Mediatized *Da'wah*: The Portrayal of Islamic Relationship Issues on Indonesian Social Media

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Abstract: This study explores the emergence of Islamic relationship themes on Indonesian social media platforms, specifically Instagram and TikTok. It primarily draws on the concept of the mediatization of religion. A qualitative content analysis was employed in this research. In this regard, the researcher observed several TikTok and Instagram accounts that feature Islamic relationship content and analysed *narrative messages*, videos, captions, sound effects, and user reactions in the comment sections of those accounts. The findings of this study show that the Islamic relationship theme has emerged as a new alternative to traditional da'wah topics. This shift is largely due to the theme's social relevance for social media users. Furthermore, Islamic relationship content serves as a counter-narrative to the trend of casual relationships that are increasingly popular among younger generations. This content also constructs and presents an imagined profile of the ideal romantic partner according to Islamic values.

Keywords: TikTok, Instagram, Islamic relationship, mediatized religion, digital da'wah.

Abstrak: Artikel ini membahas kehadiran tema-tema 'hubungan Islami' di platform media sosial di Indonesia, khususnya di Instagram dan TikTok, dengan mengacu pada kerangka konseptual mediatisasi agama (*mediatization of religion*). Desain penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan analisis isi kualitatif, dimana peneliti melakukan observasi pada beberapa akun TikTok dan Instagram yang menampilkan konten 'hubungan Islami', dan lebih lanjut menganalisis narasi tekstual, video, respon users dalam kolom komentar di akun media sosial tersebut. Hasil studi ini menunjukkan bahwa tema 'hubungan Islami' berkembang sebagai alternatif baru bagi topik-topik dakwah tradisional. Pergeseran ini sebagian besar disebabkan oleh relevansi sosial tema tersebut bagi pengguna media sosial. Selain itu, konten 'hubungan Islami' berfungsi sebagai narasi tandingan terhadap tren 'hubungan kasual' yang semakin populer di kalangan generasi muda. Konten ini juga membangun dan menyajikan profil imajiner dari pasangan romantis yang ideal menurut nilai-nilai Islam.

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Introduction

The rise of social media in Indonesia has not only influenced the way people dress, built social interaction, and consumed food, but it has also influenced their religious practices. In the context of *da'wah* (Islamic propagation), previous studies have shown that social media impacts individual religious expression (Campbell, 2012; Lövheima & Lynchb, 2011), blurs the boundaries between religious preachers and their followers (Mishol-Shauli & Golan, 2019), and complements mainstream media in delivering religious messages (Cheong, 2017).

These transformations in *da'wah* are driven by various factors, including the continuous growth in social media users. According to Data Reportal, as of January 2024, Indonesia had 139 million social media users, equivalent to 49.9% of its total population (Kemp, 2024). This number is expected to increase in the coming years, in line with overall population growth.

This large user base presents opportunities for content creators and digital activists to produce a wide range of engaging material. The challenge lies in creating content that is not only creative but also resonates with audience, particularly Islamic content, which has become a commodity in the digital landscape.

One of the most prominent Islamic content trends on social media is the topic of Islamic relationships. This content portrays the ideal husband-wife relationship according to Islamic teachings. It is typically presented through short videos, visual imagery, text, and quotes from Muslim preachers. Some creators employ longer narrative formats to depict Islamic marital life. Regardless of the format, such content often includes background music and is occasionally accompanied by Qur'anic verses or *hadith* quotes.

This phenomenon illustrates the fact that *da'wah* activities have shifted. No longer confined to sermons presented by a Muslim preacher conducted in a mosque, *da'wah* has become mediatized, shaped and distributed through modern digital formats to reach wider audiences. This aligns with Hjarvard's (2008) concept of the mediatization of religion, where media becomes a central force in

shaping religious life and practice, echoing Schulz's (2004) idea of media as an agent of social change.

Some scholars express that this shift might dilute Islamic messages, due to the democratization of religious authority (Campbell, 2012), or the blending of religious messages, economic, and entertainment motives (Slama, 2018). Meanwhile, others see the merit between media and *da'wah* activities as an inevitable fact. To remain relevant, *da'wah* is required to consider the audience preference and platform algorithms.

Islamic relationship content exemplifies this adaptation. It provides a modern *da'wah* format, a religiously grounded alternative to the abundance of secular content about romantic relationships. By incorporating Islamic values and symbols, it offers moral education and promotes harmonious relationships based on Islamic teachings.

This article examines the emergence of Islamic relationship content as a form of contemporary *da'wah*. It explores how the concept of Islamic relationships is framed within digital media, and how this content imagines and promotes a specific gender relation in Islam. Using the theoretical approaches of mediatization of religion, this study contributes to the growing field of Islamic communication in digital culture. The analysis considers not only the content but also the audience reactions it generates on the social media platforms.

Literature Review

This study primarily draws on Hjarvard's (2008) concept of mediatized religion, which explains how media functions as a platform that enables individuals to access religious information independently, thereby reducing reliance on traditional religious institutions. In addition, Hjarvard argues that the media shapes religious expression and practice according to media algorithms. Consequently, the effectiveness of religious content in digital spaces increasingly depends on the content

creators' ability to respond and navigate to these algorithms.

Hjarvard (2008) identifies three distinct roles of media in the context of religion. First, the media acts as a bridge between content creators and audiences. For instance, preachers employ various media channels for *da'wa* purposes, disseminating *hadith* quotes, *Qur'anic* verses, and calls to good deeds. Second, the media offers individuals a space to express their religiosity independently, outside the authority of formal religious institutions, thereby fostering greater personal autonomy. Third, the media function as a cultural environment whose evolving nature influences the dynamics of religious life and practices.

Previous studies has utilized the mediatization of religion framework to analyze several phenomena; changes in structural relationship between media and social institutions (Hjarvard, 2014), the shifting locus of religious authority from clerics to mediated religious messages (Fakhruroji, 2015), the visualization of religion in public spaces (Martino, 2020; Stępniak, 2023), and the link between social media user engagement and the proliferation of Islamic content on YouTube platform (Al-Zaman, 2022). Several scholars have also examined mediatized religion within specific socio cultural contexts. For instance, Clark & Gillespie (2018) explored how mediatized religion operates in Scandinavia, highlighting the media's capacity to frame religious issues and influence public opinion.

Similarly, Knoblauch (2014), in his study of Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Berlin, demonstrated the shift in communicative styles between religious leaders' media appearances and traditional religious setting. He found that media appearances were characterized by more popular and inclusive language, aimed at reaching broader audiences, underscoring how media alters religious expression.

These studies underscore that the mediatization of religion is shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which it operates (Campbell, 2012; Hjarvard, 2011), as well as by the technological affordance of emerging media platforms and audience demands for unique and contemporary content. As a result, social media content creators are compelled to continuously adapt their religious messaging to remain socially and algorithmically relevant.

This broader trend has given rise to what scholars have termed "Islamic Pop" (Noor, 2015) or "Islamic Pop Culture" (Akmaliah, 2014; Fealy, 2007), wherein Islamic symbols and messages, are integrated with elements of popular culture. This phenomenon has become increasingly visible across social media platforms, where Islamic content appears in the forms of motivational messages, religious sermons, and inspirational stories. Islam is presented in modern formats, such as film, music (Akmaliah, 2014), and fashion (Weng, 2018; Wildan & Witriani, 2021), reflecting a hybrid identity in which Muslims simultaneously embrace religious values and global culture trends (Akmaliah, 2014).

Despite the growing body of literature on mediatized religion, few studies have specifically focused on the topic of Islamic relationship content. Yet this content plays an important role in educating both married couples and younger audiences aspiring to build an Islamic relationship. The current study of Islamic relationship content, therefore, offers a timely contribution to the literature by advancing the concept of mediatized religion within the Indonesian digital context.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative content analysis approach. Observations were conducted on various social media platforms, primarily TikTok and Instagram. These platforms were selected due to their emphasis on visual storytelling and influencer driven culture, characteristics that align closely with the thematic focus on the topic of Islamic Relationships. The observation and data collection period spanned from February to June 2025, which coincided with the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. While the time frame and platform selection were not based on specific theoretical reasons, they were practically given the popularity and reach of these platforms among Indonesian social media users.

Content or accounts of social media for analysis were selected randomly, without predefined criteria. However,

preference was given to content that explicitly related to the theme of Islamic relationships. To locate relevant data, keyword searches were "*Pernikahan Islami*/Islamic marriage," "*Hubungan Islami*/Islamic Relationship," or other similar keywords.

The units of analysis included the visual elements of content, narrative messages, captions, user comments, and music or sound effects. Data were collected manually using screenshots with timestamps or screen recordings for videos, where necessary. The data were then organized through pattern coding, in which similar content elements were grouped by thematic similarities and subsequently interpreted in relation to relevant theoretical frameworks.

Result and Discussion

The phenomenon of Islamic relationship topics on Indonesian social media represents a form of digital *da'wah* aimed at maintaining user engagement on social media platforms. This aligns with Hjarvard's (2008) concept of mediatized religion, which emphasizes how religious practices and expressions adapt to the logic of media. The emerging Islamic relationship theme reflects an effort to introduce new narratives in online da'wah, particularly within the Indonesian digital landscape. It illustrates the expansion of the digital *da'wah* spectrum, offering content that promotes the concept of Islamic relationship as an alternative to casual or unregulated romantic interactions (free relationship). More broadly, this theme constructs and disseminates an imagined ideal of Islamic marital life, framed through visual and narrative forms that resonate with contemporary media users.

Expanding the Spectrum of Digital *Da'wah*

The Islamic relationship theme introduces a new alternative topic for Islamic da'wah on social media, expanding beyond commonly addressed topics such as

worship, prayer, *zakat*, or other theological discussions. When delivered through compelling cinematic techniques, voice-over narration, and background music, this theme resonates strongly with younger audiences. Such packaging makes the *da'wah* messages more engaging and accessible, as demonstrated by a platform like the Instagram account @*muslimbahagia.id*.

Figure 1. Instagram account of @muslimbahagia.id[2]

The Instagram account employs Islamic symbols to explicitly position the account manager as a Muslim. It also aims to signal that the content revolves around Islamic values, particularly Islamic relationships. Created in August 2019, the account consistently presents Islamic messages in visually appealing formats, often combining inspirational quotes, lifestyle aesthetics, and religious reminders.

Similar content is also widespread on TikTok, a platform known for its personalized and intimate user experience. Islamic relationships

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[2] https://www.instagram.com/p/CD25RusnEVr/?hl=en. Captured at 11th of May 2025

content on TiokTok draws from individual experiences and subjective perspectives. This personal tone fosters a sense of relatability and closeness between content creators and their audiences, enhancing engagement. One such example is the TikTok account @Gedungputih Tioma
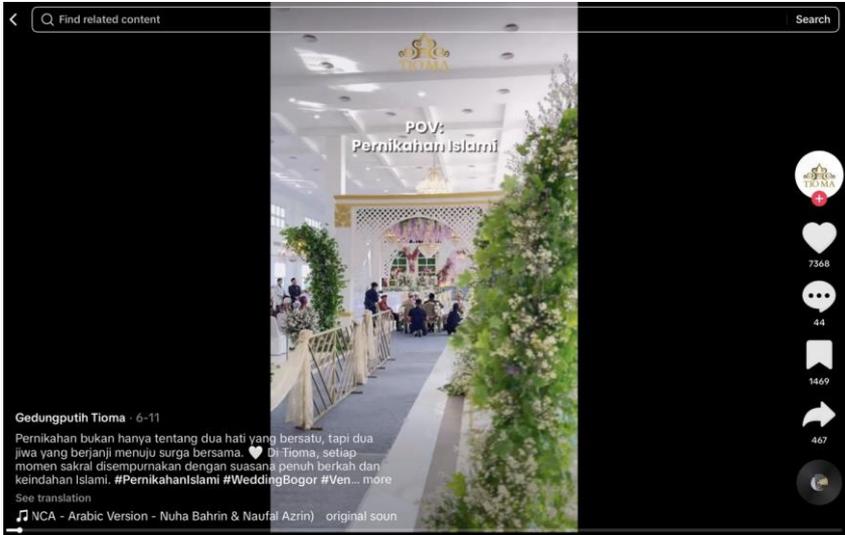

Figure 2. TikTok account @Gedungputih Tioma[3]

This account showcases various aspects of Islamic marriage, including Islamic-style wedding receptions that separate male and female guests. The content typically features a combination of text overlays, voice over narration, and Islamic-themed music. Although the content creator is not a formal religious scholar nor affiliated with any particular Muslim group, the creator conveys Islamic-themed da'wah messages through the content. The account owner also identifies as a wedding organizer, blending service promotion with religious content. This illustrates how da'wah messaging is increasingly integrated into personal branding and entrepreneurial ventures.

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[3] https://www.tiktok.com/@gedungputihtioma/video/7514535387910540551. Captured at 12 of April 2025

This phenomenon reflects the process of mediatization of da'wah, where religious messages are not merely distributed through media but are also shaped by the logic of social media algorithms (Hjarvard, 2008). In this context, da'wah is no longer the exclusive domain of religious scholars or institutions. Instead, individuals can become a da'i (preacher), regardless of formal religious training or institutional backing. The low entry barriers of social media provide an open arena where da'wah can be performed by a wide range of actors, including influencers, entrepreneurs, and everyday users.

This shift also indicates a transformation in religious authority-from centralized, institutions-based figure to a more decentralized participatory model of religious communication. Religious authority in digital spaces is no longer strictly tied to clerical legitimacy but is often negotiated through popularity, engagement metrics, and audience trust (Andok, 2024; Campbell, 2010; Whyte, 2022). As a result, content creators, Instagram, influencers. And young couples documenting their wedding experiences can all contribute to the broader field of da'wah.

Content focused on Islamic marriage and relationships thus represents an alternative da'wah method, one that is relatively underexplored by traditional preachers but highly relevant to digital audiences. This is evident in the strong engagement metrics of such content. For instance, the post of a TikTok account @Gedungputih Tioma received 7,356 likes and was saved by 1,469 users, indicating significant interest and resonance. Contemporary da'wah increasingly depends on understanding the preferences and media consumption habits of its audience, emphasizing emotional appeal, aesthetic presentation, and narrative authenticity.

Promoting 'Islamic Relationships' as a Counter-Narrative to Casual Relationships

One of the central narratives found in Islamic relationship content is the framing of romantic relationships between the sexes in accordance with Islamic teachings. The term casual relationship refers to the relationship without legal or formal ties, not permissible in Islamic context. These narratives emphasize values such as the

legitimacy of relationship through marriage, and adherence to established Islamic principles. An example of this can be seen in the TikTok account @lestariazzahra.official.

Figure 3. TikTok account @lestariazzahra.official[4]

The content on this account discusses the Islamic legal perspective on marriage following extramarital relationships. This theme is presented as educational material, aiming to inform viewers of the serious consequences of premarital relationships under Islamic law. When packaged for social media, such topics become more accessible and are capable of reaching broader audiences.

In an environment saturated with content glorifying youth dating and casual relationships, Islamic relationship content serves as a counter-narrative. It presents a contrasting perspective by framing early marriage as a permissible and even ideal step in Islam. These messages promote marriage not only as a religious obligation but also as a practical solution to the perceived moral challenges of modern social life. For example, Instagram, content creator Ikma Hanifah Restiari (@ikmahr) actively produces materia; that align with Islamic values in promoting early marriage.

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[4]https://www.tiktok.com/@lestariazzahra.official/video/7266260872341851397?q=nikah%20zina%20Indonesia&t=1752411993966. Captured at 12 of April 2025

Figure 4. Instagram account @ikmahr[5]

In this context, Islamic relationships are promoted not only as sharia-compliant practices, but also as a symbol of resistance to values perceived as un-Islamic. As Schmidt (2018) that media can function as a counter-narrative, enabling individuals and communities to challenge dominant cultural discourse. In this case, Islamic relationship content serves as a way for young Muslims to negotiate their identities, situated between the pressures of global modernity and religious commitment.

However, promoting Islamic relationships, particularly early marriage, on social media has sparked debate among online users. Some critics argue that marrying young, motivated solely by the desire to avoid premarital relationships, is not a sustainable or holistic solution. Concerns are raised over the potential economic instability, psychological stress, and reproductive health risks that may arise from inadequately prepared early marriages. This critical perspective is voiced by an Instagram account @mubadalah.id.

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[5] https://www.instagram.com/p/DLrr8Zaz-tT/?hl=en&img_index=1. Captured at 12 of April 2025

Figure 5. Instagram account @mubadalah.id[6]

This account argues that early marriage without proper emotional, financial, and psychological preparation is likely to lead to harmful outcomes. It supports its argument with a quote from an Islamic source, emphasizing that harm cannot be eliminated by equal or greater harm. In other words, the fear of committing un-Islamic relationship should not be countered solely through early marriage. Instead, Islamic teachings propose alternative preventive measures such as fasting.

Such debate also highlights concerns about the mediatization of religious messages, particularly the influence of social media algorithms in shaping what is seen and valued. Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin (2022) argued that the authenticity of online content is often compromised when content is driven primarily by metrics such likes, shares, and views. As a result, even serious religious advice can become entangled with the logic of digital popularity.

Despite these concerns, content promoting Islamic relationships, including early marriage, has become a popular form of da'wah among

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[6] https://www.instagram.com/p/CAPXBaMACMw/. Captured at 12th April 2025

younger audiences. The resonance of these messages lies in their ability to blend Islamic values with relatable and emotionally appealing narratives, offering both spiritual guidance and a sense of belonging in an increasingly complex digital world.

Presenting the Imagination of Ideal Islamic Relationships

Islamic relationship content plays a significant role in shaping the imagination of an ideal Islamic relationship among social media users. These imagined ideals are reflected through visuals that depict a loving and supportive husband and wife, who not only grow together emotionally and spiritually, but also uphold social equality and mutual respect. A representative example can be found on the Instagram account *@penerbitdawuhguru.*

Figure 6. Instagram account @penerbitdawuhguru[7]

In one of its posts, the message conveyed is that marriage is a shared learning process, not a journey in which one partner must sacrifice themselves for the success of the other. Although the account primarily serves as a book publisher, it frequently features Islamic

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[7] https://www.instagram.com/p/DLZOGkcuaCm/?hl=en. Captured at 12th April 2025

messages related to family and marriage, thus contributing to the broader ecosystem of digital da'wah.

Other recurring narratives that reinforce this idealized image of Islamic marriage include portrayals such as 'pious and modest wife', 'a loving husband as the imam of the household', and couples who embody mutual understanding and cooperation. These representations often serve as implicit normative standards for Muslim men and women in their search for life partners. The emotional impact of these messages is amplified by the inclusion of Islamic quote, hadith, and quranic verses, as seen in the TikTok account @lovemuslima.
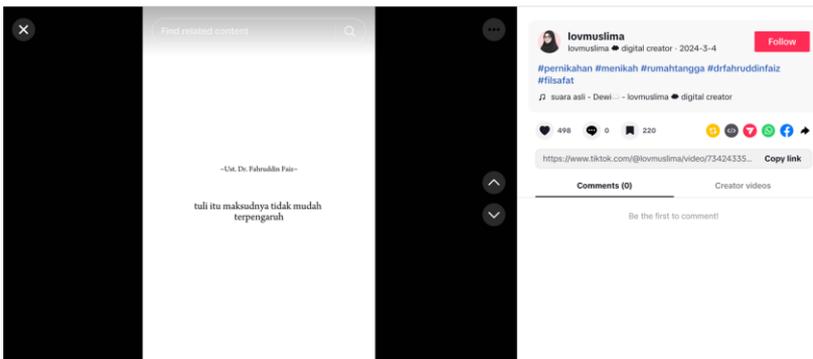

Figure 7. Akun TikTok @lovemuslima[8]

This account conveys the idea that a successful Islamic marriage is built on self-restraint and mutual emotional sensitivity. For instance, the ideal wife is portrayed as someone who guards herself from worldly temptations and avoids excessive material demands, while the husband is encouraged to be careful with his words and not easily follow the negative influence of his friends. This mutual care is presented as the key to sustaining a harmonious relationship. It corresponds with the fact that social media can influence an individual's expectations of their romantic partner (Kulkarni et al., 2019), thus reinforcing how this type of content shapes relational ideals.

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8 https://www.tiktok.com/@lovmuslima/video/7342433537842220293?q=suami%20 istri%20ideal&t=1752427650836. Captured at 12th April 2025

This imagination of the ideal spouse is also frequently promoted by religious preachers through various TikTok accounts. They frequently provide prescriptive guidance on how husbands and wives should respectfully treat each other, supported by spiritual references. One such example is the TikTok account @revalinaratuapsar25.

Figure 8. Akun TikTok @revalinaratuapsar25[9]

However, such content does not always receive good acceptance from the TikTok users. Some of them respond critically, arguing that the portrayal of the ideal spouse is unrealistic or unattainable. One user, posting under the account @cahaya, shared her personal experience:

"*nggak ada di dunia ini suami yang sayang kepada istrinya kalau ada pasti aku beruntung aku beruntung ini enggak aku lagi hamil besar sekitar 8 bulan eh ternyata suamiku malah menolak aku ingin pisah pisah tapi aku nggak mau demi anak tapi dia nggak pernah kasih aku uang dia nggak pernah nafkah aku aku cari kerjaan ke sana kemari tapi nggak dapat kasihan anakku butuh beli susu dan juga butuh beli obat vitamin buah buat anakku supaya dia minum obat di dalam*

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[9] https://www.tiktok.com/@revalinaratuapsar25/video/7515000981344718087?q=suami%20terhadap%20istri%20menurut%20islam&t=1752428492062. Captured at 12th April 2025

perut malah suamiku mau nikah lagi padahal statusku masih istrinya dan dia tergoda sama perempuan pelakor"

"There's no such thing as a husband who truly loves his wife. If there is, I must be very unlucky. I was eight months pregnant and my husband wanted to divorce. I didn't want to, for the sake of our child. But he never gives me money or provides for me. I have looked for work everywhere and found nothing. My baby needs milk, vitamins, and fruit. And now my husband wants to marry another woman, even though we're still married. He's tempted by someone else"

This example reflects the emotional gap between idealized portrayals and the lived realities of some audiences. On the one hand, these ideals can inspire individuals to strive to be better partners. On the other hand, they may create psychological burdens when one's personal circumstances fail to meet the idealized expectations promoted online.

Importantly, social media users often overlook the constructed nature of online content. Much of the material presented under the guise of religious messages is curated to evoke emotional response and drive engagement or monetization. In this sense, Islamic relationship content is a complex form of mediatized da'wah. It blends religious narratives with emotionally appealing imagery, offering an idealized vision of Islamic gender relations that is both aspirational and, at times, problematic.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of Islamic relationship content has brought a new dimension to *da'wah* activities on social media. *Da'wah* messages are currently presented in a more popular way with engaging visuals, making them more accessible and appealing to broader audiences. These trends reflect the efforts of content creators to adapt to the logic of digital media, producing *da'wah* content that is personalized, emotionally resonant, narrative-driven, and rich in human interest. These characteristics are consistent with Hjarvard (2008) concept of mediatization of religion, wherein religious communication is shaped by the norms and structures of modern media.

Mediatization of *da'wah* to be reformatted into more relatable and culturally relevant content, aligned with technological developments, audience preferences, and contemporary social issues. This shift is evident in the increasing participation of non-traditional *da'wah* actors, such as content creators and influencers, who, although they may not have formal religious training, possess a strong command of social media strategies and audience engagement.

While some express concern that the involvement of non-clerical figures in da'wah may lead to distortion or oversimplification of religious teachings, the popularity of Islamic relationship content demonstrates its resonance with a distinct target audience. In many cases, social media users do not take into account the religious authority of the content creators. Instead, they engage with the content that feels inspiring, relevant, and aligned with their informational and emotional needs.

Nonetheless, the rise of such content underscores the ongoing need for Islamic media literacy, enabling audiences to critically assess and verify the religious messages they consume online. This study highlights the importance of further research in this area, opening opportunities for the advancement of contemporary Islamic communication studies, particularly in exploring the intersection of *da'wah* and social media in the digital age.

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