing. Thematic analysis was chosen because it allows the exploration of patterns across textual, visual, and narrative data. While semiotic elements were considered in interpreting visual styles, the coding process was conducted manually rather than through software (such as NVivo or Atlas.ti) to ensure a closer engagement with the data. To ensure validity and reliability, the study applied triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentation, complemented by member checking with content creators and peer debriefing with academic colleagues. These strategies enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. The analysis focused on the visual and narrative strategies used by content creators to convey religious messages through animation, as well as on audience interpretations and responses. This approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of the transformation of da'wah communication within the visual digital ecosystem.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that digital religious content creators actively incorporate visual and symbolic elements in conveying religious messages, employing a diverse range of styles and approaches. The four Instagram accounts focused on in this study (@mau.benerbareng, @amberlyn.id, @sholehahstory, and @taarts_gram) demonstrate differentiation in the use of visual characters, narrative structure, and communication strategies with their audiences. These findings confirm that visual religious communication is not

uniform but highly dependent on the creators' value orientations, audience segmentation, and creative capabilities. In the following sections, the research findings will be presented based on four main themes: visual strategies and animation aesthetics, narrative and simplification of religious messages, the role of religious preachers as digital communicators, and audience responses and participation.

Visual Strategies and Aesthetics of Animation in Da'wah

One of the key findings of this study is the importance of visual strategies in enhancing the appeal and comprehension of religious messages, particularly among young social media users. The four Instagram accounts analyzed employ unique and segmented visual techniques that function not only as aesthetic enhancements but also as carriers of theological and social meaning. For example, the @mau.benerbareng account showcases a simple animated visual style characterized by a bright color palette and a deep, narrative voice. The lack of facial expressions in the animations fosters open interpretation among the audience and highlights the moral content of the

message, including themes of honesty, etiquette, and self-reflection. This inclusive visual style enables the religious message to resonate more widely with audiences from diverse backgrounds. Conversely, @amberlyn.id develops a symbolic and minimalist visual aesthetic. Featuring a long-veiled woman without a face, this account highlights simplicity and the symbolism of Muslim women's values. "We deliberately do not show faces in the animations because we want to focus on the message, not the characters. It is also a way of maintaining visual modesty in the Islamic context." (Interview, Creator of @amberlyn.id). The use of monochromatic colors and the absence of sound make the textual narrative the central element, creating a contemplative atmosphere and a space for personal reflection for the audience. This style functions not only as a form of da'wah but also as a resistance against the excessive visualizations that often dominate social media. From a visual semiotics perspective, the minimalist and symbolic style used by the @amberlyn.id account conveys the meanings of simplicity, purity, and firmness in rejecting the objectification of women's faces (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Visuals from the @amberlyn.id account display a faceless Muslim woman symbol as a representation, according to Peirce's semiotic theory.

PUNYA MASALAH GAK SELESAI–SELESAi?
Tuntaskan dengan Sedekah

Source: Instagram @amberlyn.id

From the semiotic analysis, the long hijab, which covers the face in Figure 2, is a symbol of faith and purity, being both iconic and symbolic. Monochrome colors suggest an association with the seriousness and simplicity of the teachings. This image embodies the universal concepts of piety and simplicity, conveying religious messages without personifying specific individuals. This approach focuses entirely on the meaning of the da'wah text and the spiritual value of almsgiving. Meanwhile, @sholehahstory showcases vibrant, feminine visuals and animated Muslimah characters that resonate with young girls. The account seamlessly intertwines text with character voice dubbing, creating a lively and emotionally charged narrative quality. The emphasis on everyday life themes, such as relationships with parents, friends, and spiritual experiences, makes the content relatable to the female Gen Z audience.

Unlike the previous three accounts, @taarts_gram adopts a visual style reminiscent of cartoon characters depicting popular public figures, such as Buya Yahya and Ustadz Abdul Somad. By showcasing the original voice of the ustadz through voice-over combined with animated versions of familiar characters, this account enhances da'wah credibility via the visualization of authoritative figures. This approach not only boosts emotional connection but also improves message reception by associating with widely recognized public figures.

This difference in visual approach demonstrates that the aesthetic strategy of animated da'wah is not uniform. Content creators utilize visual symbols, colors, characterization, and narrative design to tailor da'wah messages to their audience's

tastes, values, and expectations. Aesthetics in da'wah animation serve as a semiotic medium that packages spiritual values in a more communicative and contextualized form. This strategy reinforces the mediatization of religion theory (Hjarvard, 2014, 2017), which emphasizes that media logic shapes how religious values are transmitted and interpreted in digital space.

Narratives and Simplifying Religious Messages

Further findings reveal that narratives in animated da'wah videos play a crucial role in simplifying complex Islamic teachings into messages that are easier to understand and more relevant to everyday life, especially for the younger generation, who are the primary target of digital da'wah. The content produced by the @sholehahstory account is structured as short stories that depict the experiences of animated characters navigating real-life situations, such as tests of patience, the importance of maintaining manners, and enthusiasm in performing worship. By presenting relatable circumstances and characters that resonate with the audience (Muslim young women), Islamic messages are conveyed not only informatively but also through emotionally and inspiringly told stories. In contrast, @amberlyn.id employs a more contemplative narrative style. Relying on text as the primary means of communication, this account features short quotes that encompass spiritual reflections, Islamic motivations, and moral reminders. The calm, symbolic, and non-patronizing narrative enables the audience to derive their own meaning from each message based on the context of their individual lives.

Meanwhile, the @mau.benerbareng account develops a more direct and concise da'wah narrative. The animated videos are often short (around 1 minute) and include introspective calls or responses to trending social issues, such as work ethics, social media usage, and human relations. The messages conveyed are concrete and applicable, and the narrative packaging is kept light, allowing for easy acceptance without sacrificing the weight of spiritual values. "If it's too long or too deep, many audiences will skip it. So we make the content as short as possible, but there is still a message that can be remembered." (Interview, Creator @mau.benerbareng)

The @taarts_gram account takes a distinctive narrative approach by utilizing the original voices of clerical figures. In this context, the narrative is not only personal but also carries religious authority. The da'wah messages displayed are often presented as short lectures or tausiyah, which are then animated to clarify the meaning and enhance the visual impact. Narratives are argumentative and formal in nature, but are packaged in a way that is easily accessible and shareable by the audience.

The simplification of the message through narration in this animation reflects an adaptation to the characteristics of social media, which are fast, dense, and focused on visual attention (Hidayat & Nuri, 2024). The use of analogies, visual metaphors, and concise storylines acts as key strategies to connect religious messages with the everyday context of social media users. This aligns with Campbell's (2017) view of the transformation of religious communication in the digital era, where the method of message delivery has shifted from a structural-theological to a personal and contextual approach. Furthermore, this

strategy represents the principles of symbolic interactionism, where the visual and narrative symbols used in the animation reflect how individuals construct meaning from religious messages through interactions with media and their social context. By crafting inclusive, personalized, and concise narratives, the creators successfully formed a bridge between spiritual values and the digital lives of their audience.

These narrative strategies also reveal deeper implications for theological authority and audience interpretation. For example, the faceless hijabi character in @amberlyn.id simultaneously reinforces Islamic modesty while also inviting diverse interpretations, demonstrating how aesthetic choices can embody theological positions. Meanwhile, the use of celebrity clerics' voices on @taarts_gram raises questions about how digital mediation reconfigures authority, shifting it from traditional spaces, such as mosques, to algorithm-driven platforms. This confirms that animation is not merely a vehicle of simplification but a powerful semiotic resource that reshapes religious meaning and credibility in the digital era.

Da'i's Role as a Digital Communicator

The transformation of *da'wah* in the digital space has also altered the traditional role of a *da'i* (preacher) ('Ulyan, 2023). Instead of solely serving as direct messengers in physical spaces like mosques or taklim assemblies, da'i now have a dual role as content creators, visual editors, and digital communicators who must grasp the dynamics of social media and understand digital audience preferences.

The results of in-depth interviews with content creators reveal that they act not only as religious messengers but also as communication designers, considering various technical and strategic aspects in the animation production process. Creators from accounts such as @mau.benerbareng and @amberlyn.id, for example, stated that when compiling one da'wah content, they must consider the optimal duration, color selection, illustration style, and upload timing to align with social media algorithms and audience behavior. This role requires multidisciplinary skills, encompassing an understanding of Islamic theology and digital literacy, as well as sensitivity to emerging social issues. Digital da'i are now required not only to convey religious truths but also to do so in an interesting, relevant, and contextual manner to avoid being left behind in the "competition for attention" on social media.

As digital communicators, *da'i* or preachers also play an adaptive role in bridging traditional values with modern lifestyles. In the interview, the creators of @sholehahstory explained that their communication approach emphasizes being a "soul friend" for young Muslim women, rather than a patronizing, authoritative figure. This indicates a paradigm shift from one-way persuasive communication to relational and dialogic communication. "I taught myself about editing and storytelling. Da'wah now is not just about knowledge, but also about how to convey it in a relatable way." (Interview, Creator @sholehahstory). Additionally, in accounts such as @taarts_gram, the role of da'i is fulfilled as digital communicators through collaboration with credible public figures. Video content featuring the original voice of Buya Yahya or Ustadz Abdul Somad adds value in terms of message authority. However, re-visualization through animation demonstrates a re-mediation of religious figures to align more closely with the visual style of the younger generation. In this context, the role of digital da'i can be

analyzed through the lens of mediated religious authority theory, which explains that religious authority in the digital era is no longer solely determined by the depth of religious knowledge but also by the ability to engage, shape perceptions, and build communities through digital media. Furthermore, contemporary da'is also play a role in moderating online discussions and interaction spaces. This is reflected in the interactive activities found in comment sections and the Question and Answer (Q&A) features, which are used to respond to audience questions or requests for clarification on da'wah content. These da'is are not only content providers but also facilitators of spiritual communication in a fluid and evolving digital ecosystem. Therefore, the role of da'i as digital communicators becomes a crucial element in animated da'wah strategies on social media. They not only convey religious messages but also shape new communication styles that are relevant, inclusive, and sensitive to the social and cultural dynamics of digital-era audiences.

Audience Engagement and Participation

Da'wah through animated media is closely connected to the active responses of audiences, who are crucial to the digital communication ecosystem. Audience interaction with animated da'wah content demonstrates that they are not merely passive recipients of messages, but also active contributors who help shape the meaning, broaden distribution, and enhance the social impact of da'wah messages.

Observation and documentation data show that the four animated da'wah accounts (@mau.benerbareng, @amberlyn.id, @sholehahstory, and @taarts_gram) receive various forms of audience engagement, ranging from likes and comments to saves and reposts. However, this engagement is not uniform. For instance, the account @sholehahstory experiences a high level of comments, which are primarily personal expressions, reflections, or requests for similar content. In contrast, accounts like @amberlyn.id promote contemplation-based engagement, where users save and share content with little commentary.

Audience responses also reflect the success of the visual and narrative strategies outlined earlier. Videos with strong illustrations, emotional storylines, and explicit messages tend to trigger emotional engagement and personalized responses (Xi et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2025). Young audiences, particularly Gen Z women, often reacted to the content with expressions of "relate," "touch," or "I've been there," indicating a high level of value and experiential resonance. On the other hand, the presence of voice-overs from public figures, such as those on the @taarts_gram account, also elicits audience responses in the form of appreciation for content that "that makes them miss the study" or "touches the heart deeper than the usual lecture." This response suggests that animation is not only accepted as a form of visual entertainment but also as a valid alternative tool for spiritual reflection. "Many followers DM or comment asking to discuss certain topics. That's how we know our content is resonating and they feel connected." (Interview, Creator @taarts_gram). This phenomenon reveals that animated *da'wah* communication has evolved into a participatory form of two-way communication. Audience engagement is not solely measured by the amount of content consumed but also by

the depth of their emotional and cognitive interactions. This aligns with the uses and gratifications theory (West & Turner, 2009), which posits that digital audiences actively select, use, and interpret media according to their psychological, social, and spiritual needs.

Some content creators also indicated that feedback from the audience serves as an inspiration for further content production. For example, comments containing questions or suggestions for da'wah themes are frequently used as references for the next video episode. This fosters a cycle of content production based on dialogue and co-creation, enhancing a loyal and supportive online community (see Sohaib and Han, 2023). Thus, audience participation in animated *da'wah* content not only broadens the reach of the message but also deepens the meaning of *da'wah* itself. In a dynamic and democratic digital space, audiences play a crucial role in shaping an inclusive, interactive, and sustainable da'wah ecosystem.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has shown how animated media on Instagram has transformed *da'wah* communication in the digital era. The findings demonstrate that adaptive visual strategies, simplified narratives, and the redefined role of da'i as digital communicators are central to engaging younger audiences. Animation is not merely a supplementary tool but has emerged as a participatory medium that combines aesthetics, narrative, and interactivity to shape spiritual reflection and online religious communities.

The novelty of this research lies in its integration of visual communication theory, symbolic interactionism, and mediated religious authority to analyze digital da'wah practices. This approach enriches the understanding of the mediatization of religion, particularly by highlighting how aesthetic strategies not only deliver theological content but also actively shape meaning, redefine religious authority, and influence the construction of digital religious identity.

The results of this study contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it advances discussions on how media logic and visual aesthetics transform the authority and reception of religious messages. Practically, it provides insights for preachers, educators, and digital content creators in designing communicative and culturally relevant da'wah strategies. On a broader social level, the study underscores the role of animated da'wah in shaping the identity of Gen Z Muslims, while also noting the risks of bias, homogenization, and contestation within digital religious spaces.

Future research should broaden its scope by exploring different platforms, examining diverse audience psychographics, and analyzing the long-term effects of consuming animated da'wah. Such inquiries will deepen our understanding of how visual media not only reflect but also reshape contemporary religious communication in the era of digital disruption.

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