

Shaping Virtual Religious Authority: The Power of Digital Media on Micro-Celebrity Da'i

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ABSTRACT

Micro-celebrities preachers have taken an important part in educating the ummah through Islamic messages while establishing virtual religious authority. Celeb da'i gain strategic space and recognition from the community through religious studies and have the potential to become a reference for religious knowledge. The contestation of virtual religious authority with traditional religious authority as an authoritative source is dynamic, and at the same time fragmentation occurs. This research concentrates on da'i micro-celebrities including Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi, Ustad Syam, and Aa Gym. This research is focused on three digital platforms including YouTube, TikTok and Instagram. The time span of this research starts from February to July 2024. The research method uses descriptive qualitative through netnography studies. Religious content, journals, books, and relevant religious authority research are used as research data. The finding is that virtual religious authority is illustrated through the digital platform micro-celebrities da'i, which offers a new face of entertainment, adapts to the latest trends, and is solutive in carrying out religious missions. The practice of virtual religious authority among micro-celebrities preachers is hegemonic in expanding the space of the da'wah movement. The power of digital media catapults the popularity and religious influence of celeb da'i in the Islamic cyber environment, further perpetuating virtual religious authority as a source of religious information for the ummah.

Keywords: *Celebrity Preachers, Religious Authority, Digital Media*

Introduction

Information technology has changed many things in the dimension of social life, including religious social life. The sophistication of this information is used by a number of micro celebrities to disseminate their da'wah movement space in cyberspace. (Hashmi et al., 2021). In the past, one's religious authority was built on the mastery of classical Islamic knowledge and Islamic boarding schools as Islamic educational institutions (Darieva & Kormina, 2023). Currently, religious authorities have expanded and produced Islamic digital creators, even giving birth to a number of micro-celebrity da'i. The presence of virtual religious authority es is believed to strengthen traditional religious authorities (Afriansyah, 2021), and some even mentioned that it seemed to oppose official religious authorities such as the Indonesian Ulema Council, Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. The author is of the view that the existence of online religious authorities is dynamic through various religious offerings among micro-celebrity da'i (Oparin, 2023).

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The internet has created a new space where authority is no longer absolute or determined by traditional hierarchies, but rather incarnate as something that is negotiated and shaped through continuous social interaction. In the context of religious authorities, for example, individuals who previously did not have access to traditional pulpit can now gain influence through digital media (Bratosin & Ngoulou, 2024). This condition has the potential to create a new dynamic in the legitimacy of authority, where the recognition of an authoritative figure depends on the reception and resonance of their message in the online community (Buckley et al., 2023). This phenomenon reflects how authority no longer comes only from formal institutions, but also from the active participation of society in interpreting and disseminating meaning. Thus, religious authority and other forms of authority have become more fluid, dynamic, and responsive to the development of the times (Whyte, 2022).

The presence of the internet has a positive impact on the audience to gain religious knowledge in a practical way, including lectures, discussions, and da'wah content from various sources (Berger & Golan, 2024). This gradually rivaled the role of traditional religious institutions that were previously the only solid providers of moral guidance and education. In this context, da'wah activism in digital media plays an alternative role in shaping one's religious understanding (Mahsusi et al., 2024). On the one hand, this opens up space for the diversity and accessibility of religious information. But in different conditions, it also poses challenges related to the validity of religious authorities and the potential for the dissemination of inaccurate or biased information (Bratosin & Ngoulou, 2024). This research highlights how the media not only presents new social behaviors and practices, but also has the power to legitimize certain realities and authorities in society.

The media is not limited to functioning as a mirror that reflects social life, but also as a tool that shapes and directs people's perspective on reality that is considered legitimate or correct (Mohiuddin, 2023). In this case, the media has a role that is more than just conveying information. He was able to change the way of dominant legitimacy in society. That is, the media can reinforce certain authorities and shift the public's understanding of who or what is entitled to be considered a source of truth (Ergen, 2024). Along with the development of technology and access to information, people increasingly compare their lives with the images presented in the media. This can affect individual mindsets, values, and even decisions in daily life. Ultimately, the media not only verifies reality but also establishes new social constructs in modern life (Mohiuddin, 2022). This research looks at how digitalization has transformed classical social authority, as Might explained. In essence, digitalization allows for horizontal communication, where information can be accessed by anyone, not just by the institutional elite. This has the potential to weaken the authority of traditional institutions that usually rely on vertical structures. Instead, digital networks favor personal authority, although this authority is more limited in scope and legitimacy. However, the authority that appears in cyberspace is actually more valid (Couldry, 2012).

This statement reflects how changes in communication technology, particularly digital media and networks, have affected text-based authority in religious contexts (Allen & La Lime, 2024). Nick Couldry, a scholar in media and communication studies, examines how media creates changes in structures of authority and social representation. In this context, text-based authorities, such as religious sacred texts, are undergoing a transformation as they currently circulate in a more open and interactive communication environment (Couldry, 2012). In the past, the interpretation of sacred texts was often monopolized by official religious authorities, such as clerics, kiai, or certain religious institutions. However, with the advent of the internet and social media, this interpretation has become more democratic, allowing individuals and communities to interpret these texts freely without strict institutional control. This change is in line with a broader trend in digital media, where access to information and discourse is becoming more inclusive, but also more complex (Permana, 2021).

Nick Couldry, a media sociologist from the United Kingdom, emphasized that in analyzing relationship between internet and religious authority, we should not only look at technological factors as the main cause of slope it of traditional religious authority. According to him, it is also important to consider how the structure of religious organizations themselves is before the emergence of digital media. If a religion or its religious institution has been highly centralized since the beginning, then the changes due to digital media may have a different impact compared to a religion that is more decentralized in its leadership and authority (Couldry, 2012). In other words, digital media is not the only factor that causes changes in religious authority. There are internal factors in religious organizations that also play a role. This Couldry approach shows that transition of religious authority in cyberspace must be understood in a more complex way, not only as an impact of technology alone, but also as a result of the internal dynamics of religion itself (Couldry, 2012).

Another view, such as Gary Bunt, mentions virtual religious authority as a medium to bring together preachers and people in the Islamic social environment as long as they are connected to the internet. Through online religious authorities, Muslims can easily access religious information (G. R. Bunt, 2022). It should be noted that micro-celebrities try to claim virtual religious authority as a form of religious da'wah campaign. This condition has the potential to cause a confrontation between micro-celebrities competing to produce and promote Islamic knowledge widely (Khan, 2024). The cyber world is currently bombarded with Islamic content from various religious activists. In the author's view, Islamic news presented in digital media is not entirely valid, so media literacy is needed among the audience, both websites, da'i scientific sanad, and the information conveyed (De Leyn et al., 2022). A number of religious digital creators are shaking or consolidating the traditional structure of religious authority. Religious authority in digital media is dynamic as shown by micro-celebrities through the production of varied da'wah content, and even tends to follow the latest trends (Ibrahim, 2022). Religious authorities have been concentrated on religious leaders or official religious institutions, but are currently expanding their role and competing with a number of micro-celebrity da'i in digital media. This has also given rise to religious discourses and virtual communities on a number of digital platforms (Ajikumar & Sircar, 2024).

Meanwhile, the popularity of celebrity da'i as a public figure is an attraction in influencing the audience through an entertaining da'wah model and adjusting to current trends (Dyer et al., 2022). The presence of micro-celebrity da'i on various digital platforms is believed to be able to strengthen traditional religious authority and transfer religious insights in the latest way (Febriana Fauzi, 2023). The productivity of content is able to be relevant to modern life that is able to answer the needs of mad'u (da'wah targets) through language styles, rhetoric and da'wah content are solution-oriented. It should be noted that the presence of a number of micro-celebrity da'i in cyberspace has enlivened the virtual public space through religious narratives displayed in attracting the attention of the audience (Mohamad, 2021). The phenomenon of micro-celebrity da'i seems to confirm the metamorphosis of celebrities towards da'wah practitioners as a symbol of migration and following the trend of globalization on social media platforms (Nurjuman Husnan, Kuswarno Engkus, Badjari Atwar, 2024). His influence is quite extraordinary in igniting public attention, so that netizens' visits to his da'wah channel are slowly increasing. The metamorphosis of celebrities into preachers on digital media platforms reflects positive religious expressions in spreading Islamic insights and in order to exist in today's da'wah arena (Hoelzchen & Kirby, 2024). The existence of celebrity preachers on various digital platforms affects the way of religion, the consumption of religious information, and prioritizing the presence of da'wah on the internet as the main choice. In the current era, the productivity of da'wah is relevant to modern living conditions, whose da'wah is entertaining, has the potential to get congregations and many enthusiasts. Today, we are entering an era where scientific sanad is not a priority, the depth of religious knowledge is not the main thing inherent in a da'wah (Ibrahim, 2024). Report from the

Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association reports that by 2025, the number of internet users has reached 231 million out of the total Indonesian population of 278 million (APJII, 2025).

Research on religious authority has been widely studied among researchers before. Niki Alma Febriana Fauzi statement highlighted how the development of communication technology. There are at least three aspects discussed, including online fatwas, religious knowledge campaigns, and religious literacy. Muhammadiyah tends to respond to the through a moderate approach and intellectual approach. Instead of directly opposing or being reactive, Muhammadiyah refer to the tarjih methodology that has become its characteristic. (Febriana Fauzi, 2023). Celebrity preachers are committed to strengthening faith, strengthening commendable morals, and broad religious knowledge. The presence of celebrity preachers today has increased the popularity of the field of da'wah and the image of da'wah is on par with other professions. This attracts mad'u (da'wah objects) to learn religion easily, cheaply and flexibly through da'wah packaging with a communicative-interactive approach (Ab Rahim et al., 2023). Involvement in the country's da'wah scene is projected to exist and strengthen self-image so that it remains popular among the public. The presence of celebrity da'i in the country's da'wah landscape actually has a strategic place and position in presenting religious content (Butters & Utriainen, 2024). This research focuses on micro celebrities including Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi, Ustad Syam, and Aa Gym who today enliven the spiritual space of the people in digital media. This study aims to analyze micro-celebrity da'i in forming religious authority in the virtual arena.

Methods

This research uses a qualitative-descriptive method through a netnography approach in an effort to see virtual religious authority formed, through the role of micro-celebrity da'i. Netnography studies are understood to explore the culture, interactions, and activities of individuals in virtual spaces mediated by internet networks (Kozinets, 2010). Religious content, journals, books and relevant religious authority research were used as research data. Data analysis techniques include data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles, 2005). This research utilises data in the form of a collection of texts, images and videos containing da'wah content on digital media, especially those referring to celebrity preachers. In turn, the data analysis will describe the text or posts in the form of videos and images of the case (Moleong, 2015). This research has a time span of February to July 2024, so the da'wah content is focused on that period. This content criterion concentrates on the ongoing da'wah dialogue, depicted on the social media accounts of ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi, ustad Syam, and Aa Gym. This research is focused on three digital platforms including YouTube, TikTok and Instagram. This research creates a two-way religious climate in the virtual space between da'i and mad'u (the object of da'wah), so that da'wah is interactive.

Micro-Celebrity Da'i Establish Virtual Religious Authority

The latest study on religious authority in Islam was campaigned by Ismail Fajrie Alatas, who focused on the study of the Ba'lawi community in Indonesia (Alatas, 2021). One example is Habib Lutfi bin Yahya from Pekalongan. In practice, he is able to form and maintain religious authority so that it has a very strong influence to this day. Habib Lutfi's figure is seen as popular not limited to the religious aspects of fostering the ummah, but extends to the social and political levels in Indonesia. As in the Java region, for example, there are a number of influential and respected ulama so that their fatwas are followed by all their congregations, even in the momentum of general elections (elections), often the congregation follows their clerics in making choices. Alatas cites Arendt's thought, Foundational Past. Arendt's idea of authority refers to a hierarchy to achieve the connectedness of a group of people in the past which is then used as a guideline (foundational past) (Arendt, 1968). In turn, it gives them authority through the ability to transfer

and transform the past as an example of the present (Alatas, 2021). Alatas continued to borrow Arendt's term, the emergence of authority is based on a hierarchy of correct and legitimate recognition of the involvement of a number of elements.

Arendt concept, popularised by Alatas, helped shape the phenomenon of new religious authority in digital media. In maintaining their popularity in the virtual public space, a number of da'i celebs have ventured into the virtual da'wah stage in influencing their congregation (Arendt, 1968). The productivity of da'wah content produced either on YouTube, TikTok or Instagram has gained recognition among the ummah, so that it continues to exist in the da'wah scene in the country. The new religious authority coloured by celeb da'i is believed to strengthen the official religious authority as an effort to transfer religious information interactively (Febrian, 2024). However, at the same time there is a serious debate because it is considered that this condition has shift to changing the consumption da'wah content and shifting religious orientation among the people (Baidawi, Daulay Hamdan, Khamis, 2024). In practice, the phenomenon of celeb da'i on various digital media platforms actually has a strategic place and position to win the hearts of the people. For example, ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi through her dakwah podcast on YouTube.

Celebrity da'i gradually have new strategies and methods of utilising digital media platforms (Ergen, 2024). All three celebrity preachers actively use online media in transmitting religious teachings. The implications for religious authority are substantial in three main ways. Firstly, it expands the Islam public sphere, allowing a number of celebrity da'i to engage in online activities about Islam, thereby slowly increasing religious vibrancy and enriching public discourse. Secondly, it allows selegram da'i and online devotees to project and share religious content through digital media (Muratova, 2024). Finally, it connects online Muslim communities that have felt alienated or marginalised, who seek religious authority online with ease (Whyte, 2022). Under these conditions, the Ummah has to worry about over-reliance on the internet, the risks of fatwas being delivered and the emergence of fake scholars. Exploring the Islamic cyber environment without guidance has the potential to give rise to anonymous digital scholars. Thus, it is argued among scholars that learning Islam through face-to-face learning is more meaningful and profound. Through this phenomenon, there is a need for a critical attitude among the Muslim community towards the emergence of online scholars, the authenticity of websites and the religious information presented (Brinton, 2015).

Meanwhile, the exploration of online religious authority reveals significant limitations regarding the validity of the research, especially in the context of Islam and the whole Ummah. While digital platforms can increase the visibility of traditional religious leaders, the authority they wield often depends on their integration into established hierarchies (Whyte, 2021). This dynamic is influenced by a number of aspects, no exception the nature of the digital community and the theological grounding of the leaders. Traditional religious authorities maintain legitimacy through long-standing networks and organisational structures, as seen in Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah (Astor et al., 2024). Digital preachers often rely on these established authorities for validation, suggesting a symbiotic relationship between old and new forms of religious leadership. Anonymity in digital religious spaces allows for the emergence of influential websites that present themselves as neutral, thus appearing to challenge traditional authorities (Astor et al., 2024). These platforms can propagate interpretations that may lack the rigorous scrutiny typical of established religious science, raising concerns about the accuracy of religious teachings.

Various da'wah content on the @OSDokisetianadewi channel (Dewi, 2024) is widely accessed by netizens in the form of likes, comments, shares and subscriptions. Long before entering the world of podcasts, she pursued a career as an actress, religious film player, book writer and was even trusted as a lecturer and motivator on television. Along with the rapid advancement of information technology, Oki Setiana Dewi expanded the reach of her da'wah through YouTube. Currently, she has 3.23 million subscribers with 1,164 thousand videos, 320,045,353 views (Dewi, 2024). The da'wah method is bil Qashash (story), where the da'wah content is peppered with

various stories from the time of the prophet and present-day life and then cites the Qur'an and hadith as sources of Islamic law (Anwar, 2023). A number of presenters are presented in her podcast room, discussing family, women, gender, stories of prophets, and the phenomenon of daily life. This celebrity preacher is popular among women thanks to her da'wah which discusses the role of women both in the domestic space and the public arena (Ajikumar & Sircar, 2024). Her podcast is always crowded with followers, and there is even social interaction between netizens on her da'wah channel. Podcasts as a space to express their da'wah in the virtual arena in an effort to fill the religious public space mediated through the internet network.

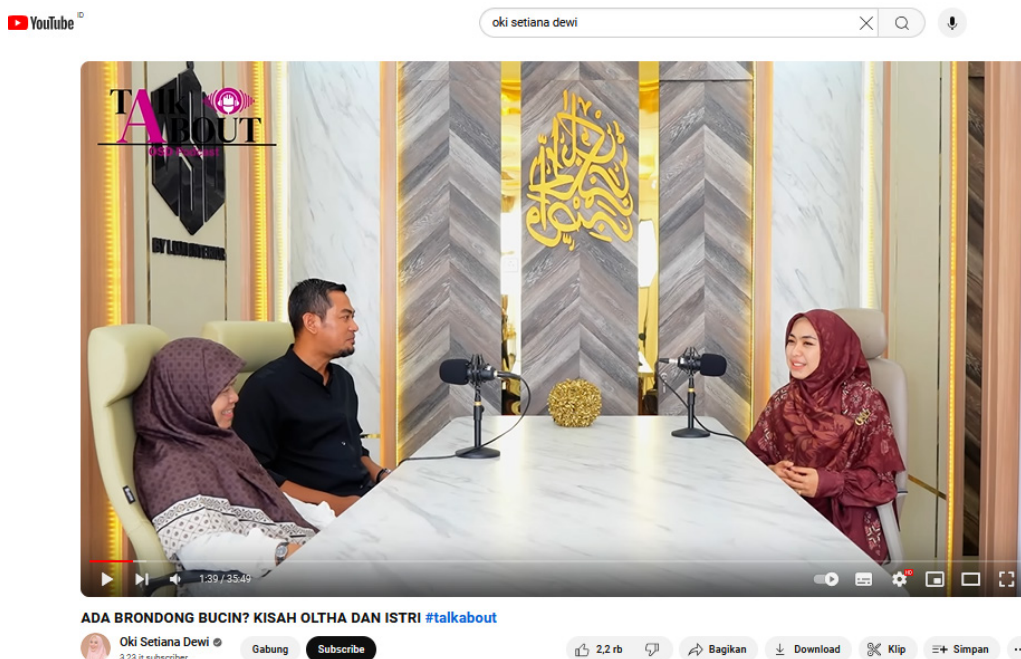


Figure 1.

Display of Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi Da'wah on Youtube

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NT54JHGd08g>

Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi dialogue with two guests in her podcast room discusses the marriage of a young man and a middle-aged woman. In this case, the popularity of podcasts continues to skyrocket along with the increasing number of internet usage and the rapid growth of information (Rakhmetov, 2022). Podcasts provide various episodes and can be listened to online or downloaded from the internet. Podcasts as a medium disseminate religious information to all levels of believers and can interact with content creators through the comments column (Ergen, 2024). The above phenomenon illustrates the power of podcasts as a propagation of Islamic preaching on social media facilitated by the internet network. Celebrity preachers get a preaching land in the form of podcasts so that religious content can be accessed and enjoyed by their congregation globally. The preaching of ustadzah Oki contributes to the direction of religious literacy (Whyte, 2022). The da'wah podcast played by Oki Setiana Dewi as a da'wah instrument contributes to contemporary religious discourse. Through YouTube, as an application of various videos provided by Google, it encourages people to produce, distribute, watch and share video clips as long as they are connected online (Forgione et al., 2025). So, Oki Setiana Dewi chose YouTube as her dakwah stage because it is one of the popular media platforms that people are interested in.

The increasing dependence of audiences on YouTube has encouraged micro-celebrity preachers to massively produce varied, innovative and interactive content. YouTube presents a short or long video platform that can be shared with fellow users, and there is even a live

streaming feature (Jung, 2024). The concept of religious authority stems from, to borrow Arendt's term, a hierarchy that connects a group of people to the past which is then used as a foothold (Arendt, 1968). In turn, it gives them authority through the ability to spread and change the past and then become an example in contemporary life. The conception of new religious authority is then shifted by the presence of social media and the rapid flow of information back and forth on various digital platforms cyber (Whyte, 2022). Celebrity preachers massively transformed to take on the role of da'i preachers using social media as an instrument of da'wah both to accommodate religious information, reach out to worshipers more thoroughly and distribute da'wah messages more flexibly. The choice of preaching on digital media is very diverse, developed by celebrity micro da'i. TikTok platform, for example, which is also used as a choice of preaching by ustad Syam, is entertaining and understood by the people (Latepo et al., 2021). The use of contemporary language is carried out in order to attract interest and audience visits on his social media accounts. One form of preaching is dialogue with the congregation. In this context, virtual religious authority is simultaneously formed, where da'i take opportunities in digital media as a da'wah field in expanding their reach to the audience. (Bártová, 2024).

The emergence of celebrity preachers is able to create religious passion and religious enthusiasm facilitated by the internet network, even virtual da'wah provides varied content choices, practical presentation and penetrates geographical boundaries (Kakko & Isotalus, 2024). Greg Fealy in his thesis states that the presence of religion in the virtual public space is packaged in an entertaining and digestible manner that is able to improve morale through the use of technological devices (Fealy, Greg and Sally, 2008). Syamsuddin Nur Makka or better known as Ustad Syam, is now rising in the da'wah scene in the country through the Cahaya Hati Indonesia da'wah programme aired on INews TV. Before entering the world of da'wah, he pursued a profession as a scriptwriter and mosque imam at the Golden Dome Dian Al-Mahri Depok. Furthermore, he was invited by Trans TV to recite the Quran with the congregation who were then asked to preach about the stories of the prophets. The rise of Ustad Syam's name is inseparable from his entertaining and easy-to-digest preaching skills. His preaching content is inseparable from the aspects of creed, sharia and akhlaq and even contemporary life so that it can solve people's problems. It is able to offer religious content online and television media as a medium to gain Islamic insight in a practical and flexible manner. It aspires to foster love, peace so as to bridge divisions and increase unity (Al Ketbi et al., 2025).

Da'wahtainment programmes on national television media have been transformed into best-selling religious commodities in fulfilling Islamic insights in the public sphere and even preachers help promote certain products (Zulkifli & Rajandran, 2024). Preachers take a central role in fostering the ummah, translating the language of the Qur'an and hadith and being a role model among the ummah, so their contributions are needed continuously. The rapidity of religious issues is getting wilder, tendentious religious narratives that promote fanaticism and the proliferation of religious communities on social media encourage the involvement of celebrity preachers to take a role in straightening out faith and strengthening religious understanding (Mansour, 2023). In expanding the reach of his da'wah, ustad Syam also preaches using TikTok so that the scope of da'wah is more global. The increasing number of internet usage in Indonesia, which touched 231 million (APJII, 2025) people, encouraged ustad Syam to aggressively spread religious content through TikTok media. This is also influenced by customer demand and balances the rapid pace of information, so da'wah must dominate in the virtual public space. The popularity of ustad on TikTok was able to gain 3.4 million followers with 128 million likes, and 4 follows. The variety of da'wah content depicted on his TikTok account includes creed, sharia, morals and about contemporary problems cannot be separated from the topic of his da'wah. Contemporary language, da'wah vlogs, and da'wah memes characterise the da'wah content on Ustad Syam's TikTok account. This millennial da'i is loved by all groups, both the younger generation and mothers, through his soothing tausiyah. The exemplary representative of Islam is the goal of his

da'wah, so it continues to be called out on various digital media platforms (Muessig, 2024).

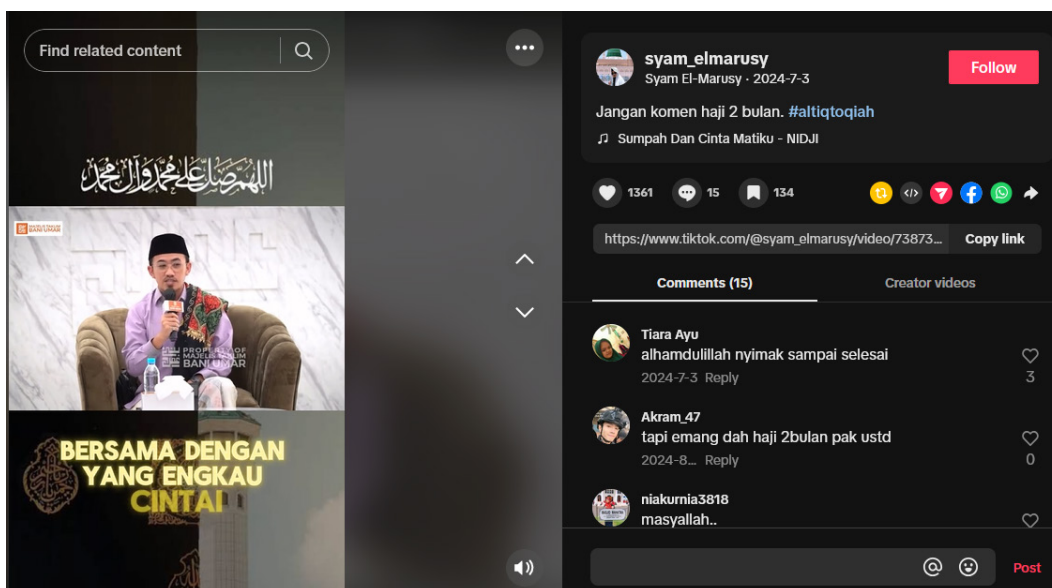


Figure 2.

Ustad Syam Da'wah Dialogue on Tiktok Platform

Source: https://www.tiktok.com/@syam_elmarusy/video/7387334660335897862

The author argues that the difference in the number of viewers on Ustad Syam Tiktok platform is due to the production of content with the latest trends such as the use of popular music, discussion of careers and the future, Ustad Syam is able to read the latest trends in Tiktok media such as the use of fashion, viral sound, humour, food, which encourages netizen involvement in the comments column. This triggers interaction among netizens either asking questions or praying for goodness. This da'wah trend is packaged by ustad Syam in broadcasting Islam easily and adapting to the times without losing the essence of Islamic teachings (Khabibullina, 2024). The ability to adapt current issues has actually received a positive response among netizens as shown by the likes and comments reflected on the tiktok platform. The productivity of ustad Syam da'wah content in the TikTok media gives rise to educative-interactive religious literacy and is able to respond to the times through entertaining da'wah content, adapting the latest trends and using easy-to-understand language (Zakaria, 2023). For information, previously ustad Syam had been popular through the Islam is beautiful programme which graced the country's television industry, so it is not surprising that the tiktok platform received many visits and positive responses among netizens.

The da'wah dialogue depicted in tiktok ustad Syam platform creates two-way communication between da'i and mad'u. This is a form of creating an atmosphere of open and inclusive religious discussion, so that audiences can enjoy it on social media (Elsner, 2023). In addition, to answer questions from his congregation on TikTok media, so that their concerns can be responded to. Ustad Syam presence on the country da'wah stage reflects the central role of da'i in spreading religious insights through digital media (Shareefa Mariyam, Moosa Visal & Rashad, 2025). Realising the rapid development of communication technology and information flow, ustad Syam also expanded his da'wah on TikTok. TikTok is a social network application and short music video platform that is currently popular among the public, allowing users to create, edit, and share short videos accompanied by filters and music as instruments. The use of TikTok is popular among young people both expressing themselves, creating a mindful digital world, and articulating structural problems through the application (McLean, Jessica, Southerton, Clare & Lupton, 2024). So, it is not surprising that ustad Syam aggressively posts his da'wah content on

tiktok in reaching mad'u on a wider scale, distributing content faster and reducing geographical boundaries (Gezginci Akpınar & Eker, 2025).

Abdullah Gymnastiar also called for virtual da'wah on his social media. Yan Gymnastiar or commonly called as Aa Gym is a muballigh, singer, book writer, entrepreneur and founder of Daarut Tauhid Islamic boarding school in Bandung. Aa Gym's work in da'wah programmes on national television began in 2000, as a performer in the Hikmah Fajar programme on RCTI. Pursuing in the field of da'wah makes Aa Gym known to the wider community and has a Hikmah Fajar da'wah programme entitled 'Qolbu Management The content of his da'wah discusses more about the family, strengthening the belief in Allah that can be applied to everyday life. The Qolbu Management da'wah programme (Gymnastiar, 2006) filled by Aa Gym on one of the national television media is able to make a reference for religious knowledge among Muslims. Da'wah soothes the heart and entertains the congregation, making his name increasingly popular in the homeland da'wah stage. The figure of da'i who is known to be friendly, patient and humorous then expanded the reach of da'wah on YouTube media. The sophistication of communication technology and the rapid pace of information encourage Aa Gym to consistently produce content on YouTube. He has a da'wah channel @AaGymOfficial with 975 thousand subscribers, 6,086 thousand videos and 130,205,641 thousand views (Aa Gym, 2024). Aa Gym also has an Instagram account with the @aagym account which has 7.4 million followers, 7,530 posts, and 78 follows. His slogan is To Allah our creator is tawhid. To his creation we are rahmatan lil alamin.



Figure 3.

Aa Gym Da'wah Dialectic With His Congregation on Instagram Media

Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/C4m_0ShRpbq/

Dialectics of da'wah is carried out by Aa Gym on Instagram media in conveying Islamic messages to the people. Aa Gym's involvement in the virtual da'wah ecosystem has led to religious expressions among the public through a direct question and answer process either through the comments column or asking him questions. This indicates that involvement da'i in cyberspace takes an important part in broadcasting Islam in a communicative-interactive manner through

the use of language that is easy to understand (Nas, 2022). Access to religious information is increasingly wide open so that learning Islam is easy even da'i can interact directly with their congregation as long as they are connected to the internet. Aa Gym popularity has not faded with the advancement of communication technology and the proliferation of preachers in the country. In fact, the sophistication of social media has helped expand the reach of his da'wah on Instagram (R. G. Bunt, 2009). Cool, friendly and enlightening da'wah makes the religious climate in the virtual arena meaningful and enjoyable. Dakwah delivery is easy to understand, is viral in society, and light language is the character of Aa Gym's da'wah so that it is popular with all groups. Preaching on Instagram as one of Aa Gym's da'wah fields in broadcasting Islam in virtual space and at the same time creating new religious authorities in digital media (Mohiuddin, 2023). The @aagym channel as a provider of religious information is able to influence audiences to visit its da'wah channel.

The fame of Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi, Ustad Syam, and Aa Gym on In cyberspace seems to reinforce the formation of a new religious authority in the virtual public space mediated by the internet network, where accessing its content must be connected online (Buckley et al., 2023). The representation of micro-celebrity preachers plays an important role in the country's da'wah scene through entertaining, interesting and answering the needs of the people. Max Weber view is that authority is a legitimate form of power (legitimate power), where compliance is given voluntarily by an individual or group because they recognize the validity of the order. Through this conception, Weber believes that authority is formed through the identification of certain obedience to figures who are seen as having a strong influence (Weber, 1947). What these three celebrity preachers do through their da'wah on various digital media platforms has tremendous support, strong influence among the congregation, and even provides positive inspiration for Muslims (Abdullah, 2021). Murtala Ibrahim argues that digital infrastructure has also given rise to social religious practices and activities facilitated by the internet network that gave birth to cyber imams, cyber people and algorithmic religiosity. The rapid proliferation of religious devices allows individuals or groups to transmit and share religious resources, including texts, audio, video, and remote images (Ibrahim, 2024). This religious infrastructure gives rise to virtual preachers whose lectures, sermons and religious activities are shared hundreds of times across various digital platforms. Digital religious infrastructure also enables the formation of Islamic cyber ummahs, created by a spectrum of social media groups that transform traditional ways and norms of Islamic knowledge acquisition by personalising and privatising access to knowledge. At this stage, it shows that infrastructures are not limited to enabling the flow and movement of people, goods and ideas, but can also provide a shared platform where many people experience a sense of presence and certain modes of real sociality (Ibrahim, 2024).

The infrastructural lens also allows us to see how social media algorithms are used and utilised to work as a tool for disseminating Islamic da'wah to audiences. Regularly redistributing religious content through notifications and other forms of notifications, algorithms play an important part in shaping religious subjectivity and helping individuals maintain their commitment to their spiritual lifeworld. These religious actors develop religious authority that extends into the public sphere. This new religious infrastructure shapes the identity of religious authorities, new directions of religious literacy, and has the potential to master communication technology so that audiences visit their da'wah platforms (Ibrahim, 2024). Niki Alma Febriana Fauzi in her thesis states that the role of religious authorities can function to issue online fatwas in digital media. As done by the Islamic organisation Muhammadiyah (Febriana Fauzi, 2023).

The Power of Social Media to Catapult Micro-Celebrity Da'i Religious Influence

The sophistication of communication technology and the rapid pace of information have also influenced changes in da'wah media, consumption of religious content among the ummah and led to the direction of interactive religious literacy. The cyberspace is filled with a number

of celebrity preachers in expanding the reach of their da'wah (Barizi et al., 2024). A series of preaching activists are competing to produce innovative, inspiring and solutive religious content in attracting the attention of the ummah, thus having a positive impact on audience visits through their preaching channels (Mir, 2024). The productivity of interesting, entertaining content that meets the needs of mad'u is able to build a cool religious climate and encourage audiences to access their da'wah channels on digital platform (Battista, 2024). The popularity of Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi, Ustad Syam, and Aa Gym is inseparable from the power of social media which has catapulted their prestige, religious influence and da'wah content on various digital media platforms (Kirby, 2024). The birth of micro-celebrity da'i cannot be separated from the appearance in several da'wahtainment programmes on television media. Along with the increasing use of social media among audiences, it encouraged the three preachers to expand the scope of their da'wah on a number of digital media channels. Religious reputation is increasingly boosting the da'wah platform on social media which slowly boosts audience visits through its da'wah channels, increasing online activities in virtual spaces so that this has positive implications in promoting da'i religious studies (Mursalat, 2024). This is a sign that the participation of celebrity preachers has taken an important position and role in the country's da'wah scene (Guzek, 2023).

Islamic da'wah movement initiated by a number of religious leaders has led to the practice of Islamic learning, strengthened the influence of religious populism, and the internet as religious references (Afna, 2023). The presence of preachers on social media seems to challenge religious figures and a series of authoritative figures. Although this phenomenon can also be observed in conveying Islamic teachings in a media-friendly way (Zaleski, 1999). The involvement of da'i preachers in online media has also attracted the attention of audiences to express their religion in virtual space. The rise of Islam in virtual space was created as access to information opened up so rapidly that a number of preachers also expressed their religion on social media (Larsson & Willander, 2024). This research observes that the charisma of celebrity da'i in digital media is able to influence the ummah, forming hegemonic religious authority in filling the spiritual space of the ummah. The popularity of celebrity preachers is able to compete with pre-existing religious authorities, thus creating a source of religious information (Mursalat, 2024). The impact of digital media has also boosted his reputation and popularity on the country's da'wah stage. The media facilitates space for religious movement and expression to the ummah amidst the increasing use of the internet among the public. Da'i proficiency in technology is essential in responding to various challenges that occur both now and in the future (Paré & Smith, 2023), so that the da'wah pattern evolves following the increasingly dynamic times. This research is of the view that celebrity preachers were previously familiar with da'wah among the people. But as the sophistication of communication technology encourages him to expand the reach of da'wah so that it is enjoyed by all groups (Feasey, 2024). The existence of celebrity preachers is understood that the sources of religious information on social media are varied, where mad'u freely choose the desired da'wah content. Therefore, mad'u wisely choose da'wah channels, celebrity preachers, religious content, so that it has a positive impact (Polizzi, 2025). Online religious authority is slowly giving rise to cyber preachers, cyber believers and creating online piety.

Conclusion

Celebrity da'i has a heavy responsibility in filling the spiritual space of the Ummah, strengthening their religious reputation and virtual religious authority. A number of these micro-celebrity da'i gain recognition and followers from the ummah through the presentation of varied, interactive and solutive religious content, thus attracting interest in accessing Islamic insights. The power of digital platforms has contributed to the fame and prestige of the selegram preachers on the country's da'wah stage. The character of da'wah that is interesting, entertaining and relevant to current issues slowly encourages religious passion and expression in the virtual space and has the potential to become the preference of the ummah. The use of digital media

among celebrity preachers as a productive space to campaign for religious content so as to create a source of Islamic information that can be the choice of the ummah. The implication of this research is that the formation of virtual religious authority has the opportunity to become online religious literacy among the ummah as an alternative and discourse of preaching in cyberspace. In completing the shortcomings of this research, the author recommends further research on digital media skills among micro-celebrity preachers.

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